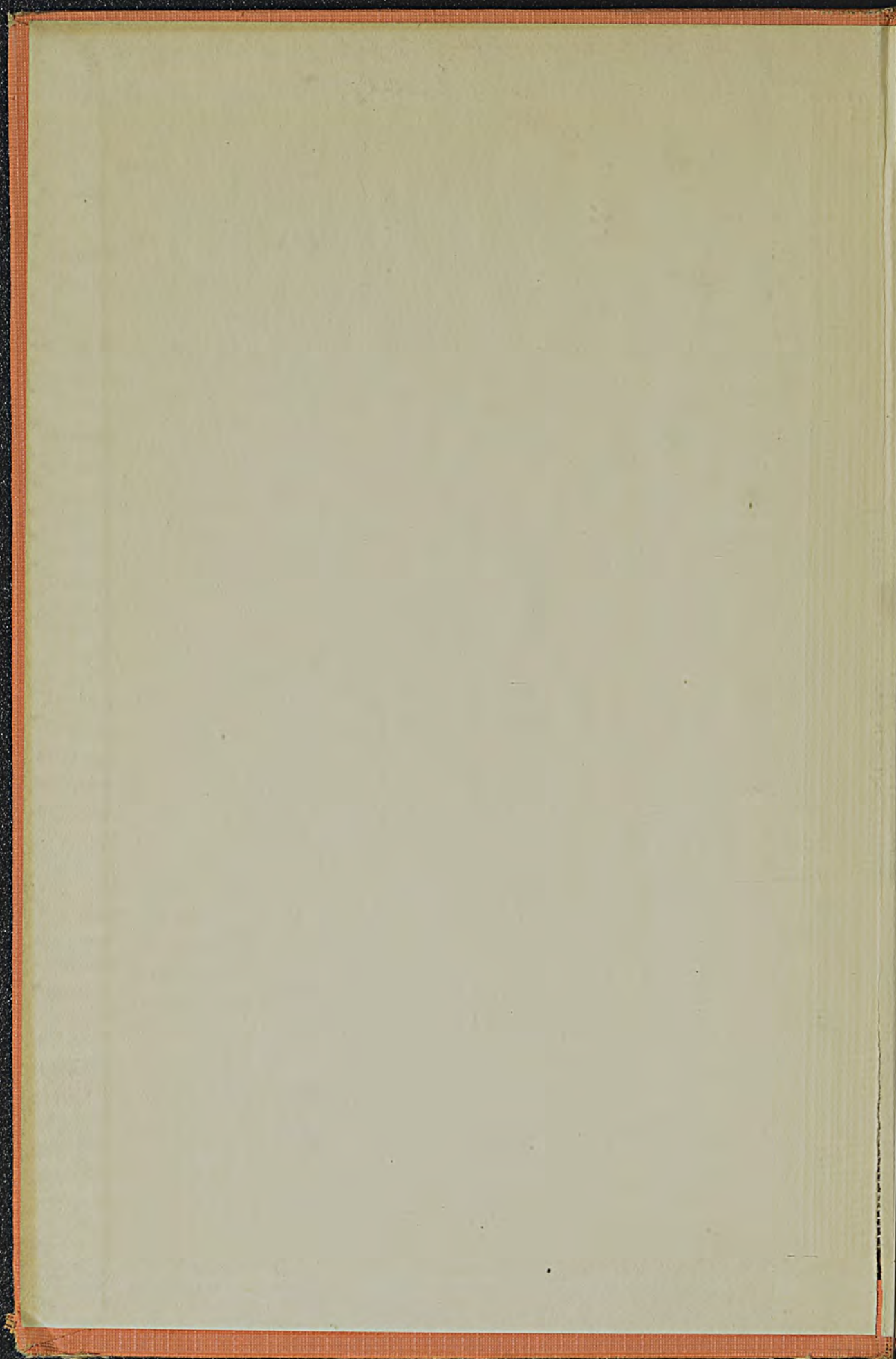


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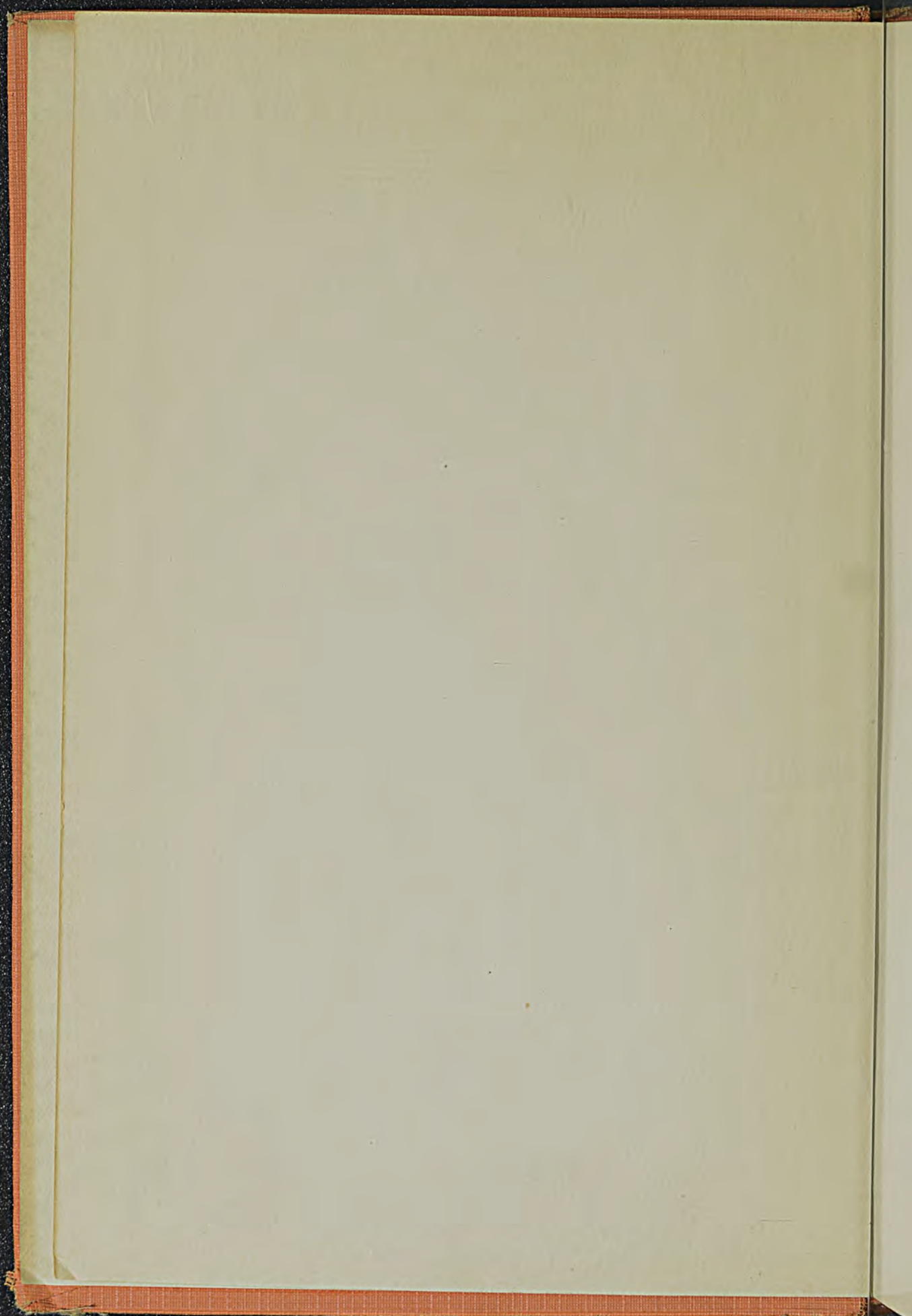
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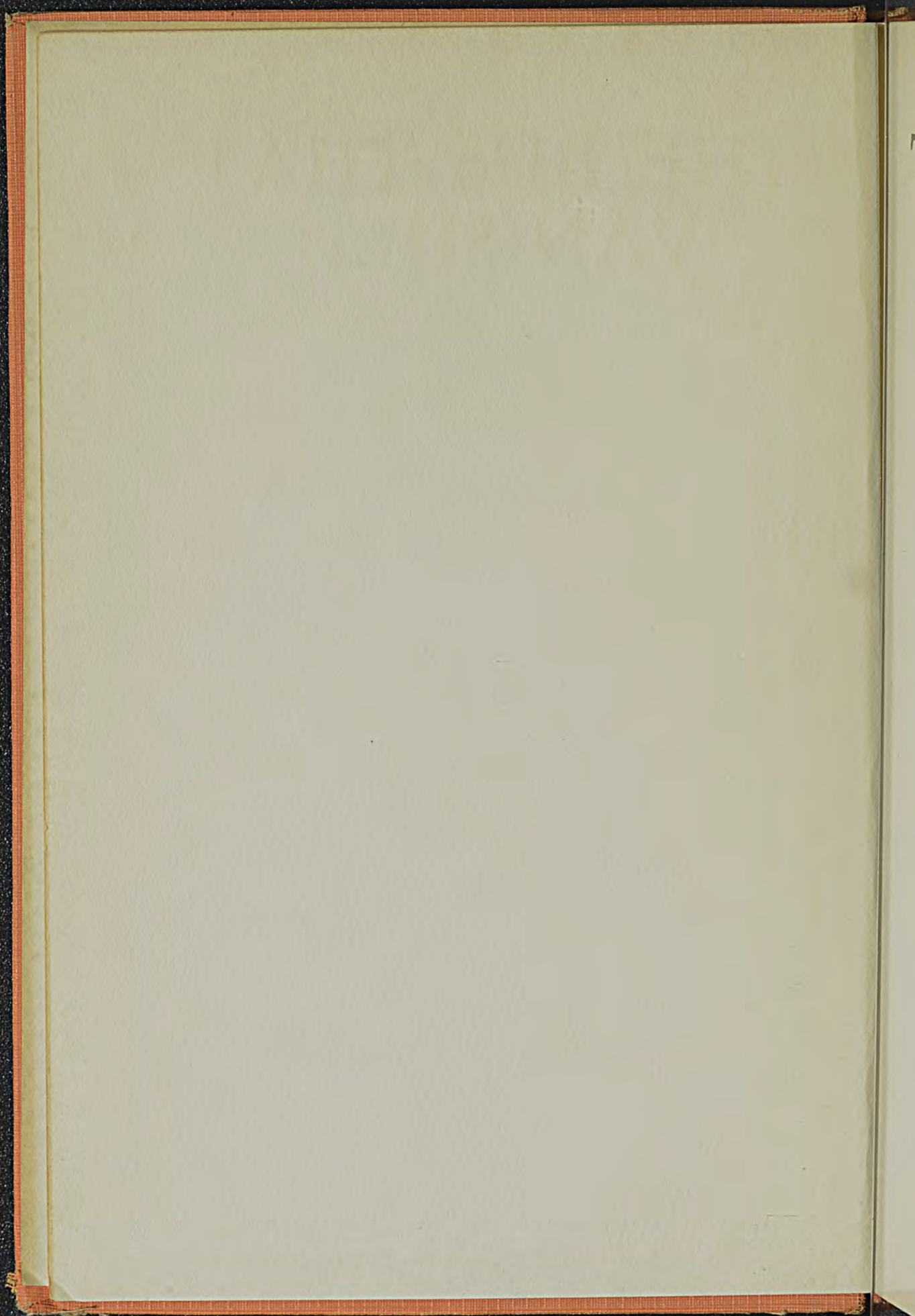
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56 Stratford Rd
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THE BUS THAT VANISHED



THE BUS THAT VANISHED

BY
LEON GROC

TRANSLATED BY
LAWRENCE MORRIS

NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

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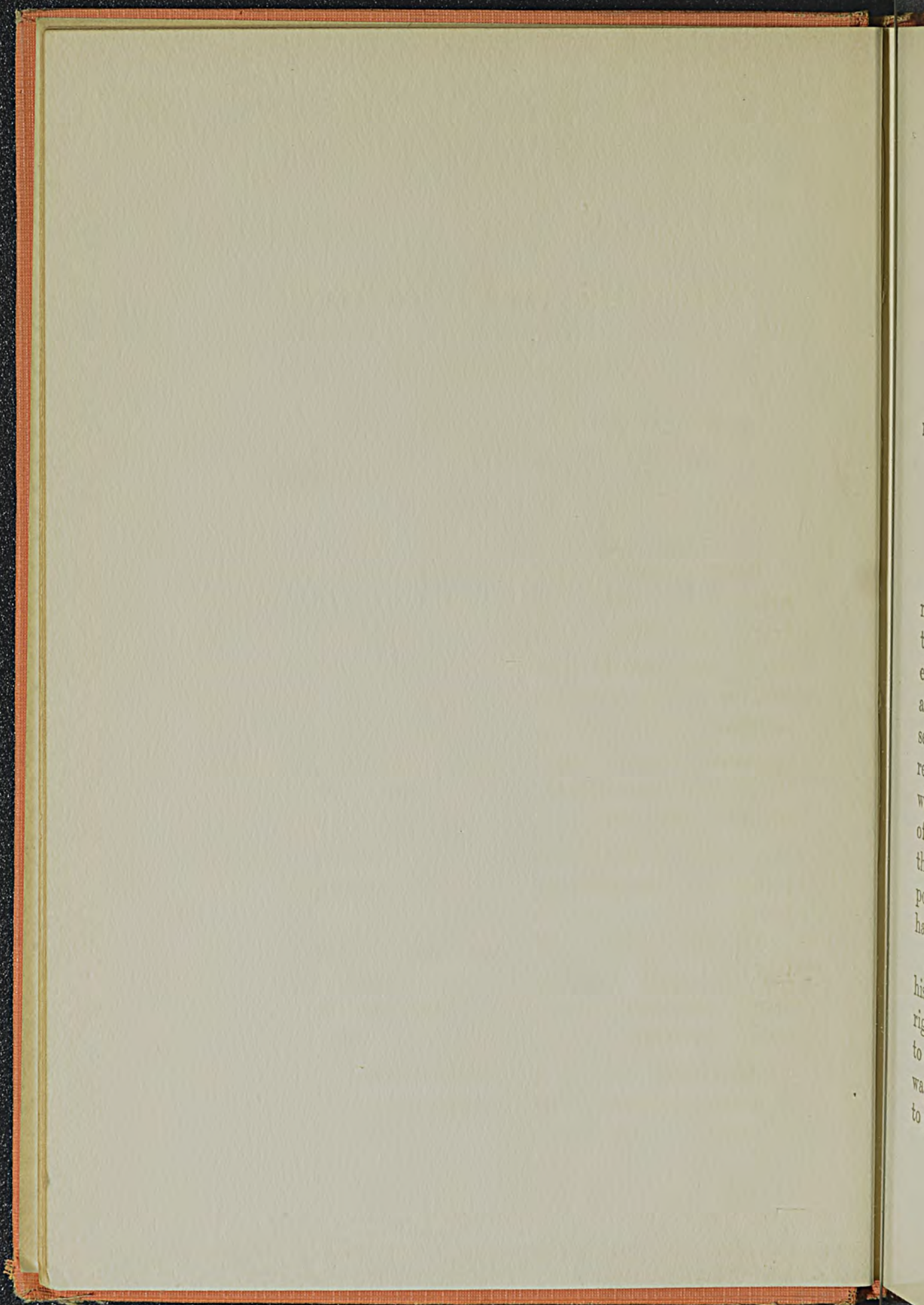
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THE BUS THAT VANISHED



THE BUS THAT VANISHED

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH SEVEN INHABITANTS OF THE GOOD CITY
OF PARIS DISAPPEAR WITHOUT LEAVING A SIGN

"ANYTHING new, Mainfroy?"

"Nothing new, sir."

Every morning, as he entered the office, Mr. Brunel, police commissioner for the Military School district, asked the same question of his assistant, and every morning Hector Mainfroy returned the same answer. It had become a ceremony with them which seldom varied. When he had made the traditional response, Hector took up once more the occupation which had been absorbing his interest at the moment of his chief's arrival. This was nothing more nor less than giving a strictly elliptical form and flawless polish to the pink nails which adorned his white hands.

He finished the left hand and paused to survey his work with satisfaction before passing on to the right. As every one knows, it is much more difficult to do the fingers on the right hand, and Hector always allowed this moment between the two, in which to prepare himself for the greater test of his skill.

As he was turning his left hand from side to side in the light, however, he suddenly exclaimed, as if he had just been struck by an entirely new thought:

"Oh, by the way, there *is* some news. . . . A man disappeared last night, and his wife has been here in tears to tell me all her worries. Just because her husband happened to stay out all night, she thinks some accident must have happened to him. If every wife, whose husband took a vacation once in a while, came to the police in tears, we'd spend all our time consoling them."

The commissioner had taken off his hat and fur-trimmed overcoat—for it was the middle of January and the weather was dry, sparkling and cold—and had entered his private office. He had left the door between their two rooms open, for Mr. Brunnel was of a sociable disposition and could not stand the solitary dignity which his position imposed on him. When his mind was at work on one of the problems of his profession, he needed a receptive audience to which he could expound his theories. He was standing now with his back to the fireplace, where a cheerful wood-fire crackled. On cold mornings he always enjoyed the feeling of snugness he experienced on entering the scene of his activities. Here he was the master. The world had recognized his intelligence and his ability by giving him this place of authority; his neighbors entrusted the preservation of their lives and their property to his hands. Lifting up the flaps of his long frock-coat he had begun to toast himself

in the pleasant warmth of the fire, and was looking about with a smile of satisfaction.

The words of his subordinate, however, made him start, and with long strides he hurried back into the room where Mainfroy was still calmly engaged in his little job of manicuring.

"Mainfroy," he said in severe tones, as if he were about to begin a public speech, "I told you three months ago when I first hired you as my secretary, and I have had occasion to repeat it many times since then, as no doubt I shall have to do many times in the future: you are nothing but an amateur and you will never be anything else. . . . Do you mean to say that right here in our own district a mysterious drama has taken place, which will perhaps give us scope to employ all our resources and reveal our genius to the world, and instead of telling me of it at once and displaying a commendable interest, you say 'Nothing new, sir,' and polish your finger-nails! . . . A little action, man! What are the details of the case? Did you get the name of the man who disappeared? What is his occupation? Where does he live? Where was he last seen? When did he disappear?"

As he poured out this series of questions, with extraordinary volubility, Mr. Brunnel was not standing still. He paced the room with rising excitement, flapping the tails of his coat behind him. He had long concealed a disappointment at having been wasted on a district where, except for a few drunken

brawls, hold-ups during the night and uninteresting suicides, nothing happened! It was sheer waste for a man of his genius, and he credited it to the evil star of his fortune that no passionate drama had ever brought him before the public.

It was not merely his desire to see his name in the headlines and to know that the world was discussing him, which animated Mr. Brunnel. He loved the profession he had chosen. He was no amateur like his secretary, and an immense need of action filled his soul. He was ready to pour out all the energy of his mind, his emotions and his body on the solution of any problem his duties brought before him. For this reason he had an innocent tendency to dramatize everything and to see mystery everywhere. He experienced a corresponding disillusionment when things turned out to be quite simple.

A good man at heart, however, and a just magistrate, he was well liked in his district, where his tall broad-shouldered figure, his ferocious mustache, his rough manner and his real kindness were familiar to all the people. They had given him the nickname of "the good cop." He was always ready with a tip for those who ran errands for him, and though his jokes were a little heavy, they were good-humored. When it was a question of professional matters, he enjoyed theorizing, and delivered endless lectures to Hector Mainfroy.

His secretary was temperamentally the exact opposite of his chief. Hector disliked complications of

SEVEN INHABITANTS DISAPPEAR 13

all kinds, and having personally very little desire to be in action, he maintained that the police should never interfere except in case of absolute necessity. Far from hoping for the outbreak of thrilling tragedies, he preferred to savor the undisturbed quiet of their district and the easy-going monotony of his job. He believed that one should enjoy life as it came, and that ambition was a disease which made men wear themselves out for a vain and empty reward. Up until a short time before, all he had asked for was enough money to live on comfortably and a few good friends. Recently a third desire had been awakened in his heart . . .

Of medium height, slender, and with pleasant features, he dressed always in style and frequently amused himself by inventing new ways of knotting his tie. While Brunnel imagined, on the slightest provocation, that he was confronted with a fatal enigma, Mainfroy kept a large reserve of skepticism and a whole arsenal of reasons to explain away the most obscure happenings.

The two men had nothing in common save their natural honesty and the goodness of their hearts. But, for this reason, in spite of their opposed tendencies, they respected each other and got on well together.

Mainfroy answered Brunnel's questions with complete calm:

"Oh, there's nothing exciting about it. The man probably went off on a spree somewhere and later on

in the day will come back home to sleep it off. His wife was in such a state over it that she repeated everything ten times and would have told me the story of her whole life. Nothing like this had ever happened to her before, and she was glad her dear mother was not alive to see her suffering, and so on. I finally persuaded her to get down to facts and talk coherently." Hector reached over to the corner of his desk and picked up a report sheet, which he had filled out in his neat handwriting. "Here's what it all comes down to: the man's name is Charron, Pierre; thirty-eight years old; printer; born in Paris; married to Juliette Bernigois, age thirty-four; lives at 74b Avenue de Suffren. No children. Charron works for the Martin Printing Company, rue de Rome. For the past week has been on a rush job working until eleven every evening. Last night he didn't come home. That's all."

"Well," answered the commissioner, "all of that perhaps holds a great deal more interest than you realize. Have you looked up any more information on the case? Did it occur to you by any chance to find out from the printing company what time he left the shop last night? Do you think—?"

"I haven't had time to do any of those things yet," interrupted the young man. "The woman had just gone out when you came in."

"Get me the Martin Printing Company on the phone and let me have the call as soon as it comes through!" ordered Mr. Brunnel. His imagination

SEVEN INHABITANTS DISAPPEAR 15

was already seizing with delight on this new situation. The presence of a mystery to be solved was one thing in the world which increased his sense of his own importance. He strode up and down the room while Mainfroy was searching for the number in the telephone directory, twisted his mustache in one hand, as he always did when beginning a fresh problem, and hurried into his private office to receive the call over his own phone.

His secretary took advantage of the fact, that his chief's back was turned, to shrug his shoulders lightly, but nevertheless he obeyed the order he had received. His neat hands, one manicured, the other still awaiting its turn, ran through the pages of the directory without hurry, but with a quiet sureness . . . in a moment he had got his call.

"Martin Printing Company? Hello! Is this the Martin Printing Company? . . . Yes. . . . Is Mr. Martin there? The police commissioner for the Military School district wishes to speak to him. . . . Hold the line a moment, please . . ."

Hector waited until he heard the click of the commissioner's phone, then hung up his own receiver and sat back comfortably in his chair.

Mr. Brunnel's voice resounded stentoriously through the open door.

"Hello! Is this Mr. Martin of the Martin Printing Company? . . . Can you tell me at what time one of your men named Pierre Charron left the shop last night? . . . Yes, Charron. . . ."

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"Why do I want to know? Because we seem to have a case on our hands here. The man never reached home last night. . . .

"A quarter of eleven, you say?

. . .

"Much obliged to you. Yes, we haven't learned yet. . . .

. . .

"Oh? Well, that may help us. . . . 'Grenelle-Saint-Lazare-Station'? That's a good detail to have. Thank you very much. . . . Good-by."

The commissioner hung up his phone with an emphatic thump, returned to his secretary's room, and triumphantly announced his new information:

"This may develop into something!" he exclaimed. "Charron is a first-class workman, very regular and never drunk. They were wondering at the shop why he hadn't come this morning, and one of the men, who works with him, said that he and Charron took the Grenelle-Saint-Lazare-Station bus together when they left last night. The bus stops right in front of the house where Charron lives. . . . Make a note of the name and address of his friend, and we'll send for him: Jules Fonval, 13 rue Amélie. Fonval got off at the stop by the Military School—the stop before the one where Charron should have gotten off. The latter seemed perfectly normal at that time, and must have . . . What is it, Gournay?"

This question was addressed to a policeman who entered the office at that moment.

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"Beg your pardon, sir," said Gournay, "but there's somebody out here wants to speak to you."

"Somebody? What do you mean? A man or a woman?"

"A janitress, sir," answered Gournay.

"Tell her to come in and be quick about it. I haven't any time to waste this morning."

A woman of about fifty, in a shabby brown dress, entered the office timidly. Her gray hair lay in a dishevelled mass on her head, falling down on her forehead and over her ears. She twisted her apron in her hands as she entered, and the expression of her face indicated some unusual apprehension to which she was evidently the prey. She looked from one to the other of the two men, awed by the presence of the officials. She had often seen Mr. Brunel pass her house, however, and knew that she had nothing to fear, despite his intimidating appearance.

"Excuse me for interrupting you, sir," she began, "but I couldn't help it. I've got to tell you the dreadful thing that's just happened to me. You wouldn't believe it, sir. . . . I got my neighbor, Madame Rochet, to take care of my place so I could come right over here to see you." She brushed the hair out of her eyes and looked at him appealingly. "I'm all upset about it still," she added.

"Well, speak out!" said the commissioner impatiently.

"That's just what I'm doing, sir," she answered, with such a naïve astonishment that Mainfroy could not repress a smile.

"All right! All right!" said Brunnel, "but get to the point!" In his mind he was turning over the question of what could have happened to Pierre Charron during the few moments between the time when Fonval got off and the bus reached the printer's door. The commissioner attended to this troublesome woman with the surface of his mind only. Deeper down he was pitting his powers of speculation against the mysterious unlikelihood of what had occurred.

Vaguely he heard the woman continue:

"I was coming to the point, sir. . . . I wanted to tell you that two of my tenants didn't come home last night, and they're such respectable, regular people that something dreadful must have happened to them, or else . . ."

Brunnel started. More people disappearing in his district! What kindly providence had sent him such good luck as this?

"Please sit down, madame," he said. "I should like to ask you a few questions. First, what is your name? Your address?"

The woman sat down uncomfortably on the edge of a chair, wrapped her hands in her apron, and looked up like a child before its teacher.

"Celestine Gonjard, janitress, 76 Avenue de Suffren."

SEVEN INHABITANTS DISAPPEAR 19

"What!" exclaimed the commissioner. "76 Avenue de Suffren?"

"Yes, sir," replied the woman. "I've been there for the last fifteen years and it's the first time that . . ."

"Never mind that!" interrupted Brunnel. "Now about these two tenants?"

"It's an elderly gentleman, sir, Mr. Muret his name is, and a very nice man too, and his daughter, Miss Cécile. You wouldn't find a better brought-up girl than she is if you hunted—"

"Are you making a note of that, Mainfroy?" asked the commissioner, whose interest was now completely given to what the woman was saying. "Go ahead, madame."

"Well, I take care of their rooms for them myself. Yesterday evening they went out after dinner. And when I woke up this morning, I remembered all of a sudden that I hadn't pushed the button to let them in during the night. That got me worried, sir, so I went up to their apartment, where I have a key, of course, as I do their cleaning for them, and there was nobody there! Such respectable people as that don't stay out all night. I don't know what to do. . . . If the old gentleman . . ."

"Did they mention to you where they were going?"

"No, but I know it was somewhere near the Saint Lazare Station. . . ."

Brunnel tapped Mainfroy's arm at these words to

call his attention to them, while Celestine Gonjard continued:

"I know that because I heard the young lady say to her father: 'André will be at the Pas-Perdus Hall at half past ten. If we don't lose any time, we can come back about eleven by the bus that stops in front of the house.' . . . So according to that, they should have taken the Grenelle-Saint-Lazare-Station line."

The commissioner's eyes shone with pleasure and interest.

"Do you hear that, Mainfroy?" he cried in a tone of triumph. "Do you hear that? . . . They must have taken, in fact they obviously did take, the Grenelle-Saint-Lazare-Station bus!"

"That means nothing," observed Mainfroy.

"Doesn't that strike you as being significant?"

"Pure coincidence," said the secretary.

Exasperated by this determined calm, Mr. Brunel had difficulty in restraining a sharp rebuke which rose to his lips. However, he returned to his questioning:

"What is Mr. Muret's profession?"

The woman looked apologetic as she replied.

"He has a small income, sir, and I think he used to be a professor. He doesn't do any work now, but all his mail comes addressed to 'Professor Muret.' "

"Good. Does he get much mail?"

"He gets a letter every day, sir. It's always the

SEVEN INHABITANTS DISAPPEAR 21

same handwriting and always from the same town."

"And that town is . . . ?"

"Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea, in Calvados."

"How long has Professor Muret been living in your house?"

"For the last five years. He came to live with us right after his wife died. At that time he seemed to be all broken up about it. I guess he was very unhappy, sir, and his little girl was the only one who could cheer him up. She was an old little youngster for her years, even then. She'd had more education than most girls her age, but she was just as nice as any one. Why, if you—"

"Where did he come from?"

Mr. Brunnel had no time to listen to her sentimental reminiscences.

"From somewhere in the provinces, he told me. I don't know just where, but I suppose the landlord would know."

"We'll question him about that later on, then. Now, could you give me any description of Mr. Muret and his daughter?"

"The professor is tall, thin, and stoops over, sir. A little bald on the top of his head. He has a white beard that comes down over his necktie and his face is wrinkled. He's probably not more than sixty years old, but he looks a good deal older than that. He's always dressed exactly the same way, sir: a frock-coat and black trousers, with a white vest and

a high hat. Not one of the shiny kind, but a dull one. You know what I mean. And he wears gold-rimmed spectacles."

"An excellent description, Madame Gonjard. He's a man we should have no difficulty in recognizing. What about the young lady?"

Delighted with the compliment she had received, the woman lifted her head higher and lost some of her air of timidity.

"Miss Cécile is a fine young girl," she answered proudly. "Her cheeks are as fresh as ripe fruit, and her teeth. . . . You ought to see her teeth! They're like mine used to be when I was her age. Ah, when I was twenty years old, sir. . . . But that's a long time ago now and lots of . . ."

"Please let's not digress, Madame Gonjard. We were talking about the young lady. Is she a blonde? Or a brunette?"

"Reddish hair, sir. Not exactly what you'd call a red-head, but a sort of . . . of copper color. I've seen people turn around in the street to admire her hair. She makes me think of my own sister, who died the first year of the war. . . . Think of it, sir, the very year the war broke out—my husband was alive then, God bless him! and I said to him . . ."

"Please, Madame Gonjard," groaned the commissioner. "Never mind your sister now."

The woman stopped and looked at him in surprise.

"I was just telling you, sir . . ." she began.

SEVEN INHABITANTS DISAPPEAR 23

"Yes, that'll do. I think we have everything we need now. . . . If I want you again, I'll send for you."

When the woman had gone out, Mr. Brunnel turned to his secretary and rubbed his hands.

"Looks like business now, eh?"

"Humph!" said Mainfroy without excitement. "Our friend the printer went off on a spree, and his two neighbors, the professor and his daughter, have left town on a trip somewhere. They don't have to tell their plans to anybody if they don't feel like it. Not even to the janitress."

The commissioner was about to begin a lecture on the dangers of amateurism in police affairs, when he was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone.

He hurried to his desk and Mainfroy caught bits of sentences, which in spite of his unruffled poise aroused a certain curiosity in him:

"Hello! . . . Yes, this is the commissioner speaking. . . . Disappeared? . . . Why, this is getting . . . I've just got word that . . .

. . .

"What! You already know about it? But who told you, sir, that . . .?"

. . .

"It's certainly very remarkable.

. . .

"Very well, sir. . . . Yes, sir. . . . I understand perfectly. . . ."

When he had hung up the receiver, Brunnel came back into the outer room and said with a slight tremble in his voice:

"An anonymous letter has already notified the Prefect of Police of the three disappearances that have taken place in our district."

"That's strange," admitted Mainfroy.

"But that's not all. . . . The Prefect tells me that a bus-driver named Digeon, *on duty on the Grenelle-Saint-Lazare-Station line*, did not return to his house last night; and that a conductor named Chalgrin, in the employ of the same company, and *on duty on the same line*, did not come home either. Furthermore, that two sisters, Juliette and Germaine Praline, who occupy a furnished room on the Avenue Lowendal in our district, and work in a millinery establishment, disappeared last night. . . ."

"A grand total," commented Hector Mainfroy calmly, "of seven: Charron the printer, Professor Muret and his daughter, motorman Digeon, conductor Chalgrin, and the two Praline sisters. . . . Apparently it is no longer a matter of mere coincidence."

"At last!" exclaimed Mr. Brunnel. "You admit it! It is no longer a matter of mere coincidence! We shall have a chance to realize that more clearly as we go on, for the Prefect has placed me temporarily in charge of the investigation. . . . Send for that other printer . . . what was his name? Jules Fonval . . . who went home with Charron. He's

probably at the printing-shop now, in the rue de Rome. Get him here at once."

Stirred by his chief's ardor, which was growing contagious, Mainfroy replied:

"I'll go myself in a taxi and bring him here."

While his secretary went off in search of Jules Fonval, Brunnel, seated at his desk, his head in his hands, revolved in his imagination a series of the most dramatic hypotheses. He saw himself unraveling the plans of a band of unscrupulous criminals, at great personal danger to himself and with great acclaim in the press.

Consequently, when Mainfroy returned with Jules Fonval, the commissioner was in a state of suppressed excitement which surpassed even his customary enthusiasms.

Fonval was a man of about forty. His hair was already turning gray, and his face indicated a certain intelligence and an admirable frankness.

A little intimidated, he remained standing in the center of the room, turning his felt hat in his hands.

"Do not be worried by this official visit," said the commissioner in friendly tones. "I merely want you to answer my questions accurately. What time did you leave your comrade, Pierre Charron, last night?"

"About a quarter after eleven, sir."

"You were on the bus?"

"On the rear platform. . . ."

"Did you notice what passengers were inside?"

"There were only a few, sir. Charron and I were

the only ones out on the back platform. Inside, in the second class, there were two young girls, who looked like working girls. In the first class there were three people, who were talking together in low voices, as if they didn't want to be overheard: an old gentleman with a white vest and gold-rimmed spectacles, a stylish-looking young girl with red hair, and a man about thirty years old, as nearly as I remember. . . . At one time their talk got quite lively for a few moments, and while I wasn't paying much attention to them and didn't attach any importance to it, I did notice that the old gentleman and the young lady called the man who was with them *André*. . . ."

"*André?*"

"Yes, *André*. I could hear that much. And then suddenly their voices got low again and their conversation was carried on in whispers, as if it were something very confidential."

"You are sure there was no one else in the bus?"

"Absolutely sure," said Jules Fonval.

"Good. You may go now. If I need you, I'll send for you."

When Fonval had left, the commissioner exclaimed:

"This affair is undoubtedly the most sensational and the most extraordinary that has ever occurred in the annals of the police! . . . Mainfroy, my friend, you and I will either become famous or go down in ridicule, depending on whether we succeed or fail in

SEVEN INHABITANTS DISAPPEAR 27

our investigation. The seven people who disappeared last night are unquestionably the seven passengers Forval has described to us. They are all there: the old gentleman, his daughter, the two girls, the printer and the two employees of the bus company. . . ."

"There is only the young man about thirty years old, named André," interrupted Mainfroy composedly, "whom we can't identify."

"We will identify him!" declared Brunnel, with magnificent assurance. "And in the meantime, send for the janitress at the rooming-house in the Avenue Lowendal, where the Praline sisters live."

Mainfroy dispatched an agent to summon the janitress in question. She arrived a few minutes later, dismayed by this brusque order to report to the police.

She began by protesting that she was an honest woman. She swore that she had "never cheated a single person out of a cent in her life," and that the tenants in her house were all respectable people.

"There's not a Bolshevik among them," she concluded. "And not one of them would do anything wrong. They're all respectable people, who have jobs and keep regular hours."

"Ah?" said the commissioner, who had listened impatiently to this speech, "then at what time last night did the two Praline sisters come home?"

The woman started:

"It's true, sir," she said. "They didn't come in.

Do you think something has happened to them? Do you know anything. . . . ?”

“It was precisely in the hope of finding out something that I sent for you. What sort of girls are these two sisters?”

“Very nice girls, sir. They work in a millinery shop, both of them, but they’re serious-minded. And their morals are of the best, sir. You can be sure I wouldn’t have them in my house, if they weren’t.”

“What time did they go out last night?”

“After dinner, about nine o’clock.”

“Where were they going?”

“To a movie, I think, sir.”

“Do you know what movie?”

“I don’t know just what one it was, but I did hear them say something about its being near the Saint Lazare Station.

Brunnel had difficulty in checking an exclamation of triumph.

“That settles it,” he said to Mainfroy. “The two girls in the bus were certainly the Praline sisters. . . . What we must do next is to get some information from the bus company about the motorman and the conductor.”

But it was decreed that Mr. Brunnel had not yet received his last surprise of the morning. He had barely pronounced these words, when Gournay entered:

“A gentleman to see you, sir. He says he is from the bus company and must speak to you.”

SEVEN INHABITANTS DISAPPEAR 29

"Tell him to come in!" said the commissioner eagerly.

But Mr. Brunnel felt that he must be in a dream when the gentleman who entered and introduced himself as secretary of the company, addressed him in these words:

"I have come, sir, to register a complaint in your office against the two men known to us as Digeon and Chalgrin, driver and conductor of bus No. 519, on the Grenelle-Saint-Lazare-Station line, this bus not having been returned to the garage last night and all attempts to discover its present location having remained unsuccessful. . . ."

CHAPTER II

THE IDYL OF THE COMMISSIONER'S SECRETARY

BARELY an hour had passed since the official from the bus company had made his startling announcement to Commissioner Brunnel, before extra editions of all the papers had informed the inhabitants of the city of the incredible adventure of bus No. 519, which had disappeared in the very heart of Paris. Public interest was at once intense. In the cafés frequented by the rich, in the working-men's bars on back streets, in fashionable drawing-rooms, and in dingy lodging-houses, "the bus that vanished" was the only subject of conversation. Innumerable amateur detectives appeared and gave their opinions on the strange event or indulged in endless deductions to bolster up their far-fetched theories. The wise ones declared that the problem was insoluble. All agreed, at any rate, in denouncing the negligence of the police and the inefficiency of the public authorities. "You don't mislay a bus as if it were a needle," argued the parlor detectives. "And what's the use of paying salaries to a lot of police if things like this can happen and nobody be the wiser?"

While the public watched breathlessly for news, Commissioner Brunnel, feverishly active, and his as-

sistant Mainfroy, calm and skeptical, studied the scant information they had received. After repeatedly going over the few facts which had been brought to light, they found themselves still incapable of forming any satisfactory explanation.

The bus had left the Saint Lazare Station at 11 P. M. and had reached the Military School at 11:15 P. M.

From there it had followed the Avenue de la Motte-Picquet, then the Avenue de Suffren, so that the drama—if there had been one—must have taken place before it reached No. 74b Avenue de Suffren, where the printer, Charron, lived. The search was therefore limited to that zone. In spite of this fact, the investigation had not yet advanced a step.

Brunnel, with his romantic turn of mind, was convinced that a detailed report on the private life of each of the passengers who had disappeared might constitute a valuable fund of information. He did not know the kind of clew he expected to find. But, he believed that somewhere beneath the apparently commonplace existence of one of these seven unfortunate persons there had been concealed all the elements of a catastrophe, which had come to a head, incongruously enough, in a public bus traveling through the city streets. The seven victims had come together through accident. Surely not all seven were implicated in the same tragedy. Was it possible that six had been sacrificed on account of the seventh? Mr. Brunnel shuddered and made an effort to push

this thought from his mind. It seemed inhuman: that was not the way men proceeded about their designs. It was more in keeping with the cruel prodigality, both in life and in death, of Nature herself.

Nevertheless he instructed Mainfroy to draw up a list of the passengers, based on the information already received and filled out with biographical details, which were obtained by the most thorough and scrupulous search.

The following is the list, as it appeared in the *Gazette de Paris*, thanks to the ingenuity of a daring reporter, who quietly slipped a carbon copy of it under a folded newspaper, while chatting with the nonchalant Mainfroy.

I—MURET, Jules-Adolphe: fifty-nine years old, former professor of physics at the University of Caen. Applied for his retirement, with pension, five years ago, after the death of his wife. His application being granted, came to Paris with his daughter and has lived continuously at 76 Avenue de Suffren, where the father and daughter occupy an apartment at twelve hundred francs a year. Is not known to receive any callers. Has little mail, except one letter each day, which is always addressed in the same handwriting and always comes from the same place: Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea. In the course of a search at the professor's home one piece of this correspondence, which must, however, have been voluminous,

THE IDYL OF THE SECRETARY 33

was discovered. This piece was a part of a half-burned letter, of which an exact reproduction is given herewith:

lem is so-
ly. We shall be the
manity
en-thirty P. M.
zare Station.
to receive at last my darling Cécile
ove, and also the final
rd for all these years of work.
André

It is believed that the "André" who signed this letter is the same person indicated below in paragraph VIII.

At the time of his disappearance Mr. Muret was wearing a loose black frock coat and trousers of the same color. Overcoat black. White vest; white necktie. High hat with flat rim. Gold spectacles.

II—MURET, Cécile; twenty-one years old, daughter of the above. Reported as very pretty. Easily distinguished by striking reddish hair. Lived alone with her father, of whom she was very fond. Is not known to have had any love-affairs, and was highly respected in the neighborhood. Well liked by the poor, with whom she was always friendly and generous. Reticent concerning her own affairs, however, and usually a little melancholy. Was dressed, at the time of her disappearance, in a tailored cos-

tume of dark blue, collar of gray fur, close-fitting hat of dark blue. No jewelry.

III—CHARRON, Pierre: thirty-eight years old, 74b Avenue de Suffren. Printer. Married. No children. Has been in the employ of the Martin Printing Company for twenty years. Thoroughly reliable. Well spoken of by his employers and popular among the other men. Never drinks to excess. Considered in his neighborhood "A fine fellow." Was dressed, the evening of the mystery, in a three-piece brown suit and soft felt hat, black.

IV—PRALINE, Juliette: twenty-two years old. Milliner. Employed by Bricout, rue de la Paix. Occupies a furnished room at 116 Avenue Lowendal, and makes regular deposits in a savings bank, to buy furniture of her own. Reports concerning her all excellent. Born in Paris. Orphan. While not pretty in the strict sense of the word, has charm. Was wearing a rather stylish black tailored dress; black hat with a single small rose; neckpiece of imitation otter.

V—PRALINE, Germaine: eighteen years old. Sister of the above, with whom she lives. Employed in the same establishment. Same report as to morals and conduct. Resembles her sister, but with much more grace and freshness. Same costume.

VI—CHALGRIN, Arthur: twenty-nine years old, conductor of bus No. 519. Bachelor. Lives in rue Saint Charles with his mother, whom he supports. Nothing known against him at the office of the com-

pany. Amuses himself on holidays, but never indulges in excess. Good reputation, in spite of an irascible nature, which involved him six years ago in a cabaret brawl. As a result of this incident he was reprimanded by the court and sentenced to pay a small fine. Seems to have behaved well since that time. In the employ of the company for the past five years. Dressed in uniform.

VII—DIGEON, Ernest: thirty-six years old, driver of bus No. 519. Married. Two children. Lives at 81 Boulevard de Grenelle. Unsatisfactory reputation at the office. Has been several times threatened with dismissal on account of drunkenness. Thoroughly reliable when not in his cups, but hardly recognizable when drunk. Cannot resist the temptation of the bottle. An honest man, however; good husband and good father. Dressed in uniform.

VIII—The mysterious passenger known simply under the name of André. Is probably the same person who signed the fragment of letter found in the Muret apartment. Indications point to the belief that it was this man whom the elderly professor and his daughter went to meet at the station. It is in this direction that the investigation should be pursued. Make inquiries at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea for some trace of him. The only witness, Mr. Fonval, was unable to give any detailed description of his appearance or dress. Remembers merely that the passenger seemed to be about thirty years old and was wearing a derby hat; that he carried a briefcase filled with

papers and held on his lap, while talking in the bus, some object which he handled with great care.

The anger Mr. Brunnel felt when he read this detailed list, which he had wished to keep secret, published in the *Gazette de Paris*, was fortunately tempered by the satisfaction which made his eyes shine and his blood flow faster, at the sight of his own picture, published by the same newspaper, with this flattering caption:

MR. THEODORE BRUNNEL
*the distinguished police commissioner
who is in charge of the investigation*

Moreover, the *Gazette* had also succeeded in obtaining photographs—no one knew how—of the seven members of the group whose identity had been established. It must be confessed that this disclosure brought a certain humiliation to the commissioner, who had moved heaven and earth to find these pictures himself and had not been able to do so. Nevertheless he congratulated himself on thus getting documents which would certainly aid him in his search. In short, he did not know whether to regret the indiscretion of the press or to be thankful for its perspicacity. The result was that Mainfroy received a lecture on the subject: "The press, like the tongue, is capable of the best and the worst."

The lecture ended with a few resounding generalities, and then dropping immediately into a consideration of the practical details, Brunnel added:

"But how the devil did they get hold of our list?"

Mainfroy promptly blamed the indiscretion on the clerks in the prefect's office, and got another lecture on "the necessity for giving district commissioners more scope for initiative and more independence."

While his chief was talking, the secretary was glancing mechanically over the copy of the *Gazette de Paris* and the photographs it had published. Suddenly he grew pale, his usual calm deserted him, and interrupting Brunel in the midst of one of his periods of eloquence, he exclaimed:

"It's she! It's she! I should have suspected it! What was I thinking of?"

Annoyed by this lack of respect, the commissioner at once began to gather arguments in his mind for a third speech on "the duties of secretaries toward their duly appointed superiors and the importance, in all branches of the police, of maintaining a strong discipline."

But Mainfroy seemed thoroughly disinclined to submit to any further torrent of eloquence. With trembling fingers he drew out his card-case and took from it a photograph, which he compared with the picture in the *Gazette* of the younger of the two Praline sisters. Meanwhile he was murmuring incoherently:

"Germaine . . . My little Germaine! . . . Is this the way I was to learn your name and your address? . . . Disappeared! . . . But, I shall find you, my dear! I take my oath on it. . . ."

He seemed so overwhelmed, so perturbed that the kind-hearted Brunnel spared him the rhetorical exposition of his thesis, and asked sympathetically:

"What's the trouble, my boy? Did you know one of those girls?"

And Mainfroy, in a voice filled with emotion, told his chief the story of an idyl which was still in its early stages, and which the event that had stirred all Paris had cut short. This was a different man from the nonchalant dandy whom the commissioner was accustomed to see taking his ease at his desk, or listening unperturbed to the brilliant theories Brunnel enjoyed developing. He spoke now with sincerity and feeling.

A month before, as he was going along the rue de la Paix, one evening just as the shops were closing, Hector had been struck by the grace, the modest appearance and the unaffected manner of two young girls. They apparently worked in one of the shops in that neighborhood and were on their way home. They were also undoubtedly sisters, judging by the resemblance between them. As they happened to be going his way, he was watching them with pleasure, though without any ulterior aim, when an incident occurred which might have proved tragic for them had it not been for a swift intervention on his part.

The two sisters were crossing the Place Vendome, talking interestedly together. A few moments before their arrival in the busy square, a heavy touring-

car had drawn up in front of one of the foreign banks which face the monument, and a tall gentleman of distinguished appearance had stepped out. Leaving his motor running, and a young boy, evidently his son, to wait for him in the car, the gentleman had hurried into the bank. As soon as he had disappeared, however, the boy began to experiment with the various levers and pedals on the dash board. In a moment the great car started to roll slowly forward, and gathering momentum plunged into the maze of taxis and pedestrians. The young lad shouted for help; a woman, pressed against the mud-guard of a taxi, screamed, and at the sound of her scream, panic spread through the other pedestrians. The car had just reached Mainfroy when he saw that the two sisters were imprisoned in the struggling crowd, their escape blocked by taxis in the rear, while the touring-car bore down on them from the front. They had completely lost their heads and fluttered helplessly before the danger.

Mainfroy, who prided himself on the ease and skill with which he managed his own much smaller car, during his summer vacations at the seaside, leaped upon the running-board as the car passed him, pushed aside the boy and seized the wheel. Twisting it sharply to the right, he faced the car out into the square, barely brushing those who would otherwise have been crushed under its impact. In what seemed less than a second he had his feet on the brakes, shut off the gas and brought the car to a stop. Leaving

an agent to question the boy, he hurried towards the young girls.

While the elder poured out her thanks volubly, her sister leaned against her, too pale to speak. Mainfroy watched her apprehensively, and communicating with the elder by a nod of understanding, they led the young girl together to a drug store, where she rested and was revived. It was on this day that Hector learned her name, from hearing her older sister call her Germaine. However, he discreetly avoided asking any questions and soon left them.

He realized that evening, however, that a love had begun to take root in his heart, and the next day at the same hour he was again strolling along the rue de la Paix. He pretended hypocritically to be greatly surprised at seeing the two sisters, greeted them courteously, and expressed a hope that they had not felt any bad effects from their adventure of the day before. Germaine, with a charming smile, said that she had been a coward and that it was absurd to be so strongly affected when one had not even been touched. She added that she had felt death close to her at that moment, and would treasure an everlasting gratitude to her savior. Her savior protested that any one could have done what he did, and that he did not deserve such praise. The conversation then drifted naturally on to other topics.

Hector observed with delight that Germaine was as intelligent as she was charming, and confessed to

himself, when he had left them, that he was well on the way to falling desperately in love with her.

Each evening he came back to the rue de la Paix, and each evening he chatted with the two girls, whom he accompanied as far as the Military School, where he left them—reluctantly—to return to the office. Through a desire not to seem intrusive, he had refrained from asking them their name. He merely knew that they were orphans and that poverty had forced them to work.

One evening, a few days before the strange disappearance of bus No. 519, finding himself alone with Germaine, he declared his love to her, and she admitted with charming frankness that his words had given her pleasure.

When they separated, however, Germaine had begged Hector to allow a week to pass without seeing her. She wished thus, by absence, to test the strength of his attachment and also to question herself as to her own feelings. She must first, she explained, ask the advice of her sister, who had always taken the place of her mother. When he might see her again, it would be Juliette who would send him a note.

Hector was now impatiently awaiting this letter—and instead he learned that the exquisite girl he loved was one of the victims of bus No. 519! . . .

When he had finished this narrative, Hector resumed, outwardly at least, the calm manner which he customarily maintained. He believed that a man

who was worthy of the name should keep his intimate feelings to himself and not spread them before the curious eyes of the public. The shock of the photograph in the *Gazette* and the need to express his anxiety to a sympathetic listener had momentarily broken down his reserve. Now that this first impulse was spent, he took control of himself once more and was to all appearances utterly cold. A superficial observer would have set this down to egotism.

The worthy Brunnel, who for his part was totally incapable of hiding his emotions, seemed more disturbed than Hector himself. He even forgot to give the little lecture on "the danger of love for a good official," which he had been preparing since Hector began his confidences. With touching awkwardness he merely tried to offer his young secretary some hope. He was floundering about in explanations in which he realized he was getting more and more deeply involved, when he was rescued by the telephone. Visibly relieved by this unexpected interruption, Brunnel hastened to take down the receiver.

He listened for a few moments in silence to the invisible speaker at the other end of the wire, answered in monosyllables and hung up the phone with indignant emphasis. When he turned about, his face was red with anger.

"That's the last straw!" he exclaimed. "What do you think of that? . . . That was the prefect's office on the wire. Can you guess why?"

With an imperceptible movement of his shoulders, Mainfroy indicated that he hadn't the slightest notion why the prefect's office should be calling them on the phone. The commissioner's face was drawn, and he continued resentfully:

"They blame me because that cursed list came out in the *Gazette*! And furthermore I'm informed that the affair has been taken out of my hands, that an examining magistrate has been appointed, and that the investigation will be carried on, under his supervision, by the Committee of Public Safety!"

"Well," said Mainfroy, "that's the usual procedure, isn't it?"

"It's a ridiculous procedure!" thundered Brunnel. "But I shan't let them make a fool of me like that."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked his secretary.

"In the first place, I am going to send in my resignation to the prefect! And in the second place, I shall carry on the investigation for my own pleasure. My income is not large, but it is enough, thank God! to make me independent. We shall see who will succeed in this matter: their pet Committee or Theodore Brunnel!"

He emphasized these words with a blow of his fist on his desk and began at once to draw up his letter of resignation.

Mainfroy, still sitting placidly at his own desk, watched him without a word either of approval or

condemnation. He made no effort to dissuade his chief from this sudden resolve.

When he had finished, Brunnel turned to Hector:

"As for you, Mainfroy, I hope that you will get along as well with my successor as you have with me."

The young man, however, answered quietly:

"I shall never know your successor, Mr. Brunnel, for I am going to send in my resignation too, in order to devote myself entirely to the search for Germaine Praline. . . . I have a small inheritance from my father, plus some savings of my own, so that I can scrape along. . . ."

"Good for you, my boy!" said Brunnel. "That's the way for a man to talk! . . . How would you like to come along with me to Saint-Julian-by-the-Sea? I have a hunch that we can learn something there. . . ."

"No, thank you, I am going to stay in Paris. I believe that that is where I shall find Germaine."

CHAPTER III

BRUNNEL FINDS A RIVAL WHO BECOMES A FRIEND

SAINT-JULIEN-BY-THE-SEA, in Calvados, is a pleasant little bathing resort, reached by a branch line of the railroad from Caen to the coast. During "the season"—that is to say, from June fifteenth to September fifteenth—several thousand vacationists from the nearby cities and Paris turn it into a gay and lively place. All afternoon the crowds stroll upon the beach or plunge into the surf. In the evenings there are dances, and lovers take possession of the boardwalk. But in the month of January, when the Casino is closed, most of the shops boarded up and the numerous villas along the shore deserted, the village takes on that dreary and desolate aspect of all places where life has been temporarily suspended.

One hotel alone remains open, and despite the lack of competition, its proprietor, Cesar Branchut, is obliged each year, as soon as October sets in, to discharge the cook and waitress, and supplement his earnings as hotel-keeper by making nets, while his wife does lace-work. The hotel itself, in spite of its pretentious name, "Grand Hotel of the Norman Coast," is really an old and modest inn. The walls

have grown decrepit and the loose windows offer easy passage to the north wind. One can easily slide one's foot under the doors of the bedrooms, and the large room on the ground floor, which Branchut has christened the "Dining Hall," is usually damp and icy.

Nevertheless the proprietor, who flatters himself that he is very up-to-date, has made one concession to progress. In the old days the sign over the door had read: "We lodge Both Man and Beast." Underneath Branchut has painted "Automobiles Stored for the Night." He considers this the last word in luxury.

It was about seventeen o'clock—for it is another sign of Branchut's up-to-date ways that he has adopted the railroad's system of keeping time—that is to say, it was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and already quite dark, when the door of the hotel opened to admit a tall, broad-shouldered man, whose face was half concealed by a soft hat pulled down over his eyes and an astrachan collar turned up to his mouth. A formidable mustache, covered with white frost, bristled under his nose, which had been reddened by the cold.

The stranger, who seemed to be in anything but a good mood, pushed the door shut with his foot and approached the fire, grumbling to himself. On catching sight of Cesar Branchut, who had got up at his entrance, he thundered, as though he were giving orders to a regiment: "Dinner and a room!" Then, taking off his hat and great-coat, he dropped heavily

into a chair, which groaned under his weight; then he stretched out his long legs towards the fire.

Madame Branchut, attracted by this unaccustomed noise, appeared at this moment in the doorway to the kitchen. At sight of the visitor she clasped her hands in surprise and exclaimed, "A traveler!" But her surprise gave way to astonishment when she saw the front door open once more and a second person enter the room. Her voice dwindled to an awe-stricken whisper as she murmured, "Two travelers!"

"Well," said the newcomer, "are travelers such a novelty as all that in this hotel?"

The man who had just entered was at least as tall as the first arrival, but decidedly thinner. His face was smooth-shaven and he did not appear to mind the cold in the slightest. However, when he had taken off his traveling-cap and overcoat, he too came up to the fireplace, sat down in the chair facing the impressive stranger who had entered ahead of him, and rubbed his hands together softly, as though pleased with something he had just accomplished. The other appeared to consider him in the light of an intruder, and pretended to take no notice of his presence. Cesar Branchut, having sent his wife back into the kitchen with a vigorous wave of his arm, followed her there, to give her instructions for the dinner.

The two strangers were thus left alone together, and in the prolonged silence the situation was threat-

ening to become embarrassing, when the newcomer asked:

"Well, *Mr. Brunnel*, have you found the address of our mysterious André?"

Brunnel started and demanded roughly:

"How do you know my name, sir? I have never set eyes on you before this moment! And how do you know what I am doing here?"

"Don't be angry, *Mr. Brunnel*, I beg you," said the other, smiling. "I recognize you, because yesterday I saw your picture—and incidentally, it was a very good likeness—in the *Gazette de Paris*. I know what you are doing here because, the same newspaper having announced your resignation this morning, I guessed that you would not give up a profession you loved so well for anything except the very love of that profession itself. Was I wrong?"

Flattered by this tribute to his fame, Brunnel softened visibly as he replied:

"Well, no! You were not wrong. I am *Mr. Brunnel*. But I am afraid I have no way of knowing. . . ."

"Who I am? Permit me to introduce myself. . . . My name is *Henri Henry*. I was formerly a reporter, with not too bad a reputation, on the *Gazette*. After having come into an inheritance and married, I gave up my profession. Recently, however, I have been growing homesick to get back in the reporting game. I'm sick of a peaceful life with no excitement

in it. When the papers published the news about the bus that disappeared, my only desire was to get into the thick of the affair. It happened that my wife was in the south, visiting her mother, and I was bored to death. I made up my mind suddenly, and came here to do some reporting, just as you have come to do some personal police work."

This speech was uttered in such a simple and friendly tone that Brunnel's irritation vanished completely. He held out his hand to his companion and said:

"In that case, Mr. Henry, shake on it! Since we are aiming at the same goal, we shall work together. We can do a better job and a quicker one than their Committee of Public Safety!"

The last three words were spoken by the former commissioner with drawn throat, as if it were painful for him to admit that such a committee existed.

After a few seconds of silence, during which he tasted to the full the bitterness of his resentment, he began again:

"I must admit, however, that our task does not appear to be an easy one. Nowhere have I ever found people so stingy with information as around here. I have been tramping this accursed town since morning, knocking at doors, questioning natives everywhere, and the only answers I get are: 'Maybe so . . . p'r'aps . . . I don't know. . . .' Or else they meet my questions with questions of their own: 'What do you want to know for? . . . If you belong

to the police, let's see your badge! . . .' Or some of them begin by protesting their own innocence: 'I'm an honest man, I am! . . .' So far as getting any information is concerned, I might as well have gone whistling for it! The Normans have certainly earned their reputation. God gave them lungs to make evasive answers with!"

As he talked, the fiery Brunnel grew more agitated still, and his voice took on such sharp tones of exasperation that Branchut, who had opened the door a few inches to see if his guests had need of anything, prudently retreated into the kitchen. No doubt he would have retired even more hastily, had he heard the last words of the ex-commissioner, who concluded his oration by saying:

"I'm going to make one more trial with this innkeeper, and if he refuses to give me any satisfaction, I'm damned if I don't skin him alive!"

This flight into realms of imaginary vengeance brought a fresh smile to the lips of Henri Henry, who remarked, with a touch of irony:

"It will not be necessary, my dear friend, to go to such extremes in the pursuit of your goal. I believe that I can give you right now the information you have been hunting ever since this morning, although I only arrived in Saint Julien a couple of hours ago. . . ."

Brunnel drew himself up erect and seemed both slightly skeptical and a little annoyed at this announcement. He glanced at the smiling face of his

new co-worker, and then thrusting out his large feet vigorously toward the fire, he drove his hands into his pockets with a grunt. A fresh log, which Mr. Branchut had put on the fire at their arrival, burst into flame at this moment and threw a reddish glare over the ex-commissioner. Slumping in his chair, his mustache disordered, his shoulders uneven, he looked exactly like a sullen giant. The reporter realized immediately the mistake he had committed, and made haste to soothe this vanity which was so easily ruffled.

"Of course I don't mean to say for a moment that I am any cleverer than you, sir. It simply happened that this time I was more lucky. I followed a different method, which wasn't infallible, I grant you, but which was perhaps a little more likely to succeed, considering the suspicious nature and the taciturn habits of the people about here. While I was coming down in the train from Paris, I thought the problem over and said to myself: 'What official document is there in a commune, which constitutes a sort of partial census of the inhabitants and which anybody can consult at any time?'"

"To this question there was obviously only one answer: the electoral lists. Of course it was quite possible that the mysterious André might not be on them; but on the other hand there was a very good chance of his name being included, considering that Professor Muret's daily letter from Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea, according to the Gonjard woman, had been

coming for at least five years. . . . You, yourself, brought out that fact, Mr. Brunnel, during the investigation which you carried on with great skill and intelligence. . . . The first thing I did, therefore, when I got off the train was to go to the town-hall and ask to look at the electoral lists.

"Out of the two hundred and sixty-six electors of Saint-Julien only four bore the Christian name of André. Two of these were old men and so could not be identified with our gentleman, who, according to Fonval, is about thirty years old. The third was twenty-five years old, but is a farm hand and cannot even write his own name. In fact, he had made his mark when he took out his elector's card. So that eliminated him without any hesitation.

"That left me only the fourth, André Gilbert, thirty-two years old, an engineer, with a doctor's degree in science, born in Caen. . . . Don't forget that old man Muret was professor for a long time in the University of Caen. There was therefore a probability in favor of the identification of André Gilbert with the unknown correspondent of the former professor. I made a note also of the young engineer's address: 'Villa Cécile.' Muret's daughter, you remember, is named Cécile. That, of course, does not prove anything, but it adds one more probability.

"Then I went to the railroad station to see if I could pick up any information there. I found the station master a very good sort. He had been born and brought up in Paris, and I knew the streets he

had played in as a boy. We chatted for a while and I learned that he knew André Gilbert well. After our talk, he was perfectly willing to tell me that the engineer bought a second-class ticket for Paris last Tuesday—the very day on which bus No. 519 disappeared—and that barring accidents he should have arrived at the Saint Lazare Station at ten o'clock in the evening. This made a third probability.

“Finally I went to the post-office. The post-mistress is a sentimental and pretentious old maid. When I came in, she was reading a book of poems. I pretended I was after some information about the hours of the mails and gradually drew her into conversation. In a few minutes we had discovered that we had the same spiritual aspirations and that we shared a fervent admiration for symbolist poetry. After ten minutes we were intimate friends and at the end of half an hour's mild flirtation, I had extracted my fourth probability from her. This time, however, it was really a certainty: I learned that it was André Gilbert who posted a letter each day to Professor Muret, whose pupil he had been at Caen.”

When the reporter had finished the account of the steps by which he had arrived, logically and inevitably, at the identification of André Gilbert as the mysterious young man who had been the eighth victim of the vanished bus, Brunnel rose and paced the room for a few moments in silence. The fire crackled

and threw long shafts of gleaming light over the heavy beams of the ceiling and the wide, uneven planks of the floor. Henry sat meditatively, seeming to be absorbed in studying the toe of his boot. The ex-commissioner had listened with the closest attention. He turned now and coming toward this unexpected rival, asked:

"Are you known at detective headquarters?"

"Fairly well," answered the reporter modestly.

"And they have never offered you a first-class salary to join the force?"

"If they had, I shouldn't have accepted it. Whatever respect and even admiration I may feel for those who defend society against its criminals, I have always preferred, for my own part, to remain in my rôle of seeker after information for the public. I have no desire to go beyond the simple bounds of that task. Where you see a useful work to be accomplished, I see nothing more than a complicated problem to be solved. And if I have disinterestedly taken up my profession again, it is purely in the hope of being the first to learn the truth of this affair and lay it before the public. . . . You cannot imagine what keen joy a man feels who is the first, before the police or anybody else, to bring clarity into some obscure drama; who can think to himself as he makes up his copy, 'It is thanks to my effort that tomorrow the whole world will have the key to the enigma. . . .' However, we have not reached that point yet, and the fact of having discovered the name and address of

the eighth victim is only a trifle, compared with the difficulties which no doubt still await us."

As he talked, his face came within the arc of light sent out by the fire. The rest of his body remained darkened by the wavering shadows. The single log which had flared up was settling down now into a slow burning, interrupted at times by a sharp hiss which betrayed the fact that the good Branchut did not always supply himself far enough in advance with firewood for it to be thoroughly dried out. A ship's lamp, suspended from the ceiling, threw out a furtive circle of illumination, which died off before reaching the ends of the room as if it hesitated to venture too far into unknown territory. What could be seen of the reporter's face revealed such an enthusiasm, such a quick power of intuition and such a clear intelligence that Brunnel, forgetting for once his bristling pride, was ready to acknowledge the superiority of this amateur.

Old habits and his own nature, however, proved too strong for him, and he could not resist the temptation of delivering a lecture on the great service rendered to society by the organized activity of the police. Henri Henry completed his conquest of the former commissioner by listening to every word of this lecture with polite attention.

Cesar Branchut had meanwhile gathered up courage, and noticing that the two strangers seemed to be talking amicably now, came back into the room. Brunnel's voice had dropped from its tone of thun-

dering irritation and his face had assumed an expression of naïve pleasure. The landlord therefore felt emboldened to smile upon them and to ask if they would have their dinners here or in their rooms.

"Set a table for two in one of the rooms," answered Henri Henry, and turning to Brunnel, he added: "We still have more things to talk about, haven't we?"

The dinner was simple but delicately cooked by the proprietor's wife. Brunnel, who took great delight in his food, appreciated the freshness and savor of home-cooking. Branchut had brought them a dusty bottle of wine from his cellar, which enhanced the tastiness of his wife's dishes, and when Brunnel at last wiped his sweeping mustache, laid down his napkin and lit a cigarette, he felt himself thoroughly warmed and cheered. Henri Henry had not spoken during the meal; he had barely touched his glass of wine, and he had pretended to listen to the commissioner's talk, but it was not hard to see that his own thoughts were engaged elsewhere. Noticing this, Brunnel stopped suddenly once in the middle of a sentence, and addressing himself directly to his reflective companion, demanded pointblank:

"What are you thinking about, my friend?"

Starting as though he had been abruptly awakened, the reporter answered:

"Why . . . nothing in particular . . . About what you were just saying."

"Ah! and what was it I just said? . . . I'll wager you haven't the slightest idea."

"To tell the truth, you would win your bet," said Henri laughingly, as though he were accepting his part in a game. "I hope you will excuse my bad manners. I *was* thinking of something quite different from what you were saying. I was thinking how strange it was for a daily correspondence to have existed between André Gilbert, a young man, and Muret, who is past sixty. Then I was thinking of the extraordinary existence of this same André Gilbert, who at the age of twenty-seven, when the most brilliant success seemed to await him in his profession, came off here to a little hole in the provinces and shut himself up like a hermit. So far as we know he may not have left here once during the past five years. And I said to myself that if we could find out what this young engineer was doing here, and what his daily letters to his former professor and the latter's replies contained, we would perhaps have a clue which would put us in the path of a more accurate understanding of the whole situation.

"Obviously," agreed Brunnel, "but how are we going to find out all that? The natives of Saint-Julien do not take very kindly to being cross-examined."

"Then we shan't cross-examine them. . . . Let's have a look at this Villa Cécile for ourselves! That is where our young friend lived alone for five years, and my devoted post-mistress tells me that he

had no servants except a deaf old woman who was half mad, and who used to go each day to clean and get his meals. We must also try to see the old woman, though I doubt if it will do any good to ask her questions."

"Quite so," said Brunnel sagely, "and first thing tomorrow morning. . . ."

"Why tomorrow? I plan to get inside that villa tonight."

"Oh! . . . but . . ." began the former commissioner. "Enter the villa tonight? That would be burglary!"

Henri Henry shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Would you rather wait," he asked, "until the Committee of Public Safety has got ahead of us? So that in addition to the crime you have just mentioned we should have to commit that of 'breaking official seals'? . . . And find nothing interesting for our trouble after all, when the police had carried everything off? . . ."

The suggestion of the Public Safety Committee brought back all of Brunnel's enthusiasm.

"You are right," he exclaimed. "Let us act at once. We cannot afford to delay!"

CHAPTER IV

TWO SHOTS IN THE NIGHT

As the two men turned into the village street, having notified the innkeeper that they would not be gone long, Brunnel exclaimed suddenly:

"We forgot to find out where this Villa Cécile is! There are lots of villas along the shore. Are we going to stumble around in the dark, looking at the name on each one?"

"Don't worry about that," said Henri Henry. "I have not overlooked such an important detail as the location of the villa. Our landlord tells me that we simply have to follow this road down to the sea and turn to our left. There, right along the shore, and just a step away, we'll find the Villa Cécile; we'll recognize it because it stands alone, with its back to a small grove of firs, facing the sea."

The "step" turned out to be more than half a mile. A stiff wind was blowing and the cold ate into the marrow of their bones, so that Brunnel soon felt his ill-humor returning. Although there was no moon, the night was not completely dark, and the two men picked their way along without much difficulty. Henry, moreover, was equipped with a pocket torch, which he flashed, on the ground before them, from

time to time. Eventually they reached a small house, which fitted the description of the one they were seeking. On one of the pillars of the gate they could dimly see a marble slab; and when the reporter turned his light on this, they read in gilt letters:

VILLA CÉCILE.

The two men stepped back a few paces and studied the front of the house in detail. On the ground floor were two good-sized windows, one on each side of the door; on the floor above, three. All five of the windows were protected by closed green shutters. Under the roof a small dormer window stood open.

"We might get in by the roof," murmured Henry.

But at that moment Brunnel gripped his arm and whispered:

"The house is occupied."

A light, in fact, had just gleamed through the shutters of one of the upper windows. It soon went out and reappeared an instant later in the next window, as if the person carrying it had moved from one room to another.

Approaching the house once more, Henry placed his ear against the front door, and in spite of the double noise of the wind and the sea, he strove to listen for some sound from within. It seems to him that some one must be dragging heavy objects across the floor, perhaps moving furniture, but the noise was so confused that he could distinguish nothing with definiteness. The light had once more changed

place, and Brunnel warned his companion. For the second time they moved back, to make certain of the change, when suddenly a shrill whistle sounded, and the light went out completely.

Was it an hallucination? It seemed to them that this whistle, which gave every indication of a signal, had been given within a few paces of themselves. As far as they could see, however, in the vague light of the stars, they could not make out the presence of any living being. Seized with a wordless apprehension, both men trembled. Henri Henry was the first to react against this impression, and he walked straight to the front door of the villa. Without consulting his companion, he pressed one finger firmly on the electric bell. The sound of the ringing within came muffled by the wind, and Brunnel could not help feeling that it was a lugubrious, and possibly an ominous, sound.

Almost immediately the shutters of one of the upper windows opened part way and a voice grumbled:

"Who are you and what do you want?"

"Mr. André Gilbert?" asked Henry in a matter-of-fact tone of voice.

"I am he," answered the other, in a voice in which the reporter detected a slight hesitation.

"But then your theory was all wrong . . ." began Brunnel, thrown out of countenance by the unexpected presence of the man he had believed lost with bus No. 519.

With an expressive gesture of his hand Henry silenced him, as the voice continued:

"Well, I'm waiting! What do you want?"

"We'll have to burn our bridges now," whispered the reporter. And aloud he replied, still as coolly as though there were no danger contained in the words he was about to speak:

"We are newspaper men and we have come to ask you for some information in connection with the disappearance of your former professor, Mr. Muret, and his daughter Cécile."

"Couldn't you wait until tomorrow morning for that?" complained the voice. "This is no time to come waking people up."

Having once unmasked his batteries, Henry was committed to audacious measures:

"You weren't asleep," he insisted, "for I heard you walking about from one room to another and moving heavy furniture."

"Well, all right," said the man, faltering a bit. "Just wait a moment. I'll come down and open the door for you."

And the shutter closed.

Brunnel at once began to reproach Henry.

The commissioner's passion for the romantic did not relish this commonplace ending to their adventure. He was bitterly disappointed to find that the man they had believed mysteriously spirited away was quietly settled at home, and his interest in the Villa Cécile disappeared at once.

"Why won't you admit you were wrong," he demanded, "and that this André Gilbert has nothing to do with the eighth passenger in bus 519? We are simply going to make fools of ourselves in this man's eyes, and I've half a mind to leave you on the spot."

"If you go," answered the reporter coldly, "I would simply request you to lend me your revolver. I haven't any weapon but my flashlight, and I foresee that I may have to defend myself."

A little ashamed of having thought of deserting at a moment when his companion anticipated danger, Brunnel changed his mind.

"Very well, then, I'll stay," he said, shrugging his shoulders to indicate his skepticism as to his friend's prophecy.

Several minutes passed, however, but no one came. Henry grew impatient and was about to ring the bell again, when the rumbling of a high-power motor was heard through the noise of the elements.

"We're tricked!" he cried, realizing suddenly what had happened.

Followed by Brunnel, he skirted the corner of the house at a run, and together they arrived on the other side in time to see a large limousine emerge from the grove of firs and disappear down the road at full speed. The dim light made it impossible to distinguish any of the characteristics of the car.

"To think of my overlooking the fact that the house had two exits!" exclaimed Henry, disgusted with himself. "My God! what a fool I was . . . !"

"Then, according to you, the person driving off in that limousine is the same man who spoke to us a few minutes ago?" asked Brunnel.

"Of course it is!"

"But then, André Gilbert. . . ."

"*This André is not André Gilbert*, that's all! And we have stupidly let him slip through our fingers—the very man who was interested in having the engineer disappear, and consequently the person, or one of the persons, who carried off the bus, and kidnaped its passengers!"

"I'm afraid I can't agree with you, my friend," declared Brunnel, with a dry note in his voice. "I should say that this man is certainly André Gilbert himself, and that, according to my theory, he has abducted Cécile because he is in love with her, and—"

"And old man Muret, I suppose he's in love with him, too? And the other passengers, I suppose he was in love with all of them? However, this is not the place to argue the matter. Just consider this one problem for a moment, if you will: Why should André Gilbert come to burglarize his own house?"

"Burglarize?"

"Certainly . . . and what is more, we can have the proof of it at once. Our unknown friend has been kind enough to leave the back door open for us."

While he had been speaking, Henri Henry had crossed the grove of firs and approached the house. His pocket flashlight, which he was now playing over

the rear wall, revealed a low door, which, as he had said, swung partially open. He added:

"It looks as if the man we interrupted at his little task hadn't left anything of value lying about. But you never can tell. . . ."

And he entered the house deliberately, followed by Brunel, who now seemed completely won over to the reporter's theory. The Villa Cécile consisted of a ground floor, an upper story and an attic. Downstairs, a dining-room, a study, a kitchen and a laboratory; upstairs, three bedrooms.

The dining-room, the kitchen and two of the bedrooms were in perfect order. The burglars, at any rate (if they were burglars), had made only a perfunctory examination of these rooms. In the third bedroom, a large wardrobe had been ransacked from top to bottom: bed linen and scattered pieces of clothing on the floor testified to the thoroughness of the job. The wardrobe had then been dragged out to the center of the room and a hiding-place in the wall, which was ordinarily concealed, had been emptied. A few envelopes had fallen to the floor and Henry picked them up. This secret chamber had no doubt contained a voluminous correspondence.

In the study the disorder was still more striking. All the drawers of the table stood wide open and empty. A safe had been forced and its door ripped from the hinges. Henry examined this carefully; there was nothing there. The burglars also had broken open the bookcases, and it was evident that they

had shaken each book, one by one, as if they had been hunting some paper which might have been hidden there.

As for the laboratory, it was literally plundered. On the floor lay fragments of equipment which once must have been highly complicated, but which were so shattered now that it was difficult to guess what their original form had been. Two large-sized platinum retorts, of considerable value, had been left lying in full view. Speaking half to himself, Henry murmured: "One point is certain. Our man is not an ordinary burglar. He was not looking for money or valuable objects. But what could it have been . . . ?"

He drew near a large wooden table placed in the center of the laboratory. The middle of the table was paler than around the edges, and a rectangle, about a yard and a half long by a yard wide, appeared, sharply outlined, as if some object with a rectangular base had stood for a long time on that spot.

Henri Henry leaned over and studied the table closely.

"Look at this," he said to Brunel. "At each corner of this rectangle there is a screw-hole, nearly four-tenths of an inch in diameter. . . . Put your finger in one of them. . . . What do you say?"

"That the screws had just been taken out a moment ago."

"Good! I am glad that we agree on that point. At least we know that it was our unknown friend who

stole the object attached to the table with four large screws. . . ."

His flashlight in his hand, he took a turn about the laboratory, carefully noting the location of the window, the door and all the details of the arrangement of the room. He also studied the ceiling and the floor, at length. When he had finished this examination, he went back for a final glance in each of the other rooms and climbed to the attic which he explored rapidly, but where he found only a few old trunks. Then he remarked to Brunnel, who had followed his investigation step by step:

"I think there's nothing more for us to do here."

The return to the "Grand Hotel of the Norman Coast" was made in silence. Henry and Brunnel were both thoughtful and could not help reflecting that the result of their searches had only been to make the problem more complicated. When they reached the inn, they found Cesar Branchut waiting for them. As soon as they appeared, he greeted them with:

"A letter for you, gentlemen. It was left here by a chauffeur."

He held out a sealed envelope, which bore no address.

"How do you know it is for us?" asked Henry.

"The chauffeur told me to give it to the two gentlemen from Paris who were stopping at the hotel."

"What did the chauffeur look like?" asked Brunnel in his turn.

"Well, . . ." said Branchut, "with the big goggles he had on and his collar turned up, he looked like any other chauffeur."

"And his car?"

"I didn't see it. He stopped just around the corner of the street. But from the sound of the motor it must have been a big car of some kind."

While Brunnel was carrying on this little cross-examination, Henri Henry had unsealed the letter.

"Take a glance at this strange message," he said to his co-worker.

In an unformed handwriting and reckless spelling, the following words were traced in pencil across a half-sheet of school paper:

*Peepel that mixes in things that aint none of their biz-
ness gets their dome stove in. the job I got on hand now
dont concurn nobody but me.
think hard, brother.*

Noticing that Branchut, with outstretched neck, was also trying to read the letter from the corner of one eye, Brunnel folded the paper, slipped it into his pocket and said to their landlord:

"Have you got our rooms ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are they adjacent?"

"Beg pardon . . . ?"

"I asked if they were adjacent?"

"Next to each other," explained Henry, smiling at the dazed expression on the innkeeper's face.

"No," said Branchut, "you didn't tell me to have 'em next to each other."

"It doesn't matter," said Henri Henry. "You can fix a different one for us. . . ."

"A different one?"

"A room with two beds. We're going to have a long conversation, and we'd prefer to share the same room."

While these new preparations were being made, Henry and Brunnel did not exchange any further speech. But as soon as they were installed in their common room, they drew up two chairs to a small table and sat down. Brunnel laid the letter open before them, and with a common impulse they both leaned forward to reread it at their leisure.

"Do you want to know what this strange letter makes me think?" said Henry.

"I was about to ask you that question," answered the former commissioner.

"Before I tell you, I'm going to take a few precautions. Our friend the landlord seems to be curious about us."

He lifted the mattress from one of the beds, placed it upright against the door and fastened it there with the little table which had stood at the head of the bed. Brunnel watched this operation in silence. Something about the gray inertness of the mattress, propped up like a corpse, gave him for the first time a full realization of the sinister nature of the errand on which they were engaged. Henri Henry's simple

precaution had changed their hotel bedroom into a retreat where the most dangerous plans might be evolved. From without the noise of the ocean and the slow creak of a pine tree in the wind made their isolation complete.

The reporter returned to his place at the table.

"Now he can neither hear us nor watch us through the keyhole," he remarked. "Let me recommend this very practical method of sealing up the doors of hotel bedrooms. . . . But to get back to our letter. In the first place, what sort of person do you think the author of it is?"

"Obviously an uneducated man . . . a roughneck of some kind. The handwriting, the spelling, the use of that expression, 'gets their dome stove in,' all seem to indicate that clearly enough."

"And I think precisely the opposite," replied Henry. To my mind it is an educated man we have to deal with, who has disguised his handwriting, and deliberately used slang and this bad spelling."

The commissioner pulled his long mustache meditatively for a moment, while he examined the letter more closely.

"That might be the case," he admitted judiciously, "but what proof of it is there?"

"There is proof in at least two places. Or if not proof, then indications that our unknown correspondent has betrayed himself; first, in his over-careful misspelling of the word 'business.' This is a word which the educated man assumes must be hard for

the uneducated to spell, especially as it is not pronounced the way it is written. So he has written it the way it *sounds*. But he has forgotten that the word 'business' is at present one of the most widely-used words in our language and that every man, educated or uneducated, has had to make use of it. And he has also forgotten the psychological law that the more striking a peculiarity—such as our spelling of this word—is, the more easily it impresses itself on the memory. There is hardly a man in the country, who does not know that there is no 'z' in the word 'business,' but there are thousands who forget the 'i' after the first 's.' That is where the really uneducated man would have been likely to make his mistake. The second place in which our correspondent has betrayed himself is in the little word, 'their.' He had used up all his ingenuity on the difficult words and forgot that it is the simple words which are tricky. In spite of himself, his trained mind made the distinction between 'their' and 'there'—a distinction which seemed so obvious that it did not even occur to him there might be any confusion. But the uneducated person, who grasps the striking peculiarities, just as he reads the headlines in the papers, is careless about the minor differences. In this case, he actually does, seven times out of ten, spell the word as it sounds. Certainly no person with such a crude, painful handwriting as this before us, would be aware of the difference between the adverb, 'there,' and the pronoun, 'their.' . . ."

Brunnel picked the paper up and scrutinized the words the reporter had been discussing.

"Nothing escapes you," he said with admiration.

"Therefore," concluded the other, "the author of this threat is trying to conceal his true personality and lead us to believe that he is an ordinary gunman. I don't imagine you can hesitate any longer in identifying him with the false André Gilbert, who has just burglarized the Villa Cécile?"

"No, there can be no doubt about that."

"Good. . . . Now one more thing: you have not forgotten that an anonymous letter warned the prefect of police of the disappearance of Muret and that. . . ."

Brunnel clapped one hand to his brow:

"I saw it!" he exclaimed. "The same crude handwriting! The same deliberately bad spelling! . . ."

"And certainly the same purpose, that is, to turn suspicion toward some one in the lower ranks of life, or even in the slums. All this does not advance us very much in our pursuit, but by fitting together enough of these hints, which our enemy has let fall, we shall eventually bring a little light into this matter. . . ."

At this moment two revolver shots, at a few seconds interval, interrupted Henry. They were followed by a moment of dead silence, and then a hurried bustling about and running to and fro in the hotel. Both men had lifted their heads and remained tensely alert during the silence which followed the

shots. Brunnel now leaped from his seat and started toward the door. Henri Henry, however, stopped him:

"Wait! . . . There's no use in showing ourselves yet. It's better to let *them* think they succeeded. . . ."

"What do you mean?" Brunnel's eyes darted rapidly from the padded door to the imperturbable figure of the reporter.

"I mean that those two shots were certainly fired from without, through the windows of the two rooms we were supposed to sleep in tonight. . . . The attempt to put us out of the way followed the threat without any loss of time. It was because I suspected some such turn as this that I made the landlord give us a different room. . . . The men we are hunting are dangerous rascals."

Henri Henry spoke with as much coolness and self-possession as if he had not been in any way involved in the attempted murder which had just broken in on their conversation. The steady light in his gray eyes, however, showed that he realized the seriousness of their situation. For a few minutes the two friends faced each other without speaking, each busy revising his thoughts to take account of this new twist of events. It was clear that the purpose of their visit in this deserted seaside village was perfectly known to their opponents, and that the unknown enemy would stop at nothing to prevent their success. The ex-commissioner and the ex-reporter

found themselves in the position of soldiers caught in a clearing and at the mercy of a hidden foe's fire.

Drawing aside the mattress he had placed against the door, Henri Henry listened. The noise of quick steps in the corridor determined him to remove his barricade entirely and open the door. He perceived the grotesque figure of Branchut, in night-shirt and drawers, wearing a cotton cap with a huge tassel and holding a candle in one hand.

As soon as the latter caught sight of Henry, he shouted:

"Did you hear that?"

"Perfectly," answered the reporter.

"Who's shooting up my house?" The landlord's fingers trembled and the hot wax from the candle dripped on the back of his hand.

"I'll tell you who is shooting up your house, if you will answer one question for me. When that chauffeur brought the letter for us, did he ask you what rooms we were going to sleep in?"

Branchut scratched his head with his free hand.

"Come to think of it, he did," he admitted. "He even advised me to give you the two rooms opening out on the street, one on the right of this and the other on the left."

"And it didn't strike you there was anything queer about that?"

"Well, no. I thought he was probably working for a friend of yours, and wanted to see that you were well fixed for the night."

"We would have been fixed all right," said Henry grimly. "And if you're interested to know all about it, I can tell you that the two shots were fired by the chauffeur or one of his accomplices. If you would like to find the bullets, go look in the wall over the beds we were supposed to occupy. . . . And now I'm going to get a little sleep. So I'll have to ask you to excuse me. . . ."

CHAPTER V

A SINISTER DISCOVERY

AT dawn Henri Henry's clear voice awoke the ex-commissioner from a heavy sleep.

"Well, Brunnel, have you forgotten that we still have work to do, and that this is not the day to lie in bed all morning?"

Brunnel rubbed his eyes and looked about him in a dazed manner, while Henry laughed and continued:

"Come on! Get up! I'm anxious to catch that ten o'clock train for Paris, and first we have to question the widow Bastien."

"The widow Bastien—?" repeated the other, still half asleep.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. That's the name of the old deaf woman, who is half mad, and used to take care of the house for our young engineer. While you were asleep, I've been getting information from the landlord, who is not entirely over the shock of last night's excitement yet. However, he verified my theory about the bullets. They were both of them neatly set in the walls of the bedrooms we were supposed to be in at the time. They're better off there than in our heads, at any rate, and there's no damage done, except a couple of broken panes. Branchut was wor-

ried about those until I offered to pay for them. Then he brightened up, and out of gratitude was willing to tell me everything he knew."

While Henry was talking, Brunnel had succeeded in shaking off his drowsiness, and was making a quick toilet. When he was ready, he followed his companion without any further questions. He felt sure that with this guide, he would be taken only where there was information to be gathered.

The landlord was waiting for them in the large room below, with two bowls of steaming coffee and a large chunk of coarse, brown bread. They ate hurriedly and set out.

After picking their way through several winding and dirty streets, they came at last before a dilapidated hut. Between the street and the hut lay a small garden, overgrown with weeds and brambles, and surrounded by a wooden fence, which was rotting away.

"This is the place," said Henry, pushing open the gate and entering.

An indefinite odor, in which filth and mildew were mingled, greeted their nostrils as they stepped into the yard; it grew stronger as they approached the house, a wretched affair of planks and old tiles, patched together, with a moss-grown roof where several holes gaped in the wintry light.

Henry rapped vigorously on the door with the handle of his cane. There was no answer.

"She is certainly deaf," observed Brunnel.

Evidently agreeing with this remark, the reporter abandoned his knocking and began to explore the sides of the hut. A single window, in the rear wall, opposite the door, lighted the miserable room. The word "lighted" is perhaps an exaggeration in this connection, for the thick layer of dust on the panes absorbed most of the sunlight which fell on them. Only a few dim streaks found their way into the uninviting interior. In spite of the absence of any sort of curtains, the two observers were forced to strain in order to see through the almost opaque glass.

As he raised himself on his tiptoes to look through the upper half of the window, which seemed a little less dirty than the rest, Henri Henry slipped and would have lost his balance, had he not instinctively seized hold of the window for support. Under the sudden pressure of his weight, the window squeaked and opened part way.

"Hello!" exclaimed the reporter. "It wasn't locked! That's strange."

Without any further hesitation, he pushed the window wide open and leaned across the sill. The stale odor of greasy cooking, old clothes and long unaired atmosphere made him step back at once and take a deep breath of fresh air.

"Must be the first time in a year that window has been opened," he grumbled. "How the devil do people keep alive in places like that?"

Then he added, more cheerfully:

"If widow Bastien took care of our young engineer's house the way she takes care of her own, he must have lived in style!"

The cold wind, however, brushing into the hut through the open window, had by now cleared out the atmosphere a bit. Brunnel, in turn, leaned across the sill, and also stepped back at once, this time not under the influence of the fetid air within, but as if struck with horror by some ghastly spectacle. He caught the reporter's arm and, without a word, pointed out to him the horrible sight which had shaken his nerve.

Henri Henry also grew pale and shuddered. Now that their eyes were accustomed to the dim light of the house, the two men could make out the details of the interior. The sight which had made Brunnel, and even Henry himself, tremble, seemed to emerge from the shadow and grow momentarily more distinct.

It was the corpse of an old woman, hanging by a rope from the largest beam of the ceiling. A horrible grimace exposed the tongue, which had turned purple and was thrust out between the two rows of jagged teeth. The appearance of this tongue gave conclusive evidence, from the first sight of it, that death had been caused by strangling. The bloodshot and protruding eyes, the disordered gray hair and the twisted arms completed the gruesome spectacle which had so profoundly affected the two detectives.

Overcoming their repugnance, however, after a few seconds of silence, Henri Henry resolutely thrust one leg over the sill, swung himself into the room and approached the dangling body. Although he was convinced that the last breath of life had already left it, he cut the rope and stretched the corpse out on the stone flags of the floor, and examined it carefully. The arms and legs had already taken on the rigidity of death. The heart was stilled, and a small mirror, which Henry held before the old woman's lips, showed no film across its surface. Brunnel by this time had also overcome his trepidation and climbed in through the window.

"I would wager," he said, "that she has not been dead more than an hour or two."

"The doctor will decide that important question," answered Henry, "and his decision may influence the action of the court. In the meantime, I'm inclined to agree with you. If we are not mistaken, the murderer cannot be far from here now. Of course, with a car like his you can cover ground. . . ."

"You mean that this is also . . ."

"The work of our friend? . . . Certainly. Who else could it be? The man who stole the unknown object, whatever it may be—and it is clear that he doesn't intend we shall ever find out—from André Gilbert's villa last night, is the only person who could be interested in having this poor old woman disappear. . . . With diabolical foresight this mysterious and formidable rascal who, don't forget, knows

us and knows what we are after, realized that we would try to question the widow Bastien. As a crime more or less means nothing to *him*, he executed her himself."

"Nevertheless," objected Brunnel, "he must have believed that we were dead ourselves, or at least wounded, from his shots during the night."

"True, but you must remember—and *he* certainly remembered—that we are not the only ones who are following this absorbing case. The investigation which is being carried on by the Committee of Public Safety will inevitably arrive some day at the door of this wretched hut. And the widow Bastien, however foolish and deaf she was, might still have been able to give some information about *that object with a rectangular base*. For it is there, I am sure, that the secret of this drama lies. . . . And now, my friend, I think that Saint-Julian-by-the-Sea has nothing more to reveal to us. When we have taken a quick glance around this room, which seems to be the whole house, we can catch our train for Paris and take up the thread of our search once more from there."

Henri Henry rummaged swiftly through the disorder of the dead woman's belongings and declared at length:

"Just as I imagined. . . . Nothing here that we want. . . . Let's go."

In one leap he was out of the window and crossing the dismal garden toward the street. Brunnel

paused to replace the window in the position in which they had found it, and then rejoined him. When they were together in the street, the ex-commissioner suggested:

"We might ask some of the neighbors if they have heard any unusual noises here tonight."

"What good would that do us?" answered Henry. "We know what has happened here, don't we? It's in Paris now that we have most chance of finding the answer to this riddle."

"At any rate," insisted Brunnel, "we ought to notify the local police of our sinister discovery. We may have been seen climbing in the window of the poor woman's hut, and if we seemed to be running away, we might be suspected. . . ."

"Of having strangled the old widow? . . . I haven't any fear of that, and on principle I don't like to take the sort of step you are proposing now. I have never found it useful to become involved with the local authorities. However, if you insist, we can step by at the police station. We have time for it. But please observe that I merely yield—and reluctantly at that—to a desire explicitly expressed by you."

"Why should I observe that?"

"In case," replied Henry, "anything unpleasant should happen to us."

Brunnel smiled once more. In his capacity of former magistrate, the prospect of entering into relations with the local police, represented by some

country bumpkin of a gendarme, who would no doubt stand in awe of his Parisian reputation, held no terrors for him. Moreover, he was not disinclined to show these stolid Normans what a metropolitan police official was capable of doing in the way of uncovering crime.

The armed force at Saint-Julian-by-the-Sea consisted of a sergeant and four policemen, who were lodged, with their wives and their children, in a good-sized building close to the town hall. A garden divided into five equal parts, one for each family, surrounded the building. The general appearance would have been essentially peaceful, had it not been for the flag hung out over the door and the inscription in capital letters: NATIONAL GENDARMERIE. At the moment when Brunnel and Henry arrived, the sergeant's wife was busy hanging out wash in her section of the garden. She watched the strangers distrustfully and called out in a penetrating voice: "Placide!" Immediately the sergeant, in shirt-sleeves with a pair of bright blue suspenders glistening in the sun, appeared in the doorway. He was a strapping figure of a man, with swarthy complexion and a well-waxed black mustache. His little beady eyes and narrow forehead obviously did not express great intelligence; but his stature was imposing and his hands, covered with dark hairs at the knuckles, were so large and thick that they inspired the local disturbers of the public peace with a respectful fear.

Brunnel drew near Placide and greeted him with an air of condescension:

"Sergeant, I am Theodore Brunnel, retired commissioner of police in the Military School District of Paris. . . ."

Noticing that the sergeant did not seem greatly impressed by this introduction, he added:

"You have no doubt heard of me?"

This time a smile which seemed to contain a malicious gleam and from which Henry augured no good, lit up the beady eyes and wrinkled the corners of the mouth under the waxed mustache.

"You're damn right I've heard of you," answered Placide. And without any apparent reason, he broke into a loud guffaw, which seemed to explode in his huge throat.

Brunnel flushed with anger at this reception, which was incomprehensible to him, but forcing himself to remain calm, he continued:

"Mr. Henri Henry, whom you see here, and I, have just discovered a woman strangled in her home. It is the widow Bastien—perhaps you know her? Before leaving town we wanted to fulfill our duty as citizens of the Republic, and notify the proper authorities of . . ."

The sergeant was no longer listening. Turning toward the room behind him, he had beckoned to some one invisible to the two Parisians. Then, facing Brunnel once more, he asked:

"So your friend's name is Henri Henry, is it?"

"That's right, sergeant," said the reporter.

Brunnel opened his mouth to continue his speech, but Placide silenced him with a dry gesture:

"Never mind any more! I know what to do."

The sergeant gathered himself together. An expression of keen pleasure lit up his stupid face, and he presented the appearance of a man about to take part in a game he thoroughly enjoyed. At length he announced:

"Since you, who call yourself Brunnel, and this man, who says he is Henri Henry, have come to the station yourselves, that saves me the trouble of going to look for you in town. You certainly have plenty of nerve, haven't you, boys . . . ?"

Brunnel felt a cold sweat break out along his spine. What did the clumsy fool mean, with this kind of talk?

Placide continued:

"I don't suppose you guessed that your breaking into the Villa Cécile and your murder of the poor old Bastien woman had already been reported, did you? Well, you can . . ."

"You're mad," said Brunnel in a hoarse voice, instinctively drawing himself tense as if to leap at his accuser.

Any movement he might have made, however, was prevented by two powerful hands, almost as large as Placide's, which seized his arms from the rear and reduced him to a state of helplessness. The policeman, who had come up silently and acted on a

nod from the sergeant, quickly slipped a pair of handcuffs over the former commissioner's wrists and held him firmly by the collar of his coat. Mr. Brunnel made an effort to speak, but astonishment and rage held his throat contracted as if in a vice. At the same time another policeman had performed the same operation on Henri Henry, who accepted the situation without resistance.

Placide then began again:

"You can wait in the cooler until we notify headquarters at Caen. Then you'll probably be transferred to some prison that is more worthy of a pair of high-class criminals like you."

With a complacent smile over this speech, he turned pretentiously away and looked to see if his wife had noticed his handling of the situation. The latter was watching him with admiration, and he drew himself up, as if to say, "I know how to treat 'em!"

The two policemen led the prisoners into a low, dark room, where the women kept their stores of vegetables, and which constituted the town lock-up. With discouragement written plain in the droop of his wide shoulders, Brunnel dropped upon a bag of potatoes.

"What a mess!" he groaned. "My God, what a mess!"

In the face of this depression, Henry did not have the heart to say, 'I warned you.' Instead he strove to reassure his companion.

"In less than twenty-four hours—as soon as our identity is established—we shall certainly be set free. . . ."

"But who has lodged this absurd complaint against us?"

"The chauffeur, of course! Still our friend the chauffeur. He evidently found out somehow that his attempt to kill us during the night had failed, and he figures that he can hold us up this way for a day at least, while he makes a clean getaway. I must say that he sized up the sergeant's intelligence pretty accurately, but before long that sergeant will be overwhelming us with excuses. . . ."

"He's a scoundrel of the first water!" said Brunnel.

"Who is? The sergeant?" laughed the reporter.

"No, the chauffeur! The sergeant's a fool of the first water. . . . Besides . . ."

And the incorrigible Brunnel was launched upon a theory about the low standards set in recruiting members of the national police forces.

CHAPTER VI

LOVE PLAYS DETECTIVE

WHEN Mainfroy learned that the girl he loved was one of the victims of bus 519, he determined immediately, it will be remembered, to devote himself entirely to the search for her. He could not conceal from himself that the task would be extremely difficult.

Far from having lifted, the shadow which enveloped the case appeared to be growing deeper. No clew to any reasonable solution of the mystery had yet been discovered by the police and the curiosity of the public was consequently still unallayed. Bitter criticism of the authorities continued to be heard in private and appeared only slightly tempered in the daily papers. The Public Safety was groping along the same trail Henri Henry had taken, but with much greater deliberation.

Mainfroy, who had no other information than that received at the beginning, had not yet heard of André Gilbert nor the widow Bastien nor the ruthless chauffeur who had proved so hard to catch. For that matter he had no interest in the affair except from the personal point of view of the disappearance of Germaine Praline. He did not care who had

committed the crime; what he wanted was to discover the hiding-place of the captives. He refused to believe that the passengers in bus 519 had been slain. This hiding-place, he argued, must be without any doubt in Paris, and according to all the probabilities, somewhere in the Military School district. What had become of the bus itself? Mainfroy addressed himself first of all to the search for a possible answer to this question, proceeding by elimination—that is to say, by going over the whole district and examining carefully every house in it.

“After all,” said the young man, “an autobus can’t have flown away like a bird nor burrowed into the ground like a mole. It must be in one of these houses. It can’t be any place used for business, so it must be either a private house or a garage. In the first case, it would have to be a house with an unusually large driveway; in the second it couldn’t be a public garage, or the first person who happened in would see it.”

Mainfroy had therefore undertaken the job of eliminating every building in the neighborhood which did not meet one or the other of these two conditions: either a private house with a driveway large enough to admit a bus, or else a strictly private garage.

The Avenue de Suffren held his attention more than any other street, since it was there that the trail of the bus had been lost; and an old house, at number 68b, near the apartment where Muret had lived with his daughter, seemed to him particu-

larly likely as a place of concealment for the stolen vehicle. The house was vacant, and according to the neighbors a sign had been hanging out in front for a number of years: "*For Sale. Inquire of Mr. Marcandier, lawyer.*" Mainfroy knew that immediately after the disappearance of bus 519, the Committee of Public Safety, with the help of Mr. Marcandier, had searched the house with no result. In spite of this he could not help thinking that there was something of interest still to be learned from this old house, which had stood so long for sale.

This reflection led him to put aside for the time being his work of elimination and find out why the house had not sold. He decided that if he informed the lawyer of his real intentions, Mr. Marcandier would refer him to the Public Safety, which had already obtained all the information he could give. He determined therefore to make use of a strategy. He had a half-dozen calling cards engraved with this inscription:

HECTOR DE MAINFROY

Bousquinet Manor

at Confolens

(Charente)

The directory had supplied him with the address of Bousquinet Manor, and in spite of the anxiety which tormented his heart, Hector could not keep from smiling ironically as he saw himself thus transformed into a lord of a manor. Putting on his most

fashionable coat and knotting his most irresistible tie, he set out for the lawyer's in a high-priced car, which he rented for the occasion, in order to play his rôle as thoroughly as possible. He sent his new card in to Mr. Marcandier, after adding in pencil, "Wishes to buy a house in Paris." The lawyer received him almost at once.

Mr. Marcandier was about fifty years old and had preserved the courteous manner, though a little stiff and ceremonious, of the old school of lawyers. His upper lip and chin were clean-shaven, but on his cheeks he wore neatly-trimmed sideburns of steely gray. His high collar forced him to keep his chin constantly in the air, and a black necktie was wrapped twice about his neck, as in the portraits of the days of Louise-Philippe. His speech was slow and grave, his gestures deliberate. His reputation was that of a perfectly honest man, a worthy successor of the long line of old-time scholar-lawyers whose professional honor has been a credit to modern democracy. When he saw the young man enter, he rose, indicated a seat and, bowing with a cordial but formal politeness, opened the conversation:

"You wish, sir, to buy a house in Paris? I thank you for honoring me with your confidence. No doubt my colleague and friend, Mr. Matifut, attorney at Confolens, gave you my name?"

"Yes, it was Mr. Matifut," Hector replied hurriedly, thankful for this opening.

"So you wish to buy a house in Paris?" repeated

the lawyer. "In what part of the city had you thought you would like to establish yourself?"

"I have been hearing about a house," began Hector, "in the Avenue de Suffren, which has been for sale for a long time and I thought . . ."

"Ah, yes! I know which one you mean. Number 68b. . . ."

"Precisely."

"I am sorry that this particular house should please you, as it is no longer for sale."

"No longer for sale?"

"No. . . . Its owner has come back from a long stay in the colonies and has notified me that he intends to keep the house now and live in it himself. Besides, I suspect that under the conditions he imposed on its sale, you would not have been more likely to buy than the others who looked at it and wanted it."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because . . . Well, I suppose I can tell you now, without violating any confidence . . . because the owner had given me orders to discourage any prospective buyers by asking an exorbitant price."

"A strange way to sell a house," commented Hector.

"Yes, he is a strange man altogether. . . . But, if you wish, we might take a look about and see if there aren't some other houses which would suit you, since that one is no longer possible."

"I must confess, Mr. Marcandier, that was the

one I wanted. Couldn't I make a personal visit to its strange owner?"

"I'm afraid it would do you little good. However, since you are a friend of Matifut, and my client has not forbidden me to give his address, I am quite willing to tell you. It is Mr. Robert Brancion, and he is at present living at the Hotel Ruscaïl, rue de Castiglione. . . . When you have been convinced of the uselessness of trying to make him change his decision, I hope you will come back here, Mr. de Mainfroy, and see me again."

"With pleasure," answered Hector.

He left the attorney and went back to his modest apartment, to think the matter over at leisure. A secret instinct told him that the movements of this Robert Brancion would be worth watching, and he began to draw up a plan of campaign.

"If Brunnel were only here," he thought regretfully, "the two of us together could shadow Brancion. But alone, it will be a harder job. . . . To think of me, who never had any taste for this kind of work, forced into becoming a versatile detective! Ah, Germaine, when I find you again, there will be no more police work for me!" Hector groaned at the conclusion of his reflections. He did not enjoy this rôle for which he seemed to be cast in an unwritten drama, to be called *Love Plays Detective*, and produced on a stage of dangerous folly.

He slipped off his fashionable coat and irresistible

tie, donned an old suit of clothes, a ready-made bow-tie, which had merely to be hooked to the collar-button, and clapped an old felt hat on his head.

In this costume he appeared a little later in a small café near the rue de Castiglione, where several of the men he had formerly known among the police, often foregathered. He sat down and ordered a cup of coffee. When it was set before him, he showed little inclination to drink it, but played with his spoon, glancing from time to time over the new faces which entered. Suddenly he trembled. Two men of large stature had just sat down at the table next to him. He knew them both well.

"Muscard, Grosvin," he said in a low whisper.

The two men turned toward him.

"Well," said one of them in the same tone of caution, "Mr. Mainfroy. . . . Have you changed to another department?"

Hector nodded his head.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"We're watching a man on that bus case."

Mainfroy suppressed a smile of satisfaction. The Public Safety was following the same trail as his. His idea was apparently not such a bad one.

He remembered that Muscard and Grosvin had always been friendly toward him, and he reflected now that perhaps it would be to his advantage to lay his cards on the table. Making up his mind abruptly, he said:

"Listen. . . . I told you just now that I had

changed to another department. The truth is I have left the service entirely. But I have a personal interest in this matter of bus 519. . . ."

"A personal interest?" asked Muschard distrustfully.

"Yes," answered Mainfroy. "My fiancée is one of the victims."

This announcement won Hector the sympathy of Grosvin, who was a sentimental soul and on occasion even rhymed sonnets to a young dressmaker in the Latin Quarter. It was Grosvin who said to Muschard:

"Well, Mr. Mainfroy has more right to be interested in this case than any one else."

And Muschard, who considered Grosvin a superior intellect, repeated:

"More right than any one else."

"In that case," said Grosvin to Hector, "what can we do to help you?"

"Tell me this: Is the man you are following Robert Brancion, owner of the house at number 68b Avenue de Suffren?"

"The same."

"Well, what do you know about him?"

The two men consulted together, or rather Muschard consulted Grosvin, and both began to speak simultaneously:

"We were with the Chief when he . . ."

Here they stopped and Muschard said to his inseparable companion:

"Go ahead, Grosvin. You can tell it better."

Grosvin then continued:

"We were with the Chief when he searched 68b. It is an old house with a lot of corners and odd rambling-places in it. We went through it from cellar to attic, without finding a thing that was suspicious. Still the Chief had an idea there was something queer about the place and wouldn't quite let go of it. When he found out that Brancion claimed he had just landed a week ago at Le Havre, on his way back from Africa, whereas he had really come back six months ago—it was simple to check up on that at the steamship company's office—the Chief got more suspicious than ever. Our man had come back from Africa with a dozen negroes, servants and attendants of one kind and another. But absolutely no way of finding out where he kept himself during those six months! He has only been at the rue de Castiglione for a week. Also no way of finding out where he keeps his negroes, for he only has one with him, to act as his private valet. You can guess that that was enough to put us on his traces."

"Have you tried to make the valet talk?"

"Ugh! . . . You don't know what you're saying, Mr. Mainfroy. I've still got the goose-flesh at the thought of it. When I tried to talk to him, he opened his mouth wide, as if he was going to bite me, and showed me that his tongue was cut off. It was horrible to look at that poor black fellow with

a shapeless stump of flesh in his mouth. I turned on my heels and got out."

"Do you know anything else about Brancion?"

"He's about thirty years old, well built, looks hard as nails. He's been in Africa for about five or six years, and nobody knows what he was doing down there. At any rate, he advertised his house for sale before he left but gave his lawyer orders not to sell it. You'll have to admit that doesn't sound natural . . ."

"I knew that detail," said Mainfroy. "What is his profession?"

"He hasn't any, but he's an educated man, all right. He studied science somewhere in the provinces . . . where was that, Muschard? . . ."

"At Caen," replied Muschard.

"At Caen!" exclaimed Hector. "Then he was probably a pupil of Professor Muret, who was in bus 519!"

"That's so! Maybe he was . . ."

"Look here, my friends, do you want to do me a great service?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Mainfroy, if we can . . . ?"

"Let me go along with you while you shadow this man."

"Certainly. . . . But steady, there he is, coming out of the hotel. . . . He is going to take a taxi. . . . You come along with me and we'll follow him in another taxi. Muschard can stay here to watch for him in case he gives us the slip."

CHAPTER VII

THE WHITE CLOUD IN THE AVENUE DE SUFFREN

THE taxi in which Robert Brancion was riding stopped abruptly, in the Avenue de la Motte-Piquet; in front of a garage. Having been coached by Grosvin, the driver of the pursuing taxi passed the other car and drew up by the curb, fifty yards farther on, before a café. Mainfroy and Grosvin, getting out, sat down at a table on the café terrace, from which they could observe the movements of the man they were shadowing, without drawing attention to themselves.

Robert Brancion was tall, slender and fashionably dressed. His skin was tanned by the sun. His dark beard was long and well combed. His clear eyes were handsome, but hard and dominating, and one peculiarity emphasized their hardness: the two eyebrows joined above the nose, making a single horizontal line, which was cut perpendicularly by a deep wrinkle. He seemed to be hardly more than thirty years old, and when he wished, knew how to adopt a seductive manner which was extremely difficult to resist.

Hector had taken note of the characteristics of this strange face in the few seconds while Brancion, having dismissed his taxi, seemed to await some one

at the door of the garage. At length the door opened, and a luxurious and powerful limousine appeared, announced by the honking of its horn. In a minute it was drawn up beside the curb where Brancion stood. The latter seemed to smile with satisfaction as he walked slowly around the car and examined it carefully. Finally he spoke a few words to the chauffeur and got in the limousine. Hector and Grosvin, a moment later, were back in their taxi and started once more in pursuit.

This time it was not so easy. The limousine was incomparably more swift than the poor taxi, and without the traffic delays which frequently stopped Brancion's car, the two detectives would have been "left in the soup," as Grosvin expressed it, "after the first three minutes."

"His chauffeur is another negro, like his valet," he remarked to Hector. "I wonder if his tongue is cut out too . . ."

At that moment the limousine stopped. Brancion got out and entered a large grocery. The taxi, of course, had also stopped, and Grosvin was determined to get a closer look at the black chauffeur. Going up to him, he asked casually: "Is the rue Saint-Dominique anywhere near here?" The negro, turning his head toward his questioner, regarded him for a moment from large, bulging eyes; then opened his mouth and exposed the stump of his amputated tongue. He accompanied this pantomime with a gesture of polite regret.

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"It doesn't matter, Black Boy," said Grosvin. He took up his station before the door of the grocery, under pretense of lighting a cigarette, but in reality to see what Brancion was doing. The latter came out at this moment and narrowly missed bumping into the inspector. A grocery clerk was following him with a half dozen hams strung together and two large bags filled with various articles of food.

Grosvin watched in amazement.

"He's taken to doing his own marketing now," he said to Mainfroy when he had rejoined the latter in the taxi.

The limousine turned finally into the Avenue de Suffren and stopped at number 68b. The followers saw the negro chauffeur get out, open the wide swinging gate, then drive his car into the courtyard and come back to close the gate.

Opposite number 68b is the vacant lot where the Modern Machinery Company building formerly stood. No house, therefore, could conveniently offer its windows as a post of observation. On the other hand the roofs of number 70 and 68 seemed well adapted to that use. Grosvin entered the janitor's apartment at 68, displayed his inspector's card and at once obtained permission to go on the roof.

He said to Mainfroy:

"Climb up there if you want. I'm going to stay here in the taxi, so as not to let Brancion get away from us."

As soon as Mainfroy had picked his way to the

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edge of the roof, he looked eagerly down into the courtyard of number 68b. But he was disappointed: the courtyard was empty. . . . "The limousine must have gone out again while I was climbing those six flights of stairs," he thought to himself. Any other hypothesis was unacceptable, for the court was enclosed on all four sides: on the street side by the wall in which the gateway was; to left and right of that by the two adjoining buildings (68 and 70); and in the rear by the façade of the house itself. Across the entire front of this façade was a high marble landing, reached by a flight of seventeen or eighteen steps, which certainly no car could climb. Hence, since the limousine was not in the courtyard, it must have gone back out into the street. After having once more studied the façade of the mysterious house, Hector retraced his way down the six flights of steps and was astonished to find Grosvin still at his post.

"Did you give it up?" asked Mainfroy.

"Give it up . . .?"

"Yes, when the limousine came out . . ."

"*The limousine hasn't come out yet!*"

At this statement Hector came near losing the self-possession which had made his reputation. The last words of the inspector had struck off a fugitive spark in his mind which was, he felt suddenly sure, the spark of the truth. For *in this courtyard where a large limousine had just vanished in a few seconds, an autobus could also vanish. . . .* This deduction

held many implications, and for the first time since he had begun to follow Brancion, Hector felt an absolute certainty that he was on the right track. If he had reached the roof sooner, perhaps he would have learned how an automobile could disappear in that courtyard. At any rate, Brancion and his car would not stay indefinitely in the building. By hurrying back to his observatory and not leaving it again, Hector would be sure of seeing the limousine reappear eventually. He would then know how it had been concealed.

When he had explained his idea to Grosvin, the latter, with intense curiosity, exclaimed:

"I'm going up on the roof with you, Mr. Mainfroy. What if he does give us the slip? We can always pick him up again, and the main thing now is to find out how that car disappeared."

He paid the taxi driver and mounted to the roof with Hector. There they settled themselves, as comfortably as possible, in the lead gutter, and waited.

"You were with the Chief when he examined the house?"

"Muscard and me."

"And there was nothing, absolutely nothing, that looked suspicious?"

"Not a thing. . . ."

The afternoon advanced slowly and the two observers still saw nothing.

"I hope he doesn't wait until it's dark to come out," said Grosvin once.

"Or that the house hasn't got another exit somewhere," added Mainfroy.

They looked at each other in dismay at these pessimistic suggestions. Then suddenly they trembled. A low detonation, as if muffled, had come up to them from the courtyard, though no one was visible there. Immediately after this explosion a thick cloud of white, opaque smoke rose to the height of the second story. It was several minutes before this smoke was dissipated. When the air was once more clear, Grosvin muttered a furious oath. The limousine had reappeared in the courtyard, with the negro chauffeur at the wheel!

"This is sleight-of-hand, or magic!" exclaimed the inspector. "This sort of thing doesn't happen."

"Obviously," said Hector calmly, "it is sleight-of-hand."

Robert Brancion was standing on the pavement of the courtyard, in front of the flight of stone steps. He raised his head and sent a penetrating glance toward the roof of number 68. The two men, busy watching what was going on beneath them, had no time to draw back. Brancion had seen them. He shrugged his shoulders, nodded to the chauffeur and stepped into the limousine. The negro closed the door of the car after him, hurried to swing open the gates into the street, and in a moment they had left.

"Now we've done it!" said Grosvin. "He's not only given us the slip, but we've let him catch us in the act of watching him. We'll either have to

give up the job or else change our system entirely. But I can't say that I'm altogether sorry at that. It was almost worth it to watch the show he put on."

Having nothing more to do on the roof, they climbed down once more to the street and determined to go pick up Muschard, who must have been bored, left so long without his other self.

First, however, they stopped at the garage in the Avenue de la Motte-Piquet, where Brancion had gotten his limousine. They might be able to pick up a little information there. When he had seen Grosvin's card, the manager of the garage made no objection to telling what he knew—which was little.

"A few days ago," he said, "this gentleman who calls himself Robert Brancion and who told me that he was an explorer, came to me and asked me to get him, as quickly as possible, a high-powered car, either new or second-hand, capable of great speed and strong enough to make long runs without any trouble. He told me to pay whatever was necessary and I found what he wanted at once. This morning he sent a negro with a letter, who took charge of the car and waited here for his master. . . ."

Muschard had reached his sixth glass of vermouth-cassis, when Grosvin and Mainfroy returned. But as he was well endowed by nature with the valuable faculty of absorbing liquids, he indicated his pleasure at seeing his friends again by ordering a seventh.

Grosvin told him the story of the disappearance and reappearance of the limousine, and Muschard

listened with his mouth open, interjecting from time to time:

"If anybody but you told me that, I shouldn't believe a word of it."

Then, as Grosvin added:

"I should like to know what he did with all that food he bought on the way?"

Muscard replied:

"To feed his negroes."

"And perhaps," said Hector seriously, "to nourish his prisoners."

This possibility, openly expressed for the first time, made such an impression on Muscard that, in order to give it due consideration, he found it necessary to order an eighth vermouth-cassis—

"Look out," warned Grosvin suddenly. "Here comes our customer."

Brancion's limousine, in fact, had just come into sight. At slow speed, it passed the little café, where the three detectives were seated, and Brancion, leaning out at the door, glanced at them mockingly. Then it speeded up and disappeared before Mainfroy, Grosvin and Muscard, stunned by the audacity of their "customer," had had time to make plans for continuing their pursuit.

Mainfroy had not yet recovered from his surprise when a messenger boy entered and said to the cashier:

"Mr. Mainfroy?"

"Over here!" said the young man.

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The messenger approached, handed him a letter and left. Hector broke the seal and repressed an exclamation as he read these words, written on the typewriter:

If Mr. Mainfroy continues to interfere in other people's affairs, misfortune will befall a certain young lady whom he knows well. If on the other hand he is good, this young lady will perhaps be restored to him before long. It will therefore be his conduct and his discretion which will determine the fate, and possibly the life, of G. P.

With the calm which seldom deserted him, Hector refolded this strange missive and slipped it into his bill-fold.

"What's that?" asked Muschard, whose training in manners had been somewhat neglected and whose natural curiosity had been whetted by the vermouth-cassis.

"Nothing about our affair," Mainfroy answered nonchalantly.

He had already made up his mind. What use could there be in struggling against forces stronger than himself? The only thing which interested him in this matter was the life and liberty of Germaine Praline. Now, according to this letter, Germaine was alive; she might even be set free soon. All that Hector might do could only endanger her liberty and her life. The wisest course was therefore to follow the advice he had received: to remain inactive and be discreet.

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His natural vocation for detective work was too slight for him to regret the necessity of giving it up. It was only reluctantly, and in the hope of finding Germaine, that he had thrown himself recklessly into this adventure. Since he now knew that the best way to reach the same end would be to do nothing, he would do nothing . . . and not complain. He reflected, with a furtive smile, that if his former chief, Brunnel, had been present and had learned of his decision, this ardent detective, who loved his profession as an art, would not have found words harsh enough to characterize his resolution, worthy only of an amateur.

If he were to break off his relations with Muschard and Grosvin, however, he must do it without causing any hurt to their feelings. They had been too willing to help him for him to abandon them now without a word of explanation. So he began, blushing slightly at the lie he was about to tell:

"The truth is, this letter has just brought me good news. It seems I was mistaken in thinking that my fiancée was one of the victims of bus 519. I can only thank you cordially, therefore, for your friendliness and not hamper you any more in your work."

"But I assure you, Mr. Mainfroy," exclaimed Grosvin warmly, "you are not at all in the way! On the contrary, you'll be a help to us."

"Thank you for saying so, Grosvin, but my mind is made up. I am going to get out of the affair com-

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pletely. Once more, let me tell you how much I appreciate—”

But Muschard interrupted him:

“Not on your life, Mr. Mainfroy! You aren’t going to drop us like that. That’s just plain desertion, after—”

“Muschard!” said Grosvin severely.

“There’s no ‘Muschard!’ about it,” replied the other, imitating his friend’s voice. “I say what I think. Mr. Mainfroy has no right to . . .”

“Muschard! Grosvin!” cut in a sharp voice, behind the three men.

The two inspectors stood up quickly, murmuring in dismay, “The Chief!”

It was, in fact, Mr. Jordon, Chief of the Public Safety, who stood before them. He had come in the café a moment before, and his subordinates, in the heat of the discussion, had not noticed his entrance.

Mr. Jordon looked at the two detectives for a moment with an expression of scorn, then said scathingly:

“You’re a couple of fine gumshoes, you are! . . . You’re sent out to shadow some one and you don’t even see your own Chief when he comes in the café where you are!”

Muschard and Grosvin turned red with confusion and studied the floor at their feet.

“The gentlemen were having a little argument,” continued the Chief ironically. “Apparently they

couldn't agree. No doubt it was about a hand of cards in last night's game, or a horse they're going to make a fortune on!"

"Let me explain to you, Chief . . ." began Grosvin hesitatingly.

"Never mind!" interrupted Mr. Jordon. "Besides, that's not what I'm here for. You're to stop shadowing Robert Brancion at once . . ."

"Stop shad—"

"Yes. . . . You were so clever at it that your man saw he was being watched. He lodged a complaint at the Ministry of the Interior, and as it seems he's a well-known man and a millionaire, not to mention being an explorer and a scientist, they begged his pardon and promised to have the shadowing stopped. I was surprised that you let yourselves be caught like that, so I came here to see how you went at your job. Let me congratulate you!"

Then, turning toward Hector, whom he knew well, he added:

"As for you, Mr. Mainfroy, in spite of the respect and friendship I have for you, let me say to you that it is hardly proper, when one no longer belongs to the force, to come distracting men from their work who have not yet abandoned our profession . . . Good-day, sir!"

And the Chief of the Public Safety left before any of them could find a word to reply. The two detectives looked at each other sheepishly.

"What do you know about that, Muschard?"

"Can you beat it?"

"So we're forbidden to shadow Brancion for headquarters . . ."

"But not for ourselves."

"Personally, I'd like to take another look at that white cloud in the Avenue de Suffren . . ."

"A white cloud with automobiles in it . . ."

"Lays 'em like a chicken lays eggs . . ."

"And since our man got us a calling down from the Chief . . ."

"We deserve a little revenge!"

The two inseparables shook hands warmly, and said nothing more on the subject. Hector was moved at the sight of their perfect understanding, but as usual his feeling was hidden by an air of apparent detachment. He shook hands with each of them and returned to his apartment. Worn out by the emotions of the day, he went to bed early and slept profoundly . . .

The next morning, as he read his paper, he was shocked to find the following item:

FATAL IMPRUDENCE OF TWO AGENTS OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY

Two detectives of the Public Safety, Joseph Grosvin, 38 years old, and Alphonse Muschard, 36 years old, climbed last night, for an unknown purpose, to the roof of number 68 Avenue de Suffren. The unfortunate men, having slipped on the lead gutter, fell into the courtyard of the neighboring house, where a servant, aroused by the noise, discovered their bodies in a badly mangled condition. The

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servant, who is dumb, had great difficulty, in the absence of his master, in making the accident known to the police commissioner of that district. The bodies were later taken to the Morgue. The building at number 68b, to which the court where the two men were found belongs, is the property of the well-known scientist, Mr. Robert Brancion, who has recently returned from a long expedition in central Africa.

CHAPTER VIII

BRUNNEL'S REVENGE

HECTOR MAINFROY was in a state of depression. He had given up his job, and now, too, that he had abandoned the search to unravel the mystery of the disappearance of bus 519, he was at a loss for some means of controlling the impatience which gnawed at his spirit.

Certainly the order he had received to drop his investigations had come to him in a strange fashion. This mysterious letter, written on the typewriter, which he had reread a hundred times, held out the hope that "if he was good," Germaine would be restored to him. Something told him that the man who had the audacity to offer such terms, was strong enough not only to sweep aside all obstacles, but also to keep his promises. Hector had faith in the promise in this letter. Already he had resolved to remain inactive and to be discreet.

The tragic deaths of Muschard and Grosvin, moreover, had shown him how dangerous it was to oppose the plans of the man who was directing this affair. It did not occur to him for a moment to attribute the fate of the two detectives to accident. There could be no doubt that a criminal hand had thrown

them from the roof. Hector thought apprehensively of his former chief. What had become of Brunnel since he had left him? Was he also on the right scent and was he, like the two inspectors, to perish by some inexplicable accident?

As he considered this possibility, Hector grew genuinely sad. He liked Brunnel and would suffer to see any harm overtake him. He hoped that he would soon have news of him.

As it happened, it was that very afternoon that he heard newsboys calling under his window:

"Extra! . . . Extra! . . . Gazette de Paris. . ."

In his present state of mind any distraction which promised to take his thoughts off the danger which threatened Germaine, was welcome. He hurried down the four flights of stairs and bought a copy of the extra.

Across the full page was the headline:

BANDITS AT SAINT-JULIEN-BY-THE-SEA

and underneath:

Two Sensational Arrests which may be Connected with the Mystery of the Bus that Vanished.

Breathlessly Hector read the amazing article which followed:

Caen, January 18 (*by special correspondent*)—A double arrest has been made at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea by the skillful and courageous sergeant of the police of that

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locality under conditions which seem to connect this incident with the famous affair of Bus 519.

It will be remembered that the eighth passenger in the bus that vanished was known only under the name of "André", but it was also indicated by the evidence that he lived at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea.

It now appears that a villa, located in this town and rented to an engineer named André Gilbert, was broken into last night and ransacked from top to bottom. Mr. André Gilbert left for Paris on the day of the disappearance of Bus 519 and has not returned. The young engineer was formerly the pupil and had remained the friend of Professor Muret, one of the victims, and the owner of the Villa Cécile, where Mr. Gilbert lived at Saint-Julien. There is therefore every probability that André Gilbert and the eighth passenger in the bus are the same person.

The first effect of this burglary, by drawing the attention of the police to the personality of the engineer, has been to shed some light on one of the mysteries which has remained unsolved since the disappearance of the bus. Unfortunately the bandits did not limit themselves to burglarizing the Villa Cécile. They also broke into a miserable hut inhabited by a poor woman who formerly kept house for Mr. Gilbert, and there, for a motive which has not yet been discovered, strangled the unfortunate woman, who was named Lucie Bronde, widow Bastien, born at Saint-Julien, sixty-three years old at the time of her death.

The chauffeur of a car passing through town at that moment caught sight of the two murderers entering the cottage of the widow Bastien and notified the police station. Unfortunately this conscientious citizen, whose intervention was so useful, did not reveal his name and

continued on his way at once, doubtless through modesty. Sergeant Placide, however, immediately set out with his men and succeeded in capturing the two murder-burglars, in spite of fierce resistance on their part. Headquarters at Caen, having been notified of the arrest, have opened an investigation to determine if these criminals are not also connected with the disappearance of Bus 519.

As will be observed, the rôle of Sergeant Placide in the matter was considerably heightened in the account. It is possible that it was he himself who supplied this information to the reporter at Caen, and in doing so felt privileged to rearrange the facts slightly to increase his own glory. But Mainfroy, who knew nothing of what had actually happened, paused to admire the courage of the good sergeant before going on with his reading.

There were only a few more lines, but they were enough to plunge Hector into complete stupefaction. Here they are in all their beauty:

LATEST NEWS (*By Telephone*): The two individuals arrested at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea have undergone a preliminary investigation and claim to be Theodore Brunnel, former police commissioner at Paris, and Henri Henry, former journalist associated with the *Gazette de Paris*. The police are engaged at present in verifying these statements.

Editor's Note: There can obviously be no connection between these two criminals and the well-known personages whose names they have borrowed: Mr. Theodore Brunnel, former magistrate whose recent resignation has been re-

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gretted by all who knew him, and our esteemed collaborator, Henri Henry, who, we hope, will some day return to his place on this paper where he has left the record of a brilliant career.

Unable to decipher the full truth, Mainfroy nevertheless realized that the unlucky Brunnel had been the victim of an excess of zeal on the part of the Saint Julien police. If it had not been for the strangling of the widow, which was only too real, the episode would have been comic. Brunnel accused of murder and burglary! Obviously it would only be a question of a few uncomfortable hours for him. Even now, perhaps, he had been set free with apologies, and Mainfroy imagined him delivering an eloquent lecture to those who had arrested him.

While readers in Paris were learning of this "sensational arrest," which seemed clearly to be connected with the affair of the bus that vanished, Brunnel and Henri Henry had been transferred to Caen in a special car. Four policemen, led by Sergeant Placide, did not take their eyes off the two formidable criminals during the trip. Henri Henry, having asked in vain for permission to buy a book in the railroad station, to while away the time en route, had decided to take a nap. Consequently Placide, who considered himself a shrewd reader of men, warned the others:

"Watch the fellow who's pretending to sleep. He's the dangerous one."

And the protectors of the peace kept a distrustful eye over the innocent slumbers of the reporter.

Meanwhile Placide's imagination, which was usually strictly limited, began to assume fantastic proportions. He saw himself promoted as a result of his brilliant conduct, rewarded with a medal and even—who knows?—decorated with the Legion of Honor. The case was a sensational one and he deserved a fitting recompense. His only regret was that he could not show the smallest wound, and he was resentful at his prisoners for not having put up a better fight against their arrest. This was, no doubt, why he began trying to irritate Brunnel, who seemed the more excitable of the two, in the hope of driving him into some act of violence against the representatives of the law.

Secretly he had adjusted the commissioner's handcuffs so that they could easily be slipped off by a little effort. He now began to make the most gloomy prophecies, assuring the helpless Brunnel that he would soon be under the guillotine's blade. The latter stood it in silence as long as he could, but finally broke out:

"You wait a little while, my friend, until this stupid blunder you're making is found out, and I'll teach you whether you have the right to insult a prisoner!"

"Brunnel, old man," murmured Henry, opening one eye, "don't shout so loud, please. I can't sleep. . . . What complaint have you got? We

wanted to go back to Paris and we're on the way. We're even getting free transportation as far as Caen! Not to mention that we have a splendid escort, to protect us from our enemies!"

"You be careful," ordered Placide, "what you say to make fun of properly constituted authorities."

Without bothering to answer this interruption, Henri Henry continued to Brunnel:

"Follow my example. . . . Take a nap. . . . We had a full enough night and morning for us to be entitled to a little rest now."

Eventually the train arrived in Caen with its load of police and prisoners. The rumor had spread that the two criminals were arriving and a crowd of curious spectators had gathered at the station. When Sergeant Placide and his men got off, surrounding Brunnel, who was furious, and Henry, who was smiling, shouts went up from the street:

"Lynch them! . . . They don't deserve to live!"

"That's the final touch," said the reporter quietly. "The populace will now tear us to pieces."

And Brunnel, like the hero of Courteline's story, cried out:

"I have been set upon while doing my duty!"

One of those uncomfortable and springless wagons, which justify their name of "salad baskets," was awaiting the supposed murderers of the widow Bastien. With a great deal of pushing and struggling the police opened a path through the crowd, and made their prisoners climb into the salad bas-

ket, meanwhile shielding them from the blows intended for Brunnel and Henry. The sergeant even received, involuntarily, a handsome crack over the eye from a cane, which sent the blood trickling down his face and supplied the irascible Brunnel with a moment of joy. Placide smeared the blood off his cheek with the back of one hand and taking his place in the wagon, said to Brunnel:

"You can laugh, all right, but you'll bleed worse than that when the guillotine comes down."

Brunnel's irritation, however, was temporarily cured. The sight of his wounded enemy had restored his good spirits, and instead of growing angry, he replied sententiously: "You mustn't count your chickens before they're hatched."

In the midst of hostile cries the wagon had reached the courthouse, where Mr. Pruniere, the examining magistrate, was waiting to question the two criminals. In the hallway Placide said to Brunnel, before turning him over to the care of the Caen police:

"We separate here, but we'll meet again at the trial."

This time Brunnel mentally thanked the man who had invented handcuffs, which prevented him at that moment from becoming a genuine criminal by strangling the sergeant.

When the judge caught sight of the two prisoners, he was struck with astonishment. After a few seconds of embarrassed silence, he said:

"What! It's really you, old man?"

"Myself," answered Brunnel, "and I'm sorry that these handcuffs make it impossible to shake hands with you."

"Take the handcuffs off these gentlemen," said Mr. Pruniere to the guard who had entered with them.

Then, to the same guard:

"Who made this arrest?"

"Sergeant Placide, your Honor, at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea."

"See if he is still here, and if he is, ask him to come in."

"But, your Honor, are you going to stay alone with the prisoners?"

"They're not dangerous, don't worry about that . . . and get me that sergeant."

Turning toward Brunnel and Henry, he continued:

"Have a chair, won't you? You must be exhausted after this excitement. . . . And tell me what's happened."

Brunnel related the events of the night and morning without omitting a detail. He presented Henri Henry to the judge, then explained the reasons for their visit to the Villa Cécile, the flight of the burglars, the attempt on their lives during the night at the Grand Hotel of the Norman Coast, the discovery of the widow Bastien's body and finally their arrest by the zealous Sergeant Placide.

Mr. Pruniere was an old friend of Brunnel. They

had studied law together and frequented the same cafés in the Latin Quarter. They had met from time to time since then and the judge knew the commissioner's honesty. So, in spite of his professional skepticism, Mr. Pruniere did not doubt any of his former associate's statements.

Brunnel was finishing his story when the guard entered with Placide, whom he had found having a quiet drink across the street while waiting to know if his testimony would be needed. Before appearing in the judge's presence, the sergeant had straightened his coat under his belt and wiped off his face with a handkerchief. He now stood with his chest out, his heels together, and his face radiant with satisfied vanity, expecting the judge's praise.

"Are you the person," asked Mr. Pruniere, "who arrested these gentlemen?"

Placide nodded. His sense of sudden importance made it impossible for him to speak.

"And why," continued the judge, "did you arrest them?"

After swallowing twice, Placide recovered his powers of speech and in the monotone employed by agents in making a deposition, recited the speech he had prepared:

"This morning at eight o'clock sharp the chauffeur of a strange car appeared at the station. He notified me that two dangerous criminals, who went under the names of Brunnel and Henry, were in

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Saint Julien, where they had broken into a villa and murdered an old woman. An hour later the two individuals who are before your Honor now appeared in their turn. They said that they were Brunnel and Henry, and they already knew about the burglary of the villa and the murder of the old woman. So I arrested them and . . ."

"Because they already knew about the murder of the old woman?"

"And because they claimed to be Brunnel and Henri Henry!"

Having finished his deposition, Placide waited, with a smug expression of contentment, for Mr. Pruniere to pronounce the approval he had earned, trusting that a more solid recompense would come later. Consequently he could not believe his ears when the judge, with a glance of scorn which should have annihilated him, declared:

"You idiot! Why didn't you arrest the chauffeur instead?"

"Wh . . . What did you say, sir?" stammered the poor sergeant.

"I said," continued the judge pitilessly, "that in the first place, you're a fool, and in the second place, it was the chauffeur you should have arrested. Try to be logical if you can. You arrested these gentlemen because they knew about the crime at nine o'clock in the morning. But the chauffeur knew about it at eight o'clock. He's the one you should have seized first. . . . In the meantime, you

can make your excuses to these gentlemen, whom I am going to set at liberty."

With death in his soul, his mustache drooping and his eyes dulled, Placide was forced to humiliate himself before Brunnel and Henri Henry. The former commissioner took no more vengeance on him than to say:

"I don't know whether I shall ever die on the guillotine, but I'm sure you will never be drowned. . . ."

After which Mr. Pruniere said to the two friends:

"Gentlemen, you are free . . . unless you will consent to dine with me this evening, in which case I shall keep you until morning. You have certainly earned a meal and a good bed."

CHAPTER IX

A FOUR-LEGGED ASSISTANT

As they got off the train at the Saint Lazare Station, Brunnel said to Henri Henry:

"I hope you will excuse me for leaving you, but I admit that I've had enough of this business and I'm going to get out of it entirely. I think I'll take a trip south. That'll give me a change of scene and perhaps cure this frightful cold I caught on the coast. . . ."

"I'm anxious to get a rest myself," replied Henry, "and I'm going to join my wife in Gascony."

"I'm very glad, however, to have made your acquaintance," added Brunnel politely.

"The pleasure has been all on my side," Henry assured him.

Once more they shook hands and then parted. When he had reached home, the reporter was pleased to find, on reading the papers, that he had had a good press and that the happy outcome of his adventure at Saint Julien had been told in a friendly tone.

On the other hand the unfortunate Placide, who the day before had been "the intelligent and courageous sergeant," was now "the stupid and grotesque

policeman." He was buried in sarcasm and it was suggested that he should be demoted. One deputy had even announced that he intended to interpolate the ministry on the "action the government intended to take in the affair of Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea."

This reversal of public opinion brought a smile to Henry's face; he knew the worth and the stability of popularity. To appreciate more fully the speed of this reversal, which amused him, he got a copy of the previous day's paper and reread it. It was then that he noticed the item headed: "*Fatal Imprudence of Two Agents of the Public Safety.*"

This event, in spite of the concise and brutal manner in which it was told, set him to pondering. He was quite aware that detectives of the Public Safety are not in the habit of strolling on roofs for their own pleasure, and that although it was claimed the reasons for which Muschard and Grosvin had taken this dangerous post were unknown, it could only have been in the course of performing their professional duties. Henri Henry, moreover, had known Muschard and Grosvin personally. He remembered that they were skillful agents and that generally they were given difficult and delicate jobs. And finally, the fact that the tragic accident had taken place in the Avenue de Suffren, the very locality where bus 519 had been seen for the last time, suggested that it was precisely something to do with this bus that had led the two inspectors to that spot. This impression was so strong that he decided to postpone

his departure for Gascony a few hours and take a look—out of pure curiosity! he assured himself—at the building where the two deaths had occurred.

When he returned from his walk in the Avenue de Suffren, he was deeply thoughtful. He had been struck by a detail which did not seem to fit in with the official story of the accident. As far as he could tell from the street (which of course was not very well) the roof had not seemed dangerous. It was apparently a flat roof, leaded and even equipped, unless he was mistaken, with hand rails wherever they might be useful.

That two men as nimble and experienced as Muschard and Grosvin should have fallen from such a homelike roof, seemed to him the height of improbability. The demon of the reporter began to stir again in him, and he considered going into this problem more deeply.

"After all," he reflected, "my wife is not expecting me. I can stay in Paris a few days longer."

And for the second time he postponed his departure. This decision took a load off his spirits. From the moment he made up his mind to take up anew—and this time in Paris with fresh clues—the investigation which had been so unluckily interrupted at Saint Julien, his cheerfulness returned and he set to work with his old ardor.

First of all he must find a way of getting on the roof whenever he wished. It was obvious that by now the janitor of the house had received orders to

prevent a similar accident from happening in the future.

Henri Henry returned to the Avenue de Suffren to look for another means, less direct but more discreet, of gaining access to the observatory which had proved fatal to the two agents of the Public Safety. Chance once more was favorable to him.

At number 78 a small sign, hung out over the door, announced: *Artist's studio for rent*. The reporter asked to see it, noticed with joy that it would be a simple matter to step from the studio out onto the roof, and that from there he could get in two minutes to the roof of number 68. He rented the place at once and told the woman that he would move in the same day.

He was sure now of being able, at any time of the day or night and without asking permission from any one, to reach the roof "from which something might be seen." It was true, of course, that he had no clear notion at all as to what this observatory was going to show him. This time he acted from intuition rather than from reasoning.

Having made these arrangements, he dropped the question of roofs for the time being, and he went back to work in his usual way, that is to say, thinking out the situation clearly before beginning to act. In order to assemble all that was known about the case once more in his mind, he reread all that had been printed concerning the disappearance of bus 519, since the first discovery of the catastrophe.

When he came to the well-known list, whose publication had been partly the cause of the disgrace and later the resignation, of his friend Brunnel, he said to himself:

"Until now all those who have been at work on the case, including myself, have let themselves be hypnotized by the three names of Muret, Cécile Muret and André. That was reasonable enough, after all, since it is highly probable that the reason for the abduction of the bus and all its passengers lies somewhere with those three people. It's equally reasonable, however, to suppose that we may be able to get some useful information by following up the other clues. The Public Safety has already made investigations along those lines and has failed to discover anything. But the fact that the police failed is no reason why I should."

Consulting the list again, he came upon the paragraph concerning Digeon, the driver of the bus. This notice, it will perhaps be remembered, indicated that Digeon was married, and the father of two children; lived at 81 Boulevard de Grenelle; that he had the unfortunate habit of getting drunk, but was on the whole a good husband and father. Henri Henry decided to begin his new investigation from this angle.

He therefore went at once to the Boulevard de Grenelle. Number 81 was a moderate-priced apartment house, evidently occupied by workmen's families, but kept in perfect order. The bus driver's

wife lived in a small suite of rooms on the sixth floor, with windows on an iron balcony. The reporter was received by Mrs. Digeon in a simple dining-room, where everything shone with cleanliness. The woman before him was about thirty years old, but her face was prematurely worn and showed traces of privation and grief. Two little girls, of whom the elder was not more than six, clung to their mother's dress and watched the stranger with clear, solemn eyes. Near the window lay a shepherd dog, who growled and showed his long pointed teeth when Henry entered.

"He won't hurt you," said his hostess as she saw him glance distrustfully at the dog. And turning to the dog she ordered:

"Keep quiet, Pipo!"

"I hope you will excuse my disturbing you, Madame," began Henry. "I am a newspaper man and I am trying to get some information about the accident of which your husband was one of the victims. . . ."

"There have already been a good many newspaper men here," she answered sadly, "and a number of people from the police. But what can I tell you? I don't know any more about it than you do. . . . And they printed in all the papers that my unhappy husband was a drunkard! That's not true! He may have gotten a little gay occasionally, but he never drank enough to lose his head. . . . There's really nothing more I can tell you. . . ."

"I should like to suggest something," continued Henry, "and you must pardon me if I insist. I assure you that my greatest desire is to restore your husband to you. Now it has just occurred to me. . . . You have a dog there of a breed that is famous for its powers of scent. Have you had him long?"

"For two years. That is to say, ever since he was born. He was given to us before his eyes were opened, and he became very attached to us. He was especially fond of his master, and if we hadn't forced him, he wouldn't have eaten a thing since my husband disappeared. . . ."

"Well, I am sure that if you will trust me with this dog for a while, he will help me find his master."

The woman seemed impressed by this idea but her face betrayed, nevertheless, a certain hesitation, and Henri Henry guessed its cause.

"I realize," he told her, "that this is a valuable dog and you cannot hand it over to the first person who comes along—"

"Oh, I don't mean . . ." she protested feebly.

"Certainly! That's perfectly natural. You don't know me at all. But if you will allow me to do so, I shall give you a five hundred franc note when I take the dog. That will at least cover the price of the animal. . . . Pipo—that's what you call him, isn't it?—will remain your property. I shall bring him back this evening, I hope, and shall beg you to

keep the five hundred francs for your charming daughters."

Mrs. Digeon blushed and the tears rose to her eyes as she expressed, with a gesture, her acceptance and her gratitude.

"Please don't feel uncomfortable at taking this money," added the reporter graciously. "I am a journalist and I am anxious to make you some slight reparation for the harm other journalists have done you in writing things which were not true about your husband. . . . Just one more word: have you a recent photograph of Mr. Digeon?"

"I have one taken only a fortnight ago . . ."

"That will be perfect." Henry slipped the photograph she took down from the mantelpiece into his inner pocket. It was the picture of a man about forty years old, with a thick black beard and rather harsh features. "Now, will you tell Pipo to come with me?"

It seemed as though the intelligent animal had understood that the reporter was a friend, for he made no objection to going with him. For greater safety, however, Henry bought a leash at the nearest shop and they set off together, the dog trotting beside him with lowered head and a sad expression in his eyes as though the loss of his master had been a genuine grief to him.

"It may be an idiotic thing I'm going to try," said Henry to himself, "but sometimes the most fool-

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ish ideas succeed best. Besides, they use police dogs every day; why not reporter dogs?"

His plan was to take advantage of the animal's marvelous instinct and affection for his master. It was in this hope that he went slowly up and down the sidewalk on both sides of the Avenue de Suffren. The dog did not once give the slightest sign of agitation.

"Perhaps I rated Pipo's intelligence too high," thought Henry. "Or perhaps I'm wrong in thinking that the prisoners are hidden not far from here. . . . I am not even sure that they are hidden anywhere. . . ."

Somewhat discouraged by the failure of this experiment, on which he had counted, Henry determined to continue his investigation. He still had to see the mother of Chalgrin, the conductor on bus 519, and the wife of the printer, Charron, who had been one of the passengers. As for the two Praline sisters, they were not known to have any family.

To proceed in the orderly manner he had mapped out in his mind, he must follow the same route the bus had followed from its departure at the Saint Lazare Station until the time it reached the neighborhood where it had "vanished."

He remembered that only one witness was known, who had made the trip from the station to the Military School. This was Charron's friend, the printer, Jules Fonval, who lived at 13 rue Amelie and worked

at the Martin Printing Company, in the rue de Rome. Perhaps a conversation with Fonval would bring to light the key to the truth for which the reporter was searching with such passion. . . .

For at least the hundredth time since he had had the honor of being the sole witness of this sensational affair, Fonval, with an abundance of unnecessary details, recited the story of his trip from the station to the Military School. He insisted on describing to Henry how the bus had been held up by a cab drawn by a yellow horse and how Charron had got change of a five franc note to pay his fare.

The questioner, however, always brought the printer back to the point and would not let him get lost in these reminiscences. When Fonval's story was finished Henri Henry took it up once more from the beginning.

"Now think carefully," he said. "You are at the Saint Lazare Station. . . . You get aboard the bus with your friend. . . . Is the driver already in his seat at that moment? Try to remember. My question, which seems strange, is really of the highest importance."

Fonval studied for a moment before answering:

"Yes, when we got aboard, he was already in his seat. . . . But he got down—I remember now!—he got down as soon as the old gentleman with the gold-rimmed spectacles, the young lady and the other man got in the first class. He ran over toward the rue Rocher. I noticed it because the bus was already

late in starting, and Charron and I were wondering how long he was going to stay away. He came back in a few minutes, just shrugged his shoulders when the conductor yelled at him for being late, jumped aboard and started the bus."

"Do you remember whether there was anything strange about his face?"

"Why . . . the only thing I noticed was that when he came back, his head was wrapped in a muffler he hadn't had on before, and that only a little of his face was visible. But it was so cold . . ."

"Good!" said Henri Henry, rubbing his hands to express his satisfaction.

Fonval did not dare ask why the existence of this muffler gave him so much pleasure. Henry already seemed to be finished with his questions, and presently the interview ended.

The printer's story seemed to have set the reporter on a new trail, for when he left the Martin Printing Company, he turned his steps towards the rue Rocher.

As soon as they entered this street, he released Pipo from the leash. The animal sniffed, ran his nose along the sidewalk, then leaped forward and came to a stop before the closed door of a small shop. There he stretched himself flat on the sidewalk, and began a long, expressive howling, until neighbors appeared at their windows and passers-by began to gather. A circle had soon formed about Henry and the dog.

Two policemen hurried up to see what was going on in this crowd. Pipo continued his howling with the regularity of a machine and with the feeling of a human being. One of the policemen tried to seize him by the collar and drag him back. The dog paused only long enough to growl in such a threatening manner, drawing back his upper lip and exposing his long yellow teeth, that the policeman quickly let go.

"Is this your dog?" the other policeman asked Henry, drawing the usual notebook and pencil from his pocket.

"No," answered the reporter in a loud clear voice, so that the bystanders would hear, "it belongs to Mr. Digeon, who was the driver of bus 519. . . ."

A wave of interest ran through the crowd. It was felt that sensational revelations were about to be made.

The growing popularity of this unknown man with a dog was distasteful to the agent, whose voice grew rougher, as he demanded:

"Who are you, anyway?"

The reporter introduced himself:

"Henri Henry, former newspaper man. . . ."

Several people in the crowd shouted their applause. Henry's name had long been familiar to Parisians, and his recent adventure at Saint Julien had given him a passing celebrity in that city where reputations are born and die with incredible swiftness.

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The dog meanwhile was still howling.

When the agent spoke again, his tone was more conciliatory:

"What are you gathering this crowd for?"

"I am not doing it," replied Henry. "It is this poor animal . . ."

Raising his voice again, he continued:

"Do you know why this dog is howling?"

Won over by the persuasive manner of the reporter, the two agents no longer assumed the air of investigating a disturbance of the peace, with which they had first spoken to him. They waited as anxiously as the public for the key to the enigma to be revealed. They anticipated something important and unexpected.

With marked gravity Henri Henry at length declared:

"Open the door of this shop and I believe you will find inside, either dead or alive, the body of the driver of the bus that 'vanished'."

These words provoked a sudden commotion in the crowd. Those in the rear pushed forward and the front ranks were forced irresistibly against the door, which yielded and cracked like thin ice. Several hands gripped the knob and in a few minutes the door was ripped from its hinges. On the floor within lay the body of a man. Half a dozen of those closest to the door crowded into the shop, but stopped immediately and drew back, in spite of the pressure behind them. Pipo had leaped ahead and stood now

between the entrance and the body, his back stiff, his eyes bloodshot and his mouth open, forbidding them to advance. His howling had changed from a tone of desolation into a furious defiance, and no one dared approach him.

The policeman who had first spoken to the reporter drew his revolver from its holster. But Henry, who had forced his way through the press, seized his arm.

"Don't shoot," he ordered. "You don't need to kill this poor animal."

And he walked slowly toward Pipo. The dog recognized him and allowed him to place his hand on his collar. Henri Henry drew him gently to one side, talking to him in a low voice. When the dog was calmed, he turned once more to the body stretched on the floor. It was the body of a man, bare-headed and in his shirt-sleeves, whose chin was covered with a thick black beard. He was bound and gagged. His features were of a ghastly pallor.

Keeping the dog between himself and the curious spectators, who regarded the powerful animal with silent respect, the reporter untied the cords and removed the gag. At the same time he said to the policeman:

"Send for a doctor . . . quick!"

Then aloud he added, as if speaking to himself:

"It's Digeon all right . . . and I'm afraid we're too late to bring him back to life." He proceeded to replace the leash on Pipo.

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The doctor arrived, and, after examining the body he announced, to the accompanying movement of fear and anger from the crowd:

“The man has starved to death!”

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH HENRI HENRY NARROWLY ESCAPES THREE "ACCIDENTS"

THE discovery of the unlucky bus-driver's body was the occasion of Henri Henry's returning to newspaper work, at the insistence of the editor of the *Gazette de Paris*. It must be admitted that the journalist did not have to be urged, for he was only too eager to go back, as he said, "into active service."

His article explained first, with the clearness and simplicity which marked his style, the steps by which he had been led to make use of the dog Pipo, and how Fonval's story had turned his attention in the right direction and had prompted him to take his four-legged assistant to the rue Rocher.

Henry then described the circumstances of his tragic find and concluded by giving the results of the study which he had made immediately of the case. From the facts he had obtained, he had recreated point by point the scene which must have been enacted the evening of the disappearance of the bus.

The shop where Digeon's body was found had been vacant for about a month. The tenant who had occupied it last had failed in his business and had been

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obliged to close out his stock. The janitress then made the error—which she bitterly regretted now—of renting it temporarily for her own profit to a stranger who claimed that he needed it only for a few days, for storing some merchandise.

In order that her action should not be noticed by the neighbors and brought to the attention of the owner of the building, she gave the stranger only the key to the door opening into the entrance-passage-way, stipulating that the street door should remain closed. The temporary tenant was an elderly man, who walked with a stoop, wore a white beard and dark glasses; for, as he explained, his eyes were weak. At this point Henri Henry remarked that the “elderly man” was obviously disguised. He then continued his account:

The janitress, whose quarters were on the first landing, as in many of the old houses in Paris, could give no information concerning the comings and goings which must have taken place in the passageway the evening of the crime.

These circumstances being clearly defined, the journalist, who had worked with extraordinary speed, had examined the employees on the Grenelle-Saint-Lazare-Station line, and by a series of well-aimed questions had finally obtained a most illuminating statement from one of them.

This employee, whose name Henry did not give, was the driver of the bus which left immediately after No. 519. He told the reporter that Digeon, the

driver of bus 519, had asked him a few minutes before leaving, if he would exchange places with him. At the last moment, however, Digeon had changed his mind and said simply: "I'm going to have a drink. I'll be right back." No one had been surprised at this, as all knew that he liked his liquor.

Finally—and this detail fitted in perfectly—the bartender in the café where Digeon finally went, remembered that he had seen the driver, shortly before his bus started, drinking with an old man with a white beard, round shoulders and smoked glasses, that is to say, unquestionably the new tenant of the shop in the rue Rocher. The old man had treated Digeon to one drink after another, then whispered in his ear and laughed. The driver began to laugh also and answered aloud: "All right, you're on! . . . It'll be a good joke."

And according to Henri Henry, what had happened was clear:

"The disguised stranger," he wrote, "knew that Muret, his daughter and former pupil, would take the bus to go home. He knew that they would arrive at any minute, and he also knew that Digeon would not object to turning an honest penny.

"When the poor fellow was half-drunk, the stranger offered him a good reward to come to the rue Rocher and tell him when the three people in question, who could be easily recognized, were in the bus. As the driver, in spite of his fondness for the bottle, was a thoroughly honorable fellow, the

stranger explained that it was all a harmless joke he was going to play on his friends.

"Under the influence of the drinks and tempted by the prospect of the reward, Digeon accepted. Fearing for a moment that he might lose the promised reward, he even asked the other driver to exchange places with him.

"At the last moment, however, the three persons he was looking for got into the bus. He then told the other driver he had changed his mind and ran towards the rue du Rocher on the pretext of getting a drink. The stranger was there, waiting for him. He knocked Digeon down, bound him and gagged him in a moment, which would not be difficult with a man who had been drinking.

"Without losing an instant the bandit then put on the driver's uniform coat and cap, replaced his false white beard with a false black one, wrapped a muffler around his face, dropped the clothes he had just taken off into a sewer and arrived in time to drive the bus which contained his future victims.

"Probably he did not think again of the bound and gagged driver. What scruple kept him from killing the unfortunate man at once? It would be impossible to say. But we have every reason to believe that the incident took place as described above, or, at least, in a way very similar to it.

"The future will reveal, we hope, the identity of the brutal and pitiless person who committed this crime, the purpose for which he committed it and

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above all the fate of his victims. In the meantime we hope that our slight discoveries in this matter will serve to further the ends of justice."

Henri Henry's article created a great sensation. His line of reasoning was, of course, open to objection at several places, and his readers promptly pointed this out to him.

How, for example, did the unknown bandit foresee that the persons he wished to carry off would take the bus and not a taxi? To that Henry replied that the criminal had perhaps made provision for all cases, and that if his victims had taken a cab or gone home on foot, they would have been carried off just the same. The bus was certainly the hardest case for him to meet successfully and that was why he had given it so much care.

Henry added moreover that he did not undertake to explain the acts of the mysterious evil-doer; he merely proposed to say what those acts had been.

His reputation, in a few hours, suddenly grew beyond anything he had known in the past. Within twenty-four hours he received several hundred letters, laying difficult problems before him and begging him to solve them. He was forced to answer by a notice in the *Gazette*, saying that life was too short to allow him to undertake so many cases.

This first success did not make him forget his observatory in the Avenue de Suffren. He had sent a few pieces of furniture there and a supply of artist's materials. Although his face was now univer-

sally familiar, from the pictures which had appeared in the papers, he succeeded in passing almost unnoticed in the neighborhood, and the janitress was far from guessing that the painter on the sixth floor was the famous journalist whose name was on every one's lips.

He congratulated himself on having found this studio, not only because of the roof which he hoped to make good use of eventually, but also because it supplied him with a refuge where he could escape from the appeals of the public and possible reprisals on the part of the criminals.

Three significant events, in fact, had led him to reflect seriously on the risks he was running, and he had also not forgotten the two shots fired at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea, during the course of a memorable night.

These three happenings were sufficiently alarming, as will be seen.

On the very day the article which stirred up so much attention appeared—that is to say, on the day after the finding of Digeon's body, Henry determined to visit the driver's widow to offer her his sympathy and if possible, some help in her present situation. He would also take back the dog which had played such an important rôle in the discovery.

As they had had great difficulty, the evening before, in dragging the poor animal from his master's body, Henry had been puzzled to know what to do with him and had confided him for the night to a

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veterinary, who boarded dogs by the day or week.

The next morning, when the journalist came to get Pipo back, he was asked to step into the veterinary's office. The latter seemed deeply moved and exclaimed:

"Well, Mr. Henry, you can be glad you got off as easily as you did!"

"What do you mean?"

"If that animal had spent the night in your apartment, you wouldn't be alive today."

After making this enigmatic announcement, the doctor pushed a button on his desk and said to the attendant who appeared:

"Bring the dog's body."

"The dog's *body*?" echoed Henry.

"I am sorry to tell you," continued the veterinary, "that I was forced to shoot him during the night. About eleven o'clock he began to go mad and choked two other dogs to death. It was impossible to go near him. No one could do anything. After I had killed him, I examined him and . . . But here he is."

Two attendants carried in the stiffened body of Pipo. Henri Henry, sincerely touched at the sight of the splendid animal who had helped him so well yesterday and was already a corpse, watched with emotion.

"If you will look closely here," said the doctor, "you will see the mark where an injection has been made in the belly. He was evidently inoculated with some poison, which put him in a state I have never

observed before, even in dogs that had gone mad. An autopsy will perhaps disclose what the poison was. As to how, by whom and when the injection was made—that is for you to tell me.”

The reporter thought for a moment and replied:

“It must have been in the shop in the rue du Rocher, where several strangers helped me hold Pipo, while they were taking away his master’s body. Because I brought Pipo here almost immediately afterwards.”

“Another mystery,” said the veterinary.

“But what is not mysterious, this time,” said the reporter, “is the motive which led to the poisoning of this poor animal. I was the intended victim. . . . And it was a clever plan. If I had been struck down with a weapon, there in the crowd, the man who had done it would have been arrested and perhaps mobbed.”

“Clever, but terrifying,” concluded the doctor.

This incident made the journalist more distrustful than ever, and he moved cautiously now, feeling ambushes all about him. That he was wise to do so, was proved that same afternoon.

Henry had just entered the building where the offices of the *Gazette de Paris* were located. A magnificent negro, wearing the livery of the *Gazette* had taken the place of the usual doorman.”

“Business must be picking up,” said Henry jokingly. “This is like being ushered into the President’s palace.”

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The negro bowed and opened the door of the elevator, as if inviting the reporter to enter.

"Hello," laughed one of the editors, who had just reached the first landing of the stairs. "Just my luck. I see it's running, now that I'm part way up."

Faithful to his resolve to be cautious, Henry hesitated and before getting in the elevator, asked:

"What do you mean?"

"Why, just a second ago there was a sign on the door that the elevator was 'temporarily out of order.' I had to take the stairs, and if your waist-measure was anything like mine, you'd know what that means."

Henry looked closely at the negro, whose face remained expressionless, and giving up the idea of taking the elevator, joined the editor on the stairs and chatted with him for a few moments.

"I may be over careful," he thought, "but you never can tell."

The negro closed the elevator door without a word.

Wishing to have his mind clear on the subject, Henry stopped at the personnel department and asked the director:

"Did you hire a negro as doorman?"

"Why, no! . . . why?"

Henry told what had happened, and concluded:

"Will you come with me and see?"

"Certainly."

The two men went down to the ground floor together. The negro was no longer there. . . .

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"This gets thicker and thicker," said the reporter. "Let's try an experiment."

They climbed back up to the third floor, still by the stairs, and there Henry pushed the button which operated the elevator. It was one of the automatic type, of the kind often used in apartment houses, which is controlled by the passenger himself. It rose to the third floor without any trouble.

The reporter opened the door and examined the interior: there was nothing which looked suspicious. At that moment the doorman, who was usually stationed at the elevator, appeared and handed the director of personnel a box of cigars.

"What's this?" asked the director.

"Those are the cigars you sent me to get, sir, at your house. Your wife wanted to know why on earth you wanted them."

"I sent you to get a box of cigars?"

"Yes, sir. . . . At least, that's what the electrician told me you wanted. Was it something else, sir?"

"What electrician?"

"The one from Durand and Company, who came to fix the elevator. He told me to put up the sign that it was out of order."

Henri Henry and the director of personnel exchanged a glance of understanding.

"Did you happen to notice," asked the director, "what it was the electrician fixed in the elevator?"

"I didn't pay much attention, sir. I just noticed

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that he was hammering in there . . . (the doorman pointed to the spring-lock on the interior of the elevator door). Besides, I went out before he finished."

Enlightened by this explanation, Henry examined the spring-lock the boy had indicated, more thoroughly. He saw then the diabolical trap that had been laid for him.

A wire-nail, recently driven into the spring-lock, projected slightly, not enough to be noticeable in the dim light in the elevator, but enough to scratch the hand if one tried to open the door from within. On examining this nail with a powerful magnifying glass, which he got from his desk, the reporter found that it was hollow and contained a reddish liquid, obviously a poison.

He understood then how the crime had been planned: it was known that Henry's office was on the third floor, and that to get out of the elevator, the journalist would be obliged to take hold of the spring-lock. The negro, who had disappeared, had been commissioned to take down the sign and open the elevator door, on the ground floor, as soon as Henry arrived. He had taken the night doorman's livery, which was kept hanging, during the daytime, in a closet in the vestibule, inside the street entrance.

As for the electrician, the doorman could not give any precise account of his appearance, for the pretended workman had claimed to have a sort throat and his face was wrapped in a scarf. Henri Henry's

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usual hour for arriving at the office was apparently known, and the doorman had been sent away, to have the field clear.

When the news of this fresh attempt on his life spread through the building, Henry began to receive visits in his office from sympathetic colleagues. All advised him not to come to the paper any more and to send his copy by messenger. They also urged him not to go back to his own apartment, until the enemies who were pursuing him had been unmasked. In the meantime he would be wise to look for some less well-known place to stay.

Henry smiled. He thought of his studio in the Avenue de Suffren and decided to shut himself up there, for a while, coming out only at night or when carefully disguised. He didn't place much confidence, however, on this latter method.

To his colleague's congratulations he answered simply:

"This afternoon's incident will give me good copy for a column in tomorrow's issue."

The others could not help admiring the professional detachment with which he considered the danger to his own person.

Nevertheless, when he left the building, Henry was anxious to get to some place of safety. It was then that the third "accident" occurred, which came near proving fatal for the reporter.

He was passing by a building under construction. It was already late and the workmen had just left

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for the night. The great skeleton of steel and stone, not yet half completed, was empty and silent. Suddenly a huge stone dropped from the top of the building. Henry instinctively leaped to one side and the stone brushed his sleeve, giving him a start, however, which made him falter. Several passers-by quickly came to his aid.

"Are you hurt?"

"Not at all."

This time, however, his nerves had suffered a severe shock. He grew pale and he looked ill.

One of the strangers, who had been among the first to come to his assistance, exclaimed:

"But you are not well, sir. Let me take you to a drug store. My car is right here."

Strangely enough, this voice seemed to have a powerful effect on Henry. The color began to flow back into his cheeks and he answered:

"I am very much obliged to you. . . . To whom have I the pleasure . . . ?"

"My name is Brancion," replied the other smilingly.

"Ah! . . . and mine is Henri Henry, newspaper man . . ."

"Good. Shall I give you a lift as far as a drug store?"

A murmur of approval went through the group.

But Henry did not answer. An intense emotion gripped him. This voice with its metallic sonorousness, its slightly foreign accent, was certainly fa-

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miliar to him. He knew that he had heard it somewhere.

It was the voice in the night at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea, the voice which had asked from the upper window of the Villa Cécile, "*Who are you and what do you want?*" His ear had kept the memory of its tones.

Henry determined not to be outdone by his adversary. Since the latter dared to brave him to his face, he would answer with the same boldness.

He stepped close to Robert Brancion and said slowly:

"Thank you, you will not give me a lift. . . . If you insist on doing something for me, you can repeat one sentence, which spoken by you, will settle an important question for me. I am still a little in doubt about it. . . ."

"And the sentence is . . . ?"

"The following: '*Who are you and what do you want of me?*'"

Brancion stepped back a couple of paces, bit his lips and shrugging his shoulders, murmured:

"The man is mad."

Then, turning on his heels, he walked away.

The spectators had understood nothing in this rapid scene, of which the questions and answers were only partially overheard.

As the journalist seemed to have recovered entirely from his shock and continued on his way home, the crowd began to break up and drift off,

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just as two policemen arrived to see what was going on.

Henry was disgusted with himself. For a stupid little satisfaction of his own vanity, he had unmasked his batteries; and instead of profiting by his opponent's error—which, at least, was explained by his desire to get rid of the embarrassing reporter as quickly as possible—he had committed a worse one, without any excusable reason.

It was high time that he found a place where he could lie in concealment until he was ready to take definite and final action.

Thinking that he might be followed, he took pains to cover his tracks by going through three buildings which he knew had several exits, before arriving finally in the Avenue de Suffren.

The avenue was empty and well lighted by the gas lamps along the curb on both sides. Henry looked up and down. There was no one in sight in either direction.

He slipped into the doorway of his new home and breathed more freely.

"It's no joke," he said to himself, with a grin, "to have to be the game when you're in the habit of being the hunter."

CHAPTER XI

OLD FRIENDS MEET AGAIN UNDER NEW CIRCUMSTANCES

HENRI HENRY, reporter, was thus changed into Antoine Lisbourdeun, a painter. For this was the name under which he had rented his studio in the Avenue de Suffren. The generous size of his deposit had taken the place of any papers of identification, and he had completed his conquest of the janitress by asking her to take care of his rooms, for which he offered to pay her well. Then, he added:

"I'm busy finishing a very absorbing piece of work at present, and it has to be done in a hurry. So I sha'n't leave the studio for the next few days. I'll use this couch for a bed, and I'd be much obliged to you if you would be willing to fix my meals for me and bring them up here."

The janitress accepted this offer with enthusiasm and thanked Providence for having sent her such a gentlemanly tenant. Then remembering the expeditions he intended to make on the roofs, Henry continued:

"If you should happen to knock on my door and not get any answer, never keep on knocking. I sleep at irregular hours, but when I do, I sleep deeply,

and it is very disagreeable for me to be waked up suddenly."

The good woman agreed to all he said. Henry was now well-sheltered from pursuit by his implacable adversary, and he was free to engage in the researches which had cost Muschard and Grosvin their lives. But, in undertaking the solution of this problem, if he was to avoid the fate of the two unfortunate inspectors, he must act more prudently than ever.

The editor-in-chief of the *Gazette de Paris* was notified that he would have no news for the time being from his brilliant collaborator, except when the latter had something of the highest interest to communicate.

The journalist's wife also received a long letter, at her mother's home in the country, urging her to stay longer in Gascony and not to worry. Henri assured her that he was in no danger and that he expected to expose the criminals without incurring any risk for himself. As soon as this task was finished, he would join her in the country and take a well-earned rest.

With these things settled, Henri devoted himself soul and body to the mission he had undertaken. Continuing to employ the method that had succeeded so well thus far, he once more went over the elements of his information, which had been neglected up to now, in the hope of drawing fresh conclusions from them.

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Thus, in rereading the papers of the day after the disappearance of bus 519, he studied more attentively than he had in the past, the reproduction of the fragment of a letter found in Professor Muret's apartment.

It will be recalled what this fragment was. The copy given in the *Gazette de Paris* had been as follows:

 lem is so-
 ly. We shall be the
 manity.
 en-thirty P. M.
 zare Station.
to receive at last my darling Cécile
 ove, and also the final
 rd for all these years of work.
 André

The end of the letter was easy to reconstruct. André Gilbert was expressing his joy at receiving "at last his darling Cécile." The three letters "ove," at the beginning of the next to the last line were no doubt the last three in the word "love." André had probably written "whom I love."

As for "the final . . . rd for all these years of work," it was obvious that he should read: "the final reward for all these years of work."

What was this reward? Probably the hand of Cécile herself. And what was the work? Henry examined the first part of the letter for the reply to that question.

He did not waste much time over the ". . . en-thirty P. M. . . zare Station." André was simply telling the professor that he would arrive at the Saint Lazare Station at ten-thirty that evening.

This left only the lines whose interpretation was a little more difficult: "lem is so . . . ly. We shall be the . . . manity." Now it sometimes happened that the journalist engaged in verse-making. This habit, by taking his conscious thoughts off the problem on which he was working at the time, frequently helped him to arrive at a solution, as his subconscious mind seemed to be freer then to take hold of the material and sort it out for him. He also enjoyed the mental zest he felt in making words obey his will and take on the rhythms and moods he wished to give them. However that may be, he had foreseen that he might have more leisure than he would know what to do with in his retreat under the roofs and had slipped his rhyming dictionary among the baggage he had sent to the house. He congratulated himself now on this precaution and promptly drew the dictionary from its hiding-place. He looked first through the list of words ending in the sound *lem*. He found only three: *phlegm*, *clem* and *problem*.

Of these three words, which has more chance of being used by an engineer, with a scientific degree, in writing to his former professor of physics? Obviously, the word *problem*. It was therefore a question of some problem, presumably of a scientific nature. With this established, the rest of the sentence

at once fell into place. ". . . lem is so . . ." should read "the problem is solved." The two letters *ly* which began the unburnt fragment of the following line, were probably the end of an adverb which had been used to give more force to the word solved," for example: "the problem is solved *completely*," or "*perfectly*," or "*absolutely*."

There still remained the expression: "We shall be the . . . manity." Once more with the help of his rhyming dictionary, Henry looked for words ending in *manity*. As it happened he again found only three: *gigmanity*, *humanity* and *immanity*. The first of these he had never heard of before himself and thought it must be a joke until he looked it up in another dictionary and found that it really existed. He was familiar with the third, but knew that it was not a word any young man would use in a scribbled note, written to announce his arrival. He therefore considered what phrase might go with the word *humanity*. "We shall be the . . . humanity."

An engineer who says: "The problem is solved," is more likely to be speaking of a practical problem than of a purely speculative one. And this engineer, in following up the news of his success with the words "We shall be the . . . humanity," is certainly developing the same idea, the idea of his recent discovery.

The aim of every invention is either to give the person who makes use of it an advantage over his fellows, as in the case of those used in war, or to reduce the sufferings of men by making life more

endurable, as by inventions for supplying heat, light, transportation, etc., or new devices in surgery.

Starting from this principle, Henri Henry concluded that he should read either "*We shall be the masters of humanity*" or "*We shall be the benefactors of humanity.*"

From all these considerations suddenly flashed the light he had been seeking: the purpose of the abduction of Muret, Cécile and André Gilbert—for it was evident that the other passengers of bus 519 had only been carried off because they happened to be caught in the same net. The purpose of this abduction was clearly to take from these three persons; first, the documents they carried with them concerning the invention referred to in Gilbert's letter, and secondly the apparatus constituting the invention, which, without doubt, was the same as *the object with the rectangular base* stolen from the Villa Cécile.

Highly satisfied with this little job, Henry wondered for a moment if he should publish the results of his study in the *Gazette de Paris*. He decided almost immediately, however, to wait until he could add to it some more exciting and definite information. Then he concluded he had earned a night's rest.

The next morning, shortly before dawn, he prepared to make his first expedition on the roof.

In order to arouse as little curiosity as possible on the part of any one who might see him taking a stroll on the house-top, he put on a blue work shirt,

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a pair of overalls and a sweater, which he had brought for this purpose. With a cap on his head and a tool bag slung on his shoulders, he felt sure that if he were seen, he would be taken for a man come to mend the roofs.

His tool-bag, however, contained nothing but a pair of field glasses and a revolver. Having this weapon within reach of his hand gave him a feeling of security, and a peace of mind which he needed to help him succeed in his expedition.

He slipped out onto the roof without trouble, and as soon as he was there, took his bearings and started in the direction he wished to explore.

The weather was misty and comparatively mild for that season of the year. But the roof was dripping wet and Henry could not help thinking that if he had to lie hidden very long, waiting for his game to appear, he would run a good chance of catching pneumonia. So he decided to make merely a reconnoitering trip this time, to familiarize himself with the lay of the land and to pick out a good place where, later on, he could observe at leisure.

He advanced toward number 68 with every possible precaution; for, in the thick mist he was afraid of stepping at any moment into some treacherous air-shaft, and he had no wish of falling six stories to a stony pavement beneath. As he approached his objective, his heart suddenly began to beat faster at the sight of a bulky, unexpected object a few feet ahead of him. A dark, vaguely reddish mass was

stretched out on the roof against a chimney, and from a little distance away, its color blended into that of the chimney itself so completely that it became invisible.

The reporter drew near softly. The mass had the appearance and shape of a huge brown bear, asleep on the roof.

He drew still nearer, until he could almost touch it. . . . It was a soft shaggy bear-skin, but under the skin there was a man. Henry could now see a human head projecting from the skin and turned toward the courtyard of 68b. The back of the neck and the ends of the hair showed beneath a fur cap.

Quietly slipping out his revolver and holding it in readiness, the reporter ordered in a firm tone:

"Let's see your face, there!"

A sudden start shook the bear-skin and the unknown man leaped up face to face with Henry, who covered him with his revolver.

He had no sooner caught sight of the man's features, however, than he dropped his arm and exclaimed in a low voice:

"Hello, Brunnel! . . . So it was you hidden under the hide of that ferocious-looking bear? I thought you were in Provence!"

And Brunnel, recognizing his friend in his turn, answered in the same joking manner:

"And I suppose you've already got back from your trip in Gascony?"

Both men laughed frankly and exchanged explanations of their unexpected conduct.

"I had really made up my mind to go away," began Brunnel. "I thought that ass of a police sergeant had disgusted me with the whole business. I was going to drop the investigation completely . . ."

"Just what I was going to do," remarked Henry.

"But," continued the former commissioner, "I had the unfortunate inspiration of reading the papers . . ."

"Again, just what happened to me."

"And the supposed accident which cost the two inspectors of the Public Safety their lives set me thinking."

"Precisely."

"Before leaving Paris I wanted to find out what there was going on up here that was curious enough to tempt two such experienced inspectors. A friend of mine, who has an important position with the Public Safety, told me that Muschard and Grosvin had acted without orders. That made me wonder even more what purpose they had had in coming up here. Since they fell into the courtyard at number 68b, which I understand is a private house owned by the famous explorer Robert Brancion, it was presumably something on that side they were trying to see. But what was it? The only way of finding out was to come here myself. . . . So I rented a little room on the top floor near here, with a window open-

ing out into the gutter, and from there it was easy to climb onto the roof."

"I rented an artist's studio."

"Yesterday I began getting myself ready for work. I'm terribly subject to colds—worse luck!—so I fixed up this comfortable little shelter, where I could make my observations for hours at a time if necessary, without immediately developing a bad case of bronchitis."

While talking he showed Henry that he had arranged a rug and several cushions under the bearskin.

"I finished these little preparations last night, and early this morning came up here and stretched myself out flat under the fur, with my mind made up not to budge until I had seen the sight that aroused such a passionate interest in Muschard and Grosvin that they lost their balance. . . . Only I don't intend to fall, if I can help it."

And he pointed out that he had fastened a solid leather belt, through which he could slip his arm without getting up from his position on the roof, to the cramp-iron on the chimney. He even had a little leather bag hanging within reach of his head and containing a pair of opera-glasses.

This ingenuity and sense of comfort delighted Henri Henry, who was both amused and pleased at finding his old companion once more. Since they had started this investigation together within sound of the waves at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea, it was only

fitting that they should continue it together on the roof-tops of Paris.

"There's room for us both here, you know," added Brunnel, "if you'd like to join me."

"I certainly would!" exclaimed the journalist. "This cursed fog is beginning to make me shiver under my cotton overalls. Not to mention the fact that your bear-skin—which, by the way, is magnificent—looks from a little distance off the same color as the chimney and hardly attracts any attention at all."

While they had been talking thus, it had grown lighter and the fog was beginning to lift.

In a little while Brunnel and Henry could get a clear view of the famous courtyard where the two crushed bodies of the inspectors of the Public Safety had been found by the negro servant. At present, however, there was no sign of any one stirring in the court. The watchers waited patiently in their comfortable ambush. They were prepared to pass many hours there before giving up the hope of solving the mystery which surrounded the deaths of Muschard and Grosvin.

Two hours passed. At length a cab stopped before the gateway of number 68b. The two detectives on the roof could see both the inner and the outer sides of the entrance to the court at once. A man got out of the cab; Henry and Brunnel turned their glasses on him.

"I know him," murmured the former commis-

sioner. "It's an architect who lives in this district."

The architect rang, and a negro in livery appeared from the house. When he had opened the door in the gateway, the visitor asked him a question, to which he answered with a nod of his head. After which he admitted the stranger, led him up the flight of marble steps and invited him by signs to enter.

A few moments later the architect reappeared on the steps, accompanied this time by a man of swarthy, stern features, whose chin was covered with a heavy black beard.

"That's Brancion, the owner of the house," whispered Henry, focusing his field-glasses on the newcomer.

Brancion and his visitor then began an animated conversation. Both looked up several times in the air over their heads and Brancion seemed to be explaining, with a great many expressive gestures, some proposed construction which he wanted the architect to undertake.

The architect nodded his approval and in his turn gave a few explanations.

Brunnel and Henry were too far away and too high up to hear the conversation. From time to time, however, a word or two, spoken more clearly than the rest, reached their ears:

"Awning . . . ground glass . . . as soon as possible."

The former commissioner commented in a low voice to Henry:

"It was high time we carried out our plan of coming up here, for if I understand correctly, Brancion's courtyard is going to be covered over soon and protected against all indiscreet observers."

"It must have been Muschard's and Grosvin's expedition that suggested this precaution to our friend the owner," answered the journalist.

Finally the conversation appeared to be finished. The architect bowed to his client, who shook his hand and led him across the court to the street exit.

When he had gone, Brancion remained standing a few moments on the marble steps and lifting his head again, looked up into the air. Doubtless he saw nothing that looked suspicious to him, for his face expressed an absolute security. He mounted the steps and paused by the door.

Immediately was heard the dull, muffled detonation, sounding as if somewhere in the distance, which had preceded the inexplicable event, which had so deeply stirred Hector Mainfroy, it will be recalled, by observing.

Near the shelter where Brunnel and Henri Henry lay concealed, a window closed with a slam. It was apparently in one of the servants' quarters, opening on the gutter towards the street. At the same moment a voice grumbled in irritation:

"There's that chemist at 68b going to start making a smell again with his experiments."

Meanwhile the thick white cloud spread over the courtyard, making any observation impossible. The

two men on the roof covered it in vain with their glasses. Everywhere it presented an impenetrable blanket, hiding from them whatever was taking place beneath. Henry waited impatiently, Brunnel fumed and twisted the knob of his opera-glasses, hoping to get a better focus. As the cloud lifted, they discovered Brancion's limousine waiting at the foot of the steps, the negro chauffeur at the wheel.

The same thought which had struck Mainfroy came irresistibly to Brunnel and Henry:

"This is how Bus 519 *vanished!*"

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH HENRI HENRY WRITES VERSES AND THEODORE BRUNNEL PULLS BONERS

AFTER they had watched the strange phenomenon of the "white cloud," Henry and Brunnel withdrew to Henry's studio—or rather, Antoine Lisbourdeun's studio. There they debated as to what action they should take next, in view of this new information.

The former commissioner was of the opinion that they should at once notify the police. But Henri Henry was firmly opposed to this suggestion.

"Weren't you satisfied with your adventure at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea? Or have you forgotten how little good it did us to bring the public authorities into our investigation?"

"But here we are in Paris and . . ."

"And what? You know as well as I that Brancion's house was searched from top to bottom after the disappearance of bus 519. You can be sure that if the Public Safety didn't find anything then, they won't find anything now. When it comes down to it, what proof have we against this man? They'll say we've gone crazy. Brancion will be put on his guard and will not commit the slightest imprudence. And my own purpose will be frustrated.

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"You don't belong to the police any longer and I never have belonged to it. It's not our business to take the cops by the hand and sweetly lead them up to gather the fruit of our labors. My ambition is to be the *first* to find out the truth and the *first* to publish it. I don't care what use is made afterwards of my revelations by those whose business it is to protect the public from its own criminal elements. I am a newspaper man and that is all. . . . I might add, however, that so far as Robert Brancion is concerned, I have a personal account to settle with him and I don't intend to forget it. . . ."

These considerations eventually convinced Brunnel, who agreed to follow the wishes and the plan of Henri Henry: to keep a secret observation over all that Brancion did until the truth came to light and the survivors of bus 519 were restored to liberty.

In the meantime the journalist described to his companion the three attempts that had been made against his life.

He told Brunnel of the emotion he felt when he recognized Brancion's voice as that of the unknown person in the Villa Cécile at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea. He also explained the conclusions he had drawn from his intensive study of the fragment of a letter found in Professor Muret's apartment. As for the discovery of Digeon's body, Brunnel already knew about that from the sensational article which had appeared in the *Gazette de Paris*.

As Henri referred to it, however, in passing, Brunnel interrupted, to honor him with a long and learned dissertation on the subject of the "instinct and devotion of the dog, the friend of man."

When Brunnel paused at length, the reporter asked:

"Now that we have got this far, the only thing left is to decide when we are going back to our post of observation. And how are we going to work it? We can't spend all our days and nights on the roof, incessantly watching the courtyard of that mysterious house. But we can relay each other and take turns as sentinel, until we have seen enough to draw some definitive conclusions. In fact, in order to do it properly, and not wear ourselves out, there really ought to be three of us.

"I know just the thing!" exclaimed Brunnel, struck by a sudden thought. "My former secretary, Hector Mainfroy, will be the third! For one thing, the young man is personally interested—for reasons of sentiment—in the success of our investigation, and in addition to that he's no fool. He'd make a good detective if he only had the professional spirit, but he's always played at it like an amateur. I've tried to cure him of it, for you know, an amateur in police matters can never . . ."

Brunnel was launched again. It would have been hard to stop him, and Henry did not even try. He resigned himself and submitted outwardly to the ex-commissioner's eloquence, though his thoughts were

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on other matters. The latter eventually swung back from his long digression to the matter in hand, and concluded:

"At any rate, Hector Mainfroy, with his qualities and his defects, can be a valuable help to us. Do you agree that it would be a good idea to enlist him in our little group?"

Henry, who was still thinking of something else, nodded in the affirmative, and Brunnel hurried impulsively from the room to carry out his purpose at once.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the reporter. "What does he think he's doing now! . . . Going out by the door. . . . The janitress will wonder how the devil he got in. And it doesn't occur to him to wear the slightest disguise! If he is seen, coming out of here, by Brancion or one of his fanatical slaves, my hiding-place is ruined."

But Brunnel was already on his way while the journalist was still regretfully cursing his imprudence and thoughtlessness.

Without taking any precautions whatever to conceal himself or to change his appearance, Brunnel had hastened to Hector Mainfroy's. The latter seemed to him a little ill-at-ease. The unmistakable pleasure he felt on seeing his former chief once more was tempered by a constraint the former commissioner could not understand.

Hector, who was usually so phlegmatic and always received Brunnel's most tempestuous speech without

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the smallest sign of impatience, appeared almost afraid to-day to listen to him.

He interrupted the ex-commissioner frequently, and contrary to his usual habits grew very talkative, as though anxious to avoid embarrassing questions. He could not escape them indefinitely, however, and when Brunnel had finished a recital of all his adventures, he asked suddenly:

"Now what about you, Mainfroy? How have you been getting along? Are you pushing your investigations?"

Hector answered with a vague gesture, which seemed to indicate that he was hardly any further advanced than at the beginning. Brunnel felt sorry for him and said:

"Poor Mainfroy! . . . It's a lucky thing for you that you've got me here to carry this on for you. I'll have the truth of the matter before I finish . . . with the help of this young newspaper man that I'm taking along with me to break in. He has a knack for this sort of thing, but not enough system and too little imagination. With a teacher like me, however, he'll learn. . . ."

He talked for several minutes of Henri Henry, whom he represented, for Mainfroy's benefit, as a faithful and zealous disciple of the great Brunnel. After giving this slight twist to the truth, he suddenly remembered the purpose of his visit, and he made his proposal:

"You see, Mainfroy, I'm on the right track and

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it won't be long now before I shed some light on the mystery. I should be glad, however, to have another helper. Would you like to join us?"

He expected to see Mainfroy accept this offer with enthusiasm, and exhibit signs of joy at being able to play a useful part in the work of delivering the prisoners, among whom was the girl he loved. Mainfroy's answer, however, was quite different from that which the ex-commissioner had imagined.

"To be perfectly frank with you," said the young man with embarrassment, "I prefer not to be involved in this affair in any way. I have personal reasons for taking this attitude, but at the present time I cannot tell you what they are: I merely . . ."

This announcement left Brunnel stunned with amazement.

"What is our younger generation coming to!" he exclaimed. "Here is a young man who thinks he is in love; the object of his love is kidnaped; and when you bring him a means of getting her back again, he says: 'I have personal reasons for doing nothing! . . .' Have you got barley-water instead of blood in your veins?"

Brunnel's ferocious mustache, his shaggy brows and red cheeks all trembled with his sudden access of anger.

Mainfroy was apparently little moved by this. He had said that which he had had to say, and he was relieved of his anxiety.

"I hope you won't judge me, Mr. Brunnel," he

added quietly, "on appearances alone. I am telling you the truth when I say that I love Germaine with the same passion as formerly and that I would shed my blood to spare her a tear. But as for helping you in your investigation—I am completely forbidden to do so. . . ."

"Why? Why?"

"I am forbidden to tell you. I can only say that it is for a very strong and perfectly honorable reason."

Disconcerted by this inexplicable attitude, Brunnel did not consider it worth-while to waste any more time in a futile anger, and he left his former secretary's apartment without even saying good-by to him.

"He has not changed," murmured Hector smilingly. "Still good-hearted and hot-tempered . . ."

The young man, standing by his window, watched Brunnel disappear down the street. He saw that the ex-commissioner, though he did not suspect it, was being shadowed by one of Brancion's negroes. Mainfroy flushed with indignation.

"My apartment," he thought, "has been a trap for him, and I myself have been the bait! I can't stand that! It shan't be said that a friend of mine, because he came to see me, went to his own destruction. . . ."

And without further reflection, he ran down the stairs, three at a time, and began to shadow the man who was shadowing Brunnel, holding him-

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self ready to intervene in case the latter was in danger.

But the negro seemed to harbor no murderous projects. He contented himself with looking carefully, as though he might forget it, at the number of the house in the Avenue de Suffren which the ex-commissioner had entered. Then he disappeared.

Hector was on the point of following Brunnel into the house in which he had vanished. But once more the struggle arose in himself between his sentiment of duty toward his friend and the fear of causing some harm to Germaine.

If he took part openly in the campaign against the kidnaper, he would draw the latter's anger down on the innocent girl. On the other hand, if he detached himself completely from Brunnel, he was leaving him to walk blindfolded into the trap which Brancion would certainly set for him, with the information obtained by his mutilated slave. He therefore adopted a compromise. . . .

The former commissioner, meanwhile, had burst into Henri Henry's studio.

"The younger generation!" he cried. "They're not worth a damn!"

"What's the younger generation done to you?" asked the journalist.

Brunnel was only waiting for that question, and in a voice of anger he described, without omitting a single detail, the conversation he had had with Hector Mainfroy and the inexplicable refusal of Ger-

maine's lover to take part in the work of rescuing her.

"Well, what of it? We'll get along without him," answered the reporter calmly. "The only thing that worries me is that you went out of here without taking any precautions to see whether you were being followed or not, and . . ."

"Don't worry about that!" cried Brunnel. "They don't play those tricks on an old fox like me. If I had been shadowed, I would have noticed it. You can almost say I would have felt it! There's such a thing, you know, as a flair for those matters, an intuition. And I think that without vanity I can say that I possess it in the highest degree. . . ."

He might have continued on this theme for some time if he had not been interrupted at this point by a knocking on the door.

"Mr. Lisbourdeun!" said the voice of the janitress. "There's a letter here for you. A messenger boy just brought it."

A square of white paper was slid under the door.

Henri Henry grew slightly pale at the sight. He had told no one except Brunnel his assumed name nor his present address. Had he already been tracked down?

He examined the envelope. The address gave no clew. It simply read:

"To the tenant who has just moved in at Number 62 Avenue de Suffren."

Henry frowned with anxiety and broke the seal

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of this strange missive. Within he found a sheet of paper folded in quarters, and written across it in a handwriting which appeared obviously disguised:

"To be delivered to Mr. Brunnel."

"It's for you," he said, growing more apprehensive than ever.

The former commissioner unfolded the paper and read aloud:

"A friend wishes to let you know that you were shadowed just now by one of your enemies. Be constantly on your guard: above all beware of roofs and remember the sad fate of Muschard and Grosvin."

If it had not been for the seriousness of the situation, Henri Henry would not have been able to keep from laughing at the sight of Brunnel's pitiful air. He had just declared with such solemnity that it was impossible for any one to have followed him; this definite proof to the contrary made him blush with humiliation.

There was no time, however, for joking. Henry took the mysterious notice from his troublesome co-worker's hand and studied its style and handwriting.

"The *friend* who sent you this letter," he said, "probably belongs or did belong to the police: the use of the word *shadowed* and the familiar way he speaks of the two inspectors who were killed, indicate that. He is young, his handwriting, although disguised, is a young man's as surely as twice two is

four. Furthermore he knows your plans for exploring the roofs. . . ."

"From which you conclude?"

"From which I conclude that the unknown friend is none other than your former secretary, Hector Mainfroy. It appears that in spite of his strange attitude, which I don't attempt to explain at present, he is still friendly toward you and wanted to put you on your guard against some definite danger. Consequently I should by no means disregard his warning. . . ."

"You mean to say you would give up our plans?"

"Not at all. But I believe it would be wiser for us never to leave each other and instead of taking turns, as we had decided, never to go on the roof unless we are both there, so that one of us can act as sentinel while the other is observing. In that way we'll be safe from any surprise attack."

Somewhat abashed, Brunnel made no opposition to Henry's decision. He merely preserved his dignity by declaring:

"That is just what I was going to suggest. And so far as that note is concerned, I saw right away that it was from Mainfroy, but I wanted to leave you the fun of deciphering it."

The journalist accepted this white lie without a smile. The important thing was that the ex-commissioner should do as he said; he didn't mind what form the obedience took.

"To begin with," continued Henry, "and to try

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to throw our adversaries off the track if possible, we won't go out of here before sundown. Tonight, if it is not too dark, we'll try our luck again on the roof, surrounding ourselves with every possible precaution."

Brunnel answered at once:

"I was just going to suggest it."

The day seemed long and monotonous to the ex-commissioner. Inaction fretted his spirit, and he was boiling with desire to get his revenge for the recent humiliation, on the subject of his being shadowed.

Henri Henry, as he had planned, had started a poem, thanks to which his mind was completely detached from its usual preoccupations. In writing these lines of irregular length, with more or less sonorous rhymes, he found a rest from the mental tension which the investigation had forced him to maintain.

But Brunnel, who did not dare interrupt him at this work, was itching with eagerness to deliver a lecture, which he had been evolving in his head, on the subject: "The mind which does not relax is like a bow which is drawn too tight; in the end it snaps."

The lunch, which was served in the studio, was excellent, thanks to the anxious care of the janitress, for Lisbourdeun had told her that his guest was a wealthy collector of paintings and an experienced judge of good cookery. Henri made a point of talking of very different matters from those which were

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actually absorbing his thoughts. He revealed himself as a brilliant talker and a man of entertaining wit. Brunnel, for his part, had the pleasure of developing a few of his most precious theories at length. When the meal was finished, the former commissioner settled himself on the couch for a siesta, and the journalist went back to his poem.

Thus the afternoon passed; Brunnel dozing, Henry writing.

During supper Brunnel made several efforts to bring the conversation back to the subject of bus 519, but Henry pretended not to understand his guest's allusions. Instead he talked about the verses he had been composing that day and his plans for publishing in the near future a booklet of the poems he had written.

He even read Brunnel a few stanzas aloud, and though the latter—our impartiality forces us to admit—felt in the bottom of his heart that they were bad poetry, the good man gave no hint of his real opinion in the praise with which he greeted them.

In short, Henri Henry acted as though he had completely forgotten the purpose which had brought them together in this obscure artist's studio, under the roofs.

When ten o'clock in the evening sounded, however, he got up abruptly. The air of indolence which his whole body had worn, only a moment before, disappeared in a flash. An expression of cool determination had taken its place.

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"Let's start," he said simply.

A few minutes later the two conspirators were feeling their way across the roof in the milky light of the moon toward the comfortable shelter which had been arranged the night before by Brunnel.

There was just enough light for them to see, without too much difficulty, what was going on in the courtyard of Brancion's house. All was quiet when they arrived, and adopting the plan Henry had suggested, Brunnel took the first turn at watching the court while his companion acted as sentinel to protect them from any sudden attack.

They were hardly settled in their places when a whistle sounded shrilly, somewhere close to them in the dark.

They trembled: Brunnel took a firm grip on the leather strap through which he had slipped his arm, and adjusted his revolver in his hand.

They had both recognized the signal they had already heard once before, during an unforgettable night, outside the Villa Cécile.

CHAPTER XIII

AN UNEXPECTED ALLY

HENRI HENRY was the first to recover from the start caused by this familiar and mysterious whistle. Anxiously he looked about him in all directions. Nothing stirred.

And yet, the reporter had the obscure, but persistent, sensation that an intruder was present. Although he could see nothing and hear nothing, he *felt* something hostile in the atmosphere. He took a few steps on the roof, examined all sides of the chimney—nothing! Dropping softly on his knees, he placed his ear against the chill metal of the roof and listened.

It was then that he heard, only a few yards away, a sort of rubbing such as might have been produced by a huge serpent advancing toward him. . . .

In one bound he was on his feet, trembling with repugnance and horror.

Mastering this impression, however, he looked closely in the direction from which this sound of crawling had come. And this time he saw . . . two black bodies stretched out on the roof, moving forward slowly in parallel lines by almost imperceptible

degrees. He breathed more freely. They were only men after all: negroes, who were slowly drawing themselves, completely naked, toward the victims indicated by their master.

Confident of not having been detected, the two executioners had not altered their slow, regular movement.

For an instant Henry thought of calling Brunnel to the rescue. But the slightest sound would give the enemy the alarm and put them on their guard. It would be better to act quickly and take them by surprise.

He did not hesitate long. Like a spring which suddenly had been released, he leaped on the nearer of the two negroes and dealt him a crashing blow on the skull with the butt of his revolver. The unlucky black, stunned before he had had a chance to make a movement, rolled down the slope of the roof and disappeared into the darkness.

A few seconds later Henry heard his body strike the pavement below with a soft thud, as if it had been a bag of sodden earth. . . .

The other negro, however, was already crouching ready to attack and Henry saw the glitter of a knife blade in his hand. The reporter aimed his revolver and was about to fire, but he did not have time.

A huge silhouette, with mustache bristling, had risen suddenly between them; a powerful and well-aimed kick had caught the negro full in the chest, and Brunnel's voice thundered:

"There, you scoundrel! . . . That's for the scare you gave me!"

Theodore Brunnel always kicked with conscientious vigor, but when he was angered, his strength was quadrupled. Thus it was that the negro was lifted from the roof like a truss of straw under this living catapult and falling on his back, rolled toward the edge, where he came near sharing the horrible fate of his comrade. He had the good fortune, however, to clutch at the gutter pipe as he went over. His hands taut and twitching, he hung miserably between the roof, which he could not climb back upon, and the pavement where he would certainly be crushed to death.

The gutter yielded under his weight and slowly began to bend. In a few moments more the drawn fingers would open of themselves and the long black body would plunge into the courtyard beneath, where it would be changed into a nameless and misshapen mass.

Henry and Brunnel approached the edge cautiously. The moon, which a little while before had been half-veiled by a light mist, was now casting a clear, metallic light, like a shaft of quicksilver. The two friends silently watched the negro's face, which had turned a chalky color. The two gleaming eyes betrayed an infinite distress.

"Poor devil," murmured Brunnel. "We can't leave him like that."

"It would be murder," agreed Henry.

Exchanging a glance of understanding, they formed a plan of action. Standing on either side of the negro's head, facing each other, they crouched down over the gutter. Then each got a solid grip, Henry with his left hand and Brunnel with his right, on the cramp-irons fixed there for the support of the roof-menders when working over the edges. Bracing their feet well they leaned over and with their free hands caught the negro beneath the arm-pits. A long hard pull, which made their breath come fast and the sweat break out on their faces, gradually dragged him up onto the slope of the roof. From there they were able to reach the safer space higher up where the slope was not so steep, and here they dropped their burden. When he was no longer supported, the negro slumped down in a faint.

"Let's get him away from here," suggested Henry. "He may be useful to us."

The trip back to the supposed Antoine Lisboureun's studio was not easy, with this heavy and cumbersome load. When the naked black body had at length been stretched out on the couch, and a blanket thrown over it, Brunnel puffed noisily and dropped into an armchair, declaring:

"Ouf! We deserve a life-saving medal, if only for carrying him in here!"

Henri Henry was already applying a restorative to their prisoner, and after a few minutes the latter opened his eyes and looked about him in terror. Suddenly he seemed to remember what had happened,

leaped from the couch, knelt before the journalist and taking his hand, placed it, as a sign of submission, on his black crispy head.

This naive demonstration moved Henry, who said gently:

"Get up and listen to what I tell you."

The negro obeyed.

"What is your name?" asked the reporter.

By way of answer the African opened his mouth and showed the stump of a mutilated tongue.

"Ah!" said Henry in disappointment. "He is dumb too."

"Conversation won't be very lively with him," added Brunel.

"Well," the reporter began again, "at any rate he can answer with signs."

Addressing himself again to the negro, he framed his next questions so that they could be answered either "yes" or "no".

"Do you understand French?"

"Yes."

"Do you belong to Brancion?"

"No."

"What? You don't belong to Brancion?"

"No."

The negro persisted in shaking his head emphatically in the negative, to indicate that he in no way belonged to the mysterious owner of number 68b.

"To whom do you belong then?"

With his long forefinger the prisoner pointed suc-

cessively to Henri Henry and Brunnel. Then he undertook a series of expressive gestures: he pointed in the direction of Brancion's house and went through a pantomime of counting out money, meanwhile pointing to himself; then he pretended to fall and lift himself up again, pointing to Henry and Brunnel; and finally he placed both hands on his breast and stretched them out again at once, in a gesture of offering, toward the journalist and the former commissioner.

"He means," said Brunnel, wishing to interpret, "that Brancion paid him well, but he hopes we will pay him better."

"No! No!" The black shook his head vigorously.

"You're on the wrong track," said Henry. "Unless I am mistaken, this is what the poor devil means by these gestures: 'Brancion bought me, and so I was his slave, I belonged to him complete; but you saved my life and so now I belong to you.'"

"Yes! Yes!" nodded the head with delight.

"Good!" said Brunnel. "We adopt you; you will owe us obedience and faithfulness. Now, to begin with, put these clothes on; you make us cold to look at you."

While talking he had tossed him the shirt and overalls which Henry had just taken off, in order to put on a more comfortable costume.

The negro complied with this order at once and began to slip rapidly into the clothes.

"This is a valuable recruit we've got," said Henry

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to Brunel. "I'm going to try to question him some more."

Addressing himself again to the slave, he asked:

"How many servants like you has Brancion got?"

The negro held up both hands with the fingers spread wide apart.

"Ten?"

"Yes."

"Good! Where are the white people your master is holding prisoners kept?"

A gesture indicating complete ignorance was the only reply.

"You don't know . . . ?"

"No."

"But what do you do in the house?"

The negro went through the pantomime of opening and closing a door.

"Ah! You were the doorman?"

"Yes."

Henry studied his features intently for a moment.

"Oh, ho!" he murmured at length. "I may be wrong, but it seems to me it was you who tried to get me to go in the elevator the day the poison was put in it, at the *Gazette de Paris*."

The slave lowered his head in confusion.

"It was you, wasn't it?"

"Yes. . . ."

"And was it you who dropped the stone from the top of the unfinished building?"

Trembling in his whole body, the slave knelt and closed his eyes, as if expecting a punishment.

"I pardon you," said the journalist. "Get up. . . . Now, try to answer another question. How does Brancion's car get in the house and how does it come out?"

The negro plunged into a series of rapid and complicated gestures, which were meaningless to Henry and Brunnel. He stretched out his arms together in front of him, then spread them apart suddenly and pretended to be going down a slope; then beat the air with his hands.

"Do you know how to write?" asked Henry.

"No."

"That's too bad. . . . Could you lead us into your former master's house secretly some time?"

The black held up two fingers.

"In two days?"

"Yes."

"Why not at once?"

A fresh series of incomprehensible gestures.

"Not very simple, talking with a dumb man," commented Brunnel. "Nature certainly works wisely when she creates us, but men . . ."

Henry interrupted this little sermon, by saying to his friend:

"It seems to me that if this fellow is going to be of any use to us, we've got to send him back to Brancion . . ."

"Yes! Yes!" nodded the negro.

"I think we can trust him," answered Brunnel, "not to betray us."

"I think so too. He is a simple soul; he has given himself freely to us and will not take himself back." Then turning again to the slave, he continued: "So the day after tomorrow, you will let us into Brancion's house?"

"Yes."

"At what time?"

The negro held up both hands open, then closed them and raised one finger.

"At eleven o'clock?"

"Yes."

"In the morning?"

"Yes."

"Why at that particular time?"

The slave made the movements of caressing an imaginary beard on his chin, then of opening and closing a door and going away.

"That means that Brancion will be out?" asked the journalist.

"Yes."

"You are sure of it?"

"Yes."

"How shall we get in?"

This time the black indicated clearly that they should simply ring the bell at the main gate.

"Will you open the gate?"

"Yes."

"All right! . . . I shall trust you."

A smile of pleasure lit up the dark face, and the slave, kneeling once more, placed the reporter's hand for a second time on his head. Then, taking off the shirt and overalls he had put on at Brunnel's orders, he climbed nimbly out on the roof.

The two friends followed him, to see how he would make his way back to Brancion's house. They watched him crawl several minutes, then work his way toward a large chimney, lower himself into it and disappear.

"That probably takes him into some apartment, that Brancion has rented," speculated Brunnel. "There he gets dressed and can go out past his janitress as a respectable tenant. . . . What are you thinking about, Henry?"

"I'm wondering if we were wise to let that fellow go. It was perhaps foolishly imprudent on our part. And yet, he gave me the impression somehow that he would be faithful to us. And furthermore, it's the only way of getting into Brancion's lair and studying the situation on the very ground."

"I certainly don't see any other way."

"But why does he have to wait until day after tomorrow to let us in. I didn't understand anything in the signs he made about that."

"Neither did I."

"Wait a minute. . . . Didn't he draw a circle around himself?"

"As if he were shutting himself in."

"And then he held up one finger. . . . I begin to

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see now. He must have meant that Brancion would lock him up for a day to punish him for having failed to push us off the roof."

"That sounds plausible."

"One day's imprisonment, that must be the usual system. Well, let's hope that Brancion doesn't double it this time!"

CHAPTER XIV

A DRAMATIC STROKE

ONE wonders at times how certain pieces of news can spread through Paris, with the swiftness of a flash of lightning, before the newspapers have picked them up. Certainly the phrase, "current rumor" is not merely words. The first person to hear the news can tell it in a few minutes to ten others, and each of these to ten more, which, at once, makes a hundred. And, when each of these hundred has told it to ten of his friends, a thousand people already know what has happened.

By following this geometrical progression, the number of those who have been informed grows so swiftly, that soon all Paris is repeating and discussing the news. Tongues are wagging in every corner, and of course by this time the original scrap of information has been twisted, and embroidered, and expanded, until an incident has been turned into an epic.

The most curious faculty which this current rumor possesses, however, is its uncanny ability to penetrate into the most remote places, to worm its way into the

most tightly shut apartments, and to make light of the most formidable locks, the most severe restrictions.

If it had not been for this precious and subtle faculty, Henri Henry and Brunnel—voluntarily cloistered in their little studio in the Avenue de Suffren, and, at their own wish, separated from the world by a door, six flights of stairs, and a faithful janitress—would never have learned, the morning after their nocturnal expedition on the roofs and their capture of the negro, of the most astounding, dramatic stroke in the whole course of the history of bus 519.

But when current rumor has a piece of news which is really worth hearing, everybody becomes its accomplice, including the faithful janitress herself.

When the good woman, who seldom left the doorstep of number 62 Avenue de Suffren except for her daily marketing, heard from a passer-by the strange news that was circulating about town, she was filled in her turn with an ardent desire to tell somebody else.

The distribution of the mail gave her an irresistible opportunity to leave the good word, along with the letters, at each story. Her only regret was that the painter on the sixth floor had no mail and consequently there was no good excuse for interrupting him.

She paused for a moment on the landing, to decide what her duty, in this important situation, was. It

was a debate involving from her point of view the most weighty considerations. Should she obey her tenant's orders not to be disturbed and thus let him go in ignorance of the great news? Or should she disregard his instructions, arouse him in his studio (at seven o'clock in the morning!) tell him what she had heard, and what her tongue was burning to repeat?

An inspiration of genius saved her. Although it had not been arranged in the terms she had made with Antoine Lisbourdeun, the latter must certainly want some breakfast in the morning. While she was finding out what he would like to have, she could easily slip in a few words about the sensational event which had become the topic of the day.

Strong in the knowledge that she had discovered a virtuous reason for disturbing him, she rapped conscientiously on Antoine Lisbourdeun's door.

"Who is there?" demanded a voice.

"The janitress," she answered.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Just to find out if you'd like a cup of coffee in the morning or some rolls and . . ."

"Nothing at all, thank you!"

"But . . ."

"Don't bother me!"

Her tenant was apparently in no mood for long conversations. She hesitated, shifting from one foot to the other while she looked at the closed door with an expression of baffled hope.

"Some people get up out of the wrong side of the bed," she remarked to herself, as if to excuse the painter's rudeness.

She could not bring herself, however, to go back to her quarters without having said what was on her mind. What if he was in a grouchy mood? She'd risk it. Leaning over, she called out as loudly as possible through the key-hole:

"They've found bus 519!"

Then she fled.

She had not gone down ten steps when the door opened as though it had been struck by a whirlwind and the "painter" rushed out on the landing. Leaning over the banister he called:

"Wait a minute, madame! Please! Come up and tell me about it!"

The supposed Antoine Lisbourdeun's features betrayed such acute emotion that the good woman did not have the cruelty to follow her natural desire, which was to make him coax her a while to repay him for his previous indifference. Abandoning all coquetry in telling what she knew, she came up the steps and poured out in a few words what she had heard. It was, in sum, the merest outline.

Her information, crushing in its impersonal brevity, was simply this: *Bus 519 had been found standing in front of the Saint Lazare Station, with the same passengers who had been in it the night of its disappearance!*

Without waiting to hear the comments with which

she was eager to pad out her story, and throwing aside any fear of the trap his enemy might have set for him, Henri Henry, followed by Brunnel, ran down the six flights of stairs and hailed a taxi from the door. His janitress, meanwhile, delighted with the effect her words had produced and annoyed at not being able to say more, flung her arms in the air and screamed after the two men:

"Mister Lisbourdeun! Will you be home for lunch to-day or not? . . . These artists! They're all crazy. . . ."

The taxi carried them across the city at top speed. In front of the Saint Lazare Station a considerable crowd had gathered around the safety zone which was the terminus for the Grenelle-Saint-Lazare-Station line. Extra police had already been summoned and were keeping the crowd back. In spite of his popularity and his pass Henry had some trouble in getting through the line. Poor Brunnel had no luck at all but was caught in the jam and reduced to expressing his anger in vehement terms. He was not consoled until he found a friendly neighbor who was willing to listen politely to a little dissertation on mob psychology.

After explaining a dozen times who he was, however, Henry had finally edged his way through the populace, talked his way through the police, and arrived in the open space where several officials of serious mien and half a dozen reporters surrounded the bus.

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There was no doubt of its being bus 519!

As the journalist escaped from the last policeman and took his place among this small group, a distinguished gentleman with gray mustaches stepped down from the platform, and one of the others asked:

"Well, Doctor . . ."

"There is nothing to fear, sir. The victims have merely been subjected to a light application of chloroform; just enough to make them take a nap."

"Can we wait here until the examining magistrate arrives?" asked the Prefect of Police. "It would be better if he could see them and their surroundings in the exact condition in which they were found."

"I repeat to you, sir, there would not be the slightest danger in doing so. My patients are as well off here as anywhere."

During this conversation Henri Henry had looked eagerly inside the bus. In the first class, half-lying on the seats, an old man, a young man and a young woman were asleep. From their appearance Henry recognized Professor Muret, André Gilbert and Cécile. They were dressed as on the evening of their disappearance.

In the second class, also asleep, were the two young girls, unquestionably the Praline sisters, and a man who had the look of a skilled workman: the printer Charron.

Finally, on the platform, seated on the little bench, his elbows on the railing, his head in his hands, the conductor of the bus, Arthur Chalgrin, slept

also. . . . The latter still had his change-pouch and block of tickets, as though he had just been collecting fares.

The crowd was growing larger every minute. The square, the station courtyard, the neighboring streets were black with people. Most of these could see nothing but the backs of the heads of the people in front of them, but this did not dampen their ardor.

From time to time a ripple ran through the crowd. The police had made a passageway and a new official had arrived to join the little group standing about the bus and talking in low tones.

As these newcomers appeared, whispers ran through the waiting mob: "There goes the Bertillon man; he keeps the identification records at headquarters" . . . Then, "That's the head of the detective bureau" . . . and at last: "Here comes Legerbier, the examining magistrate. . . ."

In any crowd in Paris there are always people who seem to have complete information about the identity of public personages and who acquire a sense of importance by volunteering their information to those about them. The names whispered thus circulated rapidly through the crowd and momentarily appeased the fever of curiosity which was rising higher all the time.

Henri Henry, meanwhile, had been learning what was known about the way in which the lost bus had returned to the fold. The following was the account given him by Mr. Martial Clement, the starter of

the line, who repeated his story, a few minutes later, to Mr. Legerbier, the examining magistrate:

"It was six o'clock this morning and I had just arrived at the post. I was getting ready to give the signal for the first buses to go out, when this one appeared suddenly out on the rue du Havre at top speed. As soon as it stopped, I went up to it to tell the driver he had been going too fast, but he jumped down from his seat and without saying a word, disappeared in the entrance to the subway. I didn't know what to make of his acting like that, so I walked around the bus to speak to the conductor, and to my surprise found him sound asleep.

"I shouted at him but he didn't answer. Then I looked at him more closely, and my surprise turned into amazement when I recognized Chalgrin!

"But when I looked inside, I couldn't believe my eyes. I recognized the passengers from their pictures in the papers.

"I climbed in the bus then, but it smelled so like a hospital, it nearly made me sick. I was wobbling on my feet, sir, when I came out. Well, I checked up the number on the bus and saw that it really was the lost 519—it didn't seem real yet—and notified the policeman here, who telephoned to the commissioner of the district, and from there I suppose they telephoned the prefecture. And that's all. . . ."

"Did you notice the driver's face?" asked Henry.

"I couldn't see it," answered Clement. "The man had a muffler around his face as if he had a tooth-

ache, and his cap was pulled down over his eyes so that there was nothing but the top of his nose. . . ."

"The same man," reflected the reporter. "The same system, infallibly simple, and the same audacity. . . . But this time his audacity is recklessness, for when his former prisoners wake up, they will talk!"

While the man from the identification bureau was studying the finger-prints scattered about the different parts of the bus—which in fact were so numerous and so varied that it seemed a hopeless task to attempt to make any record of them, Mr. Legerbier was questioning Martial Clement, as Henry had already done.

His questions, however, brought no new information to light.

The disguised driver, if he had taken the subway at six o'clock that morning, must be well out of reach by now, and all hope of arresting him had to be given up for the present at least. For that matter, who could tell whether he was not even now standing among the spectators?

Suddenly there was a movement in the crowd. A concerted trembling seemed to run over the thousands of individuals who composed it, even through those who could see nothing.

A sentence, passed from mouth to mouth, had provoked this emotion. And the sentence was:

"Chalgrin, the conductor, is waking up."

Arthur Chalgrin, in truth, had shifted his position.

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His arms had left the railing on which they were leaning and his head was raised. His eyes were still only half opened, but one could feel that he was making an effort to open them.

At length he stood up, tottering somewhat. His eyelids were lifted heavily and he looked about him with a glance in which could be read fear and incomprehension.

The examining magistrate had at first started forward, but at an authoritative gesture from the doctor he stopped short and waited for the conductor to regain his senses.

With a mechanical gesture Chalgrin picked up his change-pouch, then his tickets, and as calmly as if nothing had happened, counted over his change.

Then turning toward the inside of the bus, he called out in a professional monotone:

"Saint Lazare Station! End of the line!"

"Now you can question him," said the doctor to Mr. Leberbier.

The examining magistrate, who was waiting for this permission, hurried up to the bus-step and said:

"Well, Chalgrin, we are all very glad to see you back in good health. But at the same time we are anxious to learn the truth about this mysterious drama, in which in spite of yourself you have been one of the actors. . . . Will you tell us a little about it?"

"What drama?" asked the conductor, in a voice of the most complete amazement. "And for that

matter, who are you to ask me questions, and what's the idea of this crowd looking at me as if I was an animal in the zoo?"

"I am Mr. Legerbier, the examining magistrate," replied the other, speaking with deliberation and dignity.

"Examining magistrate? . . . But why?"

"Good God, man!" broke out Mr. Legerbier in indignation, "you ask me why there is an examining magistrate here? I'm the one who is to ask you questions; we're not here for you to demand explanations from me. Where have you just come from? Who has kept you a prisoner? Where did they put you and your passengers? . . . Well; I'm waiting for an answer."

By using his elbows indiscriminately and paying no attention to the complaints that followed him, Brunnel had succeeded in reaching the front row. Mr. Legerbier's method evidently did not satisfy him, for he remarked to an old lady standing beside him:

"If he goes at him like that, he won't get a word out of him."

The sequence of events proved that Brunnel was right. The conductor passed his hand several times across his brow, seemed to make an intense effort to remember, and finally said, with apparently sincere surprise:

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

"I understand," replied the magistrate in a more

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indulgent manner. "You prefer to make your revelations to me in private, and not in the presence of this crowd?"

"In private or anywhere else, I haven't any revelations to make, for the good reason that I don't remember anything!"

This time Mr. Legerbier grew seriously angry.

"Take care, my man!" he cried, "or you'll find yourself implicated in this matter and it'll be no joke. There's been a death, you know, to account for."

"A death?"

"Yes, your comrade, Digeon, perished . . ."

"Digeon dead? . . . poor devil! . . . but what have I got to do with that?"

"Enough of this pretense!" said the magistrate threateningly. "Since you take that attitude, I shall have to act differently."

He spoke in a low tone of voice to the Prefect of Police, who nodded to two agents, pronouncing simply the two significant words: "To the station!"

But before this order could be carried out, a fresh murmur rose from the crowd:

"The passengers are waking up!"

CHAPTER XV

MR. LEGERBIER'S BRILLIANT IDEA

It was true: the passengers were slowly waking up. The first to make a movement was André Gilbert. The young man stretched himself, yawned and sneezed. He seemed surprised to find himself in his present surroundings, looked silently for a few moments at the sleeping Cécile and then rose to leave.

But Mr. Legerbier, who had given up Chalgrin as a bad job in his present mood of resentment toward all questioning, intercepted the engineer and spoke to him as follows:

"I have no doubt, Mr. Gilbert, that you, who are an intelligent and educated man, will give us some information about this. . . . But I beg your pardon, allow me to introduce myself. I am Mr. Legerbier, examining magistrate, in charge of the investigation concerning bus 519. Now if you will be so kind as to answer the questions which my official position make it my duty to ask you . . ."

"I am listening, sir," answered André courteously.

"In the first place, where have you come from?"

"I do not know. . . ."

"What! You do not know?"

"No, sir."

"Very well, then. Who carried you off and who has kept you a prisoner?"

"I do not know that either."

"But this is unbelievable! . . . Unless, Mr. Gilbert, you are still under the influence of the chloroform which has been administered to you under conditions about which I know nothing. I must ask you now to make an effort, gather your wits about you and tell me what has happened to you between the time of the disappearance of bus 519—in which you still were a moment ago—and the present."

For the third time André Gilbert answered:

"I do not know. . . ."

In the crowd those in the front row listened eagerly to the questions and answers, which were repeated to those in the rear and spread rapidly to the farthest ranks, producing a strong sensation. Those who could hear what was taking place began to wonder if the unfortunate victims had not been restored to liberty only because they had gone mad during their captivity, and the crowd felt a sentiment of pity mingled with disappointment that the mystery, instead of clearing up, was growing more obscure.

Mr. Legerbier was now completely at a loss, but he resolved to make a final effort with André Gilbert.

"Did you know," he asked, "that your house at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea had been broken into during your absence?"

The engineer made a gesture of indifference.

"And that the poor old widow Bastien, who did your cleaning for you," persisted the magistrate, "had been murdered?"

"That's too bad," said the young man simply and rather coldly.

"So you won't say anything, either?" There was a note of menace in the judge's voice.

"I *can't* say anything, because I don't know anything," stated the engineer, as naturally as though he were chatting with a friend about some trivial matter.

In spite of the cold of the winter morning, the perspiration was breaking out on Mr. Legerbier's face. He felt clearly that if this situation lasted much longer, he would make himself ridiculous before the crowd. In fact, thanks to the temperamental nature which characterizes Frenchmen, and especially Parisians, the spectators were already changing from a mood of anxiety to one of irony, and snickers began to go around at the magistrate's expense.

Brunnel, who imagined that the crowd was accepting his point of view, whereas in reality he was himself swayed by its mood as much as anybody else, was making frequent comments to those about him on the art of conducting an examination.

Mr. Legerbier, meanwhile, had said to André:

"Until we have more definite information about all this, I must ask you, sir, to remain under

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my supervision. You will kindly not leave this spot."

The engineer bowed politely and his face maintained the same expression of proud indifference.

At that moment Charron, who had been gradually waking up, appeared in the doorway of the bus. He looked about him with a frown, as if wondering where this great crowd of people had come from, then stepped down from the platform and started off toward the rue de Rome.

"Where are you going, my friend?" the judge asked him.

Charron stopped, looked astonished and answered:

"I am going to work . . . but what business is that of yours?"

The judge was forced to introduce himself again, before Charron would consent to be questioned.

The printer's answers, however, were the same as those of the other two passengers who had already been examined. He knew nothing, remembered nothing, and had never heard of the *bus that vanished*. The whole procedure was meaningless to him and he merely asked that they let him alone.

After his two preceding failures, Mr. Legerbier was prepared for anything. Hence he was not much disturbed by the obstinate refusal he met in his third attempt. He contented himself with ordering the printer also to remain under arrest.

There were still four passengers in bus 519 who were not yet fully awake: Muret, his daughter, and

the two Praline sisters. On the doctor's advice, the magistrate waited several minutes before trying to make them speak.

He had little hope, however, of learning anything from them. He suspected that the same lack of memory from which the first three had apparently suffered would also afflict the four who remained. But as he was turning over this melancholy prospect in his mind, his face suddenly lit up with a happy inspiration. . . .

Drawing his card-case and a pencil from his pocket, he scribbled a few words on a card and handed it to a motorcycle policeman, who had been standing behind him, saying:

"Make it quick, you understand?"

While he had been doing this, Professor Muret and Cécile had regained consciousness. Leaning on his daughter's arm, the scientist climbed down, somewhat stiffly, from the bus.

The charming young girl blushed at finding herself the center of attraction in such a large crowd, as a sympathetic and flattering murmur ran through the closely-packed ranks. Men in the rear stood on their toes and a youngster who had climbed a lamppost, called down: "Hello, Cécile!" Some one behind Brunnel began to whistle, "Here comes the Bride!"

Cécile, with the thick mass of her bronze hair, her clear white complexion and emerald eyes, seemed at that moment the type of the purest and rarest

beauty. Her carriage and walk were dignified and yet modest, and one felt an instinctive desire to bow, as she passed by, in token of respect and admiration.

The examining magistrate himself was embarrassed and trembled slightly as he greeted the couple.

"I hope, Professor, that you and Miss Muret will pardon the professional necessity which compels me to ask you a few questions. I am investigating the disappearance and return of the bus in which you have just been sleeping, under the influence of chloroform."

The father and daughter exchanged glances of surprise, which seemed perfectly genuine.

"I . . . I don't understand," stammered Cécile.

Mr. Legerbier could not restrain a gesture of impatience. Once more he announced his name and position. The scientist, however, interrupted him brusquely. What sort of a game was this, he demanded, asking people the most absurd questions in the street? What was this ridiculous story of a bus that disappeared and reappeared?

He himself, he added, had no accounting to render to any one, except his own conscience, of what he or his daughter did. Even granting that there was the slightest degree of common sense in the questions asked him, he could not see why, since he had not registered any complaint, there should be an examining magistrate. . . .

The young girl tried to smooth over her father's anger; but she, too, declared that she had nothing,

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absolutely nothing, to say in answer to the judge's questions.

In the latter's breast a brief struggle was taking place between the magistrate and the man of the world. At length the magistrate prevailed and with the most exquisite courtesy (a final concession to the man of the world) Mr. Legerbier requested Professor Muret and his daughter to remain under his orders, as their presence might still be useful in solving the mystery and furthering the ends of justice.

The judge's last chance was thus represented by the Praline sisters, Juliette and Germaine, whose youthful grace and freshness at once won the hearts of the spectators.

Germaine, especially, was ravishing. To be sure, she did not offer a type of harmonious and serene beauty, like Cécile Muret's. But her charm was not less effective. Her large brown eyes expressed intelligence and kindliness; her nose, which turned up slightly, gave her face a witty and delightfully mocking air; her mouth was good-sized and firm; her figure, beneath her simple tailored dress, appeared supple and well proportioned.

She, too, produced an effect on the examining magistrate, whose voice became gentler when he questioned her. But she—and her sister—seemed to understand no more of what it was about than the others.

To listen to them, one would have sworn that nothing unusual had happened and that the story

of the bus that vanished was merely a legend, invented by reporters who had run out of news.

Mr. Legerbier did not insist. He had foreseen that he would learn nothing from the Praline sisters, as he had learned nothing from the others. He was counting, to loosen their tongues, on the idea which had prompted him to send off the policeman on the motorcycle a while before.

The latter had already returned and was whispering to the judge. "Good!" answered Mr. Legerbier, who had instructed the guards to make a passage through the crowd, and now conducted his little group of witnesses to the nearest police station.

A wave spread through the spectators and there was a sudden push toward the entrance to the station.

As there was nothing to see there, however, but a closed door, guarded by policemen, and as it was growing late and the members of the crowd had to be at their places of work;—and as, after all, the most exciting scene, that is to say, the awakening of the escaped victims, was over, the crowd little by little grew thinner. Traffic was slowly re-established, and an hour later only a few persistent watchers stood about the station door, among whom were Brunnel and Henri Henry, disappointed at not having been admitted to see the results of Mr. Legerbier's great idea. His great idea, however, did not shine with any especial originality. It consisted simply in bringing face to face all the people involved, including not only the conductor and the

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six passengers, but Chalgrin's mother, the widow of the unlucky Digeon, the witness Jules Fonval, Charron's wife and even Hector Mainfroy, who had been put on the list by the judge as being Germaine Praline's fiancé.

This general meeting did not produce the results for which Mr. Legerbier had hoped.

Fonval attempted to reason with Charron: "Just try to remember, old man: I left you one Tuesday evening at eleven o'clock in the bus . . ." But the printer met his arguments with a gentle and quiet obstinacy: "I don't know anything about it . . . I don't understand . . ." And kissing his wife, he repeated, "I don't know . . ."

At the sight of his mother's tears of joy Chalgrin patted her hand tenderly, but to her whispered questions he gave the same strange response, "I don't know . . ."

Digeon's widow appeared in mourning, and moved by a desire for vengeance on her husband's unknown murderer, besought the others to tell what they knew. To all of her appeals the only answer was: "I don't know . . ."

This was becoming maddening, and Mr. Legerbier wondered if he was not the victim of an hallucination or a nightmare.

Hector Mainfroy had led the two sisters off into a corner of the station between the stove and the coat rack, and there he formally asked for the hand of Germaine from her sister.

When this ceremony was finished, as calmly as if it had taken place in a drawing-room, among intimate friends, the young man slipped a ring on Germaine's finger, and sitting down beside her began to talk enthusiastically about their future together. When no one seemed to be paying any attention to them, however, he whispered in her ear:

"You did perfectly right in pretending not to know anything about the attack on bus 519. Brancion is a dangerous man and . . ."

The young girl's features grew suddenly hard; her eyes became almost black and she answered dryly:

"What do you mean . . . ? I am not pretending anything, and I don't know what you're talking about."

"Listen, Germaine," said Hector smiling, "that attitude is all right for the others, but with me . . ."

"I swear to you," Germaine interrupted him, "that I don't understand a word you are saying. If I did know anything, I'd tell it at once, if it were only to ease the grief of that poor woman whose husband has apparently been killed."

Hector was filled with contrition by this statement, made in a tone which left no doubt as to its frankness. And he noticed something else, which Mr. Legerbier had already noticed, and which had increased the magistrate's puzzlement: it was that the seven people who had presumably been imprisoned together for several days, apparently did not know

each other at all, except of course the two Praline sisters, and Muret and his daughter.

At length Mr. Legerbier, weary of asking questions to which the reply was always, "I don't know," and wondering how much further he had the right to torment people who, after all, had been the victims and not the guilty ones, spread his arms in a gesture of helplessness and exclaimed:

"You may all go! . . . I shall merely ask you to appear, in case of need, when I summon you."

And at that moment he observed a fact which gave him some hope. As Germaine and Cécile came together at the door, their glances met, a light shone in their eyes, and impulsively they kissed.

But immediately each drew away in embarrassment, and in the manner of people who have been mutually mistaken as to each other's identity, they said simultaneously: "I beg your pardon!"

"So they *have* known each other," thought the magistrate. "Then why the devil don't they know each other now?"

André Gilbert came out first, and Henri Henry, who had been waiting for him, stepped forward to meet him.

"Mr. André Gilbert, I believe?"

"Yes."

"I'm a newspaperman, Mr. Gilbert, and . . ."

"I can't give you an interview, I'm sorry."

"I shan't ask you for an interview. . . . Just one

question: *What is the object whose base was a rectangle one yard wide by a yard and a half long, that was fastened with four large screws to the table in your laboratory at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea, and was stolen by the unknown burglars?*"

These words produced an extraordinary effect on André. His eyes became fixed, his mouth opened as if to speak and then twisted into a bitter grin. His hand started to rise in a gesture which remained unfinished. One would have said that he was making an intense and vain effort to speak.

Finally his face grew calm, but took on a yellowish tinge, and his voice was deeply changed as he answered:

"I do not know. . . ."

Strangely enough, Muret who had come out of the station behind the engineer and had overheard Henry's question, was gesticulating like a madman and seemed to be trying to say something which stuck in his throat. Then growing calm also, he murmured like André Gilbert:

"I do not know. . . ."

Deeply moved by the attitude of the two scientists, Henry bowed and withdrew, accompanied by Brunel. But a few minutes later he could not resist the temptation to return; and seeing that Muret and Gilbert were speaking together, he strolled by in the hope of hearing their words. His astonishment grew still greater.

"I must give you back your promise, Professor,"

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André was saying sadly, "so far as Cécile is concerned."

"I know. I was expecting it, my boy," answered Muret. "I am sorry, but there is nothing I can do . . ."

And Cécile, whose pallor and beauty made her terrifying, added:

"Neither you nor I, nor any one can do anything. *We must obey.*"

CHAPTER XVI

A TALE OF OLDEN TIMES

THE attitude adopted by the escaped victims of bus 519 left Henri Henry without any theory. His clear intelligence and rare faculties of intuition were, for the first time perhaps, utterly helpless before a problem. He did not know what to believe nor dared he let his imagination take flight. A single gleam of hope shone through this mystery; a single clew which promised some day to uncover the truth he so ardently sought. Hence, abandoning all the other aspects of the situation, he came back time after time to the question which had so deeply moved Gilbert and Muret: "What was the object with the rectangular base which had been stolen from the Villa Cécile." He felt sure that the answer to that question would of itself give him the key to the enigma; but he found no hypothesis which could explain the relation between this theft and the impudent security which the thief seemed to enjoy.

"This 'object with a rectangular base'," he remarked to Brunel, "is evidently in Brancion's hands. The visit to his house, which we are going to make tomorrow, with the help of our negro, is therefore more important than ever. It may not

only give us the secret to the prison where that scoundrel held his captives, but also reveal the nature of this object which is the source of his power.

"On the success of this expedition depends the success of our investigation. Consequently we must leave nothing to chance, and take every possible precaution. We both of us know the man we have to deal with, and that he holds human life cheap.

"The more advance information we can get about the lair we are going to explore, the more chance we will have of escaping any traps he may set for us."

"That is no doubt true," agreed Brunnel, "but what are the precautions you speak of, and where can you expect to get any advance information?"

"From the one man who knows more than anybody else about the secrets of the old buildings of Paris. The house where Brancion has his headquarters is far from being modern; certain parts of it, at any rate, date from the fifteenth century.

"I happen to be acquainted with a learned decipherer of old manuscripts, who may not know anything about contemporary life, but certainly knows a great deal about Paris as it was during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. I've had the honor and the pleasure of interviewing him several times (for it is an honor and a pleasure to talk with him). He is a member of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres and he is publishing a series of volumes on 'Parisians in the Fifteenth Century.' Last year

he brought out a volume on 'their customs'; this year it is to be 'their houses'."

"You mean Mr. Martin du Pont," interrupted Brunnel, who prided himself on keeping up with the current books as they appeared.

"Exactly. . . . And if, as certain indications lead me to believe, the secret part of Brancion's house was constructed at the same time as the building itself, our friend the Academician will certainly know all about it."

"But will he be willing to share the result of his studies with us?"

The reporter smiled and answered:

"Your point is well taken, for every one who knows that Martin du Pont has no liking for reporters and hates to tell them all about his affairs. Generally speaking, he never even receives them. But he makes an exception for me, since I undertook a campaign one time—and carried it through successfully—after one of his communications to the Academy, to preserve one of the oldest corners in Paris.

"In spite of the fact that he never reads the papers, he knew how much help my articles had been in getting the old buildings, that were precious to him, classed as historical monuments. And at present his door is always open to me. Now I will wager that he knows Brancion's house as well as its owner, at least so far as the parts which date from past centuries are concerned."

Strong in this conviction, a few hours after his

talk with Brunnel, the journalist presented himself at the learned Academician's house.

As he had foreseen, he was received at once in the scholar's study.

Martin du Pont was about sixty years old; the front part of his head was bald and lined with deep wrinkles, while a bushy little beard flourished on his chin and cheeks. His blinking eyes were sheltered behind spectacles tinted a faint yellow, which gave his face a strange expression. He was so careless of his clothes that his old valet, who had been his only servant for thirty years, had to insist, at intervals, that he have a new suit made. The bow-knot of the Legion of Honor, which he wore in his button-hole, had grown faded and dingy. His coat pockets had been stretched out of shape by the many books he had stuffed into them, and he had even been known to attend meetings of the Academy without a tie.

His absent-mindedness was proverbial and there were many anecdotes about it. It was he who came home soaked to the skin one rainy day, holding his umbrella carefully rolled up in its case. His faithful servant exclaimed: "Why didn't you open it up?" And Mr. du Pont answered: "You're right! I never thought of it."

His study was as curious as he was himself. Piles of dusty papers stood about in picturesque disorder. The scholar had given strict orders that they should never be disturbed. "If you straighten things up," he explained, "I'll never be able to find anything."

And in fact, thanks to a sort of intuition, he could put his hand at once on any document he needed, among the hundreds which were stacked on the tables, on the chairs, and even on the floor.

When Henri Henry reached this sanctuary, Martin du Pont quickly cleared a chair of the folios which covered it, and said as hospitably as he knew how:

"Sit down, young man, sit down and tell me what brings you here. I don't suppose you have come into my den just for the pleasure of seeing me?"

"Your time is too valuable, sir, for me to disturb you without a serious reason. I have come to ask the aid of your learning in a most important matter. . . ."

"What!" exclaimed Martin du Pont, "are the few vestiges of old Paris threatened again by vandals?"

The reporter smiled and hastened to reassure him.

"This time it is a very different sort of question," he said. "You probably have not heard, since you don't read the papers. . . ."

"I haven't time for it," interrupted Martin du Pont, as if to excuse himself.

"Oh, I am not reproaching you, sir," answered Henry, "but in order to explain the cause of my visit I must tell you about a certain affair which at present is very much in the public mind."

And he told the story of the misadventures of

bus 519, to which the historian listened with a noticeable politeness . . . and with a lack of interest that was equally noticeable. "How can this business," he seemed to be thinking, "possibly have anything to do with my work?" But when Henri Henry reached the description of Brancion's house, explained precisely where it was and what took place there, Martin du Pont's face lighted up with understanding.

"I know that house well," he exclaimed, "and I'm giving it a prominent place in the book I'm preparing for the printer now.

"It was built in the year 1464 for a certain Lord Crespino, who had lived for a long time among the Turks and had established a harem for himself at a time when polygamy was a hanging offense. This harem was concealed in a mysterious part of the building, which was large and ingeniously protected.

"I even have a manuscript, written in Latin by Lord Crespino himself, in which his harem's quarters are described in detail, as well as the mechanism which works the entrance to this subterranean part of his house. I'll read you the translation I've made of it. It's somewhere in this pile of papers. . . ."

With these words he pointed to a mountain of documents on a stand in the corner. Then he arose, upset the mountain with a single push of his hand and after looking through the débris for a few moments, extracted a large sheet of school paper,

covered with scribblings in a handwriting which was that of Martin du Pont himself.

He cleared his throat with a cough and began:

"This is a letter which Lord Crespino wrote to a friend in the provinces, who had formerly lived at the Turkish Court with him:

" 'I have great fear,' Lord Crespino wrote half-jokingly, 'that the elaborate precautions I have taken to avoid the punishment meted out to the polygamous may expose me to the persecution visited on those wretches who practise magic. The danger lies in the cleverness of the device I learned in the Orient, which has made it possible for me to fit out a secret apartment, underneath my house, between the ground floor and the cellars, somewhat like the boxes with false bottoms that jugglers use to deceive their public.

" 'There is no apparent communication between this apartment and the rest of the house, and nothing to betray its existence to any one outside. The barred windows, which give it light and air, opening on the rear, look like vent-holes and do not attract any curiosity.

" 'The only thing that might seem strange to an observant visitor is the length of the stairway leading from the ground floor into the cellar, which is not in proportion to the height of the cellar itself. But, aside from the fact that I receive few visitors anyway, those who do come have no reason to go down into the cellar. As for my servants, I brought them

back from the East, as you know, and their faithfulness has been proved.

“Nevertheless the great ingenuity of the construction has almost got me the reputation of having dealings with the devil. The engineer who worked the thing out for me included a great interior vestibule, before coming into the secret apartment itself, large enough so that I can drive in with a carriage and four!

“It’s done as follows: The marble landing by which you reach the main entrance to the house, is very high and hollow. It opens in the middle, with one of those complicated systems of pivots they have in oriental palaces, revealing a passage, wide enough for the carriage to enter, down a gentle slope. As the carriage goes down, the marble steps swing silently back into place behind it, so that the visitors—and some of them are charming!—have gotten out of the carriage before they realize that they are my prisoners.

“But there they are, and if they don’t know the secret of the mechanism, it’s as impossible for them to get out as it would be for them to fly to the moon. Now, the machinery that opens and shuts the entrance makes use of that strange substance recently brought back from Germany which has spread terror on the battlefields. It is a blackish stuff called *powder*, which when it is ignited, causes a sudden expansion of gases.

“The use my engineer made of this expansive

property is especially clever. The door is so delicately balanced on its pivots that a push with the little finger, from within and at the right point, is enough to open it. But without this push, it is impossible to open it. There is nothing you can do from the outside which will take the place of that push, even if you know the secret.

“On the inside, however, running along the upper interior partition, is a narrow tube of stone, which leads to the movable part of the stonework. In this tube a charge of powder can be set off, not strong enough to destroy the tube, but with enough power to drive gases down it with considerable force of expansion. The pressure of these gases, when the powder has been ignited, is the only thing which will open the door on its pivots.

“The door, as it closes by its own weight, works a mechanism, which drops into the tube a fresh charge of powder, exactly the same size as before. Consequently at each opening of the door there is an explosion and a cloud of smoke, which has aroused great curiosity among the peasants of the neighborhood.’ ”

At this point Mr. Martin du Pont looked up from his manuscript. “I don’t need to remind you, Mr. Henry,” he interjected, “that at the time this letter was written the house you are interested in, and which now stands in the midst of Paris, was surrounded by open fields, and that the city limits were still some distance away.”

After this commentary, the historian continued his reading:

“‘As a result of this the peasants have already accused me of diabolical practices, and if it weren’t for certain friends I have at the court, I should probably have suffered persecution.

“‘At any rate, in case anything should happen to me, I don’t want my secret to die with me and the treasures hidden under my house to be lost. That is why I am confiding to you in this letter, which I shall send by a trustworthy messenger, how it is possible to enter my secret apartment. Read what follows and learn it by heart, for you must burn this when you have read it. . . .’”

“Fortunately for us,” added Martin du Pont, “Lord Crespino’s friend did not burn the letter, for its contents are as thrilling as the most marvelous of the *Thousand and One Nights*. . . . I intend, moreover, to read it at one of the approaching sessions of the Academy.”

Henri Henry nodded. His throat drawn, his eyes dilated, he listened eagerly to this revelation, the author of which had been dead for more than four centuries, but who now, with magnificent poetic justice, was supplying a powerful weapon against the scoundrel who was using—to carry out his crimes—the very chamber where Lord Crespino had concealed his pleasures.

After a moment’s pause the Academician began again:

“‘At each side of the main entrance, on the marble landing, are two small dogs carved in stone, which seem to be merely ornaments. To open the passage in the stonework, you take hold of the right-hand side dog’s left ear and turn it from left to right until the explosion occurs.

“‘This ear is attached to a wire, which operates a flint lighter, placed so as to ignite the charge of powder in the stone tube. The passage will open and you can enter. To get out, you merely have to apply a lighted torch to the powder. . . .’”

Mr. Martin du Pont stopped once more and looked up.

“After that,” he said, “there are various protestations of friendship that don’t interest either you or me. . . . But what do you think of this amazing manuscript? I had neglected it a little until now, because it seemed so far-fetched; the story you have just told me of the house located precisely where Lord Crespino’s was reminded me of it. . . .”

“And I’m glad it did,” said Henry, “for now there can be no doubt of the guilt of the man I’m after, and you have shown me how to get into the room he thinks is impenetrable. Once there, I hope I shall uncover his other secret, which is even more terrifying than the first: that of the ‘object with a rectangular base.’”

“It isn’t mentioned in my manuscript,” said the scholar naïvely.

“That is not surprising,” answered Henry, re-

pressing a smile, "for it's a question of an infinitely more modern and extraordinary discovery than that of the use of stones on pivots or the 'blackish stuff called powder,' as Lord Crespino says. I can only thank you, sir, for your invaluable aid. Without your help I should not have known how to get into this bandit's cave . . . nor how to get out, which might be more serious. I suppose you have no intention of making this astonishing document public at once?"

"You needn't worry about that," said Mr. du Pont. "I shan't read it before the Academy for another fortnight. In the meantime you can take any action you see fit. . . ."

When he came out of the scholar's study into twentieth century Paris, with its taxis and subways, Henri Henry wondered if he were not the victim of a dream. The revelations of this old document were jumbled in his brain, with thoughts of motor buses, and the most modern experiments of physics. The linking of such a representative symbol of modern life as a bus with the naïve inventions of the fifteenth century literally dazed him. To clear his mind he discussed the matter with Brunel, who found all of that quite natural, and prepared Henry for a good night's sleep by giving him a long lecture on the inventive genius of oriental architects.

CHAPTER XVII

A FRUITLESS SEARCH

THE next morning, promptly at eleven o'clock, Henry and Brunnel kept their appointment with the negro doorman and rang the bell at Brancion's gate. This time Hector Mainfroy was with them.

The former commissioner had repeated to him, with many comments of his own, all that Henry had learned from Mr. Martin du Pont and so aroused the young man's curiosity that Hector, knowing his fiancée to be in safety and believing her protected from Brancion's diabolical machinations, had asked permission to join the expedition. The presence of a third person in this dangerous exploit was not to be scorned.

Henri Henry, moreover, had recognized Hector's level-headedness on the occasion when Brunnel had received a note from his former secretary, putting the two detectives on guard against the trap their enemy had set for them. Hence the journalist made no objection to accepting this volunteer reënforcement.

The three companions, it must be admitted, felt some uneasiness as to the outcome of their strange undertaking. The slightest incident might turn it into disaster. Suppose Brancion had stayed home

instead of going out, as the negro expected? Or suppose the latter had been replaced by another servant? Or suppose . . .

There were so many "suppose's" in this matter that Henry regretted now that he had not taken more precautions; that he had not asked his negro ally, for example, to let him know by some pre-arranged signal if the coast was clear. But it was too late now. They had gone too far to retreat. They must follow through to the end. . . .

This uneasiness, however, did not last long. The negro who came to open the door was the same one who had offered himself to Henry, and the broad smile which revealed his white teeth showed that conditions were as favorable as he had promised and as his new masters hoped.

As soon as the gate had closed behind them, Henry asked in a low tone:

"Brancion has gone out?"

The negro nodded his head.

"Good! Don't let any one come in, not even Brancion himself, until we have gone."

The slave made a sign that he had understood and he dropped an iron bar in place across the door, which was fastened by two padlocks. He then handed over the keys of the padlocks to the reporter.

"Perfect," said Henry. "Now how many men are there in the house?"

The slave raised six fingers.

"Six?"

"Yes."

"That must be right," said Brunnel. "There were ten in all. Two have probably gone out with Brancion: the chauffeur and the footman. A third was killed the other night, in falling off the roof. Our friend here is the fourth. That leaves six blacks in the house."

The slave had nodded his agreement as the former commissioner made the count.

"Well," said Mainfroy, "if there's a fight, we're pretty evenly matched."

But the dumb slave, with a malicious smile, pointed toward the house, then raised five fingers and made the gesture of turning a key in a lock.

At first Henry, Brunnel and Mainfroy did not understand this pantomime, which the negro repeated patiently. Then the reporter exclaimed:

"You mean you have locked five of them up in the house?"

"Yes, yes," nodded the African.

"Good for you!" said Brunnel enthusiastically. "My compliments!"

"And the sixth?" asked Henry.

The slave pointed toward the flight of marble steps.

"He is in the subterranean passage?"

"Yes."

"That's all right. We'll take care of him."

And Henry started toward the steps. The slave caught him by the arm and stopped him.

"What else?" asked the journalist.

A series of gestures constituted the answer. They indicated that the negro did not know how to operate the mechanism.

Henry smiled and asked:

"Is it always Brancion himself who makes the steps open?"

"Yes."

"But the night he came in with the bus?"

The negro pointed toward the steps and lifted one finger.

"Ah! The man who is in there knows the secret?"

"Yes."

"And you have never seen how it works?"

"No." The negro shook his head and closed his eyes tightly.

"You all have orders to shut your eyes when your master wants the passage opened?"

"Yes."

"And you always obey?"

In reply the slave pointed to Henry's revolver and imitated an expression of fear.

"So disobedience is punished with death?"

"Yes."

"This Brancion," said the newspaper man to his companions, "seems to inspire his servants with an unholy fear. But we are losing time. We have talked too much; or at least, I have. . . . Don't worry," he continued, addressing the slave again. "I am as strong as Brancion and I shall open the

passage without even making you close your eyes."

He ran lightly up the seventeen steps.

On each side of the large door which gave entrance to the house two marble dogs crouched like guardians. In accordance with the instructions in the manuscript deciphered by Martin du Pont, Henry took hold of the left ear of the dog on the right hand side. . . .

The journalist's heart was beating fast. At the moment when he was about to reach the goal of his efforts, he could not escape a sudden flare of emotion. What was going to happen? Would the mechanism work? Had there been no change in all these years?

Suddenly he tightened his grip on the marble ear and turned. He immediately experienced an intense joy. A muffled explosion sounded, like a shot fired in the distance, and the central part of the flight of steps swung slowly outwards, opening the passage, large enough—as the manuscript said—"for a carriage and four." At the same time, a thick cloud of smoke filled the courtyard as far up as the second story.

Henry ran quickly down the steps of the movable part, which had carried him with it in its opening, and was the first to enter the passage. Brunnel and Mainfroy followed him.

The slave, trembling with terror, had remained in the courtyard. Behind the three men the stone door closed silently.

At the same moment, however, electric lights flashed on along the ceiling, lighting up a vast room,

with a gently sloping floor, about ten yards wide and twenty long.

"The rascal has put in some modern improvements," said Mainfroy, "at least as far as the lighting is concerned."

"And also for opening the door," answered Brunnel, pointing to a long stone tube built solidly into the wall. Attached to it was an electric wire, which ended in a switch.

"He's replaced the old flint with an electric spark . . ."

"Look out!" interrupted Henry. "Drop!"

He had thrown himself flat on his stomach and his two companions followed his example. They were none too soon. A man had just appeared at the opposite end of the room, and six shots reverberated in rapid succession within the closed walls. The bullets whistled over the prostrate bodies.

"That's the guard," murmured Henry. "Hard luck for him. . . . You take him, Brunnel. You're the marksman."

Brunnel sighted his man carefully and fired. The negro fell.

"Case of legitimate self-defense," said Mainfroy as they rose from the floor.

"Oh, I haven't killed him," the ex-commissioner assured, hurrying toward the man he had just brought down. After examining him, he added:

"He has a ball in the thigh and has fainted. . . . The shock of our coming in must have contributed

as much as the wound to the fainting. At any rate, he can't do us any harm."

"That's all we want," said Henry. "Now let's look for the 'object with a rectangular base'!"

Four luxuriously furnished rooms opened off the subterranean vestibule. Small windows, near the ceiling and heavily barred, let in a dim light. A white wall could be vaguely seen rising beyond the windows, so that any prisoners kept here would be completely isolated from the street. The doors of these rooms, hung on the inside with sumptuous tapestries, were equipped on the outside with enormous locks.

"The ideal prison," murmured Hector.

But among all the rare and precious works of art which furnished the four rooms, there was nothing corresponding to the "object with a rectangular base," which the reporter was seeking.

A long, careful search brought no result and Henry felt a cold rage spread through his veins.

"The scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "Did he get wind of what we were up to? It looks as if he were making fun of us by letting us get in here, after he had taken away this mysterious thing I'm looking for without even knowing what it is!"

Aided by Brunnel and Mainfroy he set to work turning over and examining the furniture. In vain. Then they sounded the walls with their canes, from one end of subterranean quarters to the other, hoping to find a fifth secret room. In vain.

At length Henri Henry, moved by a new idea, approached the wounded slave lying upon the floor, to whom he had paid no attention until now.

"Another African," grumbled Brunel.

"And dumb," added Mainfroy, who guessing the journalist's intention, had opened the wounded man's mouth to pour a few drops of brandy down his throat, and had seen that his tongue too was cut down to a stump. . . .

The negro gave a long sigh, opened his eyes and looked about him in terror.

"If you refuse to answer, or if you lie," said Henry, showing him his revolver, "I shall kill you."

The wrinkled black face contracted in fear.

"Is there another room besides these four?"

"No," the negro shook his head.

"Good. Did your master take something away from here this morning?"

"Yes."

"A box?"

"Yes."

"About as long as that and as wide as that?"

While speaking Henry spread his arms apart to indicate the approximate dimensions of the object he was hunting.

"Yes."

"That settles it," said the reporter bitterly.

"We're out of luck."

"Why not simply denounce this Brancion to the

police?" asked Brunnel, returning to an idea that was dear to him.

"No, I want to be the first to understand this sinister enigma, and I will be!" answered Henry vigorously. "But we must get out of here now . . . empty-handed too, damn it!"

"Not entirely," interjected Mainfroy, with his usual calm.

"What do you mean?"

"I found this between two cushions on one of the divans."

He handed the reporter a dainty little notebook bound in Florentine leather, adding:

"You were hypnotized by the idea of looking exclusively for the 'object with a rectangular base,' and that kept you from noticing anything else. I merely acted as though I were making an ordinary search, and as a result found this notebook which I think will have some interest for us since the first lines indicate that it is a diary kept by Cécile Muret during her captivity."

Henry took the notebook eagerly.

"I congratulate myself now," he said, "on having brought along as valuable a man as you are, Mr. Mainfroy."

And Brunnel, with a note of pride in his voice, exclaimed:

"He's the result of my training!"

Mainfroy did not point out the exaggeration in this, but contented himself with a smile.

After a moment's reflection, Henry continued:

"When we get home, we can read Cécile Muret's diary at our leisure. For the present our problem is to get away from here in safety."

Their exit was made as easily as their entrance, thanks to the electric attachment which had been added to the fifteenth century mechanism. The journalist had merely to turn the switch; the explosion followed, and the movable part of the stone steps swung open. When they came out once more into the fresh air and sunlight, the three men experienced an immediate feeling of security. Without admitting it to themselves, they had been subject, as long as they were locked in the subterranean prison, to an indefinable uneasiness.

The slave was awaiting them by the door.

"Nothing new?" Henry asked him.

"No."

"All right. We're leaving now."

The journalist handed the padlock keys to the negro. The latter opened the door and then stretched out both hands in supplication to Henry.

"You want us to take you with us?"

"Yes."

"Good! Come along. . . ."

CHAPTER XVIII

AN INEXPLICABLE ATTACK

FLANKED by Brunnel, Mainfroy and the faithful negro, Henri Henry left the courtyard of Brancion's house and covered the short distance to the building where the supposed Antoine Lisbourdeun had rented his studio. As they approached, they noticed a young woman at the door, who came toward them.

When she was still a little way from them, Hector Mainfroy realized with astonishment that it was Germaine Praline.

She was as pale as a corpse, and her large eyes shone in her white face with a feverish gleam. She was advancing toward them with the stiff movements of an automaton or a somnambulist, and like a somnambulist, too, she seemed to look about her without seeing.

The four men stopped, speechless, as if fascinated with horror at this strange apparition.

Hector was the first to recover himself, and stepped forward to the young girl, who had also stopped and was watching him with that expressionless stare which made him shudder.

"What are you doing here, Germaine?" he asked gently.

Germaine did not answer. She did not even seem to have heard the question her fiancé had asked. She was obviously struggling against some internal force. Her mouth contracted, her nose grew taut. At length in a voice which was devoid of any life, a voice which seemed to come from beyond the tomb, she said:

"Which of you is named Henri Henry?"

On hearing his name spoken, the journalist stepped forward.

The scene which followed was unfolded with the swiftness of a flash of lightning against a black sky.

Drawing a tiny revolver from her sleeve, Germaine fired three times at the reporter. Then collapsing suddenly in a nervous crisis, she dropped her weapon and fell on the sidewalk, which was reddened by the blood of her victim. . . .

But the victim was not Henri Henry. Some one had thrown himself between the journalist and Germaine at the very moment she was aiming her revolver: it was the poor negro, who now lay at their feet, his black skin pierced by the three bullets.

He had been faithful even unto death to the master to whom he had voluntarily given himself.

The police, attracted by the noise, quickly carried the wounded man and the sick girl into a nearby drugstore. There, while the two patients received the necessary attention, Henry described the event in terms which considerably distorted the truth.

The negro, according to his story, had himself

fired the three shots, and the girl had fainted in terror at witnessing the suicide.

As Brunnel and Mainfroy confirmed Henry's words, and as there had been no other witnesses to the attack, the police, who recognized their former superiors, did not for a second doubt the truth of this account.

The negro was too seriously wounded to be questioned himself. The doctor who examined him announced that he must be taken at once to the hospital, where Henry resolved to visit him.

In the depths of his heart the journalist was ashamed of the lies he had told about the loyal black. But the police must not be allowed to take charge of Germaine Praline. In the interests of the investigation he was carrying out, the young girl must remain at Henry's disposition. She had certainly been nothing but an instrument, in this matter, in Brancion's hands; a marionette of which Brancion held the strings.

The reporter must know by what devilish means the scoundrel exercised this almost supernatural power. Germaine alone could tell him.

The formalities were completed in quick order, thanks to the good relations Brunnel had maintained with his successor, the commissioner in the Military School district. The latter even promised to see that the press did not get hold of this "painful incident."

Germaine, who had regained her senses, allowed herself to be led to the studio without seeming to

understand where she was going. As the janitress watched her with a malevolent eye, Henry explained her presence, with a little embarrassment, by saying: "She's the model for a new picture. . . ." This seemed plausible to his stern guardian and she did not press the matter. Fortunately this Cerberus in petticoats had been busy upstairs when the tragic scene had taken place in the street, and she had heard nothing.

As soon as the young girl, still somewhat under the influence of the nervous disturbance which had overcome her, was settled as comfortably as possible on the couch, Hector Mainfroy said to her with emotion:

"What has happened to you, Germaine?"

"I don't remember. . . ."

"What! . . . You mean to say that after seriously—perhaps mortally—wounding that poor slave who threw himself between you and the man you tried to kill, you pretend not to remember anything about it?"

Germaine looked at him silently with troubled eyes.

"Germaine, darling, please say something in your own defense! At least tell me that this man who exerts a fatal influence over you, drove you to this crime! Tell me that you are sorry. Speak to me. . . ."

The girl seemed to be still in a trance.

"I can't stand this silence," groaned the young

lover. "Germaine, please! If you still have the slightest bit of affection for your fiancé, if you care at all what I think of you, tell me this: 'Why did you want to kill Henry?'"

"I don't know. . . ."

Mainfroy pressed his hands to his temples in despair. His mind was swirling dizzily. With a great effort, however, he steadied himself. Never before had he allowed himself to betray publicly such strong signs of emotion. Forcing his features to resume their impassive air once more, he reacted against his anger and his grief. He controlled his gestures, lowered his voice and spoke calmly. Turning toward the two others, he said with apparent self-possession:

"I'm afraid she won't be any use to us, at least so far as the information we want is concerned. Her inexplicable attack only complicates the matter more than ever, and God knows it was complicated enough before."

"Nevertheless I should like to know," interrupted Henry, "why she wanted to kill me."

Addressing himself to Germaine, he began to question her gently.

"You have no motive for hatred against me, have you, Miss Praline?" he asked.

"Oh, no! Of course not!"

"Good. . . . It was then out of obedience to someone else, who has power over you, that you tried to kill me?"

"I don't know. . . ."

"Very well. . . . Are you allowed to tell me how you have spent the morning?"

"Certainly. I . . . I . . . Oh, it's terrible! I don't remember anything!"

And she burst into sobs.

"Can't you see, gentlemen," interrupted Brunnel, "that this poor girl had no responsibility in what she did? She acted undoubtedly in a state of absolute unconsciousness, and at the suggestion of someone who exercises an unlimited domination over her mind.

"This is not the first time that dabblers in the occult sciences have made use of their knowledge to accomplish crimes. You don't have to go back to the magicians of the Middle Ages, for examples; if you remember . . ."

Brunnel was off now on a stream of eloquence where it was hard to stop him. This was a favorite hobby of his, and he was ready to explain every crime committed under hypnotic influence that had hitherto defied explanation.

He was convinced that this was one more example. Brancion, from his point of view, had the power to put Germaine under the influence of a hypnotic sleep and make her carry out, while in that condition, the most outrageous commands.

It must be said for Brunnel that he had never made a more successful speech in his life. No one interrupted him—which was in itself a tri-

umph—and his audience listened with acute interest.

Germaine, whose magnificent eyes were fixed upon his face, did not miss a syllable of what he said; her expression revealed an effort to understand which was so intense that it gave her a deeply pathetic air.

Hector nodded his head in agreement, as his former chief developed his ideas. The theory put forth by Brunnel and the arguments which supported it brought a great sense of relief to the young man. The sadness which had darkened his face gradually lifted. The conviction that Germaine, in spite of all appearances, was really innocent took root in his mind and filled him with joy.

Henri Henry himself at intervals gave signs of approving Brunnel's words. When the latter had finished his speech (everything has to end!) he turned toward Germaine and asked:

"Is that right?"

Hector's fiancée made a gesture of exhaustion. Her face took on again its dulled and indifferent expression, and she replied:

"How do I know?"

But Mainfroy exclaimed:

"Yes! That's certainly what happened. It couldn't be more obvious or more logical!"

"I don't entirely agree with you," said Henry slowly, and as courteously as possible.

In spite of his friendly tone, the remark irritated Brunnel, who answered sharply:

"If you have a more reasonable hypothesis, let's hear it!"

"Your theory is very ingenious and tempting," said the reporter. "Now why doesn't it satisfy me completely?"

"I had already thought of it several times, even before this unfortunate girl attacked me. But it doesn't seem enough to me to explain the strange attitude in which *all of the passengers* of bus 519 have persisted.

"I admit that experiences of a psychic nature, known as occult phenomena, are not well understood. Nevertheless it seems hardly believable to me that one man should exercise over seven people of different social situations and different mentalities the same, invariable influence, merely by his own strength.

"Besides—you'll probably say that this is a mania with me—isn't it worth pointing out that Brancion's mysterious power dates from the day when the rascal got possession of that 'object with a rectangular base'? Everything leads me to think that there is some close relation between that power and the possession of that object.

"It's perfectly true that the results may be similar to those obtained by simple hypnotism. But I am convinced that these results are obtained by different means than those employed in the past, and that the object with a rectangular base,' which was stolen from the Villa Cécile, is one of them. . . ."

Brunnel had already opened his mouth to deliver his reply when Mainfroy cut in with a different suggestion:

"Suppose, instead of arguing in the air, we read Cécile Muret's diary. We may find something definite there to base an argument on."

"You are right," agreed Henry, "but first I am going to take a necessary precaution."

"I hope you will allow us," he continued, turning to Germaine, "to protect you against yourself by keeping you here for a while. . . . This studio has a small room opening off it, which we will fix up as comfortably as possible with this couch and a few cushions. For the time being that will be your home, and we shall be your very respectful guardians."

"I trust that your captivity here will not last long, but I am sure you will understand the feeling which leads us to keep you."

Hector made a gesture as if to oppose this decision, but Germaine stopped him with a glance and said, in a tired voice:

"Do whatever you wish with me."

She was quickly settled in the small room and Henry asked if she would like any books to read. She shook her head, however.

"All I want," she said, "is to rest. If I can only sleep. . . . But please tell my sister, because if I stay away long, she will worry."

When the three friends were once more alone in the studio, Henry apologized to Mainfroy:

"It is not only in our interest, but also—and especially—in her own that I am doing this," he explained. "At any cost she must be rescued, even by force, from this hideous domination.

"But that is not all. We must fool our enemy now into thinking that the attack succeeded. It's the only way of getting him to stop hunting me down—for I am always the one at whom he aims. It is also the only way of giving him a false security, which may perhaps make him careless. And if he is once careless, we will be ready to take advantage of it."

He scribbled a few lines and then read them aloud:

"*'A mysterious attack.* Our colleague, Henri Henry, has just fallen victim to a mysterious attack. He was fired upon three times, in the public streets to-day at noon, by a woman whose identity is unknown and who escaped arrest. He is at present being cared for at his home, where it is believed, unfortunately, that there is little hope for his life.'

"That will start rumors," he smiled. "I shall ask you, Mainfroy, to take written instructions to my house, so that the servants will know what to do. Everybody must be deceived. And I trust to you, Brunnel, to arrange it at the prefecture of police, so that they will pretend to believe the news.

"At the same time, will you send off a telegram in code for me? I'll write it out now, to my wife, and put her mind at rest. When you come back, we'll all read Cécile Muret's diary together. . . ."

CHAPTER XIX

THE DIARY OF CÉCILE MURET

JANUARY 14, 19 . . . What's the use of my writing in this diary? Probably no one will ever read it. . . . But I must prove to myself that I am still sane, and fight against this bewilderment which settles down over me at times. For three days and three nights I have been alone in this luxurious room, which is really a prison.

Alone! I never knew before what the word meant. The only human face I have seen is that of the horrible negro, with his tongue cut out, who is my jailer. No one has spoken a word to me. My sleep is broken with terrible nightmares.

But the worst torment is that I have no idea of the fate of those I love? Are they dead, or are they prisoners like myself? I may never know. Even if they are alive and free, they must be suffering anguish over my disappearance.

Who is taking care of Papa? Who ties his tie for him in the morning and knows what he likes for his meals? The absence of his Cécile will be hard on him!

And poor André, who came to Paris in triumph, to receive "the reward for all his work," as he wrote

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Papa! The very first evening he lost the promised reward. Almost the eve of our marriage, and we were separated. . . .

The more I study what has happened, the more Robert Brancion's name sticks in my mind as that of the only person who could have kidnaped me in this brutal way. Only he, with his infernal genius and his unbelievable recklessness, could have planned and carried out such a scheme. As for his purpose? I know it only too well. . . .

But if, by any chance, some one should read these lines, I must try to explain why I suspect this man. The story of my life will throw some light on the matter.

I was born at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea in a house which belonged to my parents and which they named in my honor: *Villa Cécile*.

My father was at that time professor of physics at the University of Caen. Although he was still comparatively a young man, he was considered a remarkable physicist. The studies he had published had made him almost famous in the scientific world.

My birth meant little to him, and he didn't begin to be interested in me until I was old enough to ask endless questions about the strange instruments in his laboratory.

It was about that time that he became obsessed with his one idea; all his work was directed toward a single aim and he struggled to realize a dream which had been haunting him for years.

Allowed to grow up almost without any supervision, with an invalid mother and an absent-minded father, my whims were the only laws I knew. My father was the only teacher I had. Sometimes he neglected my education, and at other times during spells of paternal care he stuffed my young mind with science.

The result was that at thirteen I had never heard of Corneille, Shakespeare nor Julius Cæsar; but on the other hand Mariotte's law and Archimedes' principle were old stories to me.

Since then I have read a great deal, but I have always been more interested in science than in literature.

I was fourteen when my mother died, in the same Villa Cécile where I had been born. Papa, who adored her, without fully realizing while she was alive how deep his love was, became nearly mad for a time, with grief. He began to detest Saint Julien and Caen, asked to be retired and brought me to Paris, where it was our misfortune to meet Robert Brancion again.

The latter had been one of Papa's best pupils at the University of Caen. He had a prodigious aptitude for the physical sciences and assimilated the most complicated theories without effort. His facility, his memory, his intelligence and his passion for science aroused a great enthusiasm in Papa, who said that "if it hadn't been for André Gilbert, Robert Brancion would be the most brilliant pupil he had

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ever had." André was the beloved disciple, to whom Papa confided all his secrets, even his mistakes and discouragements. André's serious, handsome face frightened me a little when I was a child, and I used to wonder what he could possibly be doing when he would be shut up for hours in the laboratory.

Having devoured innumerable novels in secret, my imagination, in spite of my precocious scientific training, was thoroughly romantic. And I supposed that Papa and André, like the alchemists in the past, were trying to make gold. But their ambition was much greater than that of the alchemists! And their discovery was more extraordinary and more marvelous than that of the transformation of metals would have been!

But I must come back to Brancion.

When we landed in Paris, Papa and I felt lost in the roar and tumult of the city, and looking for an apartment seemed almost an impossible task. For several days we wandered around in different parts of town, on the left bank, where Papa enjoyed the comparative quiet.

Finally we settled on a place in the Avenue de Suffren, and as we were coming out, after having signed the lease, a man with a thick beard bumped into us, apologized and then looked at us in astonishment.

"Professor!"

"Robert!"

It was Brancion who had stumbled on us. By

chance—which he said was providential—it happened that he was living in the same neighborhood, in an old house dating from the fifteenth century, and which I have heard is an architectural marvel.

His former pupil quickly won Papa over completely; though this wasn't hard, as he had already been well-disposed toward him. In a little while Brancion was a daily visitor at the apartment. As he was very rich, he tried to gain at least a sort of benevolent neutrality out of me by overwhelming me with presents.

Papa, who couldn't conceive of any bad intentions in any one he liked, couldn't get along without him. But I felt an instinctive and unreasoned distrust toward him which the future justified.

I shall never forget the terrible evening when his baseness was revealed, in a scene which was horrible for me. André had come to Paris to spend a few days. He brought with him a model on a reduced scale of the wonderful apparatus Papa had conceived and he had worked out.

They were shut up together in the study until dinner-time. When they came out, they seemed very pleased. André's handsome face was lighted up with a smile and when his eyes met mine, I discovered an intense expression of tenderness in them. At that time I was only sixteen, but I was tall and quite matured. My mirror told me that I was not homely and that I could hope to be loved.

Was it possible that this dazzling young man,

whom I had always thought of purely as a scientist, could be in love with me? When I asked myself that question, a feeling of happiness stirred in my heart; and my eyes, instead of avoiding André's, turned toward him to find again that light which had moved me so deeply. . . .

After dinner I said that I should like to hear some music. It seemed to me that only music would be appropriate to the mood I felt rising within me. Papa, of course, always yielded to my whims, so he agreed and we all three went to a concert hall on the left bank where the best music is played by a marvelous orchestra.

But we were so unsophisticated in Paris that we didn't know the hall was closed for the season. We joked about our ignorance and started back home on foot.

From the sidewalk in front of the house we noticed that the windows in the study were lighted. "You forgot to put out the light again," I said to Papa teasingly. Our surprise turned into fear, however, when we came upstairs and found the door to the apartment standing open. It was fortunate for us that André was with us. He bounded toward the study door and entered, a revolver in his hand.

"So it's you, you sneak thief!" he cried.

Papa and I were both fixed with horror at what we saw.

Robert Brancion, motionless before the threat of the revolver, stood with trembling hands and anxious

eyes, beside the bookcase, which had been broken open. There were slivers of glass on the floor. On the table the small model, which he had stolen from the bookcase, had been taken apart and each piece carefully wrapped in tissue paper. There could be no doubt that the scoundrel was getting ready to carry them off with him.

Papa trembled with indignation and grief.

André began to speak slowly in a dry, clipped tone:

"I could take my choice," he said, "between turning you over to the police and putting a bullet in your head. . . . But I haven't forgotten that we used to be friends. So here are your orders. . . ."

Brancion made a gesture of rebellion. But André went on:

"Here are your orders! You are rich; there is no necessity for you to stay in France, and you are going to leave the country at once. I forbid you ever to come back, and to forestall any notion you might have of returning, you are going to write and sign what I dictate to you. . . . Sit down at that table, take a sheet of paper and a pen."

Brancion obeyed. The shining barrel of the revolver, aimed steadily at his breast, checked any desire for resistance. After thinking a few moments, André dictated:

"I hereby confess that on this date I effected an illegal entrance into the apartment of Professor Muret, at 76 Avenue de Suffren; that I broke open

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his bookcase and the drawers of his desk; that the purpose of my action was to commit theft.' Now the date and your signature."

"I refuse to sign that," said Brancion in a low, hoarse voice.

"Very well then," said André, "you can choose between the police and the revolver."

Brancion growled like a wild beast caught in a trap. Then he dated and signed the paper.

"Am I free now?" he asked.

"You are free. But if, day after tomorrow, you have not started for abroad, or if you ever come back, this paper will at once be put in the hands of the police."

His head down, Brancion walked heavily out of the room, trembling with rage.

When he had left, André asked:

"Did I do right, sir?"

"You acted well, my boy," Papa answered.

Then turning toward me, he said:

"Let's forget this scoundrel who betrayed my confidence, and talk of something else. . . . André has asked me for your hand this evening, and . . ."

Dear Papa didn't like to beat about the bush. André, who had turned crimson, tried to signal to him to drop the matter for the time, but he went calmly on:

". . . and I said 'Yes,' provided, of course, that you are willing. What is your answer?"

I gave André a teasing glance.

"A young girl," I murmured, "must obey her father."

"That means she agrees!" exclaimed Papa. "And I'm very happy for you both, my children. As soon as André finishes the work he is starting now, you shall be married. You are still too young at present, Cécile, and André must devote all his time and money to the task he has undertaken. . . ."

He took both our hands and concluded:

"It will not be more than four or five years."

At this I felt suddenly disappointed. I had already been picturing myself as André's wife, and here I was being told to wait four or five years!

But I see now that under all his eccentricity Papa was more wise than I had realized. I was much too young then to appreciate André's loyalty and fineness and distinction. It is only now that I love him as he deserves to be loved and as he loves me. . . .

I learned later that the four or five years were essential for André to carry out Papa's great invention, which Brancion had wanted to steal.

For a long time after that, we had no news of Brancion. A sign: HOUSE FOR SALE, was hung out over his door and that reassured us that he really had gone.

Only a few months ago I read in the papers that "the explorer, Robert Brancion, was about to return to France." There was a long article full of praise of "the famous explorer," who had been on long exhibitions in India, Thibet and Central Africa.

Not wanting to worry Papa, I didn't say anything to him about it.

But one evening I thought I recognized Robert, in the shadow of his gate, watching me go by with gleaming eyes that terrified me. I told Papa at once and then wrote to André. It seemed to me that if André could be with me, I'd have nothing to fear.

His work, moreover, was finished. Papa's marvelous discovery had been applied in the apparatus his favorite pupil had constructed. Their experiments had been more than satisfactory.

In his first answer, André tried to calm my fears. But when I wrote again, he replied by announcing the result of his researches and said that he was coming to Paris at once.

It was then that this strange drama took place, in which I am the victim or one of the victims, and which I cannot help believing is the work of Robert Brancion.

In the brief case he carried André had his most important papers relating to Papa's discovery and its application. They were calculations, formulas, designs, etc. After our first greetings, at the Hall des Pas Perdus, we decided to take the bus that goes by our house.

While we were standing there chatting, I felt a shudder suddenly go over me. It seemed to me that in the crowd of faces about us, I had suddenly met Brancion's eyes. "Nothing but my imagination," I thought.

Nevertheless in the bus I looked anxiously at the faces of all the passengers. Robert was certainly not one of them, and that gave me a sense of relief.

We had passed the Military School and were preparing to get off at the next stop, when I happened to look up mechanically at the window which separated us from the driver's seat. The driver turned around, and with his face close to the glass, was looking down at us.

He turned his head away quickly, but I had had time to recognize that metallic glance; they were Robert's eyes. . . .

This time I was seriously alarmed and gripped André's arm to tell him what I had seen. But I had hardly opened my mouth than the bus swerved terribly and had made a sharp turn which nearly crushed us against a wall. . . . Everything went dark and I lost consciousness.

When I came to, I was in this room, where materially I lack nothing, but spiritually I lack everything.

January 15, 19 . Today I have had a piece of great good fortune. I am no longer alone: I have a companion. She is charming. Eighteen years old; named Germaine Praline. She is a dear and I am already very fond of her.

She tells me that she was in the same bus we were in Tuesday evening. I remember noticing her large eyes, her complexion and her simple, stylish good taste. It appears that she was with her older sister.

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She underwent the same sensations I did: shock, fainting and reawakening in a room not so luxurious as this one but very comfortable.

Of course she doesn't understand what has happened to her at all, but she resigns herself more easily than I do. The thing that worries her is her separation from her sister.

As for me, the sound of a human voice and especially her lovely, sympathetic voice, is sweeter than music. I make Germaine talk as much as I can, just for the pleasure of listening to her.

This morning the negro, who is her jailor too, came into her room and signaled to her to follow him. She hoped that she was going to see her sister and was disappointed to find a stranger; but the delight at escaping from solitude was greater than her disappointment. We get along very well together.

January 15, 19 . Germaine works at present in a millinery shop, but she has received an excellent education. Her parents died and she had to go to work.

She is loved by a young man, whom she loves in return and who belongs to the police. She is ardently in hope that her lover will rescue her, and me at the same time. "If you only knew how intelligent he is," she says, "and how distinguished looking. . . ." I only hope his intelligence will put him on the right track in looking for us!

January 17, 19 . . It is too horrible for me to

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think about! The hideous offer that man has made me! . . . My head is dizzy and I can hardly collect my thoughts.

It is Robert Brancion who kidnaped me, and Papa and André, too. He came to my prison this morning and boasted of his exploit.

He tries to justify it by saying that he was also working along the lines of Papa's discovery at one time, and that Papa merely applied the ideas Brancion developed. Consequently he claims that he is merely taking back his own property when he steals what it has cost Papa and André years of labor to create. For the apparatus is actually in his possession now. That is the most terrible part of it. And he offers to set us all at liberty if I will consent *to undergo the radiations of the apparatus and thus forfeit my own freedom of will*. . . . What a mocking and incomplete liberty that would be!

Of course I would see my dear ones again, and the light of day. . . . If it only increased the size of my prison, it might at least be better than my present fate.

Germaine will consent to anything to be set free. And Brancion tells me that Papa, André and the other passengers in the bus have already accepted the offer.

I am the only one who is still holding out. The freedom of all the rest depends on me. What shall I do . . . ?

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Cécile's manuscript was interrupted at these words and remained unfinished. No doubt she had eventually accepted this mysterious offer which gave her a "mocking and incomplete liberty" and had submitted to the radiations of the apparatus.

When he had finished reading, Henri Henry reflected deeply for a long time. Cécile's diary seemed to confirm his suppositions as to the rôle played by the "object with a rectangular base," which was obviously the same as the strange "apparatus" the young girl mentioned so frequently.

At length he said to his friends:

"This Brancion is an egotist and a man of pride above everything else. If he believed that he was rid of us, he would not hesitate to announce Muret's marvelous invention to the world as his own, and take the glory for it. We must make him think that he is rid of us; I shall see to that myself."

The next day the *Gazette de Paris* announced that its "brilliant colleague, Henri Henry," had been forced to undergo an operation of laparotomy, and had died three hours later.

CHAPTER XX

P-RAYS

As soon as the *Gazette de Paris* had announced the death of Henri Henry, articles began to appear at once in all the Paris papers, detailing his career and expressing the regret of the profession which had lost him. The reporter's most brilliant scoops were recalled and Henri himself, reading the articles in the seclusion of Antoine Lisbourdeun's studio, learned of several remarkable exploits in his life of which he had never heard before. His mysterious and tragic end was eloquently regretted and respectful condolences were offered the young widow.

The latter, reassured by the telegrams in code which Henry sent her every night, read the articles about the living dead man with eager curiosity, and enjoyed the "good press" he was getting.

As one prominent journalist remarked, however, "the first fact about a daily paper is that it must come out every day." And in order to appear every day, the subjects of information must be infinitely varied. It was inevitable that Henri Henry's death should be quickly forgotten and replaced by the first novelty that offered any prospect of interest.

This, in fact, was what happened when the Academy of Science received the famous report on the newly discovered P-rays, a report which was destined to overthrow most of the ideas previously held as to "occult" phenomena.

An article in the *Gazette de Paris* explained the matter as follows:

"It is commonly recognized today that all physical phenomena (light, heat, electricity, etc.) are in reality the result of movement and are produced by vibrations traveling like waves through ether, the invisible substance which permeates everything else. If we consider the visible rays of light, we observe that the frequency of the vibrations varies in inverse ratio to the wave-length; that is to say, for example, that red, whose wave-length is the longest of the seven colors of the spectrum, vibrates less rapidly than violet, whose wave-length is the shortest. This law may also be extended to other radiations, which affect our senses in different ways. Thus, the electric waves which are made use of in wireless telegraphy and are very long, vibrate relatively slowly.

"Now, between the rays of light, whose wave-lengths are calculated in terms of thousandths of a millimeter, and electrical rays, whose wave-length varies from four millimeters to infinity, there is an enormous field which science has barely touched in its studies of the infra-red rays.

"What are these various rays whose wave-lengths

are longer than those of infra-red and shorter than those of electricity?

"This was the problem set by the distinguished physicist, Mr. Robert Brancion, who is also, as every one knows, a world-traveler, and who has studied the occult sciences of the East as well as the theories of our western laboratories. After many years he found the solution of the problem, and it is this solution which he explained yesterday before the Academy of Science.

"The linking of these words, 'Academy of Science,' 'distinguished physicist,' and 'infra-red rays,' with the words 'occult sciences' may seem strange to many readers. It will be understood, however, when it is explained that the rays discovered and studied by Mr. Brancion, whose wave-lengths lie between those of infra-red and those of electricity, though named by Mr. Brancion *P-rays*, are, as a matter of fact, *psychic rays*.

"The tremendous implications of this new concept will be clear to every one. Mr. Brancion, by placing the field of psychic phenomena alongside those of light and electricity as subjects of scientific experiment, has demonstrated that cases of telepathy, thought transmission, suggestion, etc., which have been hitherto inexplicable, occur between persons whose psychic rays are strictly identical; that is to say, where the wave-lengths are exactly the same—which, he adds, is extremely rare.

"This is the scientific explanation of phenomena

known under the name of 'occult,' whose apparent supernatural nature has troubled so many minds in the past.

"The Academy of Science received Mr. Brancion's account of his studies at first with a certain skepticism. The clearness and accuracy of his demonstrations, however, eventually overcame this attitude, which was replaced by one of sincere and ardent enthusiasm."

The writer of the article added that he had been informed on good authority that the Minister of Public Instruction had proposed Robert Brancion's name for the Legion of Honor.

This was followed by an interview with the great man himself, and Brancion's words were of such a sensational nature that the interview appeared in heavy type.

"Have you searched for a practical application of your discovery?" the reporter had asked.

"Yes, I have invented an apparatus, capable in the first place, of measuring the wave-lengths of the P-rays given out by any person willing to take part in the experiment and, secondly, of modifying the characteristic wave-length of that person to any length desired. . . . Thus the latter may, if he wishes, make his own P-ray identical with those of any other individual.

"The two persons who have performed this experiment then enter into permanent mental communication. They are in what I have called 'psychic

resonance'; and just as a musical instrument, which can give forth a certain sound, vibrates when that sound is produced by a different instrument at a little distance from it, so the second person will vibrate in unison when the first gives forth a P-ray; that is to say, when he thinks.

"We have therefore abolished all separation, and attained union in spite of distance, through voluntary and continuous telepathy. . . ."

"Can the possessor of your apparatus put himself in this way in resonance with several individuals at the same time?"

"Certainly. And he can transmit, at will, certain thoughts to one and different thoughts to others."

"What is your apparatus constructed of and how is it made?"

"You will see that for yourself if you come to the public lecture I am going to give next Tuesday in the main hall at the Sorbonne. There will be questions and answers, and I shall be ready to meet any objections which may be brought forward against my conclusions. The apparatus will be there and I shall make practical demonstrations."

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In the studio under the roof the three allies, Henry, Brunnel and Mainfroy, had read Brancion's interview with intense emotion. In the light of what they had learned from Cécile Muret's diary, the truth was now unmistakable.

"I thought the news of my death would bring the rascal out of his cautious silence," said Henry reflectively.

"His pride will be his ruin," declared Brunnel, and would gladly have expressed a few prime truths on the danger of pride if his companions had permitted.

But Henry continued reflecting out loud:

"What is our next step? . . . We know that the apparatus was invented by Muret, perfected by André Gilbert and stolen by this scoundrel; shall we denounce him as a thief? We also know that he caused the deaths of the old woman at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea and the unlucky bus-driver; shall we denounce him as a murderer? Or shall we unmask him in public, since he has the impudence to invite the public to his own triumph?"

"Let's wait until Tuesday," suggested Hector. "We can be among the crowd at his lecture and see if there is a chance to take a hand in the performance."

CHAPTER XXI

THE OBJECT WITH A RECTANGULAR BASE

A VAST crowd was already filing into the main hall at the Sorbonne, an hour before the time which had been announced on the day Brancion was to give his lecture.

The first rows of seats had been reserved for members of the Academy of Science, prominent statesmen and well-known figures of the intellectual and social world. The Minister of Public Instruction, who had promised to come, had sent his excuses at the last moment, saying that he had suddenly fallen ill.

It was whispered, in well-informed quarters, that the Minister had received a visit that morning from a mysterious person, and that it was after his conversation with this person that the statesman had decided he was not well.

In spite of his absence, the audience was unusually brilliant. A large number of police supervised the preparations and tried to prevent the inevitable pushing which takes place when a hundred people wish to get through a door barely large enough for four at the same time. In fact, the police were so

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numerous that one would have thought orders had been given to guard all the exits.

"You'd think they were trying to arrest a criminal instead of holding a scientific lecture," said one little man with large spectacles and an umbrella, who found himself uncomfortable under the gaze of so many policemen. Henri Henry, who was concealed among the crowd at the right hand side of the hall, not far from the platform, and rendered unrecognizable by a false beard, overheard this comment. He could not repress a faintly malicious smile, and turning to Brunnel and Mainfroy, exchanged glances of understanding with them.

Brunnel had had a long conference that same morning with the Prefect of Police and Mainfroy was none other than the unknown caller who had seemed to influence the Minister of Public Instruction's health. Neither of them was surprised, therefore, by the unusual presence of police or the absence of the official.

Not far away from the three men and also near the platform, seven people were sitting together: the passengers and the conductor of bus 519. Professor Muret and his daughter sat side by side, with André Gilbert directly behind them. On his left was Charron, the printer, and on his right the conductor, Chalgrin. The two Praline sisters sat with the scientist and his daughter; Germaine's hand rested in Cécile's.

How did it happen that these seven persons, of

such different occupations and education, found themselves once more united? This question might perhaps have been answered by Henri Henry, who was keeping a close watch over them.

Suddenly the fluttering of papers and the murmur of conversation in the hall ceased. Two negroes, dressed in livery, had appeared upon the platform, carrying a good-sized box shaped like a small coffin, which appeared to be heavy. They placed it carefully on the table in the center of the platform, drew out the screws at the corners and lifted off the lid and sides. Henri Henry murmured in Brunnel's ears "The object with a rectangular base."

The seven escaped victims of bus 519 had trembled when the box was opened. A realization ran through the whole audience that this was Brancion's famous "apparatus." It consisted of a glass case, from which a dozen glass tubes projected. Strange, greenish lights flickered in the tubes and around them. In the walls of the case were several openings large enough for a man to pass his head through them.

A wave of applause swept across the room. Brancion had entered. He was in full dress and his black beard stood out sharply against the white bosom of his shirt. He glanced over the rows of heads and his dominating personality at once took command of the audience. In a strong, ringing voice he began his lecture.

But suddenly his voice faltered; he seemed

troubled. He had met Muret's gaze, and the old professor's eyes expressed such deep contempt that in spite of his unparalleled effrontery Robert Brancion was embarrassed.

The presence of those seven persons, whom he had not invited, surprised and alarmed him. He made an instinctive gesture of his hand toward them as if to brush them away. Henry rose halfway from his seat, ready to intervene. . . .

Brancion, however, seemed to have mastered his uneasiness. What did he have to fear from those whose freedom of will he had annihilated? He shrugged his shoulders, smiled scornfully and continued the explanation of his theory. His embarrassment had been so brief that the public had not been aware of it; Henri Henry settled back in his seat.

The lecturer explained the principles on which he had worked in a clear, understandable form. The main line of his search and the results obtained had already been suggested in the interview he had given to the *Gazette de Paris*. He now traced the steps by which he had arrived at his astounding discovery, and even brought up himself the objections that might be made to his reasoning.

The exposition was so logical and precise, and his arguments so firmly dove-tailed that he was given an ovation at the close of the theoretical part of the program. There was a burst of applause, accompanied by a pounding of canes on the floor, and

several people stood up in their enthusiasm. Brancion rested a few minutes before passing to the second part of the program, which was to consist of practical experiments. Henri Henry slipped off the false beard which disguised him and appeared to be waiting for the proper moment to go into action.

When the acclamations had at length died down, Brancion began the description of his apparatus:

"This glass cage," he said, "contains in its base several particles of a substance hitherto unknown, which appears to be an element in itself—that is to say, it cannot be broken down by chemical means—and which I brought back with me from Africa. This metal, for it has all the properties of a metal and several others besides, is radioactive. I have named it—as I believe was my privilege—'brancium'."

A low murmur of anger interrupted the distinguished scientist's words at this moment. Professor Muret had risen and seemed ready to leap upon the platform. His face flushed and his eyes protruding, he opened his mouth, but could not utter any sound except this rumbling wrath, which drew the curious attention of the crowd.

"The man's crazy," said a voice.

"He's having a fit."

"Take him out!"

Brancion, however, gazed fixedly at Muret and made a slight gesture. The old man dropped back

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into his seat, as if under a control stronger than his own.

When the disturbance caused by this incident had calmed down, the lecturer took up the thread of his speech at the point where it had been broken:

"This 'brancium', as I said, is radioactive, and the rays which it gives out are the *P-rays*, whose wave-length may be modified, within certain limits, by means of the apparatus which I have constructed. These are the *P-rays* which we substitute for those emitted by a subject who wishes to transmit his thought to another subject. The latter enters into psychic resonance as soon as the 'brancium' is released; that is to say, as soon as I have removed the special covering of vegetable tissue, the only substance which is apoque to the brancic rays.

"The twelve glass tubes which you see correspond to twelve radiations of slightly differing wave-lengths, which allow me, if I wish, to enter into psychic resonance with twelve different individuals.

"Is there any one present in the audience who would care to come up on the platform and place his head, for a few seconds, in one of the openings, so that one of the tubes may be put in psychic resonance with him. . . ?"

It was at this moment that the dramatic event which was later to be the subject of so much discussion took place.

Before any other member of the audience had had

time to answer Brancion's invitation, Henri Henry had leaped on the platform, and announced:

"I will!"

At the sight of the enemy he believed dead, Brancion's swarthy face turned pale. Instinctively he glanced about him, as if looking for a means of flight. Then making an effort of will, he controlled his features and, addressing the public, continued:

"Since this gentleman is willing, I shall now perform the experiment I have described to you." Turning to Henry, he added: "Will you be so kind as to place your head in one of these openings. . . ?"

The audience, which was breathless with impatience, waited for "the gentleman who was willing" to stick his head through the hole in the glass. The latter, however, did not seem to be in a hurry. He was looking at the opening with a certain repugnance.

"I am waiting, sir," said Brancion.

But Henri Henry, standing erect, his hands in his pockets and his cane under his arm, declared in a truculent voice, loud enough to be heard throughout the entire auditorium:

"One moment, please. . . . It was announced that the lecture would be open to the public and that there would be questions and answers. . . . Now before offering my head for your experiments, I would like to ask one or two questions. . . ."

A boeing broke out in the audience and drowned his words. There was a chorus of whistling and insults.

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Henry, self-possessed and quiet, waited for the noise to die down. Brancion seemed far more disturbed than the reporter. In a few moments a party began to form which took Henry's side: "Let him speak. . . . He's right. . . . There were to be questions and answers. . . ."

Thanks to those sudden changes of mood which overtake crowds without any one knowing just how or why, there came an abrupt lull in the shouting, and in the dead silence which followed, Henry continued:

"I am Henri Henry, one of the editors of the *Gazette de Paris*. I was supposed to be dead, and if I ask you to listen to me, it's because I have something to say."

This romantic appearance of a man who was believed to be in the grave produced a change in the public attitude. The party which had taken Henry's side now gained adherents until it was almost unanimous. The same people who a moment ago had shouted, "Put him out!" now called, "Let him speak! . . . Let him speak!"

Brancion shrugged his shoulders and pretended to appear indifferent, though a secret fear was beginning to grip him. What did this accursed newspaper man know and what was he going to reveal?

Henry did not keep them waiting.

"The learned discoverer of 'brancium'," he began in a clear, pleasing voice, "has concealed from you,

with inconceivable modesty, one of the properties of his excellent apparatus. It is that property, since I know about it, which makes me hesitate to stick my head in one of those holes as much as if they were the guillotine. For my personality would be beheaded as surely as the public executioner could behead my body. I shan't talk in parables, however. . . . I am going to ask you, the public, to act as judge in a strange case."

Henri Henry's mysterious words produced a state of bewildered astonishment in the audience. There was a murmur of approval, however, when he called on those present to act as judges. The public was obviously flattered by this appeal. Brancion, who was determined to play his rôle to the end, forced a smile:

Henry continued:

"The unknown property of this apparatus, to which I have just referred, is as follows: any person, who subjects himself to the activity of the 'brancic' rays, loses as long as he is under their influence, his own freedom of will. In other words, his brain acts merely as a resonator. He is incapable of giving out psychic rays himself and can vibrate only under the influence of those given out by the apparatus. That is to say, the possessor of the apparatus not only can communicate his thought to those whose psychic wave-lengths he has measured, but he can impose his own will on them, as well. . . . Is that not true, Mr. Brancion?"

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Brancion made a gesture of denial, but Henri Henry went on:

"Now, in the light of that, ladies and gentlemen, suppose for a moment—merely as a hypothesis!—that some unscrupulous rascal were to steal Mr. Brancion's marvelous apparatus. Suppose he were to force Robert Brancion himself to submit to its activity and be measured psychically. Suppose, in short, that the true inventor were under the domination of a scoundrel, who claimed all the merit of the discovery and reaped all the profits! . . . If all of that were the case, what do you think: Should one save the invention or the inventor?"

From all sides, voices responded:

"The inventor! The inventor!"

A few elderly scientists in the front row of seats and the seven escaped victims of bus 519 were the only ones to shout:

"The invention!"

Their voices, however, were lost in the uproar. Henri Henry raised his hand for silence, and when a hush fell, he continued:

"So you believe as I do that a human life, a human personality is worth all the machines in the world, even the most marvelous?"

"Yes! Yes!"

"Then act according to your judgment."

And with one blow of his cane the reporter shattered the twelve glass tubes of the "object with a rectangular base."

Seven persons at once climbed upon the platform. They were the escaped victims of bus 519, at last delivered from the domination of Brancion. Professor Muret sobbed as he groped on the floor among the wreckage of the apparatus. André and Cécile helped him in his task. Germaine and Juliette cried out against the scoundrel who had made a criminal of Germaine.

Brancion dashed toward the rear of the platform, hunting in terror for a way to flee. But Charron, the printer, leaped upon him and, catching him by the shoulders, threw him to the floor. Chalgrin gripped him in a blind fury and sank his fingers into his throat.

In a moment a realization of Brancion's crime spread through the audience. There was a rush toward the stage and Charron, Brancion and Chalgrin were buried beneath a mass of attacking bodies.

When the police had reached the spot, and had dragged off those on top, Robert Brancion was dead.

EPILOGUE

The shock of the tragic events in which he had taken part proved too great for Professor Muret, who had been weakened already by years of work, grief and anxiety. He was carried from the hall in a fainting condition, and died the following morning without having regained consciousness. With him perished the secret for extracting the metal which gave out the psychic rays, the only part of his great labors which had been accomplished before André became his pupil. André Gilbert, now the husband of Cécile, is seeking in vain to rediscover, from the memory of talks on the subject with the professor, the first steps of this work which had made possible his own extraordinary application of the principles involved.

Mainfroy and Germaine were married quietly soon after the wedding of André and Cécile; and Brunnel, while honoring the young couple with many lectures on the advantage of being a bachelor, has asked Juliette Praline, so it is said, to become Mrs. Brunnel.

Henri Henry carried on, in the *Gazette de Paris*, a campaign to raise a fund for the purchase and preservation of the old house in the Avenue de Suffren. The name of Martin du Pont appeared among

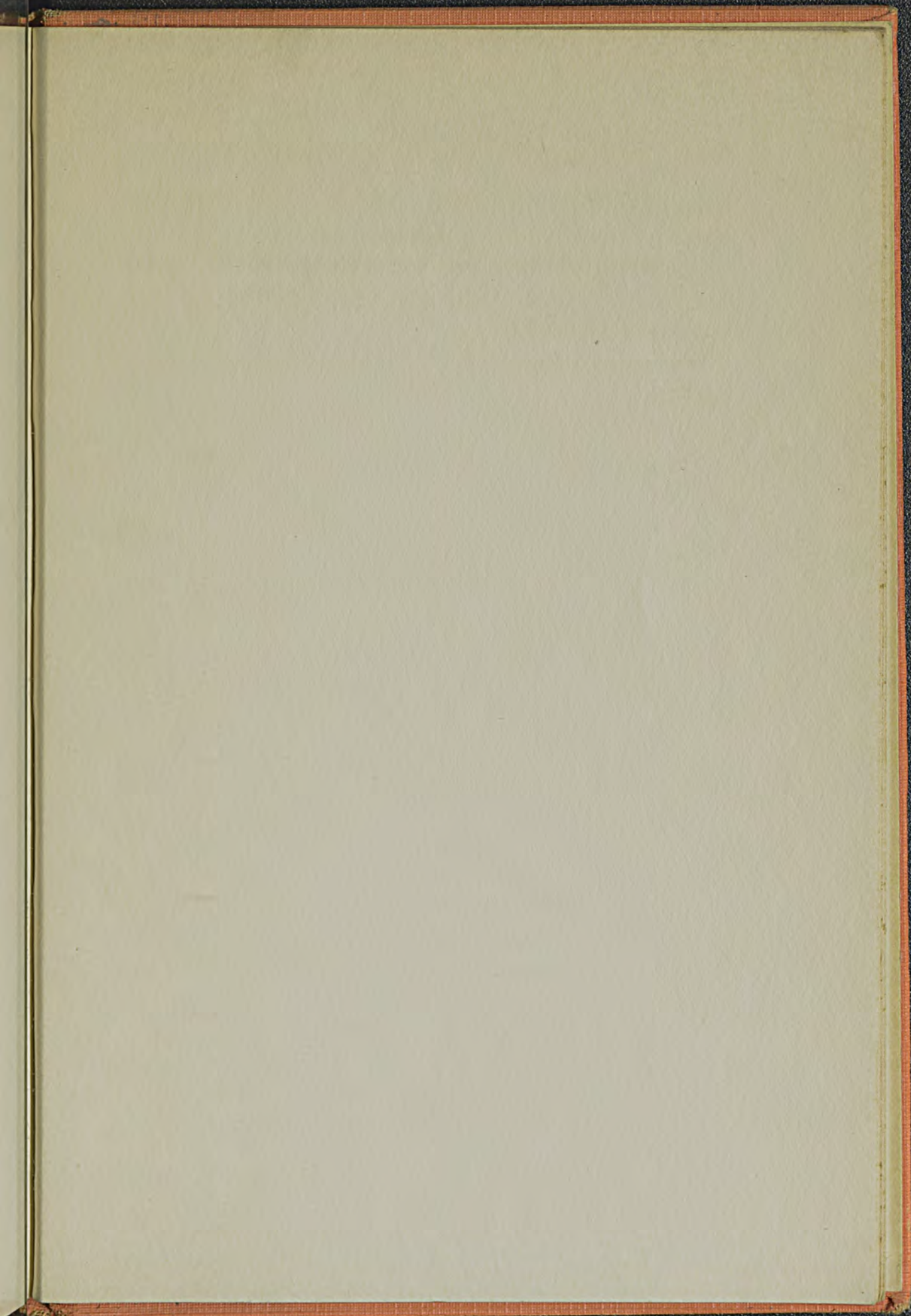
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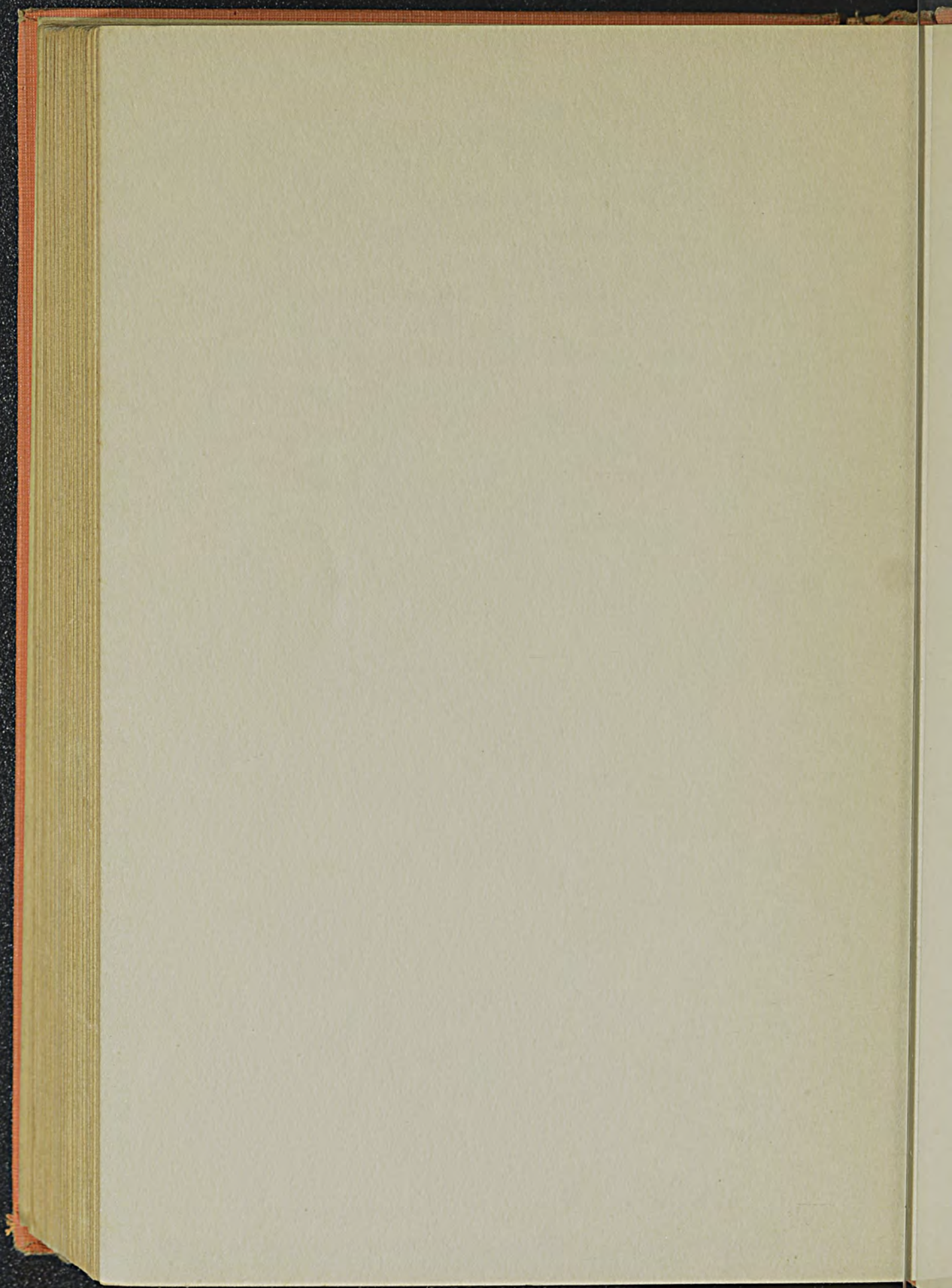
those of the first subscribers, and to-day the building has been turned into a public museum.

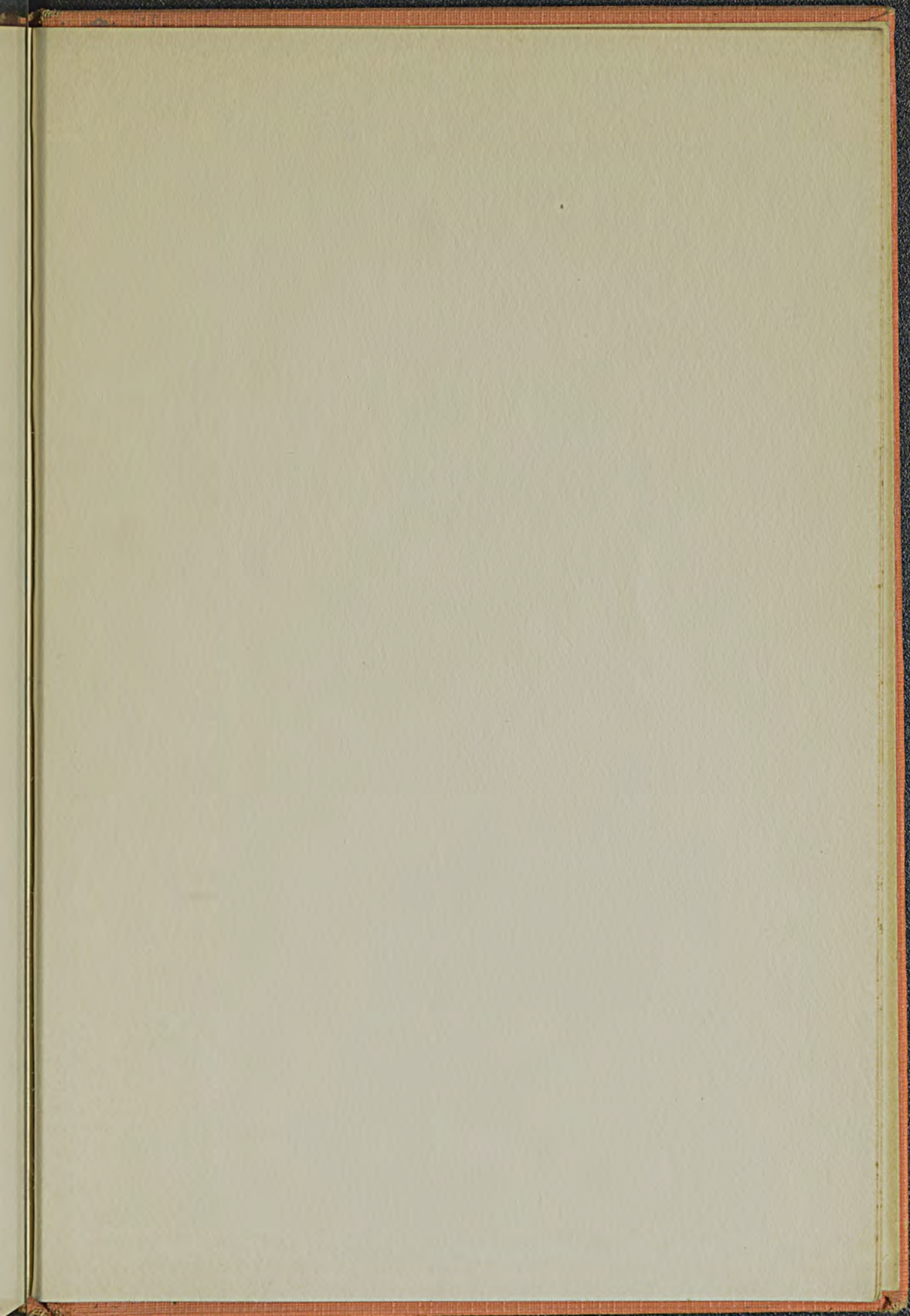
The faithful negro who saved the journalist's life, survived his wounds and has remained the devoted servant of Henri Henry.

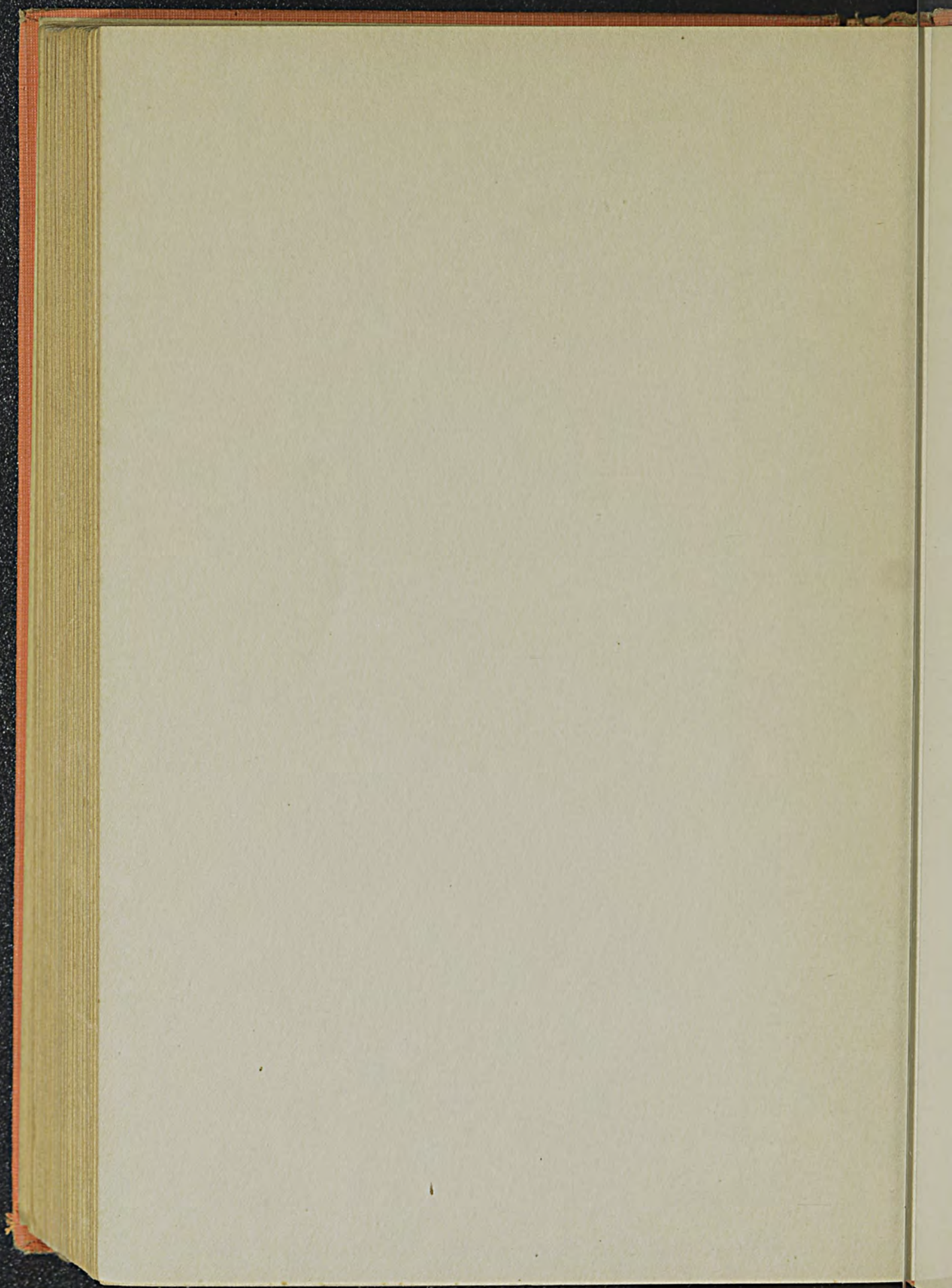
The fate of Brancion's other slaves has never been known. . . .

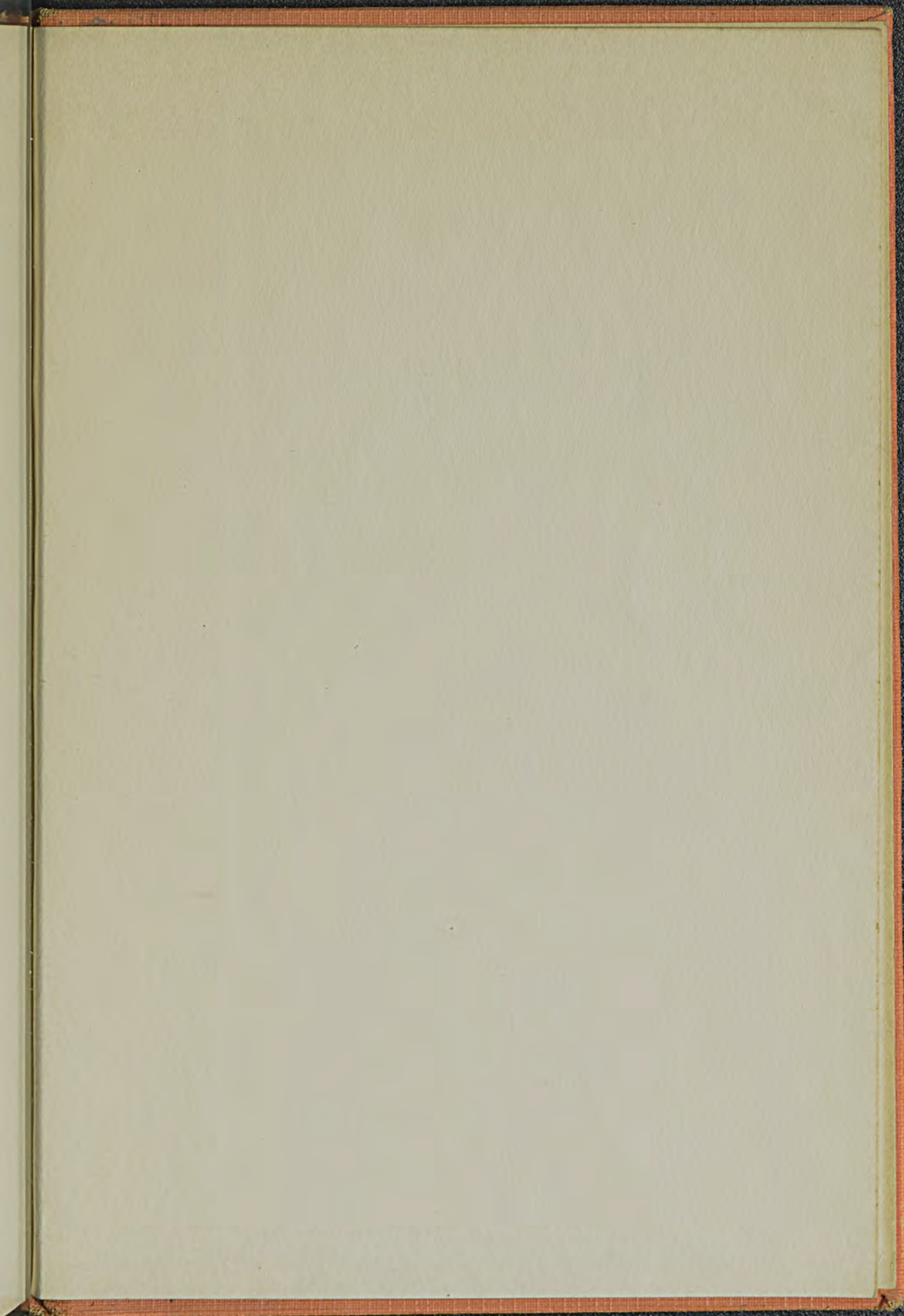
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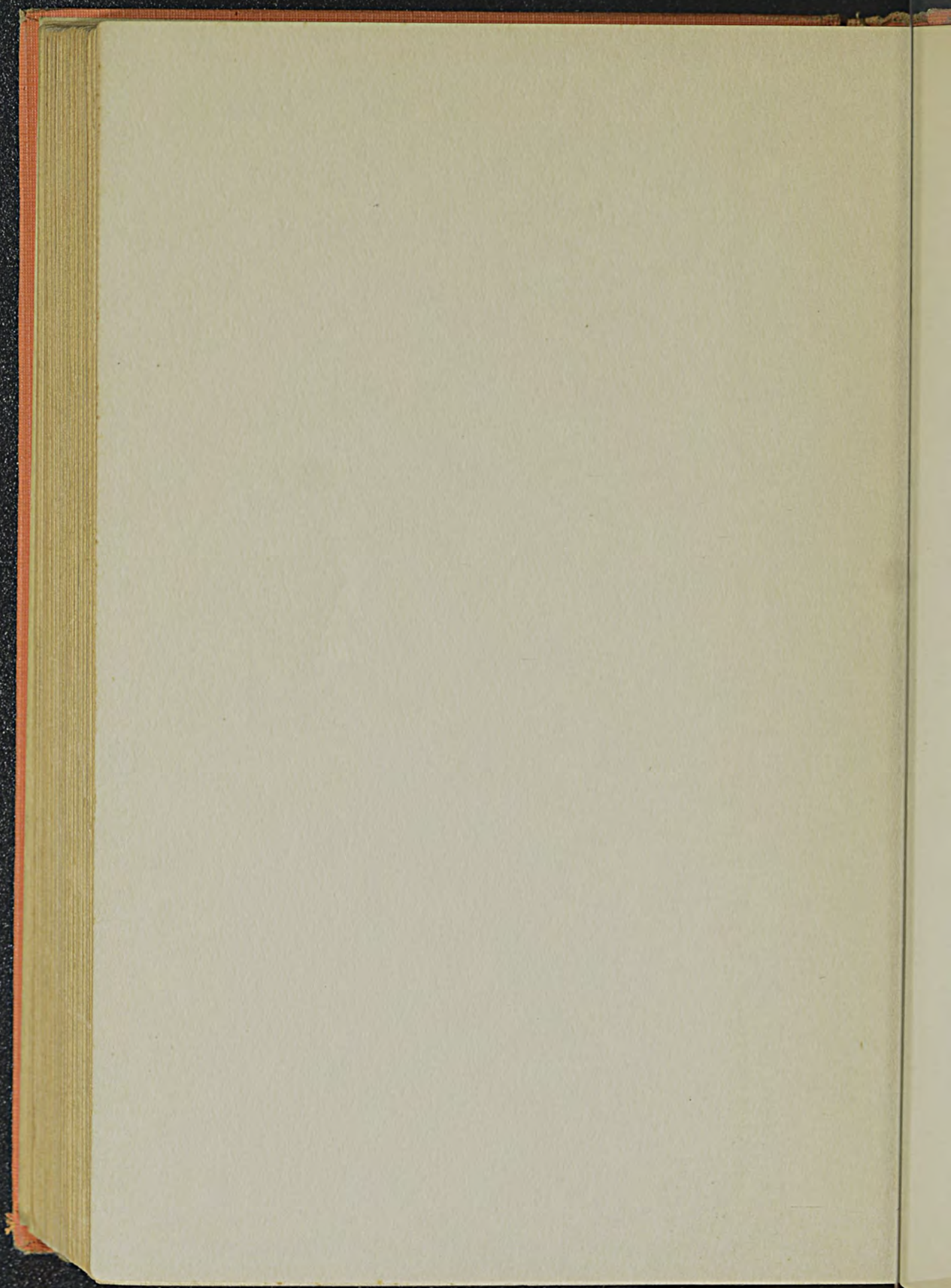


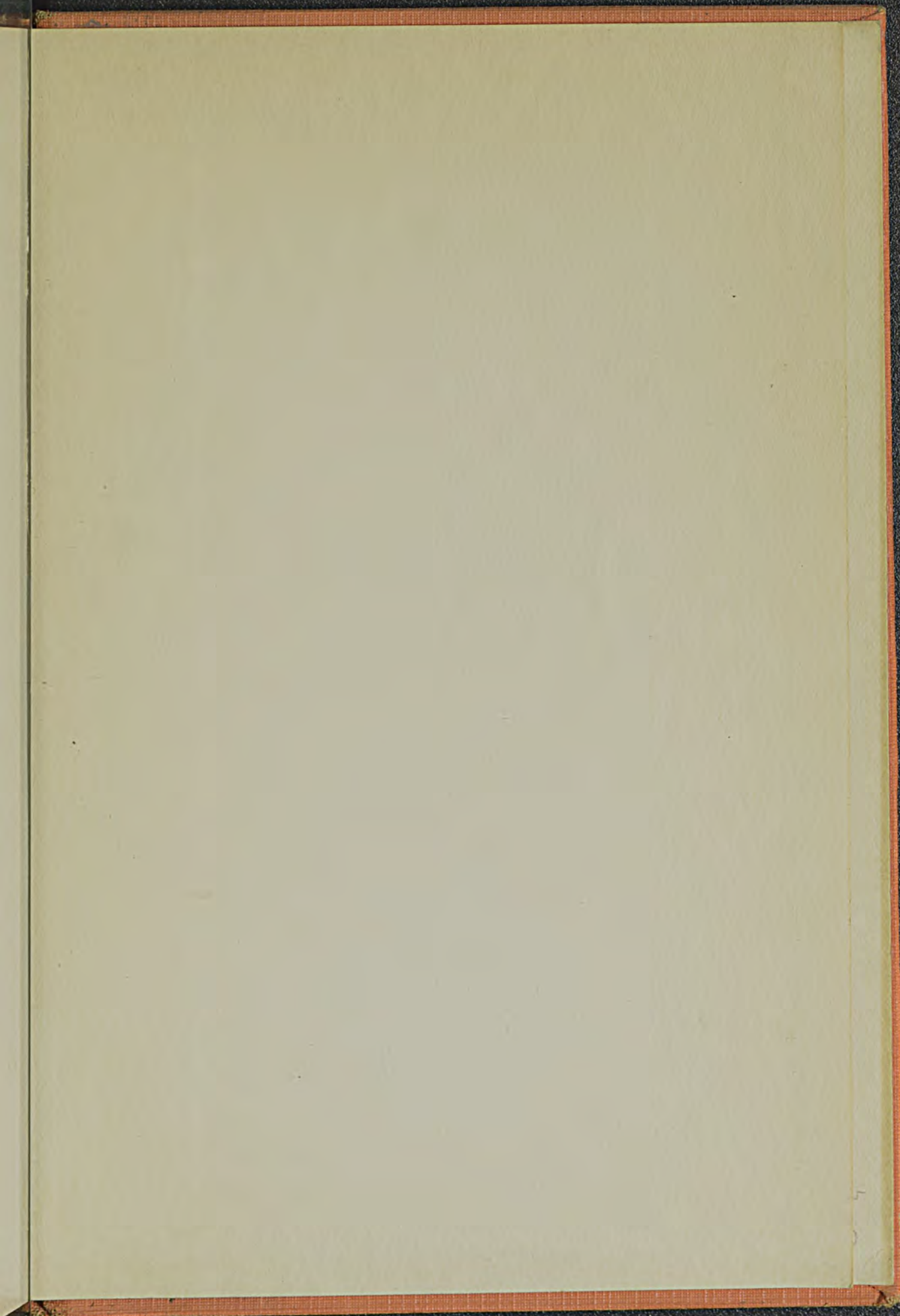


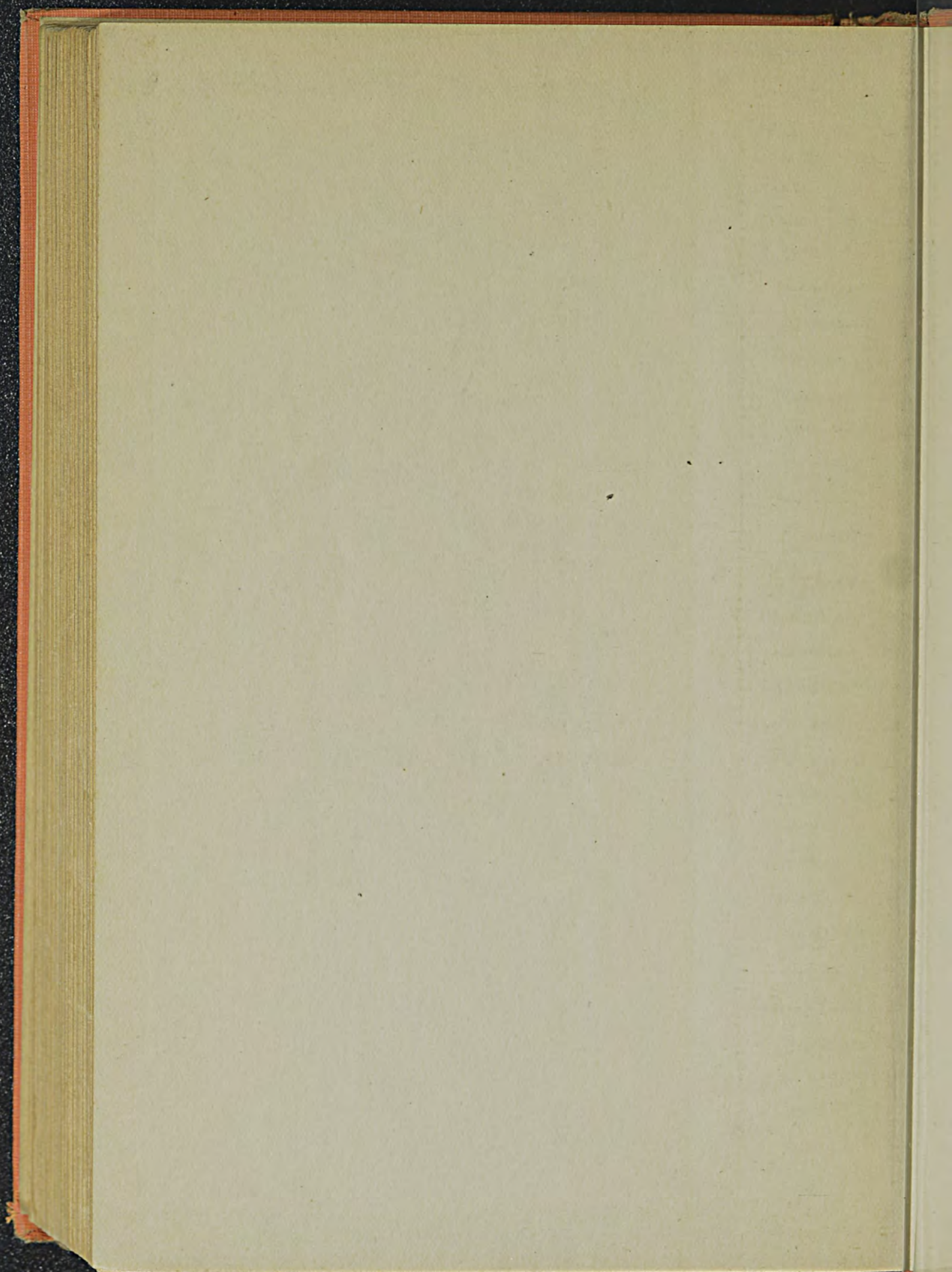












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