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## Spooky Hollow

by Carolyn Wells

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### Chapter I Prout Has A Fare

Our Pilgrim band of stern and rock-bound forefathers left us a goodly heritage in New England. And, even though we may not still in awed tones call it holy ground, yet the soil where first they trod calls forth a certain respect and admiration not compelled by any other group of these United States.

To be sure they didn't tread all of it. Lots and lots of square miles of ground and lofty soil are still untrodden to any great extent, especially the northern parts of the northern states.

Maine, with its great, beautiful Aroostook County, whose far-flung potato farms have a charm all their own, and whose glistening white farmhouses have their barns hitched on behind like majestic trains of cars—the exquisite tidiness of Maine as a state far outranks all her twelve original sisters.

In New Hampshire the white paint is less immaculate, the state less tidily cleared up, but the woods against a stormy sky their giant branches toss, and the rocking pines of the forest roar their eternal welcome. Timid little lakes nestle confidently among the hills and the White Mountains cluster in majestic serenity.

And then comes Vermont, beautiful, careless Vermont, forgetful of her white paint, heedless of her broken-down fences, conscious only of her green Green Mountains and the sounding aisles of her dim woods.

East of the Green Mountain Range, in northern Vermont, is wide, rolling country, with here and there a handful of small hills dumped down as though they had been flung at the Range and fell short of their mark. Among them are valleys and lakes, vistas and scenery, verdure and foliage,—all that goes to make Vermont what her beautiful name means.

And villages. These are not always as picturesque as they should be, but man's place in nature is frequently out of harmony with his surroundings.

What should be a quaint little hamlet with an old white-spired church and a few clustering cottages, is more often a Four Corners or a few rods or perches of a stupid-looking Main Street, totally lacking in pride, prosperity, or paint.

Farm-houses are shabby and fences dilapidated, yet, after all, there are sites and spots—oh, the sites and spots of Vermont!

If one wanted to build ten thousand homes, he could find a satisfying site or spot for each and have as many left over.

In our forefathers' days, the soil where first they trod was considered the very thing for highroads, but now the broad white ribbon of concrete that tangles itself among the green hills is exceedingly convenient, without marring the picture.

And the towns that chance to impinge on or straddle that road are up to date and almost a part of the living, bustling world outside.

But the towns reached by the lesser roads, the older roads,—they have no animal spirits and lead a mere vegetable life.

Unless a great country house has been built on a site or a spot nearby, these little villages have none at all to praise and very few to love.

Hilldale was one of the prettiest of these villages and was in fairly good repair. This was owing to the fact that it had offered an unsurpassed site for a gentleman's country house.

The gentleman had materialized, and so, later, did the house.

It had happened forty years ago. Vicissitudes had removed the gentleman but the house remained—remained empty for years, and at last, five years ago, had been bought, furnished, and occupied.

Yet the fact of the house, half a mile from the village street, so influenced and stimulated the villagers that unconsciously they lived up to it and gloried in its possession as in an invisible jewel held in trust.

For the house was invisible, by reason of those same dim woods and rocking pines, and moreover, because of high and strong stone walls.

Yet it was there and it was theirs, so Hilldale plumed itself and went about its business.

Off the main travelled road of traffic, it was also off the main line of the railroad and was reached by a tiny spur, whose trains, not impressed by the great house, ran with a debonair disregard of timetables or schedules.

And so, when one of these trains pulled up with a grinding jerk, and the leisurely, easy-going conductor sang out, "Hilldale!" John Haydock, who had risen, almost fell over backward by reason of the sudden stop.

The train was nearly an hour late, and though still well up in the heavens, the November sun was secretly preparing for a quick swoop down and out. The air was damp and raw, with a feeling that portended snow.

Beautiful Vermont had lost her green, but was bravely substituting a glory of red and russet and gold that clad her hills and dales with a blaze of autumn beauty.

John Haydock shivered as he stepped to the station platform, then drew up his overcoat collar, and appreciatively lapped up the beauty of the scene even while he looked about at conditions.

He saw a phlegmatic looking man standing near an elderly Ford, and with admirable sagacity deduced a local taxi driver.

“I want to go to Homer Vincent’s,” Haydock said, half expecting the man would drawl out “Wal, why don’t ye, then?” after the approved manner of Vermont natives in fiction.

But the influence of the house wouldn’t allow that, and the man merely gave a sort of grunt that seemed to mean “All right,” or “Certainly.”

Moreover, he showed a gleam of curiosity in his hard, weather-beaten blue eyes, and moved with alacrity as he took the stranger’s bag.

But he said nothing as he held the car door open for his passenger, and then took his own place at the wheel.

“Is it far from the village?” Haydock asked. The driver rolled a blue eye around at him.

“Ain’t never been there, eh?” he said. “Well, it’s about halfa mile,—good halfa mile. I ain’t never been in the house myself. Druv up to the entrance now, naginn,—just now, naginn. Great place!”

He spoke in an awe-struck voice, as one might of some masterpiece of God or man, and Haydock said, involuntarily:

“Is it such a beautiful house?”

“Is it? *Is it!* Well, you’ll soon see!”

They had left the village now, and were passing along a wooded country road, beautiful with its pines and hemlocks among the bright autumn leaves. A few roads branched to right or left, but the Ford car clattered straight ahead.

“Mr. Vincent get over his broken leg?” Haydock asked. “Can he walk all right?”

“Yep, mostly. Has a little limp—you’d hardly notice it, though. Course we don’t see him hardly ever.”

“Recluse?”

“Not quite that,—but sticks to his home mostly. Miss Vincent, now, she’s more sociably inclined.”

“Miss Rosemary?”

“Well, no, I didn’t mean her,—I meant the old lady,—Mr. Vincent’s sister. Miss Rosemary, now, she’s here, there, and everywhere. Ridin’ a horse, drivin’ a car, walkin’, skatin’ and they do say they’re goin’ to keep an airoplane.”

“Really? How up to date they are.”

“Well, they are, an’ they ain’t. Yes, sir, they are, ‘n’ they ain’t. The old man, now—”

“Why do you call Mr. Homer Vincent an old man?”

“Thasso. He can’t be mor’n fifty,—’n’ yet, he somehow seems old.”

“To look at?”

“Well, no; though ‘s I said, I don’t often see him. But if he’s passin’ in his motor car, he don’t look out an’ nod at people,—see, an’ he don’t seem to be smilin’—”

“Grumpy?”

“Not so much that as—”

“Indifferent? Preoccupied?”

“That’s more like it. Thinkin’ ‘bout his own affairs, seemin’ly. An’ they do say he does himself mighty well. And why shouldn’t he,—seein’s he has plenty of money. Why shouldn’t he, I say?”

“Is he married?”

The driver turned fully around, leaving the temperamental Ford to its own sweet will for a moment.

“Homer Vincent married!” he exclaimed. “I should say not! Him married!”

“What’s so strange about that? Lots of men marry.”

“So they do. Oh, well,—no, Mr. Vincent, he ain’t married.”

“What does he do? Any business?”

“Land, no; he’s got more money’n he knows what to do with. He just enjoys himself, one way ‘n’ another,—just one way ‘n’ another. Miss Vincent, now, Miss Anne, she rides about, stylish like, an’ makes fashionable calls on the minister an’ a few families of the town. They been here five years now, an’ yet mighty few people knows ‘em atall.”

“He didn’t build his fine house?”

“Land, no. It was built long ago, by a man named Lamont,—long about eighteen-eighty it was begun. Took years to build it, o’ course.”

“Is it so elaborate, then?”

“Is it? Look, here’s the beginnin’ of the stone wall now. See?”

“Good heavens, what a wall!” and Haydock stared at the high, massive, tessellated structure of carefully hewn and laid blue dolomite, that seemed to extend interminably.

“Yep, that’s it,” and the speaker wagged his head in deep pride of ownership. For Hilldale felt that it owned the place individually as well as collectively; and this in utter disregard of any opinion Mr. Vincent might hold on the matter.

“He’s an inventor, you know,” Haydock was further informed, as they neared the gates. “But I don’t think he invents anything.”

The great iron gates stood open but gave access only to a long avenue shaded by almost perfect specimens of the beautiful “wine-glass” elm.

“That kinda ellow tree’s just about gone now,”—said Haydock’s guide. “Mighty few left in all New England. Fine ones, these. Now, here begins the poplar row. See’m,—not Lombardy,—they’re North Carolina poplars. I guess Mr. Vincent set these out. They ain’t long-lived. Well, here we come to the wooded drive. The rest of the way to the house is right through a jungle. I’d hate it.”

The jungle was a grove, rather sparse than thick, of pine, spruce, hemlock, and larch, and its shadows were dank and black.

An occasional white birch, slender and ghostly, instead of lightening the gloom, rather added to it, and the rays of the now setting sun could scarcely penetrate the murk.

“Not very cheerful,” was Haydock’s comment.

“Now, here, sir, is the tree that gives the place its name.”

“What is its name?”

“Greatlarch,—that’s what they call it, Greatlarch,—’count o’ that big tree there. See?”

Haydock looked and saw the tallest larch tree he had ever seen. It was enormous, a most magnificent specimen. Surely the name was well chosen.

“That’s a hummer,” he agreed.

“Yep; nothin’ like in these parts,—an’ I don’t believe, nowhere.”

“I don’t either!” said Haydock, regardless of negatives in his enthusiasm.

“Now, you see, sir, we come to the entrance proper. This stone gateway’s where I leave you. Want me to wait?”

“No,” and Haydock dropped his sociable manner and became again a stranger. “What do I owe you?”

“One dollar, sir. Don’t want me to wait? You stayin’ here?”

Haydock looked at him.

“I’m not sure just what I shall do. Have you a telephone?”

“Yes, sir; call 87 Hilldale”

“And your name?”

“Prout. Mr. Vincent knows me. Tell him you want Prout,—that is, if you do want me. To take you back,—you know.”

“Yes, I gathered that was what you meant. Good day, Prout.”

The entrance was a massive arch with a tower on either side.

It seemed to include guard-rooms and connected with what was doubtless a porter’s lodge.

Haydock stared at the heavy stone-work, the beautiful design, and the hint of green velvety lawn through the arch.

He wished the daylight would linger, but it was even now almost gone. The gathering dusk gave the scene an eerie aspect, the great larch whispered as its long branches slowly tossed about, and the pines responded with a murmur of their own.

Seeing no one, Haydock stepped through the deep, wide archway, and then stood still, spellbound at what he saw.

A pile of gray stone, red-tiled roofs, tall chimneys, towers, turrets, dormers,—a perfect example of a French chateau of the period of the Renaissance.

Haydock knew enough of architecture to realize that he was gazing at a masterpiece. He had no idea there was such a building in America. Perfect in every detail, exquisitely set in the midst of rolling lawns, well-placed shrubbery, and noble old trees, with half glimpses, in the fading light, of terraces and gardens beyond.

Deeply impressed, he approached the entrance, a recessed portico on the north side of the house.

Outer doors of massive oak stood open, and he entered a vestibule wainscoted and paved with richly hued marble.

Wrapt in contemplation of the detail work, he pushed an electric bell, and was still unheeding when the door opened and a butler faced him inquiringly.



He felt a slight thrill of disappointment, for, without knowing it, he had subconsciously looked for a lackey in gold lace or at least a powdered and plushed footman.

But this man, beyond all question a butler, and a knowing one, gave Haydock an appraising glance, and in a tone nicely poised between deference and inquiry, said:

“You wish to see—” The voice trailed off to nothingness, but the barrier form of the butler gave way no inch of vantage.

“Mr. Homer Vincent,” said Haydock, suddenly recovering his wits, and speaking with a firm decision.

“By appointment?” But the severity of the butler’s manner perceptibly decreased and he even stepped back from the threshold.

“No, not by appointment,” and John Haydock came under the portal and into the beautiful entrance hall. Again he was nearly swept off his feet by what he saw. Marble walls and floors, painted friezes, vistas of rooms opening one from another—surely he was transported to some Arabian Nights’ Dream.

And again he was recalled to equanimity by that calm, cool voice:

“What name shall I give Mr. Vincent?”

And after the merest instant of hesitation, Haydock said:

“Tell him Henry Johnson wishes to see him,—on business, private, personal, and important.”

This speech was accompanied by a straight, sharp glance at the man, and the visitor, half turning, began to give himself up to contemplation of his surroundings.

“Yes, sir. Will you step in the reception room, sir?”

The reception room, in a large circular tower, was at the right as one entered the house, and to this Haydock went.

The butler disappeared, and Haydock studied the room.

It was of the period known as Perpendicular Gothic, and the side walls, delicately paneled in old oak, reached to the richly ornamented and domed ceiling.

The chimney-piece, which curved with the circular wall of the room, was of the rare Italian marble known as Red of Vecchiano, and it was Haydock's study of this that was interrupted by the entrance of his host.

"You like it?" Homer Vincent said in a tone of slight amusement. "It is the only bit of that stone ever brought to this country."

Turning, Haydock saw a moderately tall man with moderately broad shoulders. His hands were in his pockets, and the smile that had sounded in his voice was perceptible on his strong, well-cut lips.

He stood erect, his head thrown a trifle back, as if sizing up the situation.

"If you like, I'll show you the whole house," he offered. "It's worth seeing."

And now, Haydock looked at him as if sizing him up. Seemingly he had forgotten the house in his interest in its owner.

He saw a strong face, which, though now smiling with courtesy, yet looked as if, on occasion, it could be hard, even severe.

This may have been imagination, for Homer Vincent's whole manner and attitude betokened only a friendly welcome.

But Haydock noted the firm curve of the chin, the straight line of the lips, and the haughty, aristocratic effect of the Roman nose, and concluded, offhand, that Homer Vincent was a power.

The dark hair was thickly streaked with gray, and the deep-set gray eyes were of a peculiar penetration. And yet, important though the man doubtless was, he had an air of indolence, of impatience under annoyance, that was unmistakable and impossible to ignore.

"Well," he said, shortly, "well, Mr. Henry Johnson, what do you want to see me about?"

With a cautionary glance out through the doorway, Haydock leaned toward him and whispered two words in his ear.

Vincent permitted himself a slight raising of the eyebrows,—an unusual concession to interest or surprise.

“You do right to be discreet,” he said; “let us go to my own private room,—it is just across the hall.”

He led the guest across toward the circular room in the opposite turret, corresponding with the reception room.

And this time Haydock couldn't restrain his exclamations.

“Let the business wait a few moments,” said Vincent, almost gleefully. “I admit I am proud of my home; let me show you a little of it.

“You see, it was built many years ago by one Lamont, an eccentric millionaire. It is an exact copy of one of the finest of the French chateaux. Moreover, it is built of the most magnificent marbles ever perhaps collected under one roof. Just the walls of this hall show French Griotte, Porte Venere, Verde Martin, and here you see American Black,—from Glens Falls. The floor is Morial marble from Lake Champlain.

“Ahead of you, looking toward the back of the house, you see the Atrium, copied faithfully from the Erectheum at Athens. We will not go there now,—nor to the Organ wing, where I have one of the largest and finest pipe organs in the world. We will go now into my own private room, and you shall tell me all about this matter you speak of.”

They crossed the hall, Haydock scarce able to tear his eyes from the cabinets, paintings, and rare pieces of furniture. The tall chimney-piece of the hall, Vincent said, was of Bois de Orient marble from Africa.

“Why all these rare marbles?” Haydock cried.

“It was Lamont's fad,” Vincent replied. “And I'm glad he did it, for it saved my having to collect them. I bought the place complete, though totally unfurnished. It has been my pleasure to collect suitable furnishings and I have enjoyed the task.”

“I should say so!” and Haydock stared about the room they entered, which was Vincent’s very own.

Circular in form, it was finished in rare woods with a mantel of Siena marble and bronze, which showed figures of Hercules in statuary marble. The furniture, while not over-ornate, was in keeping with the character of the room. In the center was a great flat-topped desk, carved and inlaid, and at this the two men sat down.

It was after an hour’s conversation that Vincent said: “I will send for my sister,—we must consult with her.”

A bell brought the imperturbable, yet eagerly solicitous butler, whose name, Haydock now learned, was Mellish.

“Go to Miss Anne,” Vincent directed; “ask her to join me here if she will be so good. Tell her I have a caller here. And, by the way, Mr. Johnson, will you not stay the night? Then we can talk at our leisure and, also, I can show you over the house, which I feel sure will interest you.”

Haydock looked at his host questioningly, decided he meant his invitation sincerely, and accepted.

“But I have no evening togs with me,” he demurred.

“No matter, we will be informal. I am myself not overly given to conventions and my niece is dining out. Mellish, take Mr. Johnson’s bag to the south guest room, and make him comfortable there.”

Mellish departed, and after informing Miss Vincent, went about his other errands.

“Man here,” he announced a little later to his wife, who was also the Vincents’ cook. “Nicish chap, but addle-pated. So took up with the house he don’t know what he’s saying.”

“They’re often took like that,” returned Mrs. Mellish, placidly. “Where’s he put?”

“In the south room.”

“H’m; master must set a pile by him.”

“I don’t know about that. I’m not sure they ever met before.”

“Too bad Miss Rosemary’s out,—she likes a stranger here now and then.”

“Oh, Miss Rosemary wouldn’t look at him. He’s not her sort,” said Mellish.

## **Chapter II**

### **The Guest At Greatlarch**

The organ hall at Greatlarch was a massive west wing, with transepts looking north and south. The hall, as large as a small church, was Corinthian in design, with side walls of antique oak, marvellously carved and gilded, that had been brought from England in panels. High above the antique oak cornice rose the vaulted, coffered ceiling and at the east end was a balcony that might be reached from the second story. A rose window in the third story also looked down into the beautiful room.

In the semicircular west end was the great organ, and at its keyboard sat Homer Vincent, his capable hands caressing the keys with a gentle yet an assured touch. He usually spent the hour before dinner at the organ, and those who knew him could divine his mood from the music they heard.

Tonight his mood was variable, uncertain. He struck slow, close harmonies in a desultory fashion, his fine head bowed a trifle as if in deep thought. Then, suddenly, he would lift his head, and the organ would peal forth a triumphant strain, like a song of victory. Or some crashing chords would resound for a moment, to be followed by a silence or by a return to the slow, meditative harmonies.

Sometimes he would play works of the masters and again he would drift into improvisations of his own.

As the dinner hour drew near, Anne Vincent came from her room on a mezzanine floor, and went directly to the gallery that overlooked the organ room.

A slight little lady, a spinster of forty-seven, she had enough pretensions to good looks to warrant her pride in dress. Her hair would have been

gray, but for discreet applications of a certain concoction. It would have been straight, but for the modern invention known as a permanent wave. And so, she presented to the world a beautifully coifed head of dark-brown hair, whose frantic frizz was persuaded to lie in regular, though somewhat intractable waves. Her eyes were gray, like her brother's, but more bright and piercing. Her air was alert, observant and interested. Where Homer Vincent showed utter indifference to the universe at large, his sister manifested interest, even curiosity, toward all mundane matters.

Her slight figure was youthful, her manner animated, and her clothes were in exquisite taste and bore the labels of the best modistes.

Tonight she wore a Georgette gown of a pale apricot color, simply made, but with delicate, floating draperies that betokened the skilled hand of an artist. Her only ornament was a large and perfect ruby, set in finely wrought gold work.

With a light step she tripped down the short mezzanine stairs to the upper front hall. This was no less beautiful than the hall below. It was flanked on either side by four Corinthian columns with gilded capitals, and the panelled ceiling was modelled after one in the Ducal Palace at Venice.

Save for the Tower rooms on either side, this hall took up the entire front of the house, and from it a balcony rested on the portico above the main entrance.

Through the hall Miss Anne went, her high-heeled slippers making no sound on the rugs, which were skins of polar bears.

Through to the balcony above the organ room she passed and stood, one slim hand on the carved balustrade, looking down at her brother.

"Poor Homer," she thought to herself; "he doesn't know what to do. But of course Mr. Johnson is right in the matter,—and of course he knows—my! it means a lot of money! Well, Homer has plenty—if he will only think so. A strange man, that Mr. Johnson—now I think I like him,—and then—I don't—I wish I—but, of course,—my heavens! here he comes now!"

Anne Vincent looked up with a smile as Haydock joined her on the balcony.

The man was still rolling his eyes about as if in a very ecstasy of delight in what he saw.

This was his first glimpse of the organ, as after their talk Vincent had sent him to his room to tidy up for dinner.

“I regret my informal attire—” he began, as he joined Miss Anne, but she brushed aside his apology.

“It’s all right,” she said; “we’re always informal when we’re alone. Now I should like elaborate dress every night, but my brother and my niece wouldn’t hear to such a thing. So you’re quite all right, Mr. Johnson. What do you think of the organ?”

“I have no adjectives left, Miss Vincent. The whole place stuns me, I can scarcely believe I am in America,—I feel transported to the France of the Renaissance.”

“You are familiar with the history of that period?” She looked at him curiously.

“No,” he replied, honestly enough. “No, I am not. But I know this is all of that era, and anyway, it so overwhelms me, I can’t quite analyze my emotions.”

“Yes, I felt like that when we first came here. But five years have made me feel at home in this atmosphere. Your room, Mr. Johnson, is just above my own. It looks out on the south gardens and I am sure you noticed the lagoon and the Greek Temple?”

“Of course I did, though the twilight view made me only more anxious to see it all by daylight.”

“Which you can do in the morning. My niece will be here then, and she will show you the grounds. That Greek Temple is a Mausoleum.”

“A wondrously beautiful one!”

“Yes, is it not? And now, dinner is served,—come Mr. Johnson,” and then, “Come, Homer,” she called to her brother at the organ.

Vincent met them in the lower hall, and ushered them into the Atrium. This, perhaps the most imposing feature of the house, was a pure and perfect example of Greek Ionic architecture.

From the floor of native white marble, rose sixteen monolithic columns with gilded capitals and bases of Bois de Orient and Vert Maurin marble. The side walls were of Rose of Ivory marble quarried in the Atlas mountains of North Africa.

These details Homer Vincent told his guest as they passed through the great room, and drew his attention to the tall plate-glass windows that formed the whole southern end.

Between the Ionic columns of the semicircular south portico could be seen the lagoon with its fountain, and at its far end gleamed the pure white of the Greek Temple against a dark setting of pines and larches.

Johnson sighed as they turned to the dining room, another marvel of Italian Renaissance, in antique English oak, with tall chimney-piece of French Griotte and Belgium Black marbles.

“I wonder,” Haydock said, whimsically, as they took their seats, “if the native marble of Vermont resents the presence of these imported strangers.”

“I have thought that, too,” and Miss Anne’s eyes twinkled, “I am sure it is the case.”

“They dislike one another,” Vincent said, taking up the jest. “The Italian and African marbles scorn the Vermont stone, however pure and white. But they are silent about it, for the most part. In our living room is a chimney-piece of Porte Venere or ‘Black and Gold’ marble from Spezia, which, with its gold bronze ornaments is one of the handsomest and most expensive features of the house. You will forgive my descanting on these things, Mr. Johnson, but I own up that this house is my hobby, and I am a bit daft over it.”



“I don’t wonder,” declared Haydock, with honest enthusiasm. “And I am glad to hear these details. Of course, I am especially interested, because of—”

“I am going to ask of you,” Vincent interrupted him, “not to discuss during dinner the business on which you came here. It is,” he smiled, “bad for our digestion to think deeply while eating, and too, I want you to do justice to the art of my cook.”

The dinner, indeed, as well as the service of it, was entirely in harmony with the surroundings, and though there was no unnecessary pomp or ceremony, the details were perfect and correct.

Mellish, like a guardian spirit, hovered about, and two waitresses under his jurisdiction were sufficient to insure the comfort of the party.

“I am sorry your niece is not at home,” Haydock said, as Rosemary’s name was casually mentioned.

“You shall see her tomorrow,” Vincent promised. “This evening we must have another confab in my study as to our business, and I trust we shall settle it to the satisfaction of all. Mr.—er—Johnson, you must remain here for a time as our guest.”

“Thank you,” Haydock said, simply. “I trust I may do so.”

He looked at Miss Anne, as if expecting a confirmation of the invitation, but she said nothing.

“I suppose,” he said, “that, having your sister and your niece, you have not felt the need of a wife as chatelaine of this wonder-home.”

Homer Vincent smiled.

“I’m afraid,” he said, “no wife would put up with my vagaries. I’m not an easy man to live with—”

“Oh, now, Homer,” his sister protested, “you sha’n’t malign yourself. If my brother is a bit spoiled, Mr. Johnson, it is because my niece and I pet and humor him. It is our pleasure to do so. You see, my brother is a very remarkable man.”

“And my sister is blindly prejudiced in my favor,” Vincent tossed back. “We are a very happy family, and perhaps the more so that each of us follows his or her own sweet will.”

Although no outward change took place on the features of the blank-countenanced Mellish, yet could one have seen into his brain, there was indication of unseemly derision and unholy mirth.

For, as a matter of fact, every one at Greatlarch, whether family, guest, or servant, followed the sweet will of Homer Vincent.

At least, he did if he knew what was good for himself.

Yet Vincent was no tyrant. He was merely a man whose only desire in life was creature comfort; whose only pursuit was his own pleasure; whose only ambition was to be let alone.

His sister and niece might do what they would, so long as they did not interfere with his plans. His servants might have much liberty, many indulgences, if they would but attend perfectly to his wants or needs. Guests could have the freedom of the place, if they kept out of his way when not wanted.

Homer Vincent was not so much selfish as he was self-indulgent,—self-centered. He was scholarly and loved his books; musical, and loved his organ; artistic and aesthetic, and loved his house and his collections; he was of an inventive turn of mind, and loved to potter about in his various workrooms and laboratories, without being bothered as to what he was doing.

In return for these favors he gave his sister and niece pretty much a free hand to do as they chose, checking them now and then in the matter of expenditures. For though the Vincent fortune was large, it was not inexhaustible, and the upkeep of the place was enormous. Yet it must be kept up in a manner to please Homer Vincent’s ideas of comfort, even though this necessitated curtailing the hospitalities toward which Miss Anne and Rosemary inclined.

Homer was kindly by nature; he really disliked to deny Anne anything she wanted, but, as he said, they couldn’t entertain all Hildale all the time, especially as they had no desire to accept return hospitalities.

And if Miss Anne did have such an undesirable desire, she kept it to herself, for she adored her clever brother.

Her other brother, the father of Rosemary, had died five years before, an event which resulted in the girl's coming to live with these relatives.

The household was harmonious,—if and when the two women sank their own wills in the will of Homer Vincent. Otherwise not.

Not that there was ever any friction, or unpleasantness.

Vincent had a way of attaining his end without such. And, perhaps through habit, perhaps following the line of least resistance, both the older woman and the girl willingly capitulated when conditions required it.

For Rosemary loved her Uncle Homer, and Miss Anne fairly worshipped him.

It went without saying, therefore, that Vincent's hint that business matters should not be discussed at the table, was effectual.

Haydock acquitted himself fairly well. The interest he felt in the business which had brought him thither, and the absorbing entertainment of this beautiful home, filled his mind to the exclusion of all else. And since the first subject was for the moment taboo, he pursued the other with zest.

"The man who built this was a genius," he declared.

"It was built," Vincent informed him, "by a prominent firm of New York architects, but as they faithfully copied an old French chateau, they had little need for originality. Of course it was a folly. These great palaces often are. After getting it, the owner found he hadn't sufficient fortune left to keep it up. So it came into the market, and years later I was fortunate enough to get it at a great bargain. Probably I paid not half of the original building cost."

"Lack of funds wasn't the only reason that Mr. Lamont wanted to sell it," Miss Anne said, with a glance at her brother.

“No,” and Homer Vincent looked grave. “There is a tragedy connected with the place, but I try not to let it affect my nerves or even linger in my memory. I wish you would do the same, Anne.”

“Oh, it doesn’t get on my nerves, Homer, but I can’t put it out of my memory, altogether. I am reminded of it too often.”

“May I hear the story?” asked Haydock, looking from one to the other.

“If you wish,” Vincent said, a little unwillingly; “but it’s not a cheerful one.”

“Anything connected with this wonderful place must be of interest,” Haydock declared, and Anne Vincent began the tale.

“It’s a ghost story,” she said, her eyes showing a sort of horrified fascination. “You see, Mrs. Lamont, the wife of the former owner, was murdered in her bed—”

“Now, Anne,” her brother interrupted, “we don’t know that she was—it may have been a suicide.”

“No,” Miss Anne declared, positively, “she was murdered, and her ghost still haunts the place.”

“Have you seen it?” Haydock asked. He had deep interest in the occult.

“I haven’t seen it,—but I’ve heard of it,” she replied, in a whisper. “What do you suppose it does? It plays the harp—the Wild Harp!”

“Oh, come now, Anne, don’t bore Mr. Johnson with your fairy tales.”

Homer Vincent was in the best possible humor. He had had a dinner that exactly suited him, perfectly served, and now as he pushed back his chair a little, he was raising a cigar to his lips, knowing that at the instant it reached them a lighted match, in Mellish’s careful hand, would touch the other end of it. Knowing, too, that an ash-tray would materialize on the exact spot of the tablecloth that he wished it, and that, simultaneously, his coffee cup would be removed.

These things were necessary to Homer Vincent’s happiness, and his thorough drilling of Mellish had made them immutable.

He had instructed the butler long ago to measure carefully with a yardstick the exact distances between the four table candlesticks as well as their distance from the edge of the table.

Yet Vincent was no “Miss Nancy,” no feminine or effeminate fusser in woman’s domain. All details of housekeeping were left to Miss Anne, whom he had also trained. But the most infinitesimal derelictions from exact order and routine were noticed and reproved by Homer Vincent and rarely indeed did the same error occur twice.

In fact, after his five years of occupancy, he had his home in perfect running order, as he conceived perfection.

Banquets were never given, house guests were rare, callers infrequent, because none of these things contributed to the comfort of Homer Vincent. His tranquil days were occupied with his pleasant avocations indoors, varied by motor trips, horseback rides, or country rambles.

His stables and garage boasted the finest horses and cars, and in addition he was seriously contemplating an aeroplane. Indeed, he had already ordered plans drawn for a hangar.

All of his belongings were at the service of his sister and niece at such times as he did not himself require them. It was their duty to find out when these times were.

But the two women had no trouble about this. Vincent was not unreasonable, and both Miss Anne and Rosemary were astute enough to read him pretty well.

He required Anne to be always present to preside at his table. To be sure, he did the presiding himself, but he wished her at the head of the board always. This precluded her accepting invitations which did not include him or which he was not inclined to accept. However, the placid lady was more than willing to defer to his preferences.

Rosemary was allowed more freedom in these matters and went to visit her girl friends as often as she chose. Having them to visit her was another matter, and only to be suggested with the greatest discretion and careful choice of opportunity.

“Yes,” Miss Anne was saying, “and, do you know, Mr. Johnson, my room,—my bedroom is the one she had, and the one that is said to be haunted by her ghost!”

“Really, Miss Vincent? And are you not timid—?”

“Not a bit! You see, it is the loveliest room in the house,—except brother’s, and I would be silly to refuse it because of a foolish superstition.”

“Just below my room, you said, I think?”

“Yes, facing south,—looking out on the lagoon and fountain and on down to that beautiful marble Temple—”

“That is a tomb!” finished Vincent. “Any other woman would be scared to death to look out on that view, but I believe my sister enjoys it.”

“I surely do, Homer. Often I look out there on moonlight nights and feel sorry for the poor lady. And—” her voice fell, “sometimes I hear her—playing on her harp—”

“Oh, come now, Anne, you’ll get Mr. Johnson so wrought up he won’t dare sleep in his own room, which of course has the same outlook!”

“I’m not superstitious,” Haydock averred. “In fact, I should like to hear the ghostly harp—though I cannot say I’d welcome a spook visitor!”

“Let us look out in that direction,” said Vincent, rising. His idea of Anne’s presiding was to have her ready to arise at his signal, not the other way.

He led them back through the Atrium and on out to the great semicircular portico that was the southern entrance.

“It’s chilly,” he said, as he opened a long plate-glass door. “Better stay inside, Anne. Just a moment, Mr. Johnson, unless you think it too cold?”

“No, I like it,” and Haydock stepped out into the crisp night air.

“Feels like snow,” said Vincent. “Now, of course, tomorrow you can see this in the sunlight, but in this dim murk, with the shadows so deep and black, it is a picturesque sight, is it not?”

“It’s wonderful!” Haydock exclaimed, looking across the black water of the lagoon, where the dimly seen fountain did not obscure the faint gleam of white marble that was the Mausoleum.

“You like to keep that thing there?” he asked, curiously.

“Why not?” and Vincent shrugged his shoulders. “Since it doesn’t worry the ladies, and I have no fear of spooks, why should I have it removed? It is exquisite, the Temple. The model, as you can scarcely see now, is that of the Parthenon.”

“How did the story of the haunting come about?”

“Since it is supposed that the lady was murdered, it would be more strange if such a story did not arise. It was long ago, you know. I’ve been here five years, but before that the house stood empty for nearly twenty years. In that time many legends found credence, and many ghostly scenes were reported. Apparitions flitting round the tomb are the most common reports, but strains of a wild harp also are vouched for. Indeed, my sister thinks she has heard them.”

“Have you?”

Homer Vincent hesitated, and then said, “There have been times when I thought I did. But of course it was imagination,—stimulated by the weird aspect of the place. Look at that thicket back of the Temple. Even now, you can seem to see moving shadows.”

“What is behind there?”

“It is a sort of undergrowth of low pines and birches, scrub oaks and elms, a tangle,—almost a jungle, of vines and canebrakes—”

“Swampy?”

“Not quite that,—though mucky after a long rainy spell. I threaten now and then to have it all cleared out and drained,—but I haven’t got at it yet. It is more or less fenced off,—you can just see the low stones—”

“Yes, they look like gravestones.”

Vincent smiled. “They do. That adds to the spookiness. Do you know the villagers, before I came here, called the place Spooky Hollow?”

“And a good name, too!” Haydock shivered. The atmosphere of gloom was beginning to tell on his nerves. “Guess I’ll seek the bright lights! It’s fairly creepy out here!”

Vincent turned toward the house, his slight limp showing itself a little as he crossed the tiled terrace.

“It is all most wonderful,” Haydock summed up, as they re-entered, “but it does not make me forget my mission here—”

“Let that wait, my dear sir, until we are by ourselves.”

For the ubiquitous Mellish was in silent waiting to open the door wider for them, to close it, and to stand at attention for orders.

Haydock perceived the man was a bodyservant of his master rather than a mere butler.

“And now,” Vincent said, “we will again seek my own private room, and settle the business. After that, I trust we shall all sleep contented and serene. Come, Anne, we want your advice and opinions.” Miss Vincent joined them, and as they passed into Homer Vincent’s Tower room, Mellish, looking a little regretful, returned to his domestic duties.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Rosemary**

“That man up there is a queer bird,” Mellish declared to his wife, as he joined her in the kitchen.

“As how?” Mrs. Mellish inquired, with slight interest.

The main kitchen at Greatlarch was a spacious room with walls of pure white marble. Spotless all its appointments and speckless Mrs. Mellish had them kept.



Of a truth she dwelt in marble halls, and having plenty of vassals and serfs at her side, she secured the immaculate tidiness in which her soul delighted, and which, incidentally, Mr. Vincent exacted.

No oversight of Susan Mellish was necessary. Cook she was, but also she was queen of her own domain and life below stairs went on with no more friction or dissension than above. In the household, Homer Vincent's motto was: "Peace at Any Price," and if an underling disturbed it, there was a rapid substitution.

Nor was there any ripple in the smooth-flowing current of the family life. Homer Vincent saw to that. Not that the man was domineering. On the contrary, he was a loving and kind brother and uncle. His tastes were simple, even though luxurious. He asked only smooth-running household machinery and no interference in his own pursuits.

Anne Vincent was nominally housekeeper, and indeed she kept up a careful oversight, but Susan Mellish was so thoughtful, so capable, so meticulously watchful of details there was little or nothing for Miss Anne to do.

The whole household worshipped the master, and he repaid them by liberal wages and comfortable living.

The servants' quarters included delightful sitting-rooms and dining-room, and their sleeping-rooms were most pleasant and beautifully appointed.

A feature of the house was Homer Vincent's own suite. Above his Tower room on the first floor was his smoking-room on the second floor. Back of this followed his bedroom and elaborate bath. Next, his library, with large open terrace that in winter became a sun parlor.

These rooms, of rarest marbles and woods, with French panels of paintings, mirrors, and rich brocades, were appointed in perfect taste. No gimcrackery ornaments, but dignified furniture and a few fine paintings and vases.

The library was a joy. Comfort and beauty of the highest degree were combined with utilitarian bookracks and tables.

These rooms ran along the whole east side of the house, ending with the library and terrace, which looked down toward the Temple as well as off to the east.

They were directly above the lower Tower room, the dining-room and breakfast-room and the family living-room. The other side was taken up by the reception room, the great organ wing, and, back of that, the drawing-room. Between the two sides were the wide entrance hall, and the wonderful Atrium.

Above the Atrium, at the south end, was Miss Vincent's room, on a mezzanine floor, and above that, on a second mezzanine, was John Haydock's room.

The floor above held six large guest rooms and the servants' bedrooms were higher still. However, electric elevators did away with the discomforts of stair climbing, and the many floors, cellars, and sub-cellars were easy of access.

And the two Mellishes, with Miss Anne watchfully observing, held the reins of government of this establishment, and so great was their efficiency, so true their system and method, that a jar of any sort was exceedingly rare, and, because of its rarity, was fully and promptly forgiven by Homer Vincent.

"Yes, a queer bird," Mellish repeated, shaking his head. "He's that dark, now."

"Dark?"

"You heard me! Yes, I said dark. Dark complected, dark eyes, dark hair, dark hands, and dark clothes."

"Not dressed up?"

"No, but that isn't it, he's almost dark enough to be a Creolian."

Mellish was a good butler, but made an occasional slip in his diction. One can't know everything.

"Yes, Susan, he's not our sort, and I know it. He's peculiar,—that's what he is,—peculiar."

“So’s the master.”

“Ah, that’s different. The Vincent peculiarities are of the right sort. This man, now,—well, Susan, he was so took up with the place, he could scarce eat his dinner.”

“Small wonder. The place is a fair marvel to those who’ve not seen it.”

“It isn’t that. I’ve seen guests before, who were overwhellumed by it. But this chap,—he, why he had an appraising glance for it,—yes, sir, appraising,—that’s the word.”

“Mellish, you’re daft. Appraising, was he? Like he meant to buy it!”

Susan’s ironic scorn would have withered any one but her husband.

“Susan, you’re a witch. That’s it exactly. Not that he meant such a thing, he’s a poor man. I’m thinking,—but that was the way he looked at it.”

“Drop him, Mellish. You’ve no sense tonight. Are you dismissed?”

“Yes. Mr. Vincent said he’d not need me more. They’re shut in the Tower room, Miss Anne and all. They’re talking business. I can’t make that felly out.”

“Did he look sinister?”

“What a woman you are for the word, Susan! No, it wasn’t that,—he looked more—er—determined,—yes, that’s what that man is,—determined.”

“Determination can’t move the master. I’m bound he’ll be a match for anybody’s determination.”

“Oh, it isn’t a clash of wills—or that. But there’s a matter between them of some sort,—and Miss Anne’s in it, too.”

“And you’re eaten alive with curiosity, that’s what you are, man! Now, get about your business. And see to it the plumber is ordered in the morning. There’s a trickle in the cold storage room sink,—it only needs a washer,—and the hothouse hamper didn’t come today,—send Dickson to

the station for it at sunup—and be sure to speak to Carson about his flirting with Francine—it won't do."

As she talked, Susan was busily engaged in mixing and kneading the breakfast rolls. This was a duty that could be entrusted to no lesser artist in baking, for Susan's rolls were nothing short of perfection, but it required all her care and attention to keep them so.

In upon this engrossed couple drifted Francine, the pert little French maid, who, though Miss Anne's exclusive property, also looked after Rosemary now and then.

"That man!" she exclaimed, with a shrug of her slender shoulders, "*Mon Dieu*, but he is the beast!"

"Where did you see him?" and Mellish whirled on her.

"There, there, now, old man, don't lose any temper! Miss Anne rang for me to get her a scarf. They're all in the Tower room, and they're talking most—"

"Angrily?" demanded Susan, whose curiosity was more aroused than she would admit to her husband.

"No, not so much that,—as,—oh,—la, la,—excitement,—all talking at once,—argument—see?"

"What are they talking about?" This from Mellish,—who asked to know.

"That I can't say. When I entered all converse stopped. But I could see the—atmosphere, the attitudes,—and the dark man—oh, he is a terror! Such a low voice—"

"Oh, you couldn't hear him through the closed door!" and Mellish glared at her.

"*Non, Monsieur!* Are you not desolate that I could not?"

Pretty Francine was a saucy piece and dearly loved to ballyrag the dignified butler. But both the Mellishes liked her, though they kept a wary eye on her coquettish ways with certain servants of the other sex.

“Is he threatening them?” Susan asked.

“Not quite that—but—”

“But you know absolutely nothing at all of what is going on!” Mellish spoke sharply. “You’re only pretending you do. Stop discussing your betters and get about your work.”

“I’ve no work to do until Miss Anne wishes to retire. She will ring for me.”

“Then go and read your book. Or get some sewing. But don’t you dare go outside the door!” Thus Susan admonished her, knowing full well the girl’s secret intention of slipping out for a few moments to join Carson, the chauffeur, in a stolen interview.

So Francine dawdled about until the bell rang and then presented her demure self at the door of the Tower room.

Apparently the matter, whatever it was, had been most amicably settled, for the three were smiling and contented looking as Francine scanned their faces.

John Haydock was a dark man,—not like a Creole at all, but merely markedly a brunette. His otherwise unnoticeable face wore a look of satisfaction, and as he stepped out into the hall, he had again that expression that could, perhaps, be called appraising. Yet small wonder, for his deep and enthusiastic interest in the house led him to examine its various beauties and marvels, and few could do so without involuntary thought of the great outlay involved.

“I will go with my sister to her room,” Vincent was saying, “and you must amuse yourself a few moments. Then I will rejoin you for a good-night cigar, and then we will ourselves retire early.”

As was his nightly custom, Homer Vincent escorted his sister to her room. Francine followed, and paused at the door, with her usual discretion.

“Come on in, Francine,” Vincent decreed. “I’m not chatting with Miss Anne tonight. Get to rest, dear, and try to forget this whole matter. As

you know, I'm only anxious to do what is wise and right. You shall cast the final decision as to all details and tomorrow we will draw up contracts and all that."

"How good you are, Homer; and though it was a long confab I do not feel so very tired. Fix my powder, dear, and go back to Mr. Johnson. He is a—not quite our sort,—is he, Homer?"

"Not quite, dear,—but he is a good business man, I judge, and he seems honest."

Miss Vincent required a small dose of opiate each night, and fearing lest she should mistake the quantity prescribed, or that Francine might be careless, Homer Vincent himself each night measured out the portion for her.

"There you are," he said, as he carefully gauged the dose. "Give it to her when she's ready, Francine. Good night, Anne, dear."

He left his sister in Francine's capable hands and went down to rejoin his guest. It was a mark of respect, if not of liking, that he took John Haydock up to his own library for their smoke.

Though sybaritic in many ways, Vincent did not employ a valet. His preference was to have Mellish arrange his bedroom and night things, and then to retire by himself whenever it pleased him to do so. Like his sister, he was a poor sleeper, and often prowled round the house, upstairs and down, during many of the small hours.

On the soft rugs his footfalls disturbed nobody, or if they did, no one was alarmed, so, in this, as in all other matters, Vincent pleased himself.

On this night, when at last he was alone in his own bedroom he bethought himself of some matters he wished to attend to, that necessitated his going downstairs to his private room. He had not yet begun to undress, and as he went down the stairs and through the hall, where a dim light burned all night, he met the night watchman, Hoskins. This was by no means an unusual occurrence, for Hoskins came on every night at midnight, and made certain prescribed routes through the premises.

Vincent gave the man a pleasant nod and went on his way. Though this Tower room was sacred to his use, it was by no means kept locked or difficult of access. Indeed, the door usually stood open, though in the room itself were two wall safes, concealed by decorative hangings and also a secret panel which was so cleverly hidden as to be perhaps impossible of discovery.

It is at this point that Rosemary comes into this story.

She comes in a motor-car, out of which she steps softly, as the car reaches the wooded part of the driveway.

Unafraid, because she knows Hoskins is not far away, and because this is by no means her first experience of the sort, she makes her way silently toward the house.

She cannot be seen gliding through the shadows, and she takes good care she shall not be heard.

Reaching the stone arch of the entrance, she slips through, and pauses to reconnoitre. No lights are on save those in her uncle's suite, and one in his Tower room below.

"Aha," thinks the sagacious young woman, "up yet,—the old Prowler, is he? Well, we'll see what we'll do about it. I don't want to hang around long tonight!"

As may be gathered, Rosemary had overstayed her allowed time, and greatly desired to get into the house and up to her room unnoticed. For Homer Vincent was a bit strict about his niece's behavior, and if truth be told, his restrictions were rather necessary and all for Rosemary's good.

Not that the girl was wilful or wayward, but at twenty-one, the hour of midnight seems to strike very early in the evening, and usually just when the fun is at its height. Yet it was a Medo-Persian law that Rosemary should be in the house by twelve o'clock—and to give her just due, she almost always was.

But tonight had been a gay and pleasant party, and she had been tempted to remain beyond the hour.

The afternoon's portent of snow had been fulfilled, and though the squall had been short, it was severe, and now, though it was not snowing, there was enough fallen snow and cold dampness to make any tarrying outside exceedingly uncomfortable.

So Rosemary crept to the great window that was at the southern exposure of the Tower room, and peeped in at her uncle.

Wrapped in her fur motor coat, a brown toque spilling its plumes down one side of her pretty, eager face, Rosemary shivered as she picked her way through the soft wet snow, but nodded in satisfaction as she saw her uncle's very evident absorption in whatever matter claimed his attention.

About to turn away, she paused a moment to notice him as he opened a secret panel. She had known of the existence of this, but had never before seen it opened.

Fascinated, she saw him searching among its contents, though she could discern nothing definitely. The window had a thin film of curtain material, and she really saw little beyond the moving silhouette and the furniture of the room. Moreover, it suddenly came to her that she was rudely spying upon another's movements in a way she had no right to do, and blushing to herself in the darkness, she turned quickly away.

Rosy from the icy air, her cheeks glowed; and curled up by the dampness, her red-brown hair made little tendrils that blew across her face. She smuggled into her fur collar and even welcomed the warmth of the long russet plume that fell over one ear.

Carefully she slipped back again to the great front door, which she well knew Hoskins had not yet locked for the night. Turning the knob slowly, the opening door made no sound, and in a moment Rosemary was inside.

And it was just at that moment that Homer Vincent elected to return to his bedroom. But the girl quickly stepped behind one of the great columns, and stood in its protecting shadow while her uncle went up the stairs.



She thought he limped a little more than usual, as he sometimes did when tired, and a wave of regret swept through her tender heart that she had disobeyed his orders.

“I’ll never do it again,” she resolved. “Uncle Homer is too good to me for me to slight his wishes. I’m a wicked old thing!”

But a healthy, girlish hunger was more in evidence with her just then than her feeling of conscience-stricken remorse, and she turned her silent steps toward the dining-room. Here Mellish usually left for her some tempting bit of food on a tray in a cold cupboard, and investigating, Rosemary found a little mold of jellied chicken, with two buttered finger-rolls and a plate of fruit.

Snapping on a small table light, she sat down to enjoy her little feast.

Hoskins, passing, looked in and smiled at her. It was not the first time he had smiled at such a scene.

Soon Rosemary finished her lunch, and gathering up her fur coat, went softly upstairs.

She paused at the door of her Aunt’s room. Sometimes, if Miss Anne were awake, she liked to have Rosemary come in and tell her of the party. But the sound of heavy asthmatic breathing proved Miss Anne asleep, and the girl went on to her own rooms.

Her boudoir was the Tower room over the reception room and her bedroom was next back of that. Everything was in readiness and it was but a short time before Rosemary slumbered as soundly, if not as audibly, as her aunt.

Hoskins went his rounds stolidly. He was a good and faithful watchman, largely because he had not the brains required for any higher calling. His route he meticulously followed, punching his time clocks as required, and throwing the flash of his electric lantern in dark corners.

His orders took him outside and around the house as well as through the lower floors. The upper floors he was not required to patrol.

As usual, he found no disturbing element and trudged around his appointed path like a patient ox. He had long since ceased to wonder at the beauty and grandeur of Greatlarch,—to him it was merely the home of his employer.

He repeatedly tracked the soft wet snow in his journeys round the house, removing his damp overshoes when making his inside rounds.

His shift ended at seven o'clock, and at that hour he gladly went into the kitchen, where a hot breakfast awaited him.

“Nasty mess underfoot,” he confided to the maid who served him. “Don’t go out today, my dear, lessen you have to.”

“The sun’s out bright,” she demurred, looking from the window.

“Yes, and that makes it all the wuss. Meltin’ an’ thawin’—sloppy weather, my dear.”

As Hoskins’ “my dears” were matters of habit rather than real affection, the girl paid but slight attention and went about her business.

The routine of breakfast preparations went on. The Mellishes appeared on the stroke of seven-thirty, as was their wont. They gravely inspected the work of their underlings and then set about their own superior duties.

All was in readiness at eight, though it was an entirely uncertain question as to when the family would appear.

They were subject to moods or whims, sometimes having breakfast together and again having trays carried to any rooms that pleased them.

Mellish opined, however, that this morning would see the family congregated in the breakfast-room because of the presence of a guest.

And shortly after eight Homer Vincent appeared.

Though always impatient at a delay not of his own causing, he showed no irritation and said to Mellish he would wait for Mr. Johnson to come down.

Then Rosemary appeared. Such a pretty Rosemary, her brown eyes smiling, her animated little face showing a frank curiosity.

“Good morning,” she cried, “who’s here? Francine says there’s a guest.”

“Yes, but he isn’t down yet. A Mr. Johnson, who came to see Antan and myself on some business affair.”

Rosemary had a funny little way of pronouncing Aunt Anne, and as it sounded like Antan, the nickname had become habitual.

“Nice?” she asked, briefly.

“Rather,” her uncle returned. “Good business chap, fairly good looking, decent manners, but no particular charm.”

“Doesn’t sound much,” Rosemary observed; “may I begin my breakfast?”

“Oh, let’s wait a few moments. I told him eight o’clock, he’ll surely be down in a few moments.” And then Francine burst into the room, breathless and wild-eyed with wonder.

“But what do you think?” she cried, quite forgetting her formalities. “Miss Anne—I cannot rouse her and her door is bolted!”

Homer Vincent looked at her coldly.

“Remember your manners, Francine,” he said in a tone of reproach. “Your information does not warrant such carelessness of address. Is Miss Vincent still sleeping?”

“That’s just it, sir, I do not know. Always I hear her bell by eight o’clock at latest. Now, I go and tap, but she answers not,—nor do I hear her moving about inside her chamber.”

“Did you not go in?”

“But the door is locked,—bolted on the inside. Always she bolts it at night, but the bolt is always off before this time in the day!”

Francine was a trim little figure, her plain black dress and white cap and apron well becoming her. She was excitable, but this time her concern was deeper than mere excited curiosity. Plainly, she was alarmed.

Vincent saw this, and spoke more kindly.

“Run up again, Francine, and rattle the door. I will go with you, if you wish.”

“Oh, do, sir, I did rattle at the door, and there was no response. And I did not hear her breathing—she—she breathes deeply, you know.”

This was a discreet allusion to Miss Anne’s asthma, which at times was distinctly in evidence.

“Francine, I’m sure you’re needlessly excited; however, Mellish will go up and see—”

The butler turned slowly toward the door, and Vincent said:

“No matter, Mellish, I’ll go myself,” and then, noting Rosemary’s frightened glance, he added, “we’ll all go.”

He led the way to Miss Anne’s bedroom, the great south room on the mezzanine above the hall.

The short flight of steps ended in a broad landing, the bedroom door in its center. The door had been a heavy one of carved antique oak. But Miss Anne had disliked it, saying it was like a prison door. So her brother had had it removed and replaced by a light swing door, covered with rose-colored velour and studded round its edges with brass-headed nails.

This door had a small bolt on the inside, but it was only to insure privacy, not at all a protection from possible marauders.

Homer Vincent tapped at this door, calling “Anne—Anne, dear!”

There was no response and Vincent pressed his ear to the door.

The others watched, breathlessly, and Rosemary shrank back in nameless dread while Francine fluttered and gave voice to voluble French expletives.

“Be quiet, Francine!” Vincent commanded, and Mrs. Mellish, who had joined the group, gave the French girl an admonitory shake.

“I shall break in the door,” Vincent said; “it’s a flimsy thing. Stand back, Rosemary. Mellish, push here, as I strike.”

The combined strength of the two men easily forced the door, and Mellish fell into the room first. Vincent, following, hurried to his sister’s bed. The beautiful room, built for the first mistress of the house, had a raised dais, a sort of low platform for the bed to stand on. Also, from the ceiling depended an elaborate cornice that surrounded the space designed for the bed and from which hung voluminous curtains of silk brocade.

In the shadowy gloom of these curtains lay Miss Anne, and as her brother reached the bedside and pushed away the hangings to see his sister, he cried out in a horrified voice, “Keep back! Mellish, keep back Miss Rosemary!”

Waving a warning hand at them, Vincent leaned over the still form and then turned round, his hands clenched and horror on his face.

“My sister is dead!” he cried. “She—she—oh, take that child away!”

“I will not be taken away, Uncle Homer,” Rosemary cried. “I’m not a baby! Let me know the truth! What has happened?”

Breaking away from the restraining arms of Mrs. Mellish, unheeding Mellish’s effort to stop her, she ran to the bedside and herself looked inside the long curtains.

She saw a white, dead face, staring eyes and a nightdress stained with crimson drops.

## **Chapter IV**

### **A Mysterious Death**

“Oh, Antan!” Rosemary cried, starting back in horror. “Oh, Uncle Homer, what is it?”

Vincent put his arm round the terrified girl and they both gazed on the dreadful sight. Both were white-faced and trembling, and though Homer Vincent strove hard for composure, it was a few moments before he could even speak.

Then, still holding Rosemary close, he spoke to the others.

“Mellish,” he said, “Miss Vincent is dead. She has been killed. That’s all my brain can take in at present. I am stunned—I am heartbroken,”—and the man’s enforced calm gave way as he sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

Then Mrs. Mellish stepped nearer to the bed, gave one glance at the awful sight and turned shuddering away.

“Leave the room,” she said to the trembling Francine. “You’ll be flying into hysterics in a minute. I know you. Leave the room.”

“What shall I do? Where shall I go?” the French girl cried. “My place is here—beside my mistress.”

“She’s right,” and Mellish showed surprised approval of Francine’s self-control. “You stay in this room, Francine, and don’t you get to blubbering. Keep your head, and you can be of good service. Mr. Vincent, shall I call a doctor?”

“Why, yes,—do, Mellish. Poor Anne is dead, but—yes, I’d like you to call Doctor McGee. And—and Mellish, I suppose we ought to notify—”

“Do nothing, sir, until Doctor McGee comes. He’ll know just what to do.”

Mellish departed to telephone the Doctor, and Homer Vincent, lifting his bowed head, rose and began to assume his usual place at the helm.

“I can’t seem to think,” he said, as he brushed his hand across his brow. “Rosemary, who could have done such a thing? Who could harm such a dear lady?”

“Oh, I don’t know, Uncle,—did—did somebody kill her?”

“Unless she took her own life—she wouldn’t do that, would she, Rosemary?”

It was strange the way the strong and self sufficient man seemed to appeal to his niece. Mrs. Mellish regarded him solicitously. She had never before seen Homer Vincent troubled.

“There now, sir,” she said, in kindly fashion, “you can do nothing for the poor lady now. Come down to the breakfast-room, sir, and take a cup of coffee and a bite of breakfast. Come now, Miss Rosemary, let Melly fix you out.”

The girl often called Mrs. Mellish thus, to distinguish her from her husband.

“Oh,” exclaimed Vincent, suddenly, “that man, that Mr. Johnson! He must be already down in the breakfast-room, and no one to look after him! Run down to him, Melly.”

“Come you, too, sir. And Miss Rosemary. The man must be told,—best you should do it, Mr. Vincent.”

“Yes,” and Homer Vincent rose, with a determination to do his part, however hard it might be. “Rosemary, will you come with me, or will you have your breakfast taken to your rooms?”

“I’ll go with you, Uncle. Perhaps I can help. Who is Mr. Johnson?”

“He’s a man who came yesterday on business, and I asked him to stay the night. I asked him to stay on, but I hope he’ll go this morning.”

“Oh, he surely will,—when he hears—Uncle Homer, I can’t believe it!” she looked again at the silent, pitiful figure on the bed, where Francine was lightly laying a fine handkerchief over the face of poor Anne Vincent.

“That’s all right,” Vincent said, slowly, “but don’t touch the body otherwise, Francine. It—it isn’t right to do so.”

“No, sir,” and the maid nodded, comprehendingly.

“Come now, sir,” Mrs. Mellish urged him, and with a backward glance of grief and bewilderment, Vincent followed Rosemary from the room.

But Mr. Johnson was not in the breakfast-room. “He has overslept,” Vincent said, glancing at the clock. “For I told him breakfast at eight and he said he would be prompt. I shouldn’t send for him, otherwise,—but—as things are, don’t you think, Melly, you’d better call him?”

“Yes, sir; shall I tell him—what’s happened, sir?”

“Yes—no,—well, tell him that there is trouble in the household, you might say sudden illness—oh, I don’t care what you say, Melly, but can’t you hint that he’d better go right after breakfast?”

“Yes, sir, surely,” and Mrs. Mellish went on her somber errand.

Uncle and niece took their places in the bright and cheery breakfast-room. The weather had cleared, and the sun shone with a glowing warmth as of Indian Summer.

“Eat your breakfast, Rosemary,” Vincent said, “that will best help you to meet the trying times before you.”

Habit is a compelling thing, and Homer Vincent went about his own breakfast methodically, as usual, chipping his egg with his customary care and attention. It was characteristic of the man that even in the nervous stress and strain of the occasion, he gratified his physical appetite with apparent relish. Yet this was purely a matter of habit, and indeed, he was almost unaware of what he was eating or even that he was eating.

The girl, however, could eat nothing. Her excitement was so great, her nerves so wrought up, that she found it impossible to swallow a mouthful.

“At least drink a cup of coffee, dear child,” her uncle urged, as he solicitously proffered cream and sugar.

At this moment Mrs. Mellish returned, her round face showing a look of amazement.

“The gentleman isn’t in his room, sir,” she said. “I—”



“Then he’s out in the grounds,” interrupted Vincent, impatiently. “Go and hunt him, Mellish.”

Now, Mrs. Mellish’s place wasn’t in the dining-rooms at all at breakfast, a maid assisted the butler. But today the maids were demoralized and Melly was trying to help things along all she could.

The news of the tragedy had, of course, flown like wildfire through the servants’ halls and they were even now in huddled groups in corridors and pantries.

“But, Mr. Vincent,” Melly resumed, “the gentleman didn’t sleep in his bed! It hasn’t been touched since it was turned down for him last night.”

“What?” Vincent stared at her incredulously.

“No, sir; his hat and coat’s there, but his clothes ain’t—”

“Oh, then he’s spent the whole night prowling round the house. He was daft over it and hated to go to bed. I left him wandering round the upper floors. I hope he didn’t go out on the leads and fall over. What a bother he is! But go and find him Mrs. Mellish. Get some one to help, if you like,—but get Mr. Johnson! He’s maybe fallen asleep in some Tower room.”

Mrs. Mellish departed and Rosemary asked, “Who is this man, Uncle?”

“An ordinary person, dear. I never saw him before,—he came to see me in regard to a business proposition, and your Aunt and I grew interested and promised to decide the matter today.”

Tears filled his eyes as he realized there was no today for poor Anne Vincent.

“But why wouldn’t he go to bed?” Rosemary persisted. “Do you mean he spent the whole night wandering round the house?”

“I don’t know, child, but he was mad about the place and most curious to visit every nook and cranny of it. I showed him about a lot, then, as he seemed inclined to explore for himself, I told him to do so.”

“What room did he have?”

“The south room, above your Aunt’s. He’s a decent chap, but not quite our own sort. Ah, Mellish, did you get the doctor?”

The butler shook his head. “No, sir, he’s away on an important case, out of town, sir. Shall I call some one else?”

“Oh, I don’t know what to say or do—” and Vincent seemed to be at his wits’ end.

“I wish I could help you, Uncle,” Rosemary said, gently; “you have such an awful burden to bear. Shall I call Bryce over—”

“No; I am indeed in trouble, Rosemary, but I can bear my own burdens. I ask no help, at present. But when the time comes, I shall get help—skilled help—to solve the mystery of your aunt’s death and to bring the murderer to justice.”

Vincent’s voice rang out sternly and Rosemary marvelled at the fiery depths of his eyes.

He seemed to pull himself together anew, and said: “I think, Mellish, you’d better call up the County Physician. He must be notified anyway, and if he gets here before Doctor McGee, it will do no harm. We must have some medical man, as soon as we can. Call Doctor Archer—and then, Mellish, for Heaven’s sake find that man Johnson. It’s unpardonable for him to act like this!”

The calm, even-tempered man was getting nervously upset. Nor could it be wondered at, for in all his life before equability and composure had never deserted him. But never had there been such provocation. For a man who lived but for his own pleasure, whose every thought and act were definitely directed toward the achievement of his own comfort and happiness, for a man like this to be brought suddenly face to face with a tragedy that tore his very heartstrings was enough of itself to shatter his nerves.

But when, in addition, he must meet the terrible situation, must even assume direction of the horrible events consequent upon it, must stifle and suppress his own grief in order to preserve sufficient calm to take charge of the proceedings,—this was overwhelming, and Homer Vincent almost sank beneath the blow.

But he was made of strong fiber, he was possessed of an indomitable will and ability to cope with an emergency.

Conquering his jumping nerves, he said: "We must all help, Rosemary. You must try to take your Aunt's place so far as you can; look after the household matters, assist Melly, and be ready to see visitors,—for as soon as the news spreads there will be many callers."

Rosemary shuddered. "Must I see them, Uncle? I'd hate it—"

"Some we can refuse to see. But many must be met,—and I thought, dear child, you'd do that to help me. I have many painful matters to see to myself."

"Of course, I will, then,—and—if I could have Bryce—"

"Oh, Rosemary, just this once,—I beg of you, don't bring up that subject—"

Vincent looked so distressed that his niece said quickly, "No, I won't,—but—if you only would—"

She was interrupted by the return of Mellish. Having summoned Doctor Archer, he had himself taken up the command of the search for the missing guest.

"We can't find that man anywhere," he declared, looking completely mystified. "As my wife says, he didn't sleep in his bed, and what's more, it doesn't look to me as if he was in his room at all after dinner. There's nothing put about, no chair out of place, no cigar ashes or that,—his night things all undisturbed, just as the maid laid them out. It's mighty queer, sir,—ay, it's mighty queer!"

"His hat and coat are up there—in his room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then he hasn't left the place,—then he must be somewhere about."

"Yes, sir,—it would seem so, sir. But he isn't,—he just isn't. We've looked everywhere. We've called out, and we've rang bells, and we've searched the whole place. He's nowhere about—alive."

Vincent started at the last word.

“What do you mean?” he cried.

“Nothing, sir, only whoever done for poor Miss Anne may have done for him, too.”

“That’s so,” and Homer Vincent dropped his face in his hands as if this new phase of trouble was more than he could bear.

“Mellish,” he said, at last, “I can’t take it all in. It’s too much for me. I must have help—”

“Oh, Uncle Homer,” and Rosemary spoke involuntarily, “if you’d only let Bryce—”

“Hush, Rosemary, don’t add to my troubles. No, much as I hate it, much as I dread it, I see I must call in the police. We’d better wait, I think, until Doctor Archer comes, but I am sure he will send for them at once. It is inevitable.”

“The police! Oh, no, Uncle Homer!”

“I fear it must be so, Rosemary. And, dear, until they come is the only time we may have to ourselves. I mean, once they start investigations, the whole house will be upset and they will be entirely in charge.”

“How awful! Must we have them?”

“Yes,” he spoke abruptly. “Oh, Rosemary, I can’t stand this another minute! I shall go to the organ,—Mellish, when the Doctor comes let me know.”

No one was surprised, a few moments later, to hear the long, low, mournful notes that pealed through the stricken house. It was the habit of Homer Vincent to find solace in music if anything troubled him, but never before had his troubles been more than some slight, momentary disturbance of a trifling sort.

And as he played, he recovered his poise, he regained his courage, he felt enabled to cope with the, trials that he must endure.

One who knew him could judge from the deep, dirge-like strains or the troubled crashing chords, which phase of the tragedy was at the moment uppermost in his mind, the death of his sister, or the imminent horror of the consequent and necessary investigations.

The servants were in a state of chaotic excitement. The two Mellishes had their hands full to keep quiet and decorum in their domain.

Francine, however, showed her best side, and proved that she had a fine and efficient nature.

She put Miss Anne's rooms in order, weeping silently as she disposed of the clothing the poor lady would never wear again. She was careful to disturb nothing that might be useful as evidence, for Francine fully realized the gravity of the case, and wanted to help, if only by letting things alone.

She found Rosemary in her room, weeping her very heart out in an agony of woe.

"Poor child," thought Francine, "not a soul to go to for sympathy or comfort!"

"Mayn't I send for someone, Miss Rosemary?" she offered. "Wouldn't you like Miss Eaton, or—"

"No, Francine," the girl looked at her fiercely; "you know well there's only one person I want to see,—and I'm not allowed to see him!"

"No," and Francine nodded, understandingly: "but don't stir up your uncle about that. He's got all he can stagger under."

"So have I!" Rosemary cried out. "Don't you suppose I'm as much broken up by Antan's death as Uncle Homer is? Don't you suppose I want somebody to comfort and love me even more than he does? He has his music—that always quiets and soothes him, while I—I have nothing—nobody!"

The lovely face, torn with emotion and grief, was mutinous; the scarlet lips were trembling, while the white, tear-stained cheeks and the stormy eyes showed rebellion seething in Rosemary's heart.

“But wait,” counseled Francine. “All is now so—so excitement, so—tornado!” In moments of stress, Francine forgot her English. “After a little, after some small few of days, the trouble will clear somewhat,—the suddenness will be forgotten,—Monsieur will find himself, and, who knows, mademoiselle, all may be well for you—and yours.”

Francine had never before spoken with such familiarity, but Rosemary did not resent it. She was too stunned, too helpless, to resent anything.

“Tell me about that man, Francine,” she said; “did you see him?”

“Yes, when Miss Anne called me to get her a wrap. Oh, he was dreadful!” A French shrug betokened how dreadful.

“But how? In what way?”

“So black, so sneering,—so dictating,—yet not a gentleman.”

“What in the world did he want? I wish Uncle Homer would tell me about him. Where do you suppose he is, Francine?”

“That is not hard to guess.” The French girl smiled a sardonic little grin,—like a wise sibyl.

“Why, what do you mean? What do you think?”

And then came a peremptory summons for both girls to appear below.

Doctor Archer had arrived, and, almost simultaneously, the local police.

The Law was represented by Lane, the Sheriff of the county, and two eager-eyed detectives, who were so flabbergasted by the beauty and grandeur of their surroundings that they seemed able to detect little else.

Doctor Archer, the County Medical Examiner, was in charge, and was firing questions right and left. He had never before had such an opportunity to stand in the limelight and was making the most of it.

“The lady was murdered,” he informed his hearers, in a deep bass voice; “most foully murdered. She was stabbed with some sort of dagger or long-bladed knife.”

“Carving-knife?” asked Brewster, one of the detectives, and Rosemary smothered a shriek.

“Not necessarily,” replied Archer, “a long-bladed jackknife might have been used, or a regular dagger. Anyway, it required a long blade, for it went in her chest and pierced her heart. It was just one swift, deft blow, and death was instantaneous. Now, Sheriff, what do you make of that?”

“Murderous intent,” answered Lane promptly. “Murderer concealed in the room, like as not, all afternoon.”

“Ah, h’m, and how did he get out?”

“Door locked?” and Lane looked up quickly. He had not heard all the details yet.

They were gathered in the living-room, a delightful room on the first floor, back of the dining-room. It looked out on the terrace, and on over the lagoon and fountain to the Greek Temple that was a Mausoleum.

Lane was an artist at heart, a lover of the beautiful, and like many other visitors, he was overcome with the sights about him.

They were to visit the room of the tragedy later, but Vincent had requested that the preliminary inquiries be made in some other place.

“Yes,” Archer said, “door locked on the inside.”

“Windows?” asked Brown, the other and lesser detective.

“You must look into those things for yourselves,” Archer said. “I’m merely making my medical report. Then we’ll get a line on the time and all that and then we’ll go upstairs and take a look about.”

Homer Vincent cringed at the matter-of-fact tone and the business-like air of the men, and Rosemary, shocked at the whole proceeding, shivered so that Mrs. Mellish went and sat by her side and held her hand.

Grateful for even this human sympathy, Rosemary forced herself to listen to the inquiries now being made.

Francine, composed and alert, answered readily all that was asked of her.

So far as could be gathered, she was the last person known to have seen Miss Vincent alive.

“Tell us all about it,” Brewster said, listening eagerly.

“There’s not much to tell,” the French maid averred. “Miss Vincent spent a time after dinner in the Tower room of Mr. Vincent, her brother. There was also a Mr. Johnson with them, a dinner guest of the house. Miss Vincent left them and came up to her room at about half-past ten. Mr. Vincent came with her as he always does, to say good night and to measure her medicine. After Mr. Vincent had gone downstairs again, I assisted Miss Vincent to get ready for the bed, and I gave her her drops, arranged the coverlets, and put out the lights, all but the ones she wished kept burning. Then I said good night, and left her to herself.”

“She had then gone to bed?”

“Oh, no; it was always her custom to sit up and read for a time. I left her sitting in her armchair, her reading light at her side, her books on a small table. Always I leave her thus at night. Then, when she tires of her books, she arises from her chair, locks her door, puts out her reading light and goes to bed. This, monsieur, is her invariable routine.”

“She seemed well, in her usual spirits?”

“She seemed well, but much er—preoccupied. As if in deep—serious thought over something.”

“Over the discussion with her brother and the strange gentleman, perhaps?”

“It may be. She said no word of what was in her mind.”

“Was she irritable? Cross?”

“Miss Vincent was never that. No, she was most courteous and kind, as always, but deeply thoughtful. When I left her, she said merely ‘good night,’ not adding, ‘sleep well, Francine,’ as is most usual.”



“But this only indicates thoughtfulness, not disturbance or worry,—eh?”

“So it seemed to me. Also, she seemed rather satisfied with her thoughts, as if, after all, the matter was satisfactorily adjusted.”

“You gathered quite a bit from her manner,” Archer remarked, dryly.

Francine caught his tone and flared up at once.

“I know—knew Miss Vincent very well, mon sieur! I knew well her moods and the phases of her mind. It was not much that I should read her satisfaction from her air and manner! Surely I could tell that she was contented and not worried or disturbed! That is not so amazing!”

“No,” said Archer.

## **Chapter V**

### **Where Was Johnson?**

On the whole, Francine made a good impression. Though pert and saucy of appearance, she laid aside all such attitudes now, and seemed desirous only to be helpful and dutiful.

“Snappy chit, but devoted to her mistress,” was the way Brewster summed her up in his mind, and Brown contented himself with musing: “Full of pep, but honestly grieved.”

Brewster and Brown were themselves honest, hard-working detectives. Far from brilliant, woefully inexperienced, they felt that now at last their chance had come, and they were firmly resolved to make good.

Brewster was big and burly, and of a slow-going mind, while Brown was small, wiry, and active, with what he considered a hair-trigger intellect. They had often rejoiced in the fact, as they saw it, that they thus complemented one another, and they felt that their team work would be admirable should they ever get a chance to try it out. And now their time had come.

Eagerly they listened to Archer’s inquiries, carefully they remembered the answers, and frequently gave each other astute glances, indicative of great mental activity.

“Now,” said Lane, “let’s take up next thing we know of Miss Vincent. Did any one hear any sound from her or from her room during the night?” All present,—and several of the servants had gathered in the doorway,—declared they had heard no sounds from Miss Vincent’s room.

“There is a night watchman?” Archer asked.

“Yes,” replied Mellish, who saved his master in every way he could. “But if he had heard or seen anything unusual, he would have reported it first thing this morning.”

“Leave that for the moment, then. Now, who went first to Miss Vincent’s door this morning?”

“Perhaps I did,” said Francine.

“Why do you say perhaps?” demanded Lane.

“Because how can I tell?” returned Francine, wide-eyed at such stupidity. “Any one might have been there before me—indeed, some one must have been there before me—the villain who killed my dear lady.”

“Very well,” said Lane, “go ahead. What time did you go there?”

“At something after eight, monsieur. Always Miss Vincent rings for me earlier than that,—about seven-thirty, maybe. This morning she did not do so, and I waited until eight, then I went and hovered near her door, wondering at her sleeping so late. I listened closely, and hearing no sound, I ventured to turn the knob, but the door was locked and would not open. I called softly,—then louder, and then, listening intently, I heard no sound of Miss Vincent moving about, and I feared she was indisposed, and I greatly desired to get in to give her assistance, if need be.”

“What did you do?”

“But, naturally, I ran down the stairs for help. Forgetting my discipline, I ran into the breakfast room, where were Mr. Vincent and Miss Rosemary, and I told them of the unusual condition,—and though not alarmed, Mr. Vincent was concerned, and with Mellish, we all came upstairs, and broke in the door.”

“Who broke it in?”

“Mellish and I together,” Homer Vincent answered for himself. “The door is a light, temporary structure; my sister preferred it to the original heavy oak door. We burst it in,—in fact, it opened so easily Mellish was thrown to the floor. I went quickly to my sister’s bed, and the first glance told me the truth. I saw in an instant that she had been killed,—murdered. I admit I almost lost my consciousness. My senses reeled, and I fell back involuntarily. But I quickly pulled myself together, for my young niece was present, and forced myself to lean over the body and discover if life was surely extinct. It was,—the flesh was cold to my touch. I ordered Mellish to hold my niece back, as I wanted to spare her the awful sight. But she insisted on looking at her aunt, and for a moment we gazed together on the terrible scene. I think there is no more to tell. Finding I could do nothing for my poor sister, assuring myself that she was positively beyond human aid, I fear I gave way to selfish grief for a few moments. Then I roused myself to a sense of duty, and ever since I have been trying to do what is right and wise in the matter.

“But I am all unversed in the course the law should take, or the manner of efforts that should be made to find the murderer and avenge the crime. Will you, therefore, gentlemen, take the case in charge, and do or advise me to do, whatever is right and best. Let one thing be understood. The murderer must be found. Spare no time, pains, or expense. I stand ready to do anything I can, but as I said, I am ignorant of the proper procedure, and I desire to relegate the work to more experienced hands.

“You think, do you not, Doctor Archer, that the criminal can be found and brought to justice?”

“That is not quite in my province, Mr. Vincent. The inquiry is my duty, but the real detective work must be done by men skilled in such things.”

Brewster and Brown looked duly important and capable, but they offered no hint of their conclusions so far.

“Do you think, Mr. Vincent,” Lane asked, in his ponderous way, “that your sister’s death could have been a suicide?”

“I should say positively not,” Vincent replied, slowly, “except for the fact that she died in a locked room. I can see no way that a murderer could

escape and leave that door locked behind him. Yet, so far from probability is the idea of suicide, that I am forced to believe it was a murder, however impossible such a theory may seem. But all this business of theorizing and of deducing and collecting evidence is so foreign to my nature and to my experience, that I cannot pretend to decide any such questions.”

“What weapon was used? Was any found?” asked Brewster, looking at Vincent.

“That I don’t know,” he replied, looking in his turn at Doctor Archer. “Did you find any, Doctor?”

“No,” and Archer looked stern. “There was none in evidence. Was any such thing removed before my arrival?”

“Of course not,” said Vincent; “who would do such a thing as that?”

“Did you see any knife or dagger, Mellish? or you, Francine?” Archer asked of the servants.

But every one present denied having seen any weapon of any sort.

“Then,” said Brewster, “it must have been murder.”

“But the door was locked,” Brown reminded him, “so it must have been suicide.”

“Those statements are both true, superficially,” Lane said, “but since they contradict each other, either or both may be untrue. One must be. Such points can only be settled after much more investigation than has yet been made. Shortly we will adjourn to the scene of the crime and gather what evidence we may up there. Just now, I’d like some more information regarding this stranger, this Mr. Johnson who visited here last night, and who, I understand, is now missing.

“That’s one of the strangest features,” said Lane. “Please tell us all about him, Mr. Vincent.”

Rosemary, who had sat quietly listening to the talk, now showed signs of curiosity. She wished herself to learn more of this strange visitor, but the

conversation about her aunt had filled her soul only with horror and grief.

Rosemary Vincent was of a self-contained, self-repressed nature. Though her uncle was kind, even generous to her in many ways, yet their tastes were not congenial, and their ways more utterly dissimilar.

Indeed, this mutual sorrow that had just come to them had seemed to draw them together more closely than they had ever been before.

And though Rosemary had earlier that morning inquired concerning the mysterious Mr. Johnson, she had received no satisfaction, and now she hoped to learn details.

“I had hoped not to be obliged to tell you of his business here,” Vincent said slowly, “but his strange disappearance seems to make it advisable that I should do so. Yet,” he still hesitated, “I cannot convince myself that the man is really missing. I can’t help thinking he is about the place or in the house somewhere. He was so intensely interested in the architecture of this house, he was so eager to go into every nook and cranny of it, may it not be possible that he has fallen asleep in some unused room, or even, perhaps, met with an accident while climbing from one place to another?”

“Are there such dangerous places?” asked Lane.

“Oh, yes; at least, they might be dangerous to an adventurous stranger. You see, there are upwards of fifty rooms in the house, and there are turret rooms, to enter which one must step out on the leads; also, there are dark dungeon-like rooms down in the sub-cellar where if one were to stumble and fall, perhaps breaking a leg or even spraining an ankle, his cries might not be heard by the household.”

“You think Mr. Johnson, a transient guest, would go down in your sub-cellar alone, at night, in utter darkness?” and Lane looked astounded.

“I merely suggest it,” Vincent said, looking harassed, “because he was apparently out of his bedroom all night, and because he showed such extraordinary interest in the construction of the house.”

“Very well, Mr. Vincent, if you wish to wait until further search can be made for the gentleman before revealing the secret of his errand here, we will wait. You had better send some of your people to look over the house at once. But in the meantime, I will ask you for the details of his arrival, and a description of the man.”

“He came here yesterday afternoon,” Vincent began, slowly. “He sent in no card, but told my butler his name was Henry Johnson, and he wished to see me on important and private business. I rarely see callers who are not known to me, but I was not busy at the moment, and I had him shown in. His errand was really a simple business proposition, which involved a large investment of money if I saw fit to take it up. I called my sister down to consult with us, as her fortune is about the same as my own, and we usually made our investments together. I will tell you the full details of this business plan later,—if Mr. Johnson cannot be found. If he does turn up, I feel sure he would prefer the matter kept confidential.

“Well, Mr. Johnson proved to be a fairly agreeable guest, though not at all distinguished in any way. As we had not come to final decisions, I invited him to remain overnight. Also, as my sister and I had just about concluded to accept his propositions, and as the man was so enthralled with Greatlarch, I invited him to remain here a week and enjoy the beauties of the place.”

“He was with you all the evening?”

“After dinner he sat with us in my own private room until our plans were pretty well made regarding the venture he proposed. Then my sister grew weary, and concluded to retire, all three of us agreeing to draw up contracts and settle the business finally in the morning.”

“And you went upstairs with your sister?”

“Yes, as I always do. The doctor prescribes a certain sleeping draught for her, which must be carefully measured. I have no doubt of her carefulness and accuracy, but to be on the safe side, I have always measured the medicine myself. Moreover, my sister appreciated my little courtesy of escorting her to her room, so I have always made it a practice. Sometimes I remain for a little chat, but last night, having a guest, I went downstairs again after saying good night.”

“You rejoined Mr. Johnson?”

“Yes; I found him wandering about the halls, rapt in admiration of the choice marbles, of which, it seems, he is a connoisseur. I led him about through many of the rooms, even going with him nearly to the top of the house,—there are nine stories, counting the basements. As we came down from the upper floors, we reached the room destined for his use. It is one of the south rooms.

“He duly admired it, and after asking him if he had everything he wanted for the night, and being assured that he had, I bade him good night and left him there; telling him, however, that if he wished to prowl about he was at liberty to do so. In this house, no one is surprised or alarmed to hear footfalls during the small hours. We are all wakeful, and frequently go up or down stairs on various trifling errands.”

“And you heard Mr. Johnson prowling about in the night?”

“No, I can’t say that I did. Yet he may have done so, for the rugs are thick and soft, and with care one may make no noise.”

“Then the last you saw of this man was when you left him in his bedroom?”

“Yes, that was the last I saw of him. He was in good spirits, for he had achieved his purpose in coming here. He was satisfied with the agreement we had come to, and he looked forward to the morning, when we would sign the final contracts, and also, when he would remain as my guest for a time.”

“And then, this morning, he has disappeared?”

“He is not here, certainly, but I can’t think it is a mysterious disappearance. He may have gone for a very early morning walk, and met with some untoward accident. Or he may have remembered some important business matter, and walked down to the village to telegraph or something of that sort. I only suggest these things, because they are to my mind more probable than that the man has voluntarily or purposely gone away. Yet there may be a mystery about it, and it may be we shall never see him again. Those things I trust the detectives will delve into.”

Vincent leaned back in his chair, looking not so much physically wearied with the conversation as mentally and nervously exhausted by the strain of the situation.

“What does Johnson look like?” Lane asked.

“Describe him, Mellish,” Homer Vincent said, feeling he could delegate this task to another.

“Well,” the butler said, speaking slowly, but concisely; “he is a medium-size man, and a medium-weight man. He’s well enough shaped, but he has no carriage—”

“Carriage?” interrupted Lane.

“Yes, sir, carriage, I said. Meaning he don’t bear himself with any distinguishment,—as a gentleman should.”

A gleam of amusement passed across Vincent’s face at this, but he immediately resumed his look of weary sadness.

“Not but what he knew how to behave proper; he was all right at the table, and that,—but I should say he is not really an aristocrat.”

“Don’t be too severe, Mellish,” Vincent admonished him; “I think Mr. Johnson had good manners.”

“Good manners, yes,” Mellish granted, “but, well, he was lacking in cultural background.”

Some of the hearers stared at this phrase from the butler’s lips, but those of the household knew Mellish’s trick of picking up phrases overheard at his master’s table and, later, using them, either rightly or wrongly, in his own conversation.

Vincent smiled outright, and even Rosemary’s sorrowful face showed amused appreciation.

Lane repeated the phrase in bewilderment.

“Cultural background!” he exclaimed; “what do you mean?”



“What I say,” returned the unabashed Mellish. “Mr. Johnson, I feel sure, is not accustomed to mingle in the best of social circles; he has no phrases or allusions in his speech that betoken the college man or the student of life and literature.”

“Perhaps you’d better confine yourself to his physical description, Mellish,” Vincent suggested. “and omit your opinion of his mentality.”

“Yes, sir. Then, Mr. Johnson is a very dark-faced man,—dark hair, eyes, and skin. He wears a small black moustache, and under it his white teeth gleam like those of some ferocious animal. His countenance is what may be called sinister,—yes, sir,—sinister. In a word, Mr. Henry Johnson has the face of a murderer.”

Mrs. Mellish gave a sudden gasp, Rosemary turned white, and Homer Vincent stared at his butler.

“Yes, a murderer,” Mellish repeated; “and he’s the villain what did for our Miss Anne! How can it be otherwise? In comes a stranger, has secret dealings with master and Miss Anne,—him all the time looking like a murderer, if ever man did! Comes morning, he’d fled, his bed not touched, his hat and coat left behind him, and the dear lady dead in her bed! What else could be the exclamation?”

Mellish’s habit of miscalling a word provoked no smile this time, for everybody was startled at his idea, and was turning it over mentally, with, deep interest.

At last, Doctor Archer said coldly, “Can any one suggest a motive for such a deed on the part of Mr. Johnson?”

“No, and I can’t think of him as the criminal,” said Vincent, thoughtfully. “And yet, if Johnson never appears again, it does seem a way to look.”

“Of course it’s a way to look!” Brown cried eagerly. “The only way to look, as yet. Who else could get into the house, with the night watchman on duty? Who else is a possible suspect in a house of devoted servants and loving relatives? Why else would Johnson disappear? What else would explain his unused bed? A man doesn’t wander about the whole night, admiring house decorations, however beautiful!”

“All true, Brown,” said Brewster, slowly, “but we must get more data before we assume anything. This man’s room, now. Much could doubtless be learned from examination of his belongings. Had he any luggage?”

“A kit-bag,” Mellish informed. “A new one, not overly large. I laid out his night things,—right and proper enough, but not elaborate or fine. And all new.”

“That’s always suspicious,” declared the quick-witted Brown. “When a man has a lot of new things, it means he wants to conceal his identity.”

“But Johnson didn’t,” Vincent told them. “He told his name and address straightforwardly enough; he had to, for us to come to a business agreement.”

“Yes, that’s so,” and Brown looked a little crestfallen. “Go on, Mellish, as to his kit. Anything more personal than clothing and toilet things?”

“Not as I recollect. But the room hasn’t been touched, sir; you can go up and deduce it whenever you wish.”

Mellish was sure of his word this time.

“Let’s go now, Brewster,” cried Brown; “the chap may come back any minute.”

The two detectives went up to the room in question, while the others remained downstairs.

The windows were not wide, but owing to the thickness of the stone wall they were very deep.

Brown leaned far out of one, and drawing back into the room, informed Brewster that nobody could get in or out by that means. The room was on the third floor, and the stone wall was unscalable.

“Well, Pighead,” Brewster returned, amiably, “nobody has suspected Friend Johnson of making his exit otherwise than by this door; why the fuss about the window?”

“But how did he get out of the house by the front door without being seen by the watchman? If he could have made any other getaway, it would simplify matters a lot.”

“Don’t hope to simplify matters yet, my son. This is a stupendous case—”

“Don’t talk like that parrot-tongued butler! Stupendous is a silly word. But the case is a corker! I’ll admit that!”

“Yes, that’s what I meant by stupendous. Now, as you can see for yourself, there’s absolutely nothing to be learned from this bag or its contents. It isn’t unpacked at all,—just as the man left it. Nothing in it but a change of underclothing, a pair of socks, a timetable, a clothesbrush—”

“Here are a few things on the dresser,” Brown said. “But nothing personal. See, the brushes are plain black rubber, without monogram or initials. Here in the top drawer, we see three or four clean handkerchiefs, a necktie, and a pair of gloves. Doubtless the good Mellish put these here, by way of arranging his wardrobe.”

“Yes, of course. Not a thing marked, not a thing personal or different from hundreds of other men’s belongings.”

“Here’s his hat and coat. Old Sherlock would size him up perfectly just from the hat alone.”

“Well, I can’t; I don’t see anything but a plain black Derby, this season’s style, new,—like everything else!—and bought at Knox’s in New York. Small help in that.”

“And his coat is no better. New, too, bought at Rogers, Peet and Co.’s, also in New York. Does the chap hail from New York?”

“I don’t know. Mr. Vincent can tell us that. But I’ll say Johnson is the one to look to as a potential murderer, at any rate. Think so?”

“Yes, but he doesn’t seem to be a man of any forceful personality, so far.”

“That’s the beauty of it! You see, if he is the murderer he would come here all toggled out in clothes and things, new and unmarked, just to prevent the disclosure of his identity.”

“Something in that, by Jove! Now, if we can circumvent his bright idea,—I mean, find some purely personal thing that he has overlooked, we’ll hoist him with his own petard!”

“Well, here’s the thing! See, an atomizer,—isn’t that what you call these little sprayers? It was on the washstand.”

Brewster looked at the glass container and its black rubber spray with interest.

“Good as far as it goes,” he said. “Where’s the bottle of medicine that belongs with it?”

“Don’t see any. Well, I’ll leave it where I found it. Let’s go back downstairs.”

## **Chapter VI**

### **The Wild Harp**

Mellish had detailed two of the servants to search the house and grounds thoroughly for the missing Johnson.

This was easily done, for the men were familiar with all the unused rooms and all the dark passages and dungeon-like spaces in the cellar and sub-cellar.

They returned with the report that there was positively no one concealed in the house and no sign of any one about the grounds.

“It’s clear enough to me,” said Doctor Archer. “that the missing man is the criminal we are in search of. Had he met with an accident, he would have been found, even though injured or dead. As it is, he has evidently disappeared of his own volition and intentionally. What can we assume, then, but that he is the murderer and has fled?”

“Then, Mr. Vincent,” Lane said, “I think you should now tell us all you know about the man and what business brought him here.”

“Willingly,” Homer Vincent answered, “but,” he added, “I cannot conceive why he should have killed my sister,—or how he accomplished it.”

“That is for us to discover,” Lane said, a little pompously. “But, first, Doctor Archer, how long do you judge Miss Vincent had been dead when you arrived?”

“That is the most surprising part of it,” Archer replied. “It is not often possible to affirm positively as to that matter, but allowing a wide margin of probability, I feel sure that death occurred not more than three hours before I made the examination of the body.”

Vincent looked at the speaker with an amazed face.

“Why,” he exclaimed, “that would mean that my sister was—was killed only about an hour before we broke into her room!”

“That is my report,” Archer said, decidedly. “As I say, it is hard to tell with certainty, but death must have occurred as late as seven o’clock this morning.”

“Then,” said Mellish, who in the stress of the occasion was joining in the conversation, “then, that man, that murderer, waited till Hoskins went off duty, and then he killed Miss Anne and immediately made himself scarce! You’ll never see him again!”

“But why,—*why* would he kill her?” Vincent persisted. “However, if he did,—he’s the man we want and he must be found. I’ll tell you all I know about him. In fact, I have told you all, except the nature of his business here. It was this. He claims to have discovered or invented a way to make what are known as synthetic rubies. This is not unheard of among chemists and the results of attempts, so far, are well known to lapidaries and to jewelers. But Johnson declared that his process was so far above and beyond all others in point of merit and value, that if he could make and market his wares it would mean a revolution in the jewel business and a colossal fortune for the inventor and his backer. For, of course, his plan was for me to finance the project, he putting his knowledge and experience against my money investment. Then he proposed we divide evenly the profits. This, in a nutshell, is the gist of his business here. I am not one who is easily persuaded to invest in an unknown venture, but the way he talked proved to me that he knew his subject thoroughly, and the proofs he showed of success already attained, made me give the matter deep consideration.

“I called my sister in to the discussion, not only because I wished to give her an opportunity to share in the undertaking if she chose, but also because I place great reliance on her good judgment and sound advice. Somewhat to my surprise, she was enthusiastic over the plan, and wanted to put in a large sum of money.”

“Does it, then, require such an outlay to attain the desired end?” asked Archer, greatly interested.

“Yes, and I was convinced of it by the statistics and verified data that Mr. Johnson showed me. He also had with him two rubies which he had himself manufactured, and which a leading jewelry firm had declared genuine stones. I have those still in my possession, in my safe, and I will show them to you, whenever you like. My sister was entranced with their beauty and luster. After our afternoon confab, my sister wore down to dinner a fine and perfect ruby of her own, for the purposes of comparison. I could see no difference in the real and the false.”

“So you decided to finance his project, Mr. Vincent?” Brewster asked, respectfully.

“I had practically so decided, but we were to confer further this morning, and if we agreed on certain unsettled points in the contract, I was quite ready to sign it and so was my sister. It meant a large outlay of money for laboratories and materials, but we were firmly assured we would get it back many times over. That, Doctor Archer, was the business that brought Henry Johnson to my door, and if I hesitated to make it public, it was because I felt a certain duty to him. Since he has so surely disappeared, and since there is a reason to believe him a criminal, of course, I am absolved from my promise of secrecy.”

“Where is Miss Vincent’s ruby?” asked Brown suspiciously; “maybe he took that with him.”

Vincent looked startled.

“She had it on when I bade her good night,” he said, thinking back; “she always cares for it herself—call Francine, Mellish.”

The maid appeared, and Vincent asked her concerning the jewel.

“But yes,” she answered, “Miss Vincent had it on last evening. When disrobing, she put it in her wall safe, as usual. Is it not there?”

“Go and see,” directed Vincent. “You can open it?”

“Oh, yes, Miss Vincent trusted me with the combination.”

“I’ll just go along,” Brown said, and the two left the room.

“I am frightened to go in,” said Francine, crossing herself as they reached the threshold.

“Why?”

“Miss Anne—she is there—and yet—not there!”

“Well, she can’t hurt you! Come along. Are you superstitious?”

“No—yes, I am! And last night, the Wild Harp played! Did you know that?”

“What’s the Wild Harp?”

“It’s a spirit harp, played by phantom fingers. The fingers, monsieur, of the dead lady—”

“Miss Vincent?”

“Oh, no, no,—the lady who was long time ago dead—in this very room—this same room, monsieur, and again a deed of blood!”

“I see; you mean Mrs. Lamont.”

“Yes, Madame Lamont,—she was murdered, or, she killed herself,—it is not known which,—and of a truth, often she plays the Wild Harp, and always there follows disaster.”

“H’m, interesting. And where is the harp? In the music room?”

“No, monsieur, it is out in the dismal—the black thicket. Back of the Temple that is her tomb. There is the Wild Harp, there, among the desolation—the somber shadows, the sighing pines, where the gloom

is deepest, there the Lady Lamont walks by herself and moans, or plays wailing strains on the Wild Harp.”

“Tell me more about this some other time, Francine. We’re sent on an errand, you know. Come on in; don’t be foolish.”

With shuddering glances toward the still figure on the bed, Francine followed the detective into the room.

A guard stationed outside the door said nothing and made no move.

At Brown’s command, Francine tried to open the small safe in the wall, but her fingers trembled so, she could scarce control them.

“What a baby you are!” cried Brown, though his glance at the pretty French girl was not severe. “Tell me the letters, I’ll do it.”

“No, it is my trust,” and whirling the dial. Francine at last threw open the safe door.

“*Mon Dieu*, it is gone!” she cried; “the great ruby is gone! All else is here, yes, here is the diamond cross and the emerald bracelet—only the ruby is missing. The beast! The murderous beast! I knew he was the bad one! His blackness—ugh!”

More by gestures than by words did Francine express her detestation of the man and her distress at the discovery of the loss.

“You’re sure, Francine?” Brown persisted.

“Oh, yes, always the ruby reposed in this case, see! Now, the case is empty!”

“Well, I’m not overly surprised. Johnson is certainly the villain! Come on, we must go down and report.”

Francine closed and locked the safe, and, dabbing at her eyes with a minute handkerchief drawn from her foolish little apron pocket, she went obediently downstairs.



Brewster heard of the stolen ruby with a certain feeling of satisfaction. It was all in keeping that the maker of synthetic rubies should purloin a real one—even at the price of becoming a murderer thereby.

“Johnson’s your man,” he declared. “All we’ve got to do now, is to nab him. And that’s not so hard as you may think. Mr. Vincent has his address, and sooner or later the man must return to his home,—even if secretly. We’ll get him!”

“I can’t understand it—” Vincent looked bewildered, “How did he do it? How did he get the safe open? How did he kill my sister? It is all too unbelievable,—too mysterious—”

“It is!” declared Rosemary, her attitude of sorrowful dejection suddenly giving way to a burst of indignation; “that was to be my ruby! Antan left it to me in her will,—she told me so!”

No one thought the girl mercenary, or criticized her for this speech. It was natural that the news of the theft should call forth such regret from the one whose property it was meant to be.

“Poor child,” said her uncle, “that is true. My sister did intend for you to have the jewel. Will troubles never end, Rosemary?”

“Oh, Uncle, I fear they have only just begun. I—I heard the Harp last night—”

She stopped as a shade of annoyance crossed her uncle’s face.

Homer Vincent always frowned at mention of the mysterious harp. He declared there could be no truth in the tales about it, that no sounds were ever heard from the dense thicket that the townsfolk had dubbed “Spooky Hollow.”

Nor was it an inappropriate name. On either side of the marble Temple were beautiful pine trees and larches, and a background of these threw out the shining whiteness in fine relief. But further back still, was a deep thicket of lower growth, dwarfed trees, tangled shrubs and vines, marshy swamp ground, that, after a long rain, showed dark pools of ooze and murky patches of soggy ground.

Lower than the rest of the estate, it sloped still farther downward to a deep ravine, which, filled with a wild growth, was so picturesque, and also so difficult of access, that Homer Vincent had put off clearing it out to a future time that had not yet arrived.

The unhindered growth of the trees and the rank and luxuriant undergrowth had, of course, taken place during the long years that the house stood vacant, and it was also during this period that the term Spooky Hollow came into use.

Many stories were current of weird sounds heard from the Hollow, of ghostly shapes seen flitting there, of mysterious lights flaring for a moment, now and then.

Many of the townspeople pooh-poohed these stories, but there were many more who believed the reports.

When the Vincents first came, it had been hard to persuade servants to remain with them. But enormous wages and tempting conditions had brought many permanent retainers and Mrs. Mellish's wise government and kindly heart had secured others, so that now a vacancy on the staff was besieged by applicants.

Yet tales persisted of hauntings and apparitions, prominent among them being the stories of a phantom harp that was played upon only on dark nights, and that gave forth long, wailing strains as of a soul in anguish.

As it was a fact that Mrs. Lamont met a violent death in her room, the same one Anne Vincent had occupied, it was not strange that this harp music was attributed to her restless spirit.

Anne Vincent herself had taken no interest in the ghost stories, her hard-headed practicality refusing to credit a word of them.

But she had reluctantly admitted having heard the Harp once or twice, though afterward declaring it must have been her imagination.

Rosemary was uncertain whether she believed in the spooks of Spooky Hollow or not. She had heard, or had thought she heard, the Wild Harp, but she was never inclined to talk on the subject and indeed, except among the servants, it was not often discussed at Greatlarch.

And so, when Rosemary declared she had heard the Harp the night of her aunt's death, Homer Vincent looked at her in astonishment.

"Rosemary," he said, "I beg of you—at such a time—"

"But, Uncle, I did—I did hear it just after I came in—"

"At what time did you come in?" he asked, and then poor Rosemary wished she had not spoken.

But he was quite evidently awaiting an answer, so the girl said, falteringly, "I'm afraid I was a little late,—I didn't mean to be."

"How late?" asked Vincent, inexorably.

"After midnight," and the girl's appealing eyes seemed to beg him not to reprimand her then and there.

Nor did he. With a slight sigh, he merely said, "You know my wishes, Rosemary. I am sorry you so persistently disregard them."

"You came home at midnight, Miss Vincent?" said Brewster, hoping to glean information of some sort.

"Yes; I dined with a friend over on Spruce Hill Road, and she sent me home in her motor. I left the car at our avenue and walked to the house."

"In order to conceal the fact of your late return," observed Vincent.

"Yes, Uncle," Rosemary admitted, and her brown eyes fell before his reproachful gaze.

But Brewster went on: "Tell me, Miss Vincent," he said, "did you see or hear anything unusual when you entered the house?"

"Nothing at all," she replied. "I had my own night key, but I did not use it, as Hoskins had not yet locked the front door."

Brown looked at her closely.

"Miss Vincent," he said, "you did not come directly into the house. You walked around the northwest Tower and back before coming in at the front door."

The girl's face expressed utter amazement.

"That is quite true," she said, "but how ever did you know it?"

Rosemary's face betokened merely surprise, not alarm, but Brown continued to quiz her.

"You paused at the window of that Tower, and stood there some moments. Why did you do that?" His eyes narrowed as he looked at her, and his voice was curiously tense.

Rosemary rather resented this catechism, and then she quickly realized that the detectives had a right to question her, and moreover, that she must tell the truth.

"Tell me how you know I did that, and I'll tell you why I did it," she returned.

Susceptible young Brown was fascinated by the charm of the appealing eyes, and the piquant little face, animated now by curiosity.

"Not a difficult bit of deduction," he said; "I saw footprints in the snow along the front portico and round the Tower when I came this morning. They were made by slender, feminine shoes, and I think now they were yours."

"I daresay," said Rosemary, indifferent now that the mystery was explained. "Well, I stepped around there because I saw by the light that my uncle was probably there, and I wanted to size up my chance of getting into the house unnoticed." Homer Vincent looked at her with disapproval, but Brown suppressed a chuckle.

"Not really afraid of the old man," he silently decided. "Guess his bark is worse'n his bite."

"What was your uncle doing?" asked Brewster, casually.

"He was looking over some papers,—and he had something in his hand that glittered—"

"The two synthetic rubies that Mr. Johnson left with me," Vincent explained. "I will answer queries pertaining to myself, if you please."

Brewster felt a little abashed. Homer Vincent had a gift of making people feel abashed when he chose.

“May I see those rubies, Mr. Vincent?” asked Lane.

“Certainly, I’ll fetch them,” and Vincent left the room.

“Did it look like a ruby, the object your uncle was holding?” Brewster inquired of Rosemary.

The girl looked at him and instinctively disliked his manner.

“My uncle prefers that questions about himself should be addressed to him,” she said, coolly, and again Brown had hard work to repress a smile of amusement at his colleague’s discomfiture.

The two detectives worked harmoniously and in unison, but there was a slight feeling of rivalry that was, perhaps, not to be wondered at. Moreover, both of them were greatly impressed with the gravity of the case, the magnificence of the house, and not least, by the winning personality of Rosemary Vincent.

“Then proceed with your own story, Miss Vincent,” Brewster said, a little curtly. “After looking in on your uncle, did you at once enter the house?”

“Yes, I thought from his manner he was meaning to stay where he was for some time. So I went back to the front door, and softly opened it and slipped in. Well, of all things, if Uncle Homer didn’t start that very minute to go upstairs! I was so afraid he’d see me, I scuttled behind one of the big pillars in the hall, and waited till he passed me. I scarcely dared breathe! But he didn’t hear me,—he went on up the staircase, and—”

“And you followed after a discreet interval.”

“Well, yes,—but in that interval I went to the dining-room and ate a bit of luncheon that Mellish had left there for me.”

A smile of respectful affection crossed the face of the butler as he regarded the girl.

“But you had just come from a dinner party!”

“Oh, but dinner was at seven-thirty, and since then, we had danced till after midnight, and had no other refreshments.”

“I see. Well, then after your supper, you went upstairs?”

Rosemary suddenly saw she was practically on the witness stand.

This did not disturb her, it only served to make her more careful of her statements.

“Yes,” she said, slowly. “I went upstairs, and as it is my habit to stop in my aunt’s room to say good night, if she is awake, I listened at her door. But her regular, deep breathing told me that she was asleep, so I went on to my own apartments.”

“You did not know Mr. Johnson was in the house?”

“No, I had no way of knowing that”

“You saw the night watchman as you came in?”

“Not as I came in, but while I was in the dining-room, Hoskins looked in. We nodded at each other and he went on.”

“May I see Hoskins?” Lane asked, abruptly. Mellish went to summon the watchman, who, though usually asleep at this hour, was still in the servants’ sitting-room, gossiping over events.

He came back with Mellish, and was ready, even anxious, to answer questions.

“Yes, sir,” he informed them, “I saw Miss Rosemary a eatin’ of her little supper, and I went on about my business.”

“Did you see Mr. Johnson walking about the house or grounds through the night?”

“That I did not, or I’d reported it, you may be sure.”

“Is it necessary to report the wanderings if a guest of the house?”

“Well, I’ve never seen this Mr. Johnson they tell of, and if I’d a seen him outside the house, I’d hardly taken him for a guest. We ain’t never had

such guests as that. But if I'd a seen him a walkin' about inside, like as not I'd a supposed he was a visitor and let it go at that. You can't tell just what you'd do in such cases, less'n you're there on the spot."

"Then you saw no sign of anybody at all?"

"No, sir. After Miss Rosemary went upstairs, I saw and heard no human bein' till the stroke of seven sent me in to breakfast. That is, no human, sir."

"You mean to say you saw or heard something supernatural?"

"That's it, sir, the Wild Harp. She broke loose long about two or three o'clock, and such a wailin' sound you never heard!"

"Hoskins," Homer Vincent spoke, as he came into the room again, "you are too sensible to talk like that. There is no truth in those stories of a Wild Harp."

"Have it your own way, sir," and Hoskins cheerfully accepted the mild rebuff.

"There are the rubies, gentlemen," Vincent said, laying two gleaming crimson stones on the table.

"What beauties!" cried Doctor Archer. "Do you mean to tell me these are synthetic? Made by that man, Johnson?"

"So he affirmed. Of course, there'd be no sense in his making a false statement of that sort."

"Oh, Uncle, they're wonderful!" exclaimed Rosemary. "Can't I have one of these now that Antan's ruby is gone?"

"Oh, Miss Rosemary, don't think about foolish gewgaws with your poor aunt lying dead up above us!" Mrs. Mellish showed a horrified surprise on her round, rosy face. "And you gentlemen may search all you wish, you may do all the detective stunts you can pull off, never will you see that Johnson man again, and never will you learn any more about poor Miss Anne's death than you know this minute! For I heard the Wild Harp last night, and it was a funeral dirge it played. The dear lady was killed by a haunt, that she was! Who else could get into her locked

room? Who else could sperrit away Mr. Johnson? Tell me that now! She chose for her own the haunted room,—and she paid the penalty,—did poor Miss Anne!”

## **Chapter VII**

### **Uncle And Niece**

The dreary November afternoon passed, and the shadows lengthened and deepened the gloom that hung over Greatlarch.

The Avenue trees waved their long branches as a souging wind swept through them. The pines sang and whistled and the dense tangle down behind the Mausoleum was black and eerie, more than ever justifying its name of Spooky Hollow. Mrs. Mellish stood staring out of a rear window, almost certain she could hear faint strains of the Wild Harp.

“Come away, now, Susan,” commanded her spouse. “It’s no spook music you’ll hear, savin’ that which you make in your own ears—”

“Hush your blether, Mellish,—I want no coddlin’ from you.” And then, with true feminine inconsistency, she turned to her husband and threw herself into his arms, sobbing convulsively.

“Therey, therey, now, Soodie, cry an ye want to, it’ll do ye good,” and he patted her shoulder and smoothed her hair, and comforted her by his strong protecting arms.

“It’s Miss Rosemary,” Susan said, wiping her eyes. “I can’t stand it to see the child so gone-like. She wanders about, her eyes wide and staring, and that full of sadness!”

“She loved her Antan,—that she did,” and Mellish nodded his gray head. “There’s a terrible moil, Susan. Who killed Miss Anne?—answer me that now!”

“No mortal hand,” and Mrs. Mellish gazed solemnly into space. “Never could a human hand do it, you see, for the door was locked, and the poor lady in there alone. Comes the ghost of the other lady who met her death in that very room, and,—the wicked, evil thing,—she killed our Miss Anne! Or where’s the knife? How could a human, mortal villain kill her



and leave no weepo? Or how get out through a locked door? Answer me that, Mellish, now!”

“No, I can’t. Yet ‘twas no spook, of that I’m certain!”

Susan Mellish held up her finger, listening.

“Hark at the organ, now,” she said; “Master’s fair crazy with his grief!”

The great organ pealed and rolled its melodies through the house. Fugues and dirges of the greatest masters were played with a strong, sure touch and a powerful, agonizing sorrow, like the cry of a lost soul.

One funeral march after another sounded as Homer Vincent strove to quiet his perturbed spirit by the aid of his one great passion—music.

Rosemary stood in the Atrium, looking through the plate-glass doors down across the terrace, across the lagoon to the white Mausoleum and to the black Spooky Hollow beyond it.

She had put on a black dress, of plain and simple cut, and her white arms shone in the dusk as she leaned them up against the window and hid her face upon them.

“If he doesn’t stop that music,” she thought, “I shall go crazy! I never heard him play so like one inspired! It is heartrending, crucifying, yet it has a triumphant note,—like the triumph of Death. Poor Uncle Homer, he must be almost beside himself with grief,—I know by the way he plays. And he has no other solace—I wish he would let me talk to him,—I’d like to talk about Antan—but he doesn’t want me to mention her name—”

And then, through the long shadowy room, lighted only by a faint radiance from the Entrance Hall, came softly a footfall, and Rosemary turned to see Lulie Eaton, her friend whom she had visited the night before.

“Rosemary,” and Lulie put her arms round her, “I want you to go home with me, and stay a few days. At least, until the funeral. Won’t you? It will be so much better for you, and—your uncle won’t mind, will he?”

“I don’t know,” Rosemary hesitated; “it’s good of you, Lulie,—I’d be glad to go,—if I ought to—”

“Of course you ought to,—you owe it to yourself to get out of this atmosphere—oh, have they found out anything—about—”

“About Antan? No, not a thing. The detectives are at their wits’ end, Uncle Homer is nearly distracted—listen to that awful music—”

“It is desperately sad, but, what a wonderful performer he is!”

“Oh, yes,—there, now he is improvising,—that means he’s a little easier in his mind,—let’s go and ask him if I may go with you.”

The two girls went to the organ room, the high walls and domed ceiling giving back the music and making the place seem more than ever like a church.

With a feeling of awe, almost of fear, they tiptoed toward the silent figure on the organ bench.

The light was low, the branches of the tall trees waved against the windows with weird sounds.

Seeing the girls, Vincent paused, slowly trailing his softly touched chords off to nothingness.

“What is it, Rosemary?” he said, wearily pushing back the thick hair from his brow. “How do you do, Miss Eaton?”

Lulie Eaton dared her request.

“Oh, Mr. Vincent,” she said, “I’ve come to take Rosemary home with me for a few days,—mayn’t she go?”

“If she chooses.” Homer Vincent spoke coldly, and again his hands hovered above the keys.

“Oh, Uncle,” Rosemary cried, “I won’t go if you don’t want me to, Uncle Homer. Indeed. I won’t.”

“Would you like to be left alone in this house. Rosemary?” Vincent asked, as, barely touching the keys, he made them sound like a faint echo of a sweet, sad strain.

“No!” and the girl shuddered at the thought.

“Yet you would leave me—”

“But I didn’t know you cared to have me here, Uncle. You don’t like to have me mention Antan, you don’t even talk to me—”

“My dear, there is some grief too deep for words,—yet human companionship is a help and a comfort, even though ordinary conversation is out of the question. And you can help by looking after the house. Can you not fill Antan’s place to a degree? Can you not order the meals and give out supplies,—or, whatever your Aunt did?”

Rosemary smiled a little at his idea of her Aunt’s duties. For, she thought, Miss Vincent did none of these things, the two Mellishes arranged all such details. But Vincent was not the sort of man who knew what was going on in the domestic department.

However, Rosemary sensed the fact that her uncle wanted her to stay by him, if only as a moral support, and though she would have preferred to go with Lulie, yet she felt a certain pride in the idea that he wanted her at home.

Not exactly afraid of her uncle, Rosemary never could quite conquer a feeling of awe of him, and a dread of running counter to his will in any way. But she had long ago learned that if conditions were right, if there was no flaw in the arrangements that made for his creature comfort, she need never look for any but the kindest and most courteous treatment from him. But if any of his orders were not fulfilled accurately, if any meal was a moment late, any course imperfectly cooked or served, any book or smoking-stand moved one iota from its accustomed place, then, as Rosemary had often had occasion to notice, his sister or his niece received, however undeserved, a portion of his reprimand.

So Rosemary declined to go with her friend, and after a short visit, Lulie went off alone.

“What were you two girls talking about?” Vincent asked, as he left the organ and joined Rosemary in the living-room.

The lights were on, now, and the beautiful room was warm and cheerful.

But the girl seemed struck dumb. She blushed and remained silent, raising her troubled eyes to her uncle’s face only to drop them again in confusion.

“I can read your thoughts the same as if you had spoken, my dear,” her uncle said, a tinge of displeasure in his tone. “You talked of young Collins. Has he been here to see you?”

“No, Uncle, not since you forbade it.” Rosemary’s tone was gentle, her voice steady, but in her golden-brown eyes there shone a sudden light, that was rebellious, almost mutinous.

Vincent caught this gleam, and said, in real irritation, “I do think, Rosemary, at this time, when I am in such deep grief, you might be less selfishly inclined to brood sullenly over your own petty grievances. You know my dislike for Bryce Collins, you know I will not hear of your marrying him; why not, then, give over thinking about it?”

“Did you ever love anybody, Uncle?” she asked, quietly, mentally adding, “except yourself!”

Vincent gave her a curious glance, and then said, sadly, “I loved your Aunt Anne. She was my dear sister, and now that she has been so terribly taken away from me,—away from us, I should think, Rosemary, that you would turn your thoughts to your great loss, even if you have no sympathy or sorrow for mine.”

“Oh, Uncle, don’t talk to me like that! I do feel sorry for you, I do grieve for Antan,—oh, I can’t realize she’s gone! What shall I do without her?”

“A very grave question, my child. But now, we must make some necessary arrangements for the funeral. My sister must be buried with the dignity and beauty befitting her life. And you must help, for there are many details to be looked after.”

“Yes, Uncle, anything I can do to help or to lessen your load of care and responsibility, I am glad to undertake.”

“That’s the way to talk, my dear child. Now, listen and I’ll tell you what you can do.”

And when the talk was over, Rosemary found herself weighted down with her share of the errands and arrangements necessary for the obsequies that Homer Vincent deemed appropriate for his sister.

Not that he desired any ostentation or display.

But his directions as to the music, the flowers, the clergyman’s address, the luncheon to be prepared for guests from a distance, and the thousand and one things that he mentioned seemed to Rosemary to make a task both burdensome and difficult.

However, she relied on the Mellishes for much help, and she was so glad to be of some real assistance to her uncle, that she willingly promised all he asked.

And then they drifted into a discussion of the terrible circumstances, as mysterious this minute as they had been early in the morning when the discovery had been made.

“Uncle,” Rosemary cried, “who killed Antan,—and how? I must know those two things or I shall go out of my mind! I can’t conceive of any possible explanation, can you?”

“No, Rosemary, I can’t. It is as great a mystery as it is a tragedy,—and I can’t say any more than that.”

“No, Uncle, we can’t say more than that. But somebody killed her,—that we know. How, then, did he get out of the room, and what did he do with the knife?”

“Those, Rosemary, are the unanswerable questions. And I must say I don’t believe these dunder-headed detectives that are on the job can ever solve the mystery. Do you?”

“Oh, I don’t know anything about such things, Uncle dear. But they do seem unable to discover anything or to suggest anything. Tell me more about that Johnson man, Uncle. Was he a—a gentleman?”

“Why, no, Rosemary, not as we look upon a gentleman. Yet he had decent manners and presentable appearance. I wish I had never seen him!”

“Do you think he killed Antan?”

“How can I say I think so, when I can’t imagine his motive for such a deed. Unless, of course, he stole her ruby. Too bad, dear,—that gem was to have been yours.”

“Yes, I know. But, Uncle, when a strange man comes here, and acts in such an extraordinary manner,—not going to bed at all,—and then mysteriously disappears, and we find Antan dead,—isn’t there logical reason to think maybe he did it?”

“There certainly is, Rosemary, and I shall never rest till we find that man! It must be possible to find him. He can’t have dropped out of existence. But that’s where I thought the detectives would do better work. I supposed they would get on his trail somehow, almost immediately. I thought detectives could always trace a fugitive,—always find a skulking, hiding villain. But they seem not to know which way to turn!”

“Yes, I noticed that. And that Mr. Lane knows even less, I should say.”

“Yes, he’s a numskull. But the little detective, that one called Brown, seems rather alert, and wide-awake, yet he can’t get anywhere, apparently; unless they do something soon, I shall call in a more expert detective.”

“Can you do that? Right over their heads, I mean?”

“I most certainly shall. My sister’s death must be avenged, if any effort of mine can accomplish it. But I do admit it seems a problem impossible of solution.”

“The facts are so irreconcilable,” the girl said, musingly. “I can’t see any conceivable way the deed could have been done, and the room left locked and the weapon missing.”

“Rosemary, there’s only one explanation. But I am not yet quite able to believe in it.” Vincent’s voice was low and his direct gaze was so piercing, that the girl was startled. She felt an uncanny, a sinister presentiment of his meaning.

“Oh, Uncle Homer,” she cried, “you don’t mean—you can’t mean Mrs. Lamont—” She looked over her shoulder, and out the window toward the Temple where once had rested the mortal remains of that other victim.

“I’ve always been a practical hard-headed unbeliever in spiritualism,” Vincent said, slowly, “but I am so staggered by this thing, so puzzled to think of any possible explanation, however improbable, that, as I say, I see no other way to look but toward the supernatural. Yet I will not as yet put myself on record as going over to the spiritualistic belief, only, unless we can unearth some evidence, find some clues, I cannot say what I may do.”

“Uncle Homer,” and Rosemary’s face looked wondering, “I heard the Harp last night.”

“You imagined it, dear. How could you hear what doesn’t exist?”

“But I did,—I’m sure of it. It was between two and three o’clock. I was wakeful, and I was tempted to get up and go to some south window. But I didn’t, and yet, even in my own room, which is north, I heard faintly the low wailing strains of the Wild Harp. Have you never heard it, Uncle?”

“I have sometimes thought I did, child, but I put it down to imagination. Leave me now, Rosemary,—I am very weary, and I must think over some matters by myself.”

So Rosemary went in search of the two Mellishes and they discussed the arrangements for the funeral services of Anne Vincent.

To Rosemary's own surprise, but not to Mrs. Mellish's, it soon transpired that the girl was not at all wise or experienced in household matters. Anne Vincent had been the guiding spirit, the directing hand of the establishment, and though she had occasionally called on her niece for some slight assistance, it was always mere routine work, and carefully under the elder woman's own supervision.

So when the cook began to ask about how many chickens and hams should be prepared for the cold luncheon, and what sweets should be provided, Rosemary found herself quite at sea, and told Mrs. Mellish and her husband to get whatever they deemed best.

"That's all very well," and Melly shook her head; "all very well, Miss Rosemary,—but your uncle won't like it a bit, if you don't fill your aunt's place. Many's the little thing she did for him, many's the time she looked out for him and stood between him and some bit of a bother. Be careful now, Miss Rosemary, to do such things yourself. Keep a constant watch on your uncle. See that everything is ready to his hand when he reaches out his hand to get it—meaning, of course, such as is outside the duties of me and Mellish."

"I don't know what you mean, Melly. What am I to do? Darn his socks,—that sort of thing?"

"That, of course, Miss—and his buttons and all. But hand him a paper or a book that he's glancing about for,—offer to play Russian Bank with him, when he's in just the mood for it,—gather from his symptoms what sort of food he'll want for dinner,—that's the way Miss Anne looked after him."

"Good gracious, Melly, I can't do those things! Why, I don't know how to play that stupid old card game! And I didn't know he had symptoms!"

"You must learn, then, Miss Rosemary." Mellish himself spoke now, and very seriously. "Your uncle is a good man and a kind man if he is comfortable. If not,—oh, well, Miss, you know him!"

"Of course I do. And I know you two look out for all his real wants. I'll do anything I can, of course, but I guess he'll have to diagnose his own symptoms, and select his special foods himself. As to this luncheon, Melly, order whatever you think best. Be sure to have enough, that's all,



for relatives and friends will come from all the country round. And, Melly, I don't know much about ordering and such things. Antan never let me help her much or tried to teach me anything about housekeeping."

"You should know, Miss Rosemary. It's right every young lady should be a housekeeper, such as your aunt, rest her soul, was. Now, if you'll let me, I'll teach you, and you'll soon learn, for you've a quick wit and handy fingers."

"All right, Melly, and we'll begin after all this trouble has cleared up a little. Melly, who killed Antan?"

"The Ghost Lady, Miss Rosemary. Didn't I hear her playin' on her Wild Harp—"

"Why, so did I, Melly. What time did you hear it?"

"As it might be say two or three o'clock of the mornin', Miss."

"That's the very time I heard it! Melly, how could a ghost kill anybody, with a dagger?"

"Likewise, Miss Rosemary, how could a human kill anybody with a dagger, and go away leaving the door locked behind him?"

Mellish, who had mysteriously disappeared, returned and whispered to the girl.

"I opine, Miss Rosemary," he said, softly, "if you was to step out this little back door now,—just step out, you know,—you might—well, just step out now. I opine you won't be sorry."

Having more than a suspicion of what Mellish was opining about, Rosemary stepped out of the small door that gave on an areaway.

As she had hoped, there stood the tall, thin form of Bryce Collins.

"Oh," she whispered, "you ought not to have come—how did you dare?"

"I felt I must see you, Rosemary; it's too utterly absurd to be forbidden the house,—for no reason at all—"

“I know it, Bryce,—but Uncle Homer is terribly upset anyway, and if he sees you—”

“He won’t see me. I just want a few minutes with you, dear. Can’t we go inside,—somewhere?”

“No, I don’t dare. Melly has just been telling me I must look after Uncle Homer as Antan used to. And, surely, I can’t allow anything that he has so positively forbidden. He’d—oh, I don’t know what he’d do!”

“What would he do, dear? Fly in a passion?”

“No, I’ve never seen him do that. But he’d be so displeased, he’d reprove me so—”

“Rosemary, it’s idiotic for a girl twenty-one years old to be so afraid of anybody! Your uncle is not your father, and even if he were—”

“Don’t talk like that, Bryce. He’s the same as a father to me. Ever since my own dear father died, five years ago, Uncle Homer has done all for me that a father could do, and more than a great many fathers do. I’ve seen the other girls,—their fathers aren’t half as good to them as Uncle is to me. And now Antan is gone, I owe it to him to be obedient and to observe all his commands.”

“Don’t you love me, dear?”

Bryce Collins was a tall, slender man, but his physique showed strength, and his bearing was that of an assured, determined nature.

His deep blue eyes were honest and straightforward, and his smooth-shaven face showed a chin that betokened will power to the point of stubbornness. And Collins was stubborn. He clung to an opinion or a determination like a puppy to a root, and he never gave up.

Now, at twenty-six, he was an insistent suitor of Rosemary Vincent, but his plea was denied by her uncle.

Homer Vincent gave no reason for his decision,—it was not his habit to give reasons,—but he declared it was final. To Rosemary he said she was too young to think of marriage yet, and he preferred that she should never marry. He hinted that he and his sister Anne had been much

happier in their lives than their brother, Rosemary's father, who had married young. In any case, he told the girl she must give up all thought of Bryce Collins, and, unable to do otherwise, Rosemary had submitted to his decree.

And as the girl was by no means of a sly or deceitful nature, she obeyed the spirit of her uncle's dictum as well as the letter.

That is, she did so, as far as she could; but Collins, with his indomitable will and his firm determination, would not let her give him up finally, unless she would tell him she did not care for him.

This Rosemary could not do, for she loved Bryce, and hoped against hope, that some day her uncle would relent

Now, in view of the tragedy that hung over the house, Rosemary was more than ever afraid to have Collins' presence known, and yet, never before had she felt so strong a wish, a need, for his presence.

And his gentle tone, his whispered question, seemed to take away all her power of resistance.

"Yes," she said, "I love you," and eagerly he clasped her in his waiting arms.

"Bless her heart! Whatever is coming to her?" and wiping her eyes, Melly turned from the window, where she had been watching the pair.

## **Chapter VIII**

### **Spooky Hollow**

Twenty-four hours had elapsed since the funeral of Anne Vincent, and the mystery of her death was no nearer solution than it had been the moment her body was found.

None of the relatives or friends who had attended the simple but beautiful services had been asked to tarry at the house.

Homer Vincent had no desire to have them do so, and though several had dropped hints betokening their wish to stay on for a visit, they had

met with no responsive invitation and had reluctantly taken their departure.

He sent for Brewster and Brown and asked for their report.

“I have to confess, Mr. Vincent,” Brewster said, “that we are up against it. We are convinced that the strange visitor, Mr. Johnson, is responsible for the death of your sister, but we can form no theory that will fit the facts. We have examined the bedroom, and we find there is absolutely no means of entrance or exit, save that one door. The windows have patent ventilators that admit air without leaving possible space for an intruder. The lock of the door is burst in such a fashion as to show clearly that it was locked on the inside and could only be opened by force. We have tried every possible suggestion of suicide, and find that theory untenable, because there is no weapon in evidence. Miss Vincent could not have killed herself and then disposed of the dagger, for the death blow was instantly fatal,—we have the doctor’s assurance for that.”

“I am very sure,” Homer Vincent said, “that my sister did not kill herself. She had no motive for such a deed,—I left her that evening in the best of spirits and she was looking forward to the matter we were to confer about the next day. And, as you say, it could not have been suicide, as there has been no weapon found. I assume you made a thorough search of the bedding—”

“Oh, yes, I attended to that myself. No, suicide is out of the question.”

“I suppose,—” Vincent spoke a little diffidently. “I suppose you hard-headed detectives wouldn’t consider the—er,—the supernatural for a moment.”

“No, sir!” declared Brown, “not for a moment! I’ve been a detective too long to suspect a spook as long as there are human beings upon this earth. Miss Vincent was murdered by a knife held in a hand of flesh and blood! The motive was robbery,—robbery of her valuable ruby. The criminal is, of course, the man named Johnson, the ruby manufacturer. I can reconstruct the crime as it must have been—but, I confess, I can’t see how it could have been so!”

“What do you mean by ‘reconstruct the crime’?” Vincent asked, curiously.

“Why, I mean, that evening, after you left Mr. Johnson in his room, he came out of it, later,—probably walked round the house a bit, reconnoitering, and laid his plans to murder Miss Vincent as soon as the first faint light of dawn gave him opportunity. He did this, and then slipped out of the house, while the watchman was at his breakfast and the other servants about their work.”

“Logical enough,” Vincent said, “except for the seemingly impossible feat of getting in and out of that locked room.”

“There you have it, Mr. Vincent,” Brewster exclaimed. “That’s right,—*seemingly* impossible feat. It wasn’t impossible, because he did it,—he had to do it, there’s no other explanation. Now, the thing is to find out how he did it, and the only way to do that is to catch him and ask him. Nobody knows but himself, so he must do the explaining.”

“That sounds plausible, Mr. Brewster. Now, can you find him? He has four days’ start. May he not be far away by this time,—perhaps out at sea?”

“That’s true, Mr. Vincent, but all we can do is to hunt him down. Perhaps he can be found even if he is on an ocean steamer. Indeed, that would be one of the easiest hiding places to track down. But, and this is not an easy thing to say,—we can’t do it. Mr. Brown and I have done all we could, so far, but for a big hunt like this must be, we require the machinery, the facilities of a larger police department, of more experienced investigators.”

“I daresay,” Vincent nodded in agreement. “In fact, I had thought of proposing the plan of putting the matter up to some one else. Whom do you suggest?”

“The Burlington police. Not only have they a well-equipped Detective Bureau, but they have one man in especial, whose forte seems to be delving into mysteries that defy solution by others. His name is Prentiss, but so keen is he, so sharp-sighted, he is called the Burlington Hawkeye.”

Homer Vincent gave an involuntary smile. “Why, that is a celebrated paper of quite another Burlington!”

“Yes, it’s only a nickname. Well, what do you say, sir? Shall we call him in?”

“By all means. As I told you, I wish to spare no effort, no expense, in my endeavor to avenge my sister’s death. I suppose this man will come in the interests of the Police, but if it is any better or more advisable to engage him personally, I will do so.”

“We’ll see about that, sir. If he succeeds, you can, of course, give him an honorarium. He is a wizard,—I’ll say that for him, but I can’t see him solving this case,—it’s too strange!”

However, when Prentiss arrived, he gave the impression that he certainly could solve that case or any other.

Not that the man was bumptious or unduly conceited, but he had an air of self-reliance, of self-assuredness, that carried weight by its mere physical effect.

Homer Vincent regarded him with curiosity, that turned to respect and then to entire satisfaction.

He had a long talk with him, and Prentiss earnestly declared his ability to find the murderer.

“There’s a mystery,” he said; “I am here to solve it. There’s a seeming impossibility,—I am here to explain it. There’s a missing man,—I am here to find him.”

If Vincent thought the man too sure of himself or his powers, he did not say so, and merely nodded approval of such determination.

The Burlington Hawkeye was not an impressive-looking man, in fact, he was rather inconspicuous. Medium height, average figure, unimportant coloring, his appearance was saved from absolute nonentity by his piercing, darting eyes. These eyes were of the color sometimes called beryl or topaz. Also, they were a trifle prominent, and were so quick of motion, so glinting of shine, that they made remarkable an otherwise negligible face.

He shot a glance of inquiry at Vincent, as if to ask his recognition of his powers.

But Homer Vincent was not accustomed to bestow praise.

“I am glad to learn of your enthusiasm,” he conceded, “and I am ready and willing to do anything at all I can to help you. But I must ask that you will not disturb me unnecessarily. While I am most anxious to have the mystery of my sister’s death solved, most eager to find that man Johnson, yet I am not at all interested in the details of the search, nor do I want uncertain or partial reports. When you have learned beyond doubt some important fact, acquaint me with it, but do not come to me with trifling discoveries that may or may not mean anything. Am I clear?”

“Yes, Mr. Vincent, perfectly so. I understand. In fact, I have been told you are a recluse and wish no unnecessary communications with your fellow-men.”

“That is perhaps an exaggerated way to put it,” Vincent observed, calmly, “yet for your own edification, it is perhaps the best way. Yes, you may look upon me in that light, Mr. Prentiss. However, that does not mean that I do not want to be told of anything you may discover of real importance. And if you are uncertain as to the value of your news, refer it to Mellish, my butler. He is entirely in my confidence, and often stands between me and what you have termed my fellow-men.”

If Prentiss had expected to jar the calm of Homer Vincent by his outspokenness, he must have been disappointed, for Vincent seemed rather pleased than otherwise at the implication of retirement.

Sensing this, the detective resolved to get all the information possible at this time, for it might prove difficult to get future interviews.

“Will you describe Johnson, please?” he asked.

“He is a very dark man, both as to hair and skin. He is as good-looking as the average citizen and has an air of business alertness and executive ability.”

“What is his business?”

“Aside from this plan of manufacturing synthetic rubies, I know of none. It is probable he has some other calling, for he appeared a well-dressed, well-set-up man, as if accustomed to a competency but not wealth. He put his business proposition to my sister and myself with a straightforward manner and a fair and equal arrangement of profits.”

“You were to finance the thing?”

“Yes; and my sister wished also to take a share in it. She had a fortune equal to my own, and was anxious to invest in this new scheme.”

“What disposition did your sister make of her fortune?”

“She left no will. Neither she nor I have ever made one. We agreed that as whichever of us died first would legally inherit the estate of the other, a will was unnecessary for either of us.”

“And Miss Rosemary Vincent?”

“The question of her inheritance has not yet been brought up. It is true that my sister intended our niece should have her great ruby,—but alas! that gem is missing. It may be, however, that if you find Johnson you can recover the ruby. In that case, it will, of course, belong to my niece. As to my niece’s fortune or prospects, we need not take up that subject at this time. Sufficient to say that she is under my care, and I shall guard and protect her interests. Now, Mr. Prentiss, I will ask you to excuse me from further conversation. Mellish will show you the room Mr. Johnson occupied; it is still untouched, I think. He will also show you my sister’s room and the rest of the house and grounds. Or he will depute some one to do so. You may command him in any way you choose.”

“Thank you, Mr. Vincent. I can’t help hoping for success in this investigation. It is conceded among our profession that the more strange and bizarre conditions appear, the more impossible the correlation of facts seems to be,—the easier of solution a mystery is. This may or may not be literally true, but at any rate it is true in part.”

“You most certainly have contradictory conditions in this case; you surely have strange and bizarre situations. Go to it, then, Mr. Prentiss, and advise me when you have achieved some definite success.”



But the Burlington Hawkeye was not so easily shaken off.

“One more thing, Mr. Vincent,” he said. “What about this Wild Harp? Have you ever heard it?”

“I should be sorry to put myself on record as a believer in the supernatural,” Vincent looked as if the matter were distasteful to him, “but I will say this much. If there are occult forces, if there are deeds done without the intervention of human agency, then, Mr. Prentiss, then I must say this looks like such a case. But, mind you, I do not say that there are. I do not state that I believe my sister met her death by supernatural means,—but I own I cannot explain the circumstances by any natural procedure. Also, I think you ought to know that the place is reputed haunted, and that the room my sister occupied was the room of a previous mistress of the house, who was also found dead in her bed there. It is said that her spirit has haunted this place ever since her death, but of these tales I am no sponsor. I merely mention them because I think you ought to hear of them from me, rather than from the silly townspeople. They have dubbed the place ‘Spooky Hollow’ and they claim to have seen ghostly figures and to have heard ghostly voices.”

“This brings us back to the Wild Harp. Have you ever heard it?”

Homer Vincent hesitated. Then he said, “Mr. Prentiss, I am no authority on the subject. The truth is, music is my passion. Not only do I play on my organ frequently, but when I am not playing I seem to hear the strains of my favorite compositions. They ring in my ears to such an extent that I am as conscious of them as when I am actually hearing them. And so, if I say that I have heard, or think I have heard, this so-called Wild Harp, you must remember that I am also willing to admit that it may easily be only my memories of music I have played, or that it is some of the harmony with which my brain is always teeming.”

“I see—and yet you are willing to say that at times you have thought or imagined that you heard the Harp music?”

“Yes, I am willing to say that. But I insist that you do not lay too much stress upon it in your deductions. For I object to being set down as a spiritualist when I am far from certain that I really do believe at all in such things.”

“I see. Now, one thing more, Mr. Vincent. Will you describe to me this woodland down back of the Temple—the part of your estate that they definitely call Spooky Hollow? What is it like?”

“It is a densely wooded area, full of low, tangled underbrush and containing, also, tall pines, larches, and spruces. There are, too, some white birches, which, I make no doubt, are the shapes the frightened townsfolk have diagnosed as spooks.”

“Doubtless that is true. And the ground—is it wet—swampy?”

“A little marshy, I believe. I’ve never been down in it, but I think it is wet, and I purpose having it drained and reclaimed.”

“Is it damp enough, marshy enough, to have bogs or quagmires? I’m wondering, you see, if Johnson could have wandered down there and could have gone into the swamp and have been sucked in by the quaking bog.”

Vincent looked up in surprise.

“Oh, I don’t think the swamp is as bad as that! Hardly of the quicksand variety,—if that is what you mean. But ask Mellish about it, he will know the details of it far better than I do. And I scarcely think Johnson would have gone out of doors,—I mean to walk about. He was entranced with my house, and wished to examine its architecture and marbles. But I can’t think he went outside until, his fell aim accomplished, he went out to run away.”

“He left coat and hat behind him?”

“Yes, that is one of the strange features of the case.”

“Had he an umbrella?”

Vincent pondered. “I really don’t know. If so, doubtless Mellish took it from him and cared for it. Can you gather nothing from his hat or coat? I thought such things carried meanings for detectives.”

“Possibly. I haven’t examined them yet. Now, Mr. Vincent, you don’t know of any other possible reason for Mr. Johnson to kill your sister except robbery? Could he have been an old-time suitor of hers, or a

crank, an anarchist, or even a homicidal maniac? Did his conversation hint any such thing?"

"I never thought of such explanations," and Vincent looked bewildered. "No, of course he was not an old beau,—ridiculous! My sister never saw him before,—of that I am positive. Nor did he seem like an anarchist,—or a homicide. He was normal in manner and conversation. I object to talking of business affairs at the dinner-table. I do not think it good for digestion. But our conversation was on usual, ordinary subjects. Mr. Johnson did not seem an educated man, in a cultural sense, but he seemed a thorough man of the world, of fairly wide experiences, and good judgment."

"He said nothing of his life or affairs, outside the ruby business?"

"No; our talk was impersonal. He knew little of music, and I know of no subject that specially interested him. I'm sorry, Mr. Prentiss, but I can tell you nothing definite concerning his personality. If I could, I should have told it long ago."

"Of course, of course. Well, Mr. Vincent, I will go about my work. By the way, you have confidence in all your servants?"

"Absolute confidence in Mellish, my butler, and his wife, who is my cook. Also in Francine, the little French girl who was maid to my sister, and who also attends on my niece. She may seem like a shallow-pated little thing, but she was devoted to Miss Vincent and truly mourns for her now."

"Yes, yes, I will talk with her. Good morning, Mr. Vincent."

"Ah, one moment, Mr. Prentiss. I shall not ask you to make your home at Greatlarch while you are conducting your investigations. It would not please me to know of your continued presence here. But, pray feel free to come and go as you like, and refer all questions to Mellish."

Assenting to this, the Burlington Hawkeye took his leave of the master of the house and went in search of the servants.

"Umbrella, sir? yes, sir," said Mellish, in response to the inquiry of Prentiss. "Mr. Johnson did carry an umbrella and I did take it from him

that day, and never again did it occur to my rememory! I put it, of course, in the coat room, in the umbrella cupboard, and there, I make me no doubt, it still is. I'll see, sir."

In a moment, Mellish returned, bringing triumphantly a good-looking and carefully-rolled umbrella.

Prentiss looked at it with interest.

"You can learn a lot from an umbrella," he said. "First, I deduce a careful, tidy sort of person, accustomed to take good care of his belongings. A knob handle, not a crook, denotes a fastidious or particular person. Nine out of ten umbrellas have crook handles."

"Do they now, sir?" asked Mellish, much interested.

"Of good quality silk," Prentiss went on, "black, fairly new, made by—" He opened it and read the name of a well-known New York haberdasher.

"H'm, we ought to trace it through that firm—"

"Trace an umbrella, sir, as any one might buy—"

"Ah, but you see our man had this marked. See, H. J., the initials intertwined. Now, if we can trace up that order—"

"You'll find out that Henry Johnson had his umbrella marked there, but how will that tell you where to look for him now?"

"Every bit of information we can get is important when hunting a missing man. Put it away, Mellish,—or suppose we take it up to the room Johnson had when he was here. Yes, that will be best."

The two went up to the room Johnson had occupied. But as he had only tidied up for dinner, not having evening clothes with him, there was little to notice and but few things disturbed at all.

Prentiss went over the scanty array of clothing in the bag.

"Come now, Mellish, you're by way of being a valet, wouldn't your master take more than that when going on a journey?"

“That he would, sir. Mr. Vincent’s overnight bag holds as much as a small trunk.”

“Just so, and I deduce our friend here didn’t expect to stay the night.”

“Maybe so, sir. Maybe he thought he could do up the business in a short time.”

“Yes; strange he left no papers, no letters, or memoranda of any kind.”

“Mr. Vincent has all the papers about the ruby construction business, sir. Mr. Johnson left all those with Mr. Vincent that night.”

“Yes, but I mean other papers. You’ve not cleared out any, Mellish?”

“Oh, no, sir. Not a thing in this room has been disturbed. Orders, sir.”

“And that turned-down bed is just as the housemaid left it?”

“Exactly, sir. But she’d be for tidying up his brushes and that, at the same time. So as one of the brushes is out of line, and there’s a towel or so rumpled up in the bathroom, I take it the man was in his room after the confab with Mr. Vincent in the evening.”

“Oh, yes, and beside, Mr. Vincent brought him up to his room, you know, and said good night to him.”

“Did he now? That’s a deal for the master to do for any guest!”

“Mr. Vincent not given to putting himself out for anybody?”

“That he is not. Mr. Vincent prefers that people put themselves out for him.”

“But a good master, eh?”

“Never a better. Given that things go right.”

“The place will go on just the same, now that the lady is not here?”

“Oh, yes; leastways, I suppose so. My wife, now, she can run the house as Mr. Vincent wants it, and I doubt not Miss Rosemary will help look after things.”

“Miss Rosemary? She’s a niece?”

“Yes, sir; her father, Mr. Vincent’s brother, died five years since, and Miss Rosemary then came here to live.”

“She has money of her own?”

“I take it she has, sir. She never lacks for anything she wants. But money is not talked of in this house. They are no purse-proud upstarts. Mr. Vincent wants only what’s comfortable and to his wishes, naught for show or ostentatious purposes.”

“That’s fine. And Miss Anne was the same?”

“The very same, sir. Though whatever Mr. Vincent was, of course Miss Anne would be. And Miss Rosemary, too.”

“Yes. And, now, Melish, what about the Wild Harp?”

A slight smile hovered on the man’s features.

“Well, sir, I’d not say as there is any truth in them stories. They are what you might call—imaginative,—yes, sir, merely imaginative.”

“But some people have heard the weird strains.”

“They think they have, sir,—but, well, you know yourself, it couldn’t be. How could a harp be for making music, when there’s no harp there and no hand to pull its strings?”

“But a phantom harp,—and a phantom hand to touch the strings—”

“Nay, nay, sir. Nothing of the sort. All old woman’s tales. All made-up yarns,—that’s what they are.”

“And all made up about the visitations of Mrs. Lamont’s spirit?”

“Of course, sir. Take it truly, sir, you waste your time a looking for the spooks of Spooky Hollow.”

“Then, Melish, then who killed Miss Anne?”

“It was that Johnson, sir. Yes, sir, he’s the villain, the criminal, the anathema maharajah!”

And Mellish’s solemn face and tense, strained voice kept Prentiss from laughing at his queer, mistaken words.

## **Chapter IX**

### **A Living Tragedy**

The Burlington Hawkeye bided his time to obtain an interview with Rosemary when he could see her alone. He felt considerable curiosity about the girl and wanted to learn some personal facts concerning her.

Rosemary Vincent had been what is sometimes called buffeted by Fate. But the buffetings had been so gentle and the girl so well protected, she had never felt them definitely.

She still had delightful memories of a childhood spent in Paris, of a devoted mother and doting father, who might easily have spoiled her had she been of a less loving and lovable disposition. Naturally obedient and dutiful, always sunshiny and happy, her life was uneventful until, when she was ten years old, her mother died.

But the broken-hearted child was so petted and entertained by her father that her life again became happy and her mother merely a beloved memory.

Moreover, her father, soon after his wife’s death, was sent by his business firm to America to establish a branch business in Seattle.

This pleased Carl Vincent, who was glad to return to his native land, although in a hitherto unfamiliar portion of it.

He grew to like the Seattle climate and people, and contentedly remained there, bringing up his daughter in kindly and well-conditioned circumstances.

Carl Vincent became a very rich man, but of this Rosemary had no knowledge or thought. Vincent deemed it best to keep the girl to her simple tastes and ways, and though their home was delightfully

appointed, it was by no means magnificent or of a grandeur commensurate with Vincent's income.

Then, when his daughter was sixteen years old, Carl Vincent was killed in a motor accident.

The tragedy was a terrible one, and the girl was not even allowed to see her dead father.

Immediately Homer Vincent went out to Seattle, from his home in Burlington, Vermont, where he was then living.

He tenderly cared for the orphaned girl and took her back home with him as soon as the business matters consequent on his brother's death could be completed.

Anne Vincent, whom Rosemary lovingly called Antan, welcomed her niece warmly, and again Rosemary's acute grief was diverted by the scenes and experiences of her new home.

She deeply mourned her father, but Rosemary Vincent was an eager, vivid spirit, a life and laughter-loving girl, and she quickly became a favorite among the young people and neighbors.

Then, six months later, Homer Vincent bought the huge mansion of Greatlarch, and the three moved there.

Rosemary loved the house as much as her uncle did. Her Paris memories made her appreciate the full charm of the old French chateau, and her own beauty-loving nature made her feel at home in the marble halls.

Uncle and aunt were kind and loving to their niece, but Rosemary found her freedom a bit curtailed. Her father had let her do everything she wished, for she had never desired the inadvisable, in his opinion.

But Uncle Homer was more stringent in his commands. The girl could have her own way in many instances, but if her ways interfered in the slightest with Homer Vincent's personal inclinations, Rosemary must give them up.



She did not openly rebel; in fact, she felt she owed willing obedience to her kind uncle, but at times her patience gave out, and her disappointments made her petulant.

Especially in the matter of young visitors at Greatlarch. Rosemary wanted dances and house parties, and girl friends for long visits. But these were banned by Uncle Homer, because the laughter and chatter of a lot of young people disturbed the restful calm that he wished to pervade the household.

It had been tried a few times, with results embarrassing to the guest and heartbreaking to Rosemary.

Aunt Anne had interceded for her niece, had begged her brother to indulge the girl, at least occasionally, but Vincent was firm. It was his house, therefore, his castle. He had a right to order it as he chose, and it was Rosemary's duty to obey.

His calm air of finality, which was never absent from him, made his rules adamant, and Rosemary gave up the struggle and succumbed to a solitary life in her home, though getting much enjoyment from social gayeties elsewhere.

Though, here again, she was handicapped by her uncle's insistence on her early homecoming. This brought about a slyness and secrecy, quite foreign to Rosemary's nature, but developed by her love of dancing and of young society.

And by the help of Hoskins and the connivance of the two Mellishes, all of whom adored her, Rosemary managed to stay at most parties until they were over.

Another thorn in her flesh was the trouble about Bryce Collins.

Though Homer Vincent had no definite objection to the young man, he expressed his strong disapproval of Rosemary's marriage with any one. Of this stand he gave no explanation, his usual manner being such that explanations never seemed necessary. His word was law, unquestionable and immutable.

Yet Vincent was not a stern or awe-inspiring personality. If things were going as he wished,—and they usually were,—he was not only amiable, but charming and entertaining.

He was subject to moods, which must be observed and humored by his household. He made laws which must be obeyed. He gave orders which must be carried out. These things done, Homer Vincent was the most gracious of hosts, the most generous of brothers and uncles.

And all this, the Burlington Hawkeye learned from Rosemary Vincent when he asked her to go for a brisk walk with him, around the grounds of Greatlarch.

The girl, with her responsive disposition, liked Prentiss at once. He had an ingratiating manner, and a pleasant air of courteous deference. The stare of his slightly prominent eyes was often veiled by lowered lashes, and under the influence of his discreet but leading questions, Rosemary told him all about her life, past, present, and future, so far as she knew it.

“And your father was the brother of Mr. and Miss Vincent?” he asked, interestedly.

“Yes, their youngest brother. And the dearest man! Dad had the best traits of Uncle Homer and Antan, and none of their faults.”

“And he was very rich, wasn’t he?”

“Why, yes,—I suppose so. I never thought much about that. I’ve always had all the money I wanted, but I’m not an extravagant person.”

“But you must be an heiress. You must inherit your father’s fortune, don’t you?”

“I suppose so. Probably he left it to the three of us.”

“Do you mean to say you don’t know? Don’t know anything about your own finances?”

Rosemary laughed outright.

“Is that strange?” she said; “well, then, it’s true. I don’t know a thing about money matters—but I do know this. Antan’s great ruby was to be mine, and now that horrid Johnson man has stolen it! Oh, don’t think I am heartless to think of it, but you know how I do mourn dear Antan, and it seems awful that he should have taken the ruby, too!”

“Are you fond of jewels?”

“Not specially, but that stone was a favorite of mine,—and it is a wonderful stone,—it has a history—”

“Miss Vincent, do you believe in hauntings,—in,—well, in spooks?”

“Oh, I do and I don’t. It’s too absurd to think a ghost killed Antan,—and yet, how could a mortal get in—and get out?”

“Well, just granting that a mortal could do that,—suppose a skeleton key or something like that,—whom would you suspect?”

“Why, that Mr. Johnson, of course. He was a clever burglar,—he just took that means of hoodwinking Uncle Homer,—the ruby-making business, I mean.”

“Yes, it would seem so. But why didn’t he steal anything else? Wasn’t there other jewelry of your aunt’s about?”

“I daresay; but nothing to compare in value to that. Why, do you know that a ruby is worth three times as much as a diamond of the same size? And Antan’s ruby was enormous!”

“Where did she get it?”

“Bought it herself,—soon after I came here to live.”

“Well, Miss Vincent, I truly think, now that you and your uncle are left alone, you ought to have some sort of a financial settlement. From what you tell me, I am sure you have an independent fortune, and it ought to be settled upon you. Aren’t you of age?”

“Twenty-one last birthday.”

“Then you should see to it at once. Doubtless your uncle is going to attend to it shortly, but don’t let him delay.”

“Why, Mr. Prentiss?” the girl asked, curiously “I am well provided for. All my bills are paid without question, all my wants supplied unhesitatingly.”

“Oh, well, perhaps it’s a matter of no immediate importance. You may as well wait until after this awful mystery is solved.”

“Will it ever be solved? Can you find that Johnson man? Where can he be? Where do you think, Mr. Prentiss? They call you a Hawkeye, has your sharp eyesight yet discerned anything?”

“I know that Mr. Johnson has five or six days’ start of me, and that in that time he could get to the ends of the earth,—with his ruby!”

“Don’t call it his ruby,—it’s mine,—and I hope you are going to get it back for me.”

The girl’s topaz-colored eyes looked into those of Prentiss. Her eyes were not unlike his own in tints, but while his were round and staring, hers were deep-set and expressive. Her long lashes were golden-brown, like her hair, and her whole face was suggestive of the russet and gold glory of an autumn day. Her clear, olive skin was tanned by a summer in the sun, and her red-brown hair showed golden light in its clustering curls that shone like copper or deepened to dusky bronze.

Her principal characteristic was an effect of vivid life. Her glance was direct, her face animated, her lithe, graceful gestures indicative of vitality and enthusiasm.

Perception and responsiveness shone in her eyes and her scarlet, sensitive lips quivered with a bewildering charm.

A fleeting, evanescent dimple showed only when she was deeply amused, but whoever once saw it used every effort to bring it forth again.

Though too intelligent not to have a subconsciousness of her own beauty, Rosemary was not vain or conceited over it.

She accepted it as she did food or sunlight, and gave it no more definite thought. Full of the joy of living, absorbed in her daily duties and pleasures, she went her way like a wise butterfly, taking no heed of the morrow in the occupations of the day.

Her trivial troubles were those caused by her uncle's restrictions on her freedom, and her only real trouble, and that just dawning, was his refusal to recognize Bryce Collins as her possible suitor.

The pair were in love with that first flush of youthful affection that is none the less real because of its ignorance and inexperience.

Rosemary had liked other boys, had felt an interest in other young men, but until she knew Bryce Collins, she had never felt the personal attachment, the mating thrill, that is the precursor of true love.

Moreover, she admired Collins from an intellectual viewpoint. She appreciated his mentality, and liked his casual traits. She adored his big, strong manliness, and she was beginning to love him with a sense of reciprocation of his own affection for her.

Their love was dawning, budding, just ready to spring into full light, to burst into full blossom, when it was thwarted by Homer Vincent's decree against it.

Nor was Bryce Collins ready to submit tamely to the dictum. He openly rebelled, while Rosemary, uncertain of the wisdom of defying her uncle, was waiting to see what would happen.

Antan had been her niece's ally, in secret, but Anne Vincent would never dream of opposing her brother's decisions.

And now, even Antan's support was gone, and Rosemary began to think she must do something definite about it all.

Her nature felt a strong distaste to secret meetings with Collins. Her father had brought her up to strict honesty and a hatred of deceit. Her little evasions about late homecoming or casual meetings with Bryce at other girls' houses, she condoned to herself as trifles. But now a real dilemma confronted her.

She was left the only helpmeet in her uncle's home; the only overseer and housekeeper for him to depend on in the matter of his small habits and peculiar comforts. If she were to desert him, he would be left entirely to the care of paid servants, and after all he had done for her, Rosemary's soul rebelled at the thought of ingratitude.

And yet,—there was Bryce,—growing dearer and more lovable every day. And with her growing love, came growing womanhood, growing desire for her chosen mate, for her own life partner.

And perhaps egged on by her talk with Prentiss, Rosemary decided to have a talk with her uncle.

She found him in his own Tower room, and to her satisfaction his mood was a composed and apparently pliable one.

“I want a talk, Uncle Homer,” she said, as he held a chair for her. “A serious talk.”

Rosemary was glancing about the room, and a sudden thought struck her.

“Uncle Homer,” she exclaimed, “what were you hiding in a secret panel the night,—the night Antan died?”

Homer Vincent's face showed his amazement.

“What do you mean?” he asked, blankly.

“Yes, when I came home,—oh, I was late,—you were putting something away in a secret panel, in this room. Some papers and also something that shone like gold.”

“Well, Rosemary, even if I was doing that, it doesn't really concern you, and in fact, I don't remember the circumstance. But what is your serious talk about? Bryce Collins?”

“Yes, Uncle,” and the girl bravely stated her case. Fortified by the advice of Prentiss, she asked concerning her own financial affairs, and declared that, being of age, she had a right to know these things.

Homer Vincent drew a long sigh, and regarded his niece with a look that was both sad and sympathetic.

“I’m glad, in a way, Rosemary, that you have brought up this subject. I’ve been trying to get up my courage to broach it to you for a long time, but I couldn’t bear to disturb your happy, girlish content.”

From his tone, rather than his words, Rosemary sensed trouble, and she looked up quickly to find her uncle regarding her with real sorrow in his deep gray eyes.

“What is it, Uncle Homer?” she cried, paling in an intuitive premonition of an unpleasant disclosure of some sort. “Don’t condemn Bryce unheard!” for the poor child could think of no other ill news.

“No, Rosemary, what I have to tell you now is in no way connected with young Collins, though it may have a bearing on your friendship for him. Child, I don’t know how to begin.”

“Is it so very disagreeable?” she asked, wonderingly. “Then get it over quickly,—I’ll be brave.” And she had need of bravery, for this was the tale he told,—the secret he revealed.

“Then, to put it baldly,—plainly, Rosemary,—you are not—you are not really the child of your supposed parents. You are adopted.”

“What!” There seemed to be nothing else to say, and Homer Vincent did not repeat his statement, for he knew she had heard.

Her mind raced, her quick perceptions realized everything in one blinding flash.

Not her parents’ child! Merely an adopted daughter! Whose?

“Don’t look like that, Rosemary, listen to the story.”

“But it can make no difference. What are details? If I am not the daughter of my dear father—and my angel mother—who am I?”

Her cry rang out, like the shriek of a lost soul. Her emotional nature was stirred to its depths for the first time in her happy young life.

“Go on,” she cried, inconsistently; “tell me the rest! Who am I?”

“Try to be quiet, dear, and let me tell you. My brother Carl married a lovely woman named Mary Leslie. A little child was born to them, but died almost immediately. My sister-in-law, sadly stricken, wanted to adopt a baby in its place. My brother approved of this, and so, Rosemary, they took you from an orphan asylum. And they brought you up as their own child, they loved and cared for you, and, as they never had any other children, they lavished real parental devotion on you, as no one knows better than you do yourself.”

“Oh, I do know it!” and Rosemary moaned between her interlaced fingers. “But I can’t believe it, Uncle! I can’t sense it! Not the daughter of my dear, dear father! Why, he loved me so—”

“Yes, that’s what I said,—they both loved you like a real child of their own,—I know they did.”

“Who else knew of this? Antan?”

“Yes, of course she knew it, but no one else at all. That is, except the asylum authorities. Your parents,—for I shall continue to call them so,—lived in Paris at that time, and you were taken from a small and exclusive orphanage—”

“Do you know who I was? Did they know? Oh, Uncle, I can’t stand it! It’s too dreadful—”

“Dear Rosemary, don’t overrate the thing. It is a shock to you, of course, but remember I’ve known it all your life,—so did your Aunt Anne,—so, of course, did your parents. Did it make any difference in our love for you? In our treatment of you? Never. And it will make no difference now. The only difference is that you know it yourself, and I deem it wise that you do know. As I said, I’ve been thinking for some time that I ought to tell you,—it is your right to know—”

“My right! I have no rights! I have no birthright, even—no name! Uncle, I can’t stand it! I shall kill myself—”

“Hush, Rosemary,” Vincent commanded, sternly. “Never say a thing like that again. You’re over-excited now,—you are stunned at this news,—but



you will get used to it,—you must get used to it. You have your life to live—”

“I have no life to live! I have no name—no hope—no—”

“Unless you can calm yourself, my dear, I must ask you to leave me until you attain some degree of composure. I want to talk to you about several things, about your prospects, about your future, but I cannot talk with a girl who rants and screams in nervous paroxysms.”

“Forgive me, Uncle,” and Rosemary’s habit of obedience came to her aid. “I will try to be calm,—I will talk rationally,—but—I mean, I will if I can.”

The poor child strove vainly for composure, but her quivering sobs were persistent, and her tears would not stop.

Ignoring them then, Homer Vincent continued. “I will take this opportunity to tell you some further truths, Rosemary, for I don’t want to repeat a scene like this if we can help it. Let us, therefore, talk it all over now, and do try,—make an earnest effort to stop that convulsive crying.”

“Yes, Uncle. Tell me, first of all, do you know who I am?”

“No, Rosemary, I do not. Your father,—as I said, I will continue to call my brother by that name,—kept no record of your birth. I know this, because at his death I took charge of all his papers, both concerning business matters and private affairs, and there was no document of any sort pertaining to your adoption. But I have personal letters from my brother and from his wife, telling my sister and myself all about the matter. You can read them for yourself, and it will comfort you to read how they loved you from the first, and how delighted they were with their little new daughter. Never for one moment, Rosemary, forget the love they showered upon you, or the debt of gratitude you owe them and their memory for the happy and beautiful life they gave you. Also, if it pleases you to recognize it, your Aunt Anne and I, myself, have always endeavored to show you the same love and affection as if you were really our niece.”

“You did, Uncle, you both did,—and I do realize it, and I am grateful.”

“Try to show it now, my dear, by less agitation. This scene is wearing me out,—I am in a nervous state, naturally, since your aunt’s death, and I cannot bear much more. But what I must tell you, Rosemary, is that you are virtually penniless. My brother left no will, and, of course, his estate reverted to your Aunt Anne and myself, as his natural heirs. He assumed I would provide for you, and I have done so, and I always shall. But, Rosemary, I do not wish you to continue to live here. When your aunt was with us, it was quite different. Now, I am not able to meet the conditions consequent upon having a young lady in the house. You are young and fond of young society. I am getting old, and I need rest and quiet in my home I am sure you can see for yourself that it would be impossible for us to remain together happily. And I am sure you would not wish to stay here, unwanted. So, Rosemary, dear, we will at some early date talk over your plans, and see about settling you somewhere by yourself. Of course, you cannot expect the luxurious life you have led here, but I will give you what I consider a sufficient allowance for a young girl, and doubtless you will like to take up some light occupation that will bring you in an additional sum. You are not a Vincent, as I have told you, and so you have no real claim on me. But I will willingly give you an allowance and I trust you will find a little home for yourself. This is why I had to forbid you all thought of marrying young Collins. They are an aristocratic old family, and his people, of course, would not hear of his alliance with—”

“Don’t say it! I am a nameless orphan, but I never shall foist myself on the family of Bryce Collins—or on anybody else!”

And, white-faced and trembling, biting her scarlet lips in agony, Rosemary walked out of the room.

## **Chapter X**

### **How Collins Felt About It**

Rosemary walked alone in the south gardens. These beautiful terraced plots lay either side of the lagoon, and ended only at the broken stone fence that bounded Spooky Hollow.

This fence, not unusual in New England, was merely a succession of flat, unevenly shaped stones, most of them pointed, standing in a ragged row between the gardens and the swampy jungle of undergrowth. They had a

slight appearance of old and neglected gravestones, and their grim, gaunt shapes added to the eerie aspect of the place.

One had fallen over to a horizontal position and Rosemary went and sat upon it.

The girl was stunned. Not yet did she feel grief, sorrow, or despair at her uncle's revelations; not yet could she look ahead or plan for her future; she couldn't even realize the situation. She was dazed, bewildered,—her mind a senseless blank.

Wrapped in her long fur coat, a small fur hat drawn down over her brow, she nestled into the deep coat-collar and tried to collect her wits, to marshal her thoughts, to make some plans.

But she could not think coherently. Her memories raced back to the dear, kind father—who was not her father! to the loving, beautiful mother—who was not her mother! Oh, it couldn't be true,—it must be an awful dream! Then the dear Antan, who had died—not her aunt—not Antan at all! Uncle Homer not her uncle—Greatlarch not her home—

Wonderful Greatlarch! Rosemary loved every tower and turret of the splendid old pile. Every bit of marble and wood-carving was her joy and delight. And she was put out of Greatlarch—put out because she had no right there—no claim or inheritance in its ownership.

It was too incredible, she could not believe it!

And then the tears came, and poor Rosemary buried her face in her fur sleeves' and her whole slender frame shook with convulsive, heartrending sobs.

She tried to stop but it was impossible, so she let herself go and cried until she was physically exhausted from her wild bursts of grief.

Everything swept away at once! Home, relatives, parents, even her name! She was a homeless, nameless orphan,—a wanderer on the face of the earth!

She knew her Uncle Homer well enough to understand his attitude.

He had always objected to the presence of her young friends in the house. He hated anything that obtruded to the slightest degree on his even routine of life, and many a time Antan had stood between Rosemary and Uncle Homer's displeasure.

And now, without his sister's presence, Rosemary was not surprised at his desire to have her out of his house.

That was bad enough,—to leave Greatlarch was a tragedy of itself,—but it was lost sight of when she remembered the other and worse misfortune that had come to her.

What could she do? But her brain still refused to plan. Every fresh realization of her parents, her birth, brought the tears anew, and it seemed to Rosemary she was at the end of her endurance.

She could have borne the shock of her parentage if she could have remained at Greatlarch with Uncle Homer. She could have borne to leave Greatlarch if she could have gone forth as Rosemary Vincent, in truth. But the two blows were too much for her, and she bent under them like one of the slender white birches before the chill autumn wind.

As she sat, motionless, her face hidden, her whole body shivering with cold and quivering with agony, she heard faint strains of music.

"The Wild Harp," she thought, but so great was her apathy, she paid little attention to it.

Subconsciously, she heard the weird, wailing sounds, an incoherent melody, eerie as a banshee's cry.

It was twilight, the early twilight of the late November afternoon, and as Rosemary glanced uneasily toward the Hollow, she imagined the Harp strains came from there.

It was almost like an æolian harp, but that makes only accidental harmonies. This, though disconnected and fragmentary, had a certain sequence of notes that betokened an intelligent agency of some sort.

Abstractedly she gazed into the deepening shadows of the Hollow, and a sudden determination came to her to walk into it, and—never to come

out. If a supernatural agency was in there, was making that weird music, perhaps it might attack her and put an end to a life that had become unbearable. Better so, she thought, and half rose to go, when a man's voice sounded through the gathering gloom.

“Miss Vincent!” Prentiss exclaimed, “out here all alone? You'll catch your death of cold!”

“I wish I might,” she said, mournfully, scarcely noting or caring that she was speaking to a new and casual acquaintance.

“Now, now, my child,” Prentiss said, puzzled, but seeing her agitation, and quickly deciding that kindness was his cue, “don't despair so utterly. Your dear auntie was much to you, but you have much left in life—”

“I have nothing left! I have no life—no name—no home!”

“Why—what do you mean?” Prentiss was utterly astounded. He couldn't imagine what she meant, and wondered if the tragedy had turned her brain.

Rosemary hesitated a moment, but the situation was too strong for her.

She had no one to turn to for advice or help. She had put away all thought of Bryce Collins from her forever. She would never face him with her terrible story, she would never want to hear his pitying sympathy. She was a nameless, homeless girl, not fit to be the wife of any man with a name and a heritage.

Nor would she ever willingly see Lulie Eaton again. Lulie had been a dear friend, but Rosemary knew her well enough to realize that her friendship never would stand the strain of Uncle Homer's story.

The Mellishes would stand by her through thick and thin,—of that Rosemary was certain. But they were only servants, and Uncle Homer's servants. What could they do for her?

And so, the impulse to speak freely to Prentiss was strong. He was an intelligent, experienced man of the world. He might tell her what to do.

So Rosemary did tell him, and he listened attentively. She gave him the facts of her parentage, as her uncle had related them, and she admitted her utter helplessness and bewilderment.

“You poor child!” Prentiss exclaimed. “You dear child—” and he restrained a sudden impulse to take her in his arms and comfort her.

For Rosemary was very lovely in her abandonment of grief. Her imploring eyes, gazing through tear-wet lashes, her quivering lips, beseeching help, her little hands nervously clasping one of his own, would have thrilled a far less impressionable man than the Burlington Hawkeye.

But he quickly saw that the girl was utterly unconscious of his personality, utterly oblivious to the fact that she was appealing to his impulses, and that she was merely pouring out her woe to him, because he happened to be there, and she must speak or go mad.

He said quietly, “Suppose we go in the house, and sit by a comfortable fire to discuss these things. If you are going to leave Greatlarch, you may as well enjoy its comforts while you can. Come, won’t you?”

And, like a trusting child, Rosemary went with him.

Homer Vincent was playing the organ as they entered.

Rosemary listened a moment, and then nodded her head in satisfaction. At least, he was in a calm frame of mind. Close harmonies rolled through the dimly lighted house, and Rosemary led Prentiss to the pleasant living-room, snapped on the lights, and rang for Mellish to mend the fire.

“And bring tea, mayn’t he?” suggested Prentiss, and Rosemary agreed.

“Now,” the detective said, “would it be better to call in your uncle and discuss your future plans? Or shall we just talk them over by ourselves?”

“By ourselves,” she said, promptly. “If Uncle Homer wants to, he will join us without being called.”

But their talk was desultory, and without definite result.

As a matter of fact, Prentiss did not believe Vincent would really send the girl away. He thought it was more likely a threat, in order to get her to agree to have less company and fewer intrusions upon his own retirement and solitude.

A strange man, Prentiss deemed Homer Vincent, but, after all, a just and kind one. Not a man who would really turn away his brother's child, even though she were only an adopted daughter.

An adopted child, he argued, who had lived all her life with her adopted parents and their family connections, was entitled to recognition of some sort. And though he knew Vincent's solitary habits and eccentric disposition, yet he felt sure he would provide properly for Rosemary either in his home or out of it.

He had sympathized with her and did still, but he felt certain she was exaggerating the case, and that while she must realize she was not a Vincent, yet she would doubtless get used to that in time and pick up her life and happiness again.

"Forget it for a time, Miss Rosemary," he said, as the advent of tea and hot crumpets absorbed his own attention. "At least, you'll stay here for the present,—while I'm tracking down this Johnson man."

"Have you any clue to his whereabouts?" the girl asked, half-heartedly.

She was interested in the search for Johnson, but her own troubles had obliterated all thought of him.

"Not quite that, but I'm going down to New York to look up the jewelry firms whose cards he left with your uncle. Surely they can tell me all about him,—I mean his home and habits, and that will help us to find him."

"But if he has run away,—which, of course, he has,—and if he has sold that valuable ruby,—which, of course, he has,—he has money enough to take him anywhere, and he has doubtless gone out beyond civilization, and so, how can you ever find him?"

"That's all true, but missing men are often found, and no criminal is quite clever enough to cover all his tracks. Besides, he can't sell that ruby

at present. It's too large and important to offer to a pawnbroker or to a 'fence,' as they are called. Still, he probably has money enough for his escape. I'm banking on his overlooking some trace or some clue that will lead me to him."

"Have you any real clues?"

"Oh, yes. The business cards, the synthetic rubies,—surely they can be traced to the laboratory where they were made. Then there's the hat and coat and umbrella—"

"You know, Mr. Prentiss, it's too absurd to think of that man running away without his hat or coat. The umbrella he might easily forget, but not the others."

"Oh, he didn't forget them, as I see it. He was probably frightened away. Perhaps he heard the watchman on his rounds, or thought he heard some one near him. And he ran off hurriedly, without stopping for anything."

"How could he get away? The grounds are locked and guarded."

"But, Miss Rosemary, he did get away. We've searched the place too thoroughly to allow of his concealment here. Now, as we know he did get away, it's futile to guess how he did it. The thing is to find him."

"Yes, I see that. And I hope you will recover my ruby. That, at least, is my own, and I don't want that horrid man to have it."

"I'll surely make a try for that," Prentiss said, glad to note her interest in it.

And then, to Rosemary's intense surprise, Homer Vincent and Bryce Collins came into the room together.

"Will you give us some tea?" asked Vincent, in a pleasant tone, and still stupefied at Collins' appearance, Rosemary tilted the teakettle over a fresh cup.

"We're going to have a conclave," Vincent said, as he took an easy chair, and the ubiquitous Mellish, suddenly appearing, set a small table beside him for his cup. "Mr. Collins called to see you, Rosemary, and I received



him; and I have told him the story of your birth, as I have already told it to you.”

“And I don’t believe a word of it!” Bryce Collins declared.

“I wish I needn’t,” Vincent said, a little sadly. “I’d rather, indeed, that Rosemary were my own niece. I have always loved her as such,—and this disclosure was bound to come sooner or later. I often talked it over with my sister, and we agreed that we never could let Rosemary marry without acquainting the man of her choice with the truth of her birth. It wouldn’t be fair to him or to her. I think now, it would have been better if Rosemary had known all her life that she was an adopted daughter of my brother and his wife. But they preferred to let her grow up in ignorance of the fact, and this is the result.”

“I’m glad they did!” Rosemary burst out. “At least I’ve had twenty-one years of happiness,—even if I am miserable the rest of my days.”

“But you needn’t be, Rosemary,” Vincent said: “as you well know, many children are adopted, and lead the happiest of lives. That this knowledge has come to you just now, is because of my brother’s plan of keeping you in ignorance during his life, and my sister’s disinclination to tell you during her life. I, too, would have spared you the knowledge, except, as I said, that Mr. Collins came to me, and asked for your hand in marriage. I could not honorably let him marry you under your assumed name,—so, what could I do, but tell him the truth?”

“It is not the truth,” Bryce Collins reiterated. Vincent looked at him curiously.

“I don’t follow your thought, Bryce,” he said; “why do you say that when I tell you the facts as they are?”

“Because Rosemary is all Vincent,” Collins declared. “Those topaz eyes of hers are just like her Aunt Anne’s were. Her nose is shaped like your own, Mr. Vincent, and she has the manner and ways of her aunt in many particulars.”

“I wish your arguments could carry weight,” Homer Vincent said, looking kindly at Rosemary; “but let me call your attention to the fact that Mr. Prentiss here has eyes of that same peculiar color, and he is not

related to the Vincents. Also, Rosemary's manners and ways are of course modeled on those of her aunt, with whom she has lived for five years, and also, doubtless, she learned Vincent traits and habits from my brother, with whom she lived thirteen years."

"Why," Rosemary exclaimed, "I'm twenty-one, Uncle Homer. You make me out only eighteen!"

"You were three years old when you were adopted, Rosemary," Vincent said; "you lived in the asylum the first three years of your life."

Bryce Collins looked serious.

"Will you give me the dates, sir?" he said.

"Certainly. Suppose we all go into my Tower room, where are all the papers and documents referring to the matter. Mr. Prentiss, will you not come, too? Your advice may be useful."

As the other two left the room, Collins drew Rosemary to him, and whispered, "Trust me, dear. I'll straighten out this mail. You are a Vincent, I'm sure of it! And I'll prove it, too!"

Rosemary's heart fell. She was glad of Bryce's comforting tone, but his words meant nothing. She knew the story was true. She knew Homer Vincent was telling the facts and there was no denying them. And she would have preferred Bryce's assurance of his love for her, whatever her name might really be, to his protestations of unbelief of the story.

The four, seated in the Tower room, watched with interest as Homer Vincent opened the sliding panel and took out some bundles of papers and letters.

"This is not exactly a secret panel," he said, noting the curious glances, "but it is a private hiding-place. One has only to press this embossed ornament on the panel, and it slides open—as you see."

The Burlington Hawkeye fastened his alert eyes on the slide, but Collins paid little attention to it. He was eagerly awaiting a sight of the papers.

"There are no articles of adoption or anything of that sort," Vincent said; "it is possible my brother had some, but at his death all his personal

effects were put into my hands, and I searched in vain for some such documents. But I have here letters from him and from his wife, which tell in full detail of the adoption of little Rosemary.

“As may be seen from his marriage certificate, which I have here, my brother was married in 1904. Here is a letter from him and one from his bride telling my sister and myself of his marriage. We did not attend the wedding as he was travelling in France at the time, and was married in Paris.

“Here is a whole packet of letters from both of them, written in the year following. You may read them at your leisure, Rosemary, and indeed, they are at the disposal of any one interested. They tell of the happiness of the young couple, and of their joy in anticipation of the advent of a child.

“Later here are the letters that tell of the birth of a daughter in 1905. And sad letters follow, telling of the early death of the baby. Soon after that,—here is the letter,—they decided to adopt a little one in hope of easing the heart of the sorrowing mother.

“Visiting the asylum, they were struck by the beauty and charm of a child of three years,—our Rosemary. My sister-in-law preferred a child older than a mere infant, and, too, they thought she showed a vague likeness to the Vincents. This explains, Bryce, the resemblance you have noted.

“So the little girl was taken into their home, at first on trial, and then gladly adopted permanently. I daresay it was because of the temporary arrangement at first, that papers of adoption were not formally made out. Or it may be that my brother did not wish them. At any rate, there were none drawn up, and the little Rosemary simply grew up as the real daughter of her adopted parents. I do not mean that my brother and his wife pretended she was their own child, or wished to deceive anybody. But she was as a daughter to them, and when, at her mother’s death, Rosemary and her father went to live in Seattle, he said nothing about her adoption and she passed as his own. All this I learned from his letters, which were regular though not frequent throughout his life. Then, when his sudden death occurred, in a frightful motor accident, I

went out there at once, settled up his estate and brought Rosemary home with me.

“Knowing she was ignorant of the truth, my sister and I never told her. Often we talked it over, often had anxious and worried hours wondering what was our duty, and how best to tell Rosemary what she must eventually know.

“And then my sister was taken from me, and I had to face our family problem alone. There was but one way open to me. Rosemary has grown to be a woman. No longer a child, the truth was her due, and she had to have it. No woman would want to be allowed to marry a man in ignorance of such a truth. No man should be allowed to marry a woman under such a delusion. Tell me, Rosemary, tell me, Bryce, tell me, Mr. Prentiss, did I not do right, did I not do my duty, however hard a task, when I told Rosemary the truth?”

Homer Vincent’s face was troubled, his voice shook a little, but he looked squarely in the faces of one after another as he awaited their answers.

Rosemary, sobbing, could not respond. Bryce Collins, convinced at last, was speechless with surprise and consternation.

So the Burlington Hawkeye answered. He spoke slowly and cautiously.

“I suppose, Mr. Vincent, there was no other way to proceed. You are sure of all you have told us?”

“There are the letters.” Homer Vincent spoke wearily, as if worn out by the harrowing scene. “As you can see, they are written and posted in Paris on the dates I have mentioned. Good heavens, man, do you suppose I trumped up this yarn? The letters bear their truth stamped on their face! I have scores more of my brother’s letters, you may compare them—but,” his voice dropped to a quieter key, “you have only to read those letters from my sister-in-law, to realize that they are from a heartbroken mother mourning the loss of her own baby, and later from a cheerful-hearted woman glad in the possession of her adopted little one.”

“I don’t remember anything about being in the asylum,” Rosemary said, slowly. “Don’t children remember their experiences at three years old?”

“You never did,” Vincent said. “Your aunt and I frequently quizzed you when you first came here, to see how far back you could remember. And you never spoke of anything that happened before you lived with my brother.”

“Yes,” Rosemary said, “I remember such questionings by you and Antan.”

Prentiss had been reading the letters hastily, but with deep absorption.

“Of course it’s true,” he said, throwing down the last one. “Those letters are too positively genuine to admit of the slightest doubt. But would you not think that Mr. Carl Vincent would have made some provision for his adopted daughter in his will?”

“I have no doubt he meant to do so,” Vincent returned. “But he, like many another man, postponed the matter, and then death overtook him without warning. But no one can say that my sister and myself treated Rosemary as other than our own niece. We have indulged her every whim; given her every luxury, and surrounded her with all the joys and comforts of a beautiful home. If now, that my sister is no longer here, and I, myself, am in advancing years,—if now, I feel that I cannot have the responsibility of the ordering of the life of a vivacious young lady,—it can scarcely be wondered at. And, since I am willing to make generous provision for her maintenance, and since she is not really a blood-relative of mine, I feel that I should not be too severely criticized for consulting my own well-being in the matter.”

“As you always have done and always will do!” blurted out Collins. “You are a selfish, self-indulgent, self-centered man, Mr. Vincent! You have no sympathy nor consideration for the helpless girl you thrust from your roof! You!—”

“Just a moment, Mr. Collins. What about yourself? Do you want to marry the nameless girl you thought was my niece? Do you want to give your children a nameless mother? Where now are your protestations of love and devotion to Rosemary?”

Collins put a strong, protecting arm round the sobbing girl beside him.

“My love and devotion are stronger than ever,” he declared. “I do want to marry her—and at once. It matters not to me who her parents were—she is my love—my Rosemary!”

## **Chapter XI**

### **A Run Over To France**

But if Bryce Collins was willing to stand by his love and loyalty to his sweetheart, Rosemary was by no means acquiescent.

She positively refused to marry Bryce or to be engaged to him.

“It will not do,” she told him. “Your mother would never agree, and I would never marry you against her wishes. Oh, Bryce, can’t you see it as I do? I should be utterly miserable as your wife, unrecognized,—or even unwillingly recognized by your people. I, who have always considered myself a Vincent, whose fine line of stainless names has been my inspiration as well as my pride, now to find myself not only no Vincent, but of no known parentage whatever! Bryce, you can’t realize what that means to me. My parents may have been anybody—anybody at all! I may have in my veins the blood of ignorant, low-bred people, even criminals! It is appalling,—I can’t bear to think of it. But I must think of it,—I must face it, and plan my life accordingly. I shall never marry, of that I am certain. It would be unfair to my husband, unfair to my children. I would be willing to stay right here with Uncle Homer, and never have any company or go anywhere. But he won’t have me. Nobody wants me. I am an outcast, a wanderer on the face of the earth.”

Rosemary did not say this by way of appealing to Collins’ sympathy, nor was it a mere dramatic cry on her part. She was thinking aloud more than talking to him, and she really felt her utter friendliness, loneliness, and homelessness. It was a cry from her very soul, and it went straight to Collins’ heart.

“Rosemary,” he said, and his thin, dark face was strong with purpose,—“I am going to find your parents. I want you anyway, dear,—nameless or a Princess Royal,—it’s all the same to me. You are my own Rosemary. But I know, for your own sake, this thing must be cleared up. And for

mine,—for ours, Rosemary. I know you too well to believe you are of anything but gentle birth. Such features and mental traits as yours never belonged to an ignorant or low-born ancestry. I can't help thinking you are a Vincent—maybe they adopted a cousin or distant relative—”

“No, Bryce, that's impossible. Uncle Homer is most clannish and loyal to his kindred. If I had the slightest claim to the Vincent name, he would stand by me. And he is standing by me. We must remember, Bryce, that he had to tell me about this,—he couldn't let me marry you under a name not my own. Could he?”

“No, Rosemary, he couldn't. I do see that. But his putting you out of the house—”

“You don't know him, Bryce. Uncle Homer is a peculiar man, but his strange ways are simple, after all. He only asks to be let alone, to enjoy himself in his own way.”

“And isn't that infernally selfish?”

“Not so much so as you think. He loves his books, his music, his collections of curios and pictures, and he wants to enjoy them unbothered by people about, especially young people. He frequently has guests of his own age, and he is a charming and courteous host. Now, if I were really his niece, really a Vincent, I might resent his not wanting me here. But when he is so fond of solitude, and freedom from interruption, when I am not the slightest relation to him, when he says he is willing to give me a fair allowance,—why should he feel any further responsibility for me, or any obligation to let me remain at Greatlarch?”

“As you put it, Rosemary, it is logical enough, but in all these years he must have learned to love you—”

“Ah, Bryce, that's the worst of it. He didn't and it has been my own fault. Antan loved me, because she sympathized with my gay disposition and love of social life. But Uncle Homer didn't like my everlasting running about, as he called it, and,—here's the trouble,—I took no pains to please him, or to give up my inclinations to his. I was the selfish one, I thought only of my gayeties, my dances, and my friends, and I ignored Uncle's wishes, and even deceived him often as to my doings. Oh, I was more to

blame than he, that he didn't love me as Antan did. And as I sowed the wind, now I am reaping the whirlwind."

Rosemary's lovely, wistful eyes looked into Collins' own and she shook her head in utter disapproval of her own past conduct.

"Tell him you'll do differently now. Tell him you'll stay at home and look after his comforts and order his household for him—"

"He doesn't want me or need me," Rosemary said, the sad tears filling her eyes. "Mellish and Melly can do everything he wants, they know his ways, and they are devotion itself. The few little things I could do in their absence would not compensate to Uncle for the bother of having me around. He doesn't want me, Bryce, that's all. And as there is no reason why he should have me here, of course I must go. But where can I go?"

"Don't think I am whining—or playing the martyr. I hate such a spirit. And I am going to brace up and bear this thing bravely,—but, oh, Bryce, it is so hard to bear, and it came to me so suddenly,—it was so undreamed of! Don't despise me for giving way to my despair."

"Despise you! My darling—I love you more every minute!"

They were alone in the living-room, Homer Vincent at the organ on the other side of the house. They could hear the low strains of mournful music now and then, and Rosemary knew his soul was troubled.

But so was her own, and while Bryce Collins' love was a solace, yet the very fact that she must thrust that love away from her made her grief the more poignant.

He led her into the embrasure of a south window and took her in his arms.

"Rosemary," he said, and her lifted face showed white and drawn in the moonlight, "sweetheart, I am yours. My heart is devoted to you and to your service. If you will marry me at once, I will brave my parents' displeasure, I will marry you under the name of Rosemary Vincent, and we will go away and establish a home of our own, where no one shall ever know more about you than that."



“No, Bryce, it can’t be done that way. No minister would marry me by a name to which I have no right. Oh, I wish Uncle had told me long ago. I wish my father had told me—Bryce, he couldn’t have been more like a real father if I had been born his child! He loved me with a true fatherly affection—”

“Well, we know he was not your father, dear. There’s no getting away from those letters. Is there?”

“No, I’ve read them all over and over. They’re true as Gospel.”

“Then, let’s face facts. If you won’t,—if you can’t marry me now, we must find a nice, snug home for you, and I shall set about finding out your history.”

“You can’t do that, Bryce.”

“Can’t I? Well, I can make a pretty big stab at it! Do you happen to know, my little love, that your future husband has quite some persistency? Quite some of what is known as bulldog stick-to-it-iveness! And what I set out to do, I most generally sometimes always accomplish! So, dear little girl, try to possess your soul in patience till your ardent cavalier can run over to France and back and then we’ll see what we shall see!”

“To France! You can’t mean it!”

“But I do mean it, and if you’ll go, I’ll take you with me.”

“No, Bryce, we can’t marry. On that point I’m positive.”

“Well, then, it’s merely a postponed wedding. Don’t you dare fall in love with any one else while I’m gone.”

For answer Rosemary put her soft arms round his neck and kissed him voluntarily. It was the first time she had ever done so, and Collins clasped her close.

“My little girl,” he whispered, “my darling little girl, with your love to look forward to, with you to win, I can do anything! accomplish any task. I shall go to the asylum where you were adopted, and I haven’t the slightest doubt that I can trace your parentage. Of course they have records, and I shall insist on seeing them.”

“I’m afraid, Bryce,—afraid of what you may find out—”

“I will ask you, mademoiselle, to have more respect for my future wife! I allow no one, not even you, to imply the least disparagement of her birth or breeding. So, kindly refrain from such comment! When I return from my quest I will announce to you the details of her illustrious lineage!”

But Rosemary was not comforted by Collins’ gay chatter. She had a foreboding that his investigation, if he really made one, might bring to light more and worse facts than those already known. For, poor Rosemary thought, people don’t put their children in orphan asylums if everything is all right and proper.

“It’s awful, Bryce,” she said, “not to have the least idea whether you’re the child of decent people, or scum of the earth!”

“Don’t talk like that, dear. The suspense, the uncertainty is awful,—oh, I appreciate your feelings, darling, but these conditions we have to face, and we must face them bravely. Now, I shall get from Mr. Vincent all the addresses of the asylum in question and the various residences of your adopted parents while they remained in France, and then, if necessary, I shall follow up your father’s removal to Seattle, and go there to learn what I can.”

“You never can trace it, Bryce, you can’t delve into matters so far back, as you might do if the dates were later. The war, doubtless, caused the loss of lots of records and statistics, and you never can get the truth from those old archives.”

“Now, my little Cassandra, no more of these dismal forebodings. No more cold water to be thrown on my projects,—if you please. And I’ll tell you another thing. After I get you all straightened out as to vital statistics, I’m going to devote my energies to tracking down the murderer of your aunt. I don’t believe those addle-pated policemen will ever get anywhere. Oh, yes, I know that Burlington man is alert and promises well. But if he doesn’t succeed in getting at the bottom of the mystery, I will! Now, my little love, do you begin to realize what a determined man you’ve got to put up with for the rest of your life? Just as soon as I get matters fixed up to my liking you’ll be wooed and married and to a tyrant worse than any feudal lord you ever read about in mediaeval history!”

But Rosemary was not deceived by his banter. She knew he meant it all, but she knew the obstacles in his path, and without unnecessary doubt she clearly foresaw the opposition his plans would receive from his own people.

Bryce Collins had an independent fortune left him by his grandfather, but it was not large enough to preclude his having a business of his own. Nor did he mean to go through life without working and earning. But now, fired with enthusiasm over these new plans of his, he proposed to use his inheritance and postpone his business career, which, naturally, would not seem wise to his parents.

And Collins was a devoted son, and on the best of terms with his family. Also his mother admired Rosemary, and was glad at the hope of an alliance between her son and the Vincent family. But in view of the new developments, Bryce Collins well knew the quick turn that his mother's inclinations would take.

With his volatile nature, however, he put from him all unpleasant anticipations, and gave himself up to the joy of being with Rosemary and of comforting her by his presence and by his love, in spite of her forebodings.

When Collins detailed his plans to Homer Vincent, he was given a patient and thoughtful hearing.

"You propose to go to France and to Seattle both?" Vincent asked, for the young man's enthusiastic statements were a bit incoherent.

"If necessary, sir. You see, I must get at the truth of things. I mean I must find out who were the real parents of Rosemary."

"You're not afraid of what that discovery may mean—to you—and to her?"

"I've thought about that, Mr. Vincent, and it seems to me the truth, however disappointing, will be better than ignorance. If Rosemary is of decent and legitimate birth, I don't care how lowly her origin. If, however, she is of disgraceful ancestry, then I shall take her away from here to some distant place, and try to make her forget it all."

Bryce Collins' young face was somber and his strong jaw was sternly set in his intensity of purpose.

"You are taking a fine stand, Collins," Homer Vincent said, "and I admire your pluck and your loyalty to Rosemary. But my advice would be to let sleeping dogs lie. Aside from the fact that a trip to France at this late date would in all probability be a wild-goose chase, there is also an even chance that your discoveries, if you make any, will be disappointing."

"What is your advice, then, sir?"

"I don't know what to say. But, though I'm not at all sure it's right, I would be willing to ignore the whole matter of Rosemary's birth and, if you are willing, let her marry you as Rosemary Vincent, my niece."

"Does no one else know the truth?" Collins was thinking quickly.

"Only the detective, Prentiss. I believe, in her frenzied surprise the girl told him. But I'm sure we can pledge him to secrecy. You understand, Collins, I never would have let her marry you as my niece without telling you both the truth. But since you know it, if you care to adopt such a course, I will do my part. I will give her a wedding, small and quiet, of course, as the house is in mourning, and I will never divulge the secret of her adoption."

Collins thought this over.

"I don't know what to say, Mr. Vincent," he said, at last. "I confess I am tempted to do this thing. It is the line of least resistance, and quite the simplest way out of our difficulty. But, beside the question of Rosemary and myself, we must think of our possible children. You know as well as I do that, while in America ancestry and lineage is not looked upon as it is in England, yet if, in time to come, there should be discovered any stigma on my wife's name, is it a fair deal to the innocent babes who may be born to us?"

"That is a question for your own consideration, Bryce." Vincent spoke gravely. "I feel strongly about family ties myself. I admit I have never felt toward Rosemary as I should have felt toward a child of my brother's own. But it is too hard on her to tell her these things. She is a sweet,

sensitive nature,—a dear girl in every way. But she is not my kin. Yet, as I said, I will keep her secret, if you wish me to.”

“No!” and Collins’ face took on a look of even sterner determination. “No, I cannot do it. I love Rosemary too well, too deeply, not to try, at least, to vindicate her claim to honor and right. I shall go on my quest,—at most, it will not take me more than about a month, and I shall find out something,—or learn that nothing can be found out. In the latter case, I will, perhaps, give your proposition further consideration. I will ask you to keep the secret until my return. Can you—will you do this?”

“I will if I can. But since Prentiss knows it, it is in danger of further publicity. What is your project, in detail?”

“I’ve planned nothing further than to go to that asylum from which Rosemary was taken. You have the address of that, have you not?”

“Yes, and all the addresses of my brother’s residences in Paris and some suburban towns. They moved two or three times. You will, of course, return here before going to Seattle, if you conclude to go there?”

“Yes, and I hope I shall not have to go out there. But I know there is no use in writing to these places, or sending any sort of an emissary. Only my own desperate determination can accomplish my ends, if indeed I can accomplish them at all. Now, another thing. May not Rosemary stay here with you until my return? I cannot think you will turn her from your door.”

“It isn’t exactly turning her out,” Vincent said, looking troubled. “But,—well, as man to man. Collins, I may as well admit that I’m what is known as a woman-hater. I loved my dear sister, but I have never cared for any other woman, and I long for a home without a woman in it,—except as a servant. This may seem strange to you,—perhaps it is strange. But you must realize that alone in my home I can pursue my own avocations, I can have things just as I want them, I can have the uninterrupted solitude that I love; when, with Rosemary here, the whole atmosphere is changed, the whole house on a different basis. This is really not unreasonable; I am aging, I am a bit eccentric, I have suffered a terrible tragedy, and I have no real responsibility toward my brother’s adopted child, outside of her financial maintenance; and, so, I hold that it is not my bounden duty to keep Rosemary here.”

“That is all true, but won’t you consent, even to keep her here until my return? You’ve promised to keep her secret until then—if you can. Surely to send her away would rouse suspicion against her of some sort. I am sure she will agree to annoy you by her presence as little as possible. She can keep out of your way—”

“Oh, don’t make me out an ogre!” Vincent exclaimed. “Of course, she can stay here—for a month or two. As I have had her here for five years—but, you see, Bryce, it was very different when my sister was here. She stood between me and any nuisance the girl might have been. She kept Rosemary in a sort of subjection, which I see now, with her aunt’s restraint missing, has utterly vanished. She permeates the household,—unconsciously, of course, but breezily, noisily, as any young girl would. I can’t deny her the visits of her young friends entirely, yet when they come they are laughing and chattering all over the house, and it annoys me frightfully. Absurd, you would say. But you can’t realize the difference between the viewpoint of an enthusiastic young fellow and a world-weary, hermit-souled old man.”

“You’re far from an old man, Mr. Vincent, but I do understand what you mean, and I can see it from your point of view. And I realize that if Rosemary were really your niece, things would be very different. However, I’m going to hold you to your agreement that she may stay here a month or so, until I can run over to Paris and back. Then—”

“Collins, I’m not sure I ought to say this,—and yet, it’s only fair to warn you of even a remote possibility. You know, those detectives have no theory, no idea of how my sister’s murder was accomplished. Nor have I, for that matter. But since we know it was accomplished, since some murderer did, somehow, gain access to that locked room, and get out again, we must assume some diabolically clever criminal. Now, you must not overlook the possibility that it may have been some one of Rosemary’s relatives,—some one who has watched over her career, secretly, meaning to profit in some wicked way by the girl’s good fortune. This may seem far-fetched, but what theory does not seem so? At any rate, suppose the murderer of my sister should turn out to be some evil-minded relative of Rosemary’s real parents, do you want to delve into the matter?”

“Yes, I do. Even though there is a possibility of what you suggest, I deem it so remote a one that it is almost negligible. I have determined to go to France; I shall tell my people it is merely a travel tour, they will raise no objection. And I will ask you to preserve Rosemary’s secret, in so far as you can. Your definite request will ensure Prentiss’ silence, I am certain. And, Mr. Vincent, if your hinted theory should prove true, at least you will have achieved the solution of the mystery of Miss Anne’s terrible death. It is one of my strongest desires to avenge her memory, and once the matter of Rosemary’s birth is settled, I shall turn my attention to the murder tragedy, if it has not by that time been discovered.”

“You are a determined man, Bryce, and while I admire your indomitable perseverance, I wish I felt more faith in your success. I doubt your making any discoveries at all in France, but if you are bent on going, I will give you all those old addresses, and letters, if you want them, to various people who may help you in your search. In all probability the asylum will have the old records of Rosemary’s adoption by my brother, but will they have the statistics to prove who her own parents were? Still, as I said, I will give you all these documents, if you are bent on going.”

“I am bent on going,” said Bryce Collins.

And go he did. Obstacles fell before him like grain before the reaper. His determination was so strong, his will so powerful, that he made his departure possible and speedy.

Rosemary knew his errand, and imbued with his own hopefulness, she bade him Godspeed.

But she did not know she remained at Greatlarch only on sufferance and because of Collins’ insistent plea to her uncle.

Vincent treated her kindly but with no words of love or sympathy. Indeed, his words were few and his manner self-absorbed and often seeming utterly oblivious to her presence.

Rosemary did not resent this. She quite understood her uncle’s attitude toward her, she well knew his distaste for her presence. And she felt, at times, that she would gladly go away. But the charm of the place, and her great love for it, held her there, as well as her ignorance of the world

and her feeling of inability to face its unknown and perhaps unfriendly possibilities.

She wrote notes to Lulie Eaton and a few other girl friends, asking them not to come to see her for the present. And she gave Mellish orders to admit none of the young men who came to call on her.

She was determined to think things out for herself, but she could not do this all at once. It was all so new and unaccustomed,—this thinking for herself. All her life her plans had been made for her, in important matters. She had willingly acquiesced in all Antan's advices, knowing that the aunt who loved her would give all the liberty and pleasure that could be hers.

And now, she had no one to whom to turn for advice or for information. Even Prentiss, who was friendly, was away on his investigations in New York.

There remained only the two Mellishes and little Francine.

Reduced to the society of servants or none at all, Rosemary did talk over her affairs with good Susan Mellish.

"Never fear, dearie," that kind woman said; "it'll all come out right. Your uncle is for now that worried there's no doing anything with him. But these detective men, they'll find out the wicked villain and they'll hang him high! Or, what's more belike, they'll find there was no mortal murderer, and then they'll know where to look!"

For Mrs. Mellish was strong in her belief that the hand that slew Anne Vincent was the phantom hand of the dead Mrs. Lamont.

And there were those who agreed with her.

## **Chapter XII**

### **A Nameless, Homeless Waif**

Although Prentiss had gone to New York in search of information concerning Johnson, the local police of Hilldale were by no means idle.



They searched and researched the premises of Greatlarch, both in the house and about the grounds. The room that Johnson had occupied they studied over and over, in their efforts to learn something further of the man's personality. They left his few belongings where they found them, deducing nothing beyond the general facts of a business man on a hasty trip.

The entire absence of letters or personal papers was peculiar in itself, but there was no conclusion to be drawn from it. The fact that his clothing was new and unmarked was thought to be a suspicious circumstance, but it led to no definite suspicion.

It was a favorite remark among the detectives that Sherlock Holmes could have deduced the whole man from his few articles of luggage, but Sherlock Holmes was not there, and the men who were there only looked at the things blankly and without inspiration.

The same with Miss Anne Vincent's room.

Day after day they surveyed the beautiful appointments there. Again and again they drew back the heavy silk hangings that fell round the head of the bed and scanned the bed anew. The sheets with their crimson stains had been removed, but were still kept at the Police Station as possible evidence.

The wall safe, from which the great ruby had presumably been stolen, was examined frequently, and all the details of Miss Anne's personal belongings had been studied to no avail whatsoever.

There were the two rooms, one above the other, the rooms, all agreed, of victim and criminal, yet from neither room could a single fact be deduced that was of helpful significance.

Police reconstruction of the crime,—for they took no cognizance of suicide or of spooks,—set forth that Johnson had spent the entire night in preparation for his crime, and in waiting for dawn to bring his chosen moment. That he had, as soon as the watchman went indoors, unlocked Miss Anne's door with some clever sort of key, had killed the lady, stolen the ruby, and then, relocking the door with his patent contraption, had easily made his way out of the front door, when the family were still asleep and the servants busy in the kitchen quarters.

Almost superhuman cleverness they conceded this criminal, but, they argued, only such diabolical ingenuity could have perpetrated such a mysterious crime.

Their decisions were arrived at by elimination. There was no other suspect, there was no other means of procedure. The only thing to do was to catch the man. This, they hoped, Prentiss would accomplish.

But the Burlington Hawkeye returned from an unsuccessful search.

His report, given to Homer Vincent, in the presence of Brewster and Brown, was disappointing in the extreme.

“There isn’t any Henry Johnson,” he declared, looking both crestfallen and defiant at once. “I went to the address you gave me, Mr. Vincent,—the address he gave you, and they declared they never had heard of him there. Then I visited those two jewelry firms, of which he left you the cards, and they said they had never heard of any Henry Johnson in connection with ruby manufacturing. They spoke of a Mr. Markham or Markheim who made synthetic rubies, but that was of no interest to me. I begged them to search their books and records to find Johnson’s name. They were most obliging but utterly unsuccessful.”

“What else did you do?” Brewster asked.

“Oh, lots of things. I went to the stores where he must have bought his coat and hat, but I couldn’t trace any sale. This is not to be wondered at, of course. I only tried it on a chance. But that umbrella, now. That is a new one. I wish I had taken it with me. However, I went to the store it came from and asked what monograms they had put on umbrellas recently. Not an H. J. amongst them! As I say, I didn’t really hope to find out these things, but I took a chance.”

“You did well, Mr. Prentiss,” Homer Vincent assured him. “Where there’s nothing to find out, you can’t, of course, find out anything. But I’m surprised that the jewelry firms repudiated all knowledge of him. Do you suppose he was entirely a fake? Do you suppose he came here merely to rob and murder, and that the ruby story was all made up?”

“I do suppose just that, Mr. Vincent,” Brewster declared. “And probably his name wasn’t Johnson at all—”

“There’s the umbrella,” put in Prentiss.

“I know,” Brewster assented, “but that may have been made for a Hiram Judkins or a Hugh Jennings.”

“That’s so,” said Vincent, thoughtfully. “Or perhaps he stole the umbrella somewhere.”

“Yes, the umbrella gets us nowhere,” and Prentiss sighed. “I feel as if I’d accomplished nothing, and yet it is something to have learned that the Johnson name was assumed—”

“Not necessarily,” objected Brown. “You see, he may be named Henry Johnson all right, and yet have made up all the ruby business.”

“If he came here with intent to rob and murder, he most certainly didn’t announce his true name,” Brewster declared, and his words carried conviction.

“Then,” Vincent summed up, “we have a criminal with a definite purpose, who came under an assumed name, and carried out his plans successfully to the smallest detail. I remember, now, his asking me rather particularly as to the watchman’s rounds and all that. But, of course, I never suspected anything wrong.”

“Of course not,” Prentiss said. “Now I’d like to see that butler of yours again.”

“Surely,” said Vincent, and rang for Mellish.

That worthy came in, and contrary to his habitual calm, he exhibited a hint of suppressed excitement.

“Will you look what Hoskins found, sir,” he said, holding out his hand toward Vincent.

As all could see, he held a long amber and ivory cigarette-holder.

It was one of those extremely long ones that are affected by the ultrafashionable.

“Where was this found?” Vincent asked, looking at it attentively, and then passing it over to Prentiss.

“Hoskins found it, sir, out in the grounds. Or maybe the gardener found it and gave it to Hoskins. But it’s the one Mr. Johnson used, sir, and I opine he lost it as he hurried on his way.”

“You remember it?” Prentiss inquired of the butler.

“Oh, yes, sir. I noticed it when Mr. Johnson used it at the table, sir. After dinner, he took no cigar, but took a cigarette, which he fitted into that outlandish thing, sir!”

Mellish’s scorn of the eccentric implement was evident on his face.

“They’re quite fashionable now,—I’ve seen them in use,” said Brown, with an air of wide experience. “And see, here’s the H. J. monogram again! The fellow’s initials must be H. J. whether his name is Henry Johnson or not.”

“Unless he stole this thing and the umbrella from the same party,” argued Prentiss. “Wonder if we could trace the cigarette-holder. It looks rather valuable, and a specialty shop, where such a thing was doubtless bought, might remember the buyer.”

“Keep it carefully,” Brewster admonished him; “it’s a good bit of evidence,—maybe a real clue! Where was it found, exactly?”

“I don’t know the precise spot,” Mellish said; “but I opine it was somewhere on the east lawn. The gardener is working there to-day.”

“Would that be on his way out of the grounds?” Brown inquired.

“It might be,” Vincent returned, slowly. “Or, he may have been walking about outside—”

“Killing time until the dawn broke!” Brown exclaimed. “Oh, I’m sure we can get a line from that thing. It’s most unusual,—not common at all”

“You go down to New York then, on this errand,” Prentiss said; “I don’t want to go right back there.”

“All right, I’ll go,” Brown agreed, rather liking the idea.

“And I thought, Mr. Vincent,” Prentiss continued, “you might recall some more data about the synthetic rubies. You see, even if he faked that whole ruby proposition, at least he must have known enough about the matter to make a good showing before you and your sister. You would have known if he had been a mere layman. He couldn’t have made you believe he was an expert without knowing a good deal about the processes and all that.”

“That’s true,” Vincent agreed. “But, knowing little or nothing of the subject myself, I daresay I was not in a position to be critical of his explanations and descriptions.”

“I opine,” Mellish said, speaking deferentially but with a look of pride at his master, “that Mr. Vincent is not so ignorant of these things. You remember, sir, there was another gentleman here not more than a month ago, who also wanted to interest you in the making of imitation rubies.”

“Why, yes, that’s so,” Vincent said; “I had forgotten that. But I daresay the market is full of such things. The process, recently invented,—or perhaps I should say discovered,—has doubtless been taken up by various would-be lapidaries. Well, does all this get you anywhere, Mr. Prentiss?”

“We have only one goal, sir, the whereabouts of the man who called himself Henry Johnson, whether that is his true name or not. I think no one can doubt he killed Miss Vincent, even though we cannot yet determine his exact method. But given this mysterious visitor, his mysterious disappearance, and the immediate discovery of the robbery and murder, we cannot think otherwise than that he is the criminal. He may not have intended murder, in the beginning. He may have used the ruby chatter to induce Miss Vincent to exhibit her splendid jewel,—of which he must have known,—and then, when he endeavored to steal it and make away, very possibly she awoke and would have made an outcry, had he not silenced her. Burglars often commit murder because of a sudden danger of exposure.”

“That is all true, Mr. Prentiss,” Vincent agreed; “I had not thought of that sequence of events at my sister’s bedside. It may well have been just

as you suggest. Granting his ability to get in and out of that room,—and you have suggested an explanation of that,—I feel sure there can be no doubt of Johnson's guilt. Now, we must find him. It is imperative. Can any one suggest any further or more far-reaching plan?"

"It is hard to circumvent such fiendish ingenuity as that man has showed." Brown spoke vindictively. "We have, of course, inquired at all the near-by railway stations. I assumed he might have walked to some one of them and boarded a train there. But we find no trace of such a thing."

"More likely," Brewster said, "he walked to a near-by town, and after a rest and a breakfast walked on to another, and so on, until he was far enough away to take a train without fear of detection. In a large town he could do that, but not in one of our small villages."

"There are many ways he could escape," said Vincent, looking wearied, as if tired of their futile conversation. "He could lie low for hours anywhere, and then go on by night. Or he could beg a ride in a passing motor, or in a farmer's cart. At any rate, he did get away, he did get beyond our ken, and if we find him, it will not be by simple search, but by some deduction or conclusion based on some bit of evidence. I know little of these things myself, but I supposed detectives worked from small clues."

"We are supposed to," Prentiss declared, frankly, "but I must confess there are fewer clues in evidence in this case than in any I ever saw before."

"There's this," and Brown held up the long cigarette-holder.

"Yes," agreed Vincent, "there's that. Now, that's just the sort of thing I mean. Can't you experts gather anything from that?"

"I gather that he had sharp teeth," Brown said, smiling a little, "for the amber mouthpiece is a good deal scratched."

"He did have strong teeth," Vincent remarked, "and very white ones. But I can't see how that will help you to find him. Perhaps, after all, you may have to give it up, and put it down among the unsolved mysteries of history."

“Not yet,” Prentiss declared. “I’m by no means ready to lie down on the job, and if Mr. Brown will run down to the city and try to trace the fancy cigarette doodaddle, I’ll try some few little manœuvres I have in mind up here.”

“Try all you like, gentlemen,” Vincent directed them. “Use every effort, call upon me for whatever money you need. I will refuse no sum in reason to bring about the discovery of my sister’s assassin. But, I must ask you to report to me only when you have some worthwhile news. This interview to-day was, of course, necessary, but until you have equally important information, continue your search by yourselves, or report to me through Mellish here.”

The detectives, of course, agreed, and the interview was brought to a close.

At dinner that night, Rosemary asked her uncle what the detectives had accomplished.

“Very little,” he returned. “They have concluded Henry Johnson killed your aunt, which we were practically certain of all along. They have learned, they think, that Henry Johnson was an assumed name, which is an obvious conclusion. They have practically admitted that they have doubts of being able to find him, which is no surprise to me. The murderer in this, as in most cases, is far cleverer than the detectives, and can, of course, easily outwit them. A criminal who can plan and carry out such a scheme as this man has done is no ordinary evildoer. He is a genius in crime, and such are not usually apprehended. Now, let us drop the subject, Rosemary, for I have had all I can stand of it for one day.”

The subject remained dropped between the two, for there were no new developments to bring the detectives for another report to Vincent.

They were continuing their efforts to find Johnson, they were hunting for new clues or evidence, but all their endeavors were futile.

Even Brown’s assiduous hunt for the shop where the cigarette-holder had been bought was to no avail. Such holders he found, but could get hold of no dealer who had monogrammed that one.

Days at Greatlarch followed one another in much the same routine as before the tragedy. The household routine, that is. The two Mellishes and their under-servants admirably kept up the high standards that Miss Anne had instilled in the *ménage*, but the family, as represented by Homer Vincent and Rosemary, was far from a happy one.

Each day, it seemed to the girl, her uncle grew more and more reserved, more absorbed in his books and music. She did not resent this, in a way it was a relief not to have to entertain him, but Rosemary was very lonely and very sad.

It was on one of their silent evenings, when Vincent mused over a book and Rosemary tried to interest herself in a bit of needlework, that he said:

“Child, have you any belief in spiritualism?” His tone was gentler, more interested, than common, and Rosemary hesitated before she answered. She didn’t want to express herself contrary to his own views, and yet the girl had never felt any faith in the supernatural.

“Table-tipping or spooks?” she said, trying to turn it off lightly.

“Don’t be flippant. I mean this idea of Mrs. Lamont returning to the scene of her tragic death.”

“Oh, that. No, Uncle, I can’t say I do believe she does that.”

“And yet it may be. Why may not the souls of the dead return?”

“Oh, they may, but I’ve never seen any evidence of it, have you?”

“What would you say if I said, Yes, I have?”

“I’d say, Tell me all about it.”

The subject was a distasteful one to Rosemary, but she would willingly have talked on any topic, so glad was she to have her uncle talk to her at all.

“Well, a queer thing happened last night,” he began. “I was wakened out of a sound sleep by a sort of light in my room. A strange, hovering light,



that seemed to sway and waver and at last shaped itself into the semblance of a human form. Rosemary, it was your Aunt Anne.”

“No!”

“Yes, child, it surely was. I felt no fear; she waved a gentle hand as she came nearer to me. ‘Brother,’ she said, ‘it is all right. Do not seek my slayer, I am happy in my new life.’ And then, Rosemary, she seemed to vanish slowly, and as the phantom shape was nearly gone, I heard a few more fleeting words, that sounded like a promise to play the Wild Harp tonight.”

“Tonight! Antan! Oh, Uncle Homer! You believe it was really her spirit?”

“If the harp plays tonight and I hear it—I shall have to believe,” he replied, in a solemn tone.

And that night the Wild Harp did play. Rosemary was awakened soon after midnight by the low, wailing strains. She wondered if her uncle heard it, too.

She lay in her bed listening to the weird music, and wondering if it could be possible her dead aunt was responsible for it.

She could not believe it, nor could she believe it was the work of the spirit of Mrs. Lamont.

But then, she asked herself, what is it? What can it be?

She rang a bedside bell which brought Francine to her.

“What is it, mademoiselle?” asked the French girl. “What is it that I can do for you?”

“Listen, Francine, do you hear the Wild Harp?”

“Oh, yes, ma’am. Is it not beautiful—so faint, so sweet!”

“Who is playing it, Francine?”

Rosemary fully expected the girl would assert it to be a phantom that made the harmonies. But, to her surprise, Francine said, "Of a truth, I do not know,—but I think it is Mr. Mellish."

"Nonsense! Go to bed!" and Rosemary had to smile at the girl's foolishness.

But the next morning she referred to it before her uncle.

"Yes, Rosemary, I heard it," he said, "and I believe it was the spirit of your aunt who made the music. Do not you?"

"No, Uncle, to be truthful, I do not."

But Rosemary regretted her frankness, for Homer Vincent turned grim and moody and scarcely spoke again that day.

But at last came the news of Bryce Collins' arrival in New York, and Rosemary's heart beat high with hope and joy.

His letters had given no hints as to the results of his quest, but he had written that he had results, which he would detail on his return.

Rosemary eagerly desired to accept this as an omen of favorable news, but her forebodings were not happy ones and she felt an undercurrent of despair that grew stronger as the time of his homecoming drew near.

And when at last she saw him, when he came to Greatlarch, and, taking her in his arms, kissed her gently, she knew in her heart that his tidings were not happy ones.

"Tell it at once, Bryce," Homer Vincent said, curtly. "I know from your manner you bring no good news."

"I do not," Collins said, his face dark with sorrow and his eyes sad and somber. "Yes, I will tell you at once, but do not hurry me, Mr. Vincent. I will tell you as it happened to me."

"You found the asylum?"

"Yes, with no trouble at all. But it was not at the address you gave me."

“Ah, they have moved?”

“Perhaps so; but they told me they had never been at the other address. However, I found them. They have full and complete records,—they willingly let me study them. The present head of the institution is not, of course, the one who was there when Rosemary was left there. Nor is he the immediate successor. They have had several in his place, as the years went by.”

“You found the entry of Rosemary’s admission to the asylum?”

“Yes, I did. And I learned,—this is the strange part,—that she was placed there by your brother Carl.”

“Before his marriage?” Homer Vincent fairly blurted out the words.

“Yes, two years before.”

“Then that means—”

“There is no use blinking the facts. It means that Rosemary is the child of your brother Carl, but was not born in wedlock.”

“An illegitimate daughter of my brother—then a Vincent after all.”

“No, a nameless, homeless waif,” Rosemary moaned, and as she swayed from her chair, Collins ran to catch her fainting form and held her in his arms.

“I’m all right,” she said, struggling to preserve her self-control; “only it seems this last blow is more than I can bear. Uncle Homer, I will leave your house tomorrow. You shall not be burdened with the disgrace of a nameless child,—a child of shame!”

“Who was her mother?” Vincent asked.

“It is not known,” Collins replied. “The records so far back are imperfect. And I could find no one who remembered the circumstance. All the attendants are changed since that time. It was by the merest chance I came across the book that contained the entry of her admission. There was no mistake about that. She was left there by Carl Vincent, an

American citizen travelling for pleasure. Her birth-date was given and her name stated as Rosemary Vincent.”

“And two years later, my brother and his wife adopted this child,—the daughter of my brother!”

“Three years later. After he had been married a year.”

“I cannot stand it,” Rosemary cried, and without another word, she fled from the room.

“There is no doubt about this?” Vincent asked.

“Not the slightest,” replied Collins, hopelessly.

“What is to be done?”

“I do not know.”

### **Chapter XIII**

#### **A Vincent After All**

After the news brought home from France by Bryce Collins and after a day’s reflection on the matter, Homer Vincent called Rosemary to him in his Tower room.

The girl gave him a curious glance. Her own attitude in the matter had changed. She was still downcast and despairing because of her illegitimate birth and her nameless condition. But she had most loving memories of her father, and it was a deep consolation to know he was really her father even though she had no acknowledged mother.

Rosemary’s life had been a sheltered one. During her first years with her adopted mother, during the succeeding term of years with her father, and, later, with the Vincents at Greatlarch, the girl had been kept carefully from companions save such as her elders deemed wise for her.

She had never attended public schools, never mixed with uneducated or unrefined people, and really knew little of the gossip or scandals of society.

Anne Vincent had never talked with her of immoral conditions or events, and Rosemary, while blankly wondering just how bad it was to be illegitimate, was yet gladdened at heart by the realization that at any rate she was a Vincent.

But she was destined to a rude awakening when Homer Vincent told her in a few words how hopeless and irremediable was her fate.

He was not unkind in his manner, he was rather pitying and sympathetic. But he explained that she could never hope to marry, that to transmit such a stigma to children would be out of the question, and, moreover, no man, knowing the truth, would be willing to marry her.

“Bryce would,” she said, her red lips quivering with emotion, but her little head held high, in a sort of bravado.

“No, he would not. You’ll see. He said he would when he thought you were adopted by my brother, and born of respectable though humble parents. That’s what he went to France to see about, and thereby learned the whole unpleasant truth. No, Rosemary, neither Bryce Collins nor any other self-respecting young man will marry a girl who was born out of wedlock.”

Rosemary’s despair returned. Her long dark lashes drooped over her sad eyes and her whole figure relaxed into an attitude of utter dejection.

“What can I do?” she murmured, her voice tragically sad.

“You will be cared for,” Vincent replied. But he sighed deeply and looked at the girl as if she were indeed an unwelcome responsibility.

“You see,” he continued, “now that I am led to believe that you are the child of my brother, I cannot turn you away. When I thought you merely his adopted child and the offspring of unknown parents, I had no real family interest in your welfare. But if you are my brother’s child, you are a Vincent, even though not a legitimate member of the family.

“And so, I propose to keep you here with me,—at least so long as I find you tractable and amenable to my wishes. I think you will not expect to hold your position as a daughter of the house, but neither shall I allow you to be slighted or scorned in any way. If you have good common

sense, Rosemary, you will accept the anomalous position that is now yours and you will be thankful that you have a home and a protector here.”

“Oh, I do! Oh, Uncle Homer, how good you are to me. I can never thank you—”

“There, there, no histrionics, if you please. You can easily thank me, by the mere observance of my wishes. You know those already,—you know, that though I may be eccentric, my odd ways are not really very dreadful. You know all I want is a quiet, peaceful home, and if you devote your life,—as you probably will prefer to do,—to some such pursuit as study or philanthropic effort, you will make no disturbance in the household and you will have ample time to look after such matters as tend toward my peculiar desires and exactions.”

Rosemary looked thoughtful. She fully realized her position, fully appreciated her uncle’s kindness and generosity, but she was young and of a pleasure-loving, vivid temperament. She could not foresee happiness in this humdrum existence he proposed. It was all very well for Antan, who was of a quiet, indolent nature.

But for Rosemary to be at home day in and day out, occupied in household duties or philanthropic pursuits,—whatever they were,—did not sound appealing.

In fact, the previous plan, of living by herself, seemed more attractive.

“How much money have I?” she asked, almost abruptly.

Vincent looked at her, and shook his head.

“None at all, Rosemary,” he said, “but what I give you. Your father left no will, and, of course, as an illegitimate child you have no inheritance claim. Your Aunt Anne’s ruby, which would have been a small fortune in itself, has been stolen, so what I choose to give you constitutes your sole source of income. But I shall not be mean or small in this matter, if you agree to my plans. If, however, you are thinking of asserting your independence, I may as well tell you at once, that I shall not contribute to your support except here at Greatlarch. You must admit, my dear, that you are a little inconsistent. Last week you were in tears at the

thought of leaving this place, now, when I offer you a home here, you are contemplating going off by yourself.”

“How do you know I am?”

“I knew by your expression of rebellious discontent at the sort of life you must accept if you remain here. I knew by your sudden inquiry about finances. I know you would prefer independence and a home by yourself to a home with me under the restrictions that I must make. But you are not in a position to dictate. You may choose,—but I must tell you, Rosemary, you will make a great mistake if you attempt to go out into the world, nameless and penniless.”

Vincent spoke very gravely, and Rosemary’s mutinous red lips curved downward into an expression of surrender.

“Don’t think I’m ungrateful, Uncle Homer,” she said, slowly. “But you must remember I’m crushed under this sudden blow. You must remember that I’ve lost parents, home, fortune, reputation, everything in the world, at one blow,—and I must think things over before I can see my way clear. What is it Kipling says:

“ ‘If you can see the things you gave your life to broken,  
Yet stoop and build them up with worn-out tools—’ ”

“That’s all very well, Rosemary, for hifalutin ethical poppycock. But, I’ll tell you, my girl, that if you know what’s good for yourself, you’ll gladly accept a home here, under the protection of my name, rather than face any sort of career out in the cold, hard world. You’ve no idea, Rosemary, what slights, what scorn, you would receive! Good heavens, child, I don’t believe you realize at all what a terrible misfortune has come to you!”

“Yes, I do, Uncle,—indeed I do. But sometimes I feel I am so hopeless, so dishonored, it might be better to strive to live a new life—”

“Fine talk! That’s what all the younger generation harp on nowadays. Live a new life—live your own life—well, Rosemary, do what you choose. But if you choose to go out from under my roof, it is on the understanding that I will never take you back again. Think well before you throw away a home like this!”

Vincent glanced round the beautiful room and out into the great hall, and Rosemary's eyes followed.

Her deep love for the place welled up in her heart, and with an uncontrollable sob, she caught her uncle's hand in hers, and cried:

"Oh, you are right! I never could be happy away from here—"

"Not with the conditions you have to face," he returned, gravely. "Let us consider it settled then, and you may take your place as head of the household, in so far as ordering meals and presiding at table is concerned. What you do not know, Melly will show you, and I myself will instruct you in some of the matters your dear aunt used to look after."

Rosemary went away from her uncle with a heart full of conflicting thoughts. She knew her best plan, as he had said, was to stay at Greatlarch under the conditions he imposed. She knew the world would be hard on her, would look down upon her, and as a member of her uncle's household she would at least run no chance of scornfully pointed fingers.

But Rosemary's whole nature rebelled at the restrictions she would be under, and the vision of her future seemed far from bright.

It is said stone walls do not a prison make, but as the girl saw it, they would come very near doing so.

Yet the alternative was no more desirable. What could she do, alone in an inhospitable world, without money, name, or friends?

And as to marrying Bryce Collins, Rosemary firmly put aside all thought of it. Even if he asked her to do so, she would not take advantage of his offer, she would not go to him a nameless bride.

There was no way open, the girl concluded, but to stay on at Greatlarch, and try to do exactly as her uncle wished her to.

She would have a home,—a beautiful home that she loved,—and she would try to adjust herself to the new conditions and get along without young companionship or society.



She would forget Bryce Collins, forget Lulie and the other girls, and take up what her uncle called philanthropic work.

She was a bit hazy as to what this meant,—visiting the poor and old, she supposed,—or making flannel petticoats for orphan babies.

She wondered who had made flannel petticoats for her when she was an orphan baby, as she must have been the first three years of her life.

Those first three years! It seemed to her sometimes that she could dimly recall scenes that must have been asylum scenes. She seemed to see rows of cots and numberless babies, but she couldn't be sure that this was not mere imagination and not memory.

Well, it didn't matter. She had been an orphan baby, and now she was something still worse, an orphan girl and an illegitimate child.

But when Bryce Collins came that evening, he cheered her by his very presence. He was so strong and masterful, so determinedly hopeful, so eagerly anxious to do something, anything, to bring about new developments that might point to brighter days.

Also, he was more than ever resolved to solve the mystery of Miss Anne's death.

"Who knows?" he said, "that may have some bearing on your parentage, Rosemary."

"As how?" asked Homer Vincent, interestedly. "I can't imagine," Collins admitted, "but there seems no motive—"

"No motive, when the murderer took away a hundred thousand dollar ruby!"

"But did he take it? May not Miss Anne have hidden it elsewhere? I can't seem to see a burglar taking that one stone and leaving the other jewels."

"But the ruby is a fortune in itself. He needed nothing more to make him independent for life."

“I know,—but what can he do with it? Those enormous stones are famous. Every jeweler in the country,—in the world, knows of that ruby. He would be spotted the moment he offered it for sale.”

“I suppose so,” Vincent said; “and yet, I’ve heard those people have what they call ‘fences’ who dispose of stolen jewels in some manner. And, anyway, the man must have taken it, for I’ve looked everywhere among my sister’s belongings and all through her rooms and there is no possible hiding place where the stone can be. No, Bryce, that Henry Johnson stole the jewel and killed my sister. As I see it, Anne woke up and he killed her lest she scream and alarm the household. Now, the thing is to find him.”

“That’s exactly it,” assented Collins, “and I’m going to do it. You said, Mr. Vincent, that you would spend any amount of money to find the murderer, which, of course, means to find Henry Johnson. Now, I heard on board ship, coming home, of a wonderful detective,—Stone, his name is, who can, without doubt, solve this mystery. Murder cases are his special forte, and though I understand he is expensive, yet I know you said—”

“I did say so, at first, Bryce, but I’ve already spent a lot on detectives. And what have they done? What have Brewster and Brown done? Nothing. What has Prentiss done? Nothing. And quite aside from the money I’ve paid and still have to pay them, I am tired of having these investigators around my house. They examine the rooms over and over again. But they learn nothing from them. They quiz my servants over and over again. But they deduce nothing from their stories. The man Johnson has disappeared and the detectives are not able to find him. That’s the case in a nutshell. Now why should I spend any more money, or be put to any further inconvenience when there is no probability that a new man would or could do any more than the others have done?”

“But this Stone is a wizard,—why, he—”

“I know that wizard type. They come in and look around, and say the murder was done by a man five feet nine inches high, who wore a number seven hat and smoked a Havana Perfecto cigar. And then they waste days in futile attempts to find that man,—and never find him. No, I have decided not to spend any more on the case, and—I have a

reason—a secret reason why I prefer not to delve further into the mystery.”

“I know what that reason is,” Rosemary cried. “Bryce, Uncle Homer has gone over to the spiritualists! He has messages from Aunt Anne and I’ve no doubt his secret reason is connected with—”

“You’re quite right, Rosemary,” Vincent spoke very seriously, “my reason is that my sister’s spirit has communicated with me, and she has asked me to refrain from further investigations.”

“Did she tell you who killed her?” Collins asked, not showing his true feelings in regard to these supernatural communications.

“No,—not exactly, but she said the murderer would never be caught, and for my own peace of mind and—for Rosemary’s, it would be better to let the matter rest.”

“And you fancy that it may be some of Rosemary’s relatives—on her mother’s side—”

“Don’t put it into words, Collins. You know yourself it may be that the Johnson person was some such relative,—and it may be as well never to find him—”

“Rubbish! I don’t believe for a minute anything of that sort, and I refuse to listen to such absurd theories. Now, look here, Mr. Vincent, here’s my platform. I propose to marry Rosemary in any case. She is my affianced wife—”

“No, Bryce,” and Rosemary’s tone was as decided as his own, “no, I will never consent to marry you, a nameless, shameful, illegitimate girl! I would not,—could not be happy, knowing that I brought you only ignominy and disgrace. I will never marry you or any one. The fact that my father was a Vincent does not make me one, since I was not born in wedlock. I am an unhappy girl,—but I am fortunate in having Uncle Homer,—for I shall always call him that,—give me a home. I will continue to live here with him and you must not think it strange if I ask you not to come to see me any more. I am going to try to forget you and all my young friends—”

“Now, Rosemary, let up on that rigmarole. I am going to take hold of this matter and fight it to a finish. If Mr. Vincent won’t employ this Stone, I will do so myself. I have some of my money left, and if it isn’t enough, I’ll get busy and earn more. I have one or two ideas that I haven’t divulged yet, and if Stone takes any interest in them, they may be of use to him.”

“I don’t think, Bryce, that you ought to keep from me any knowledge or ideas that you may have discovered.”

“Well, Mr. Vincent, they’re hardly definite enough to be called ideas,—they’re merely vague impressions—for instance, here’s one. The detectives say that Johnson could have locked that bedroom door behind him by the use of a little instrument that burglars use, which can turn a key from the other side of the lock. Now, I’ve looked up that matter, and while there is such an implement known, it is very hard to come by, and only found in the kit of the most expert and experienced burglars. This man Johnson, as I make it out, wasn’t a burglar. He was merely a business man, here on a business errand. If his cupidity was aroused by the sight of Miss Anne’s great ruby, is it likely that he would chance to have in his pocket that rare and peculiar tool that would lock the door after he had committed the crime? Also, why did he want to lock the door? He made his escape at once. He knew breakfast wouldn’t be until eight o’clock, and he committed the murder, they say, at seven or thereabouts. Why waste time locking a door when every minute was precious in making an escape? And how happen to have the implement needed, when, so far as we can gather, he had no other burglar’s tools?”

“He may have had a whole kit, and taken it away with him.”

“But when he arrived, Mellish says, he had only the one bag which, as we now know, contained his night things and a change of underclothing.”

“I’m not arguing the case, Bryce, nor am I reconstructing the crime, as they call it, or guessing how it may have been done. To me the case is simply this. Johnson killed my sister, stole her jewel, and made his escape. How he did it, I do not know. But as I truly believe it is the wish of my dead sister that I should make no further effort to discover any more about it, I propose to cease my investigations. If you persist in calling in further detective service, it will be at your own expense and on

your own responsibility, and, I may add, greatly against my wishes and, in fact, under my disapproval.”

“Sorry, Mr. Vincent, but I’m going to employ this Stone, if I can get him. And not only regarding the murder, I can’t help a certain feeling, maybe a forlorn hope, that he may help me in the search for Rosemary’s mother. I admit I want to know, if possible, who her mother was. Not, understand, for my own sake alone,—but for her sake. However, I want it understood that our sake is one and the same henceforth. I know Rosemary says she will not marry me, but if she doesn’t it will not be for lack of importunity and insistence on my part. But that is a future consideration. First, I’m going to pursue my own investigations as I see fit, and then I will consult with you as to Rosemary’s future. I take it you do not,—you cannot forbid me to look into this mystery further?”

“I can’t forbid you, Bryce, but I can and do most earnestly request you to leave it alone. You may laugh if you will at spiritual revelations, but older and wiser minds than yours do not laugh at them. If I have been persuaded that I have had visitations from the spirit of my dear sister, it is no more incredible than that great and good men have also been so convinced. I ask of you, I beg of you, not to try further to elucidate a mystery, the victim of which has requested that it be forgotten.

“And, quite aside from that, remember I am an older man than you, and I can see the futility of renewed search. Indeed, I am convinced that, as a layman, I can see better than a detective the utter impossibility of finding a man as clever and determined as Johnson must necessarily be. Doubtless he has so changed his appearance and demeanor by this time that no one could recognize him; in addition to which he has in all probability fled to the very ends of the earth. These obvious conclusions present themselves to the clear-seeing mind of a layman, while the detective instinct is roused by the mystery and by the call of the chase. If you look at it calmly, you must agree that I am right.”

“It may be, Mr. Vincent, and I understand that is the way it looks to you. But I am on the other side, I admit. To me, there seem to be other avenues to explore,—other clues to follow up.”

“What clues, for instance?”

“Few, if any, definite clues, I admit; but hints, theories, possibilities,—oh, I am sure such a man as Fleming Stone would have suggestions to make and ways to try out.”

“Uncle Homer,” said Rosemary, suddenly, “what was that shiny thing you were hiding in the secret panel as I looked in the window at you that night?”

“Good heavens, child, what do you mean? I wasn’t hiding anything!”

“Well, what were you putting in there, then? It shone and glittered, and it wasn’t those two imitation rubies,—for it wasn’t red—it was bright like gold.”

“Like gold? I don’t know what it could have been—for I have nothing made of gold there. You may come into my room, if you like, and look over all the contents of that hiding-place. There is nothing there but some valuable papers, including all the letters and papers concerning my brother Carl. Come along, both of you, and I will show you the way to open it for yourselves.”

The three went to Vincent’s Tower room, and he showed them both exactly how to manipulate the tiny knob, hidden in the carved design, that opened the panel.

The hiding-place thus revealed was quite large, and held many bundles of papers. These Vincent touched as he named them.

“I’m glad this subject came up,” he said. “for it is better some one should know the secret of this panel. My sister knew, and now, it is well you young people should know, for if anything happens to me, you will find all my effects here. This is my will,—as you see, I have left the bulk of my property to Rosemary. I have, of course, left goodly bequests to the two Mellishes, who have served me long and faithfully. Also, to Hoskins and a few other servants. And some trifles to a few friends. The residuary is for Rosemary, who, though not legally a Vincent, is the child of my dear brother,—and,—I will refer to this matter for what I trust may be the last time,—I daresay, if we knew all the circumstances we might judge my brother more leniently than the world would if the matter became known. So, if Rosemary does as I wish her to, and lives here quietly with me, she will eventually have a fortune of her own.”

“What’s that key, Uncle?” Rosemary asked, more interested just then in the contents of the opened recess than in her future financial prospects.

“That’s the key of the wine cellar, child,” and her uncle smiled. “In these days, it is wiser to keep such things locked up, for though Mellish is impeccable some of the newer servants may not be. Why, Rosemary, this is doubtless what you saw glistening that night. I perhaps moved it as I hunted for a paper,—I don’t remember precisely.”

“Yes, that was it. It shone like brass and that has a brass tag.”

“Yes, and now run away, you two. I am very tired tonight. Collins, think twice before you run counter to my expressed desires. I do not like to have my advice utterly ignored.”

## **Chapter XIV** **Fleming Stone on the Case**

Bryce Collins did think twice before he made up his mind to run counter to Homer Vincent’s advice, but as his second thoughts coincided with his first ones, he carried out his plan of employing the celebrated detective, Fleming Stone, to investigate the mystery of the death of Anne Vincent, and to endeavor to recover the stolen ruby.

On receiving word from Stone that he would come to Hilldale, Collins told Vincent of his expected arrival.

“Very well,” Vincent returned, “I have no real objection, of course, since you are willing to assume the expenses of the investigation. As I told you, I have spent all I care to on the work, and, moreover, I am convinced that my dear sister has advised me to do nothing further.”

Collins wondered at this, to him, utter foolishness, but he remembered that, as Vincent had told him, greater minds than his own had gone over to spiritualism, and there was no reason why Homer Vincent should not do so.

Now and then, Vincent would tell Rosemary or Bryce Collins that his sister had told him she would play on the Wild Harp, and always at the appointed hour they could hear,—or imagined they heard, faint strains from the direction of the Temple.

Collins pooh-poohed at this, but he was obliged to admit that he did hear the sounds. Mrs. Mellish, a firm believer in the supernatural, often heard them, whether others did or not, but the old butler only shook his head with a patronizing grin, that seemed to pity such foolishness.

Francine, who was very quick of hearing, declared the sounds came frequently.

“And I can tell,” she volunteered, “when it is that my adored Miss Anne touches the strings, and when it is the music made by the dead Madame Lamont.”

And it was into this moil of inexplicable circumstances, into this jumble of supernaturalism and crime, into this mystery of robbery and murder, that Fleming Stone was expected to throw himself and, by the skill of his experienced wisdom and judgment, solve the mystery and expose the criminal.

The police had become apathetic in the matter.

One and all they agreed that nothing could be done until the missing man, Henry Johnson, was found. And as there was not the slightest trace of him, as there was positively no clue or bit of evidence to show which way to search, the police contented themselves with vague promises and hints of discoveries that they could not yet make public.

They had done their best. They had worked on numerous theories, had gone off on several wild-goose chases, had quizzed many people, but no definite conclusions were forthcoming, except that Henry Johnson was the criminal and Henry Johnson could not be found.

The few things he had left behind him were now at Police Headquarters; the room that had been assigned to him at Greatlarch had been cleaned and put in order, as also had Miss Anne's room.

So, Homer Vincent advised Collins, there was no occasion, as he could see, for the new detective to be a guest at his house. Indeed, he must refuse to have Stone quartered there, as he felt sure he could not stand such an intrusion on his home routine.



“But he may consider himself free to come and go as he chooses,” Vincent conceded; “he may make all the investigations he desires, he may question my servants or myself, or Rosemary, all he wants to. But, I beg of you, Bryce, do make him hurry up the thing. Don’t have him dawdling here for weeks, accomplishing nothing. It’s six weeks and more now, since my sister’s death,—nothing has been done,—nothing will be done to solve the mystery. But I shall put no obstacle in the way of any one’s effort, only, do make the man work as expeditiously as possible.”

Collins understood the distaste of Homer Vincent for the thought of the dreary repetitions of question and answer that they all knew by rote, but which Fleming Stone must ask and learn for himself.

“I appreciate your feelings, Mr. Vincent,” Bryce assured him, “and I will do all I can to facilitate Stone’s work and to save you all unnecessary participation in the whole business. If you wish, I’ll take him over the house, take him to the servants and all that. You need only answer the questions he wishes to put directly to you.”

“Good for you, Bryce. Save me all the annoyance you can. Rosemary will help you, and the two Mellishes. Of course, he’ll want to poke about all over the house. Let him do so, but keep him away from me, whenever you can.”

Bryce Collins agreed, and relieved that Vincent was even fairly affable about it, he went off to the station to meet the detective.

It was nearing the Christmas holidays now, and though Vincent had given no hint of his recognition of that fact, yet Collins knew that he would be grateful if Stone could make his investigations and announce either success or failure before the Christmastide should arrive.

Not that there would be any celebration at Greatlarch this year, but Vincent’s nature leaned toward religious observances, and Collins knew the season would be a sacred one to him.

Rosemary took little interest in the advent of Fleming Stone. She had no hope that any one would ever find Johnson now. She felt that as six weeks had elapsed, no further search could result in a discovery of the missing man. And she was so disheartened at her own sad fate that,

while she mourned her aunt and missed her sorely, yet the avenging of her tragic death meant less to the girl than the tragedy of her own life.

Night after night she cried herself to sleep, now resolving she would never marry, and then almost yielding to the temptation of consenting to Bryce's plea that they be married at once.

But she knew Bryce's mother, and she was not brave enough to face the angry scorn of that haughty and aristocratic dame.

Mrs. Collins had learned of Rosemary's refusal to marry her son, and thoroughly approved of the girl's decision. But should Rosemary change her mind, Mrs. Collins was quite ready to put up a fight.

Bryce Collins was of a sanguine, hopeful nature. His strong will and his unflinching determination were supplemented by a sublime optimism that never gave way until forced to do so by absolutely unconquerable circumstances.

And, quite aside from his firm belief in Stone's ability to find the murderer, he also was sure that the detective could be of help in discovering the mother of Rosemary. And he had a blind faith in that mother.

For Rosemary's sake even more than his own, he wanted to prove her mother of gentle birth,—perhaps a young and innocent girl led into error because of ignorance or too blind confidence in her lover. Perhaps she had been deceived by Carl Vincent—tricked by a false marriage, or,—Bryce couldn't always formulate his hopes, but at any rate he meant to have Stone look up the matter thoroughly. It might necessitate another trip to France, but this thought was no impediment to Collins' flights of fancy.

He was musing on these things when the train came to a stop at the station and a tall, good-looking man stepped off, who was, Collins felt sure, the detective.

He was accompanied by a red-headed, eager-faced boy, whose alert blue eyes darted comprehendingly about.

"That's our man, F. S.," the boy said, "that's Mr. Collins—aren't you?"

“Yes,” Collins said, smiling at the lad, whose cap sat saucily aslant on his thick red hair, but who pulled it quickly off as the two men greeted one another, and Fleming Stone added, “and this is my young assistant, McGuire.”

“How’re you, Mr. Collins?” the boy responded, “and to people I like I’m Fibsy. I like you.”

“Thank you, Fibsy,” Bryce smiled at him. “I hope I shall like you.”

“You bet you will. Where do we go from here?”

Bryce Collins conducted them to the village inn, which was so near by that they walked the short distance.

He had already engaged rooms for them, and very soon they were in a private sitting-room and Collins was earnestly telling Stone the principal facts of the case.

“I know a good deal from the newspaper accounts,” the detective said; “what I want to learn is the knowledge they seemed so carefully to withhold. Who was this Johnson man? Why did they never pick him up again? Where is he now?”

“That’s just the point of the whole thing, Mr. Stone. Get Johnson,—and you’ve done it all. He’s the murderer beyond all doubt—”

“How did he get in and out of the locked room?”

“That’s the question. But get Johnson and he can answer that himself.”

“Of course. Perfectly true. Now, to get a missing man, we have to trace him. Did he leave any indicative clues?”

“That he did not! He went like a wraith—he dissolved like a mist—no one saw him go, no one has seen him since. He made no tracks, he left no clues.”

“Oh, come, now, I’ll bet he left clues. Only, those who saw them failed to recognize them as such.”

“That’s what I think, Mr. Stone,” Collins spoke eagerly. “I believe that’s right.”

“But of course there are no signs of those clues now,” Fibsy said, with a deep sigh. “Six weeks must have obliterated all the footprints and fingerprints there were in the first place.”

“I don’t think anybody thought of fingerprints,” Collins said, looking at Fibsy with dawning respect. He had thought him merely Stone’s clerical assistant, or perhaps valet, and was amazed at the boy’s intelligent gaze and perspicacious remark.

“Not much chance for ‘em, anyway,” Fibsy went on. “No use getting Johnson’s fingerprints, if you can’t get the mitt that made ‘em! No use in getting the prints of the family and friends,—or even the servants. No s’picion of the butler person is there?”

“Good gracious, no,” and Collins smiled at the bare thought of suspecting Mellish.

“No offence to His Nibs,” Fibsy offered, “but you know, quite frequently sometimes it is Friend Butler.”

“Hush up, Fibs,” Stone admonished. “Now, Mr. Collins, I have, I think, all the information you can give me. The rest I must get for myself. Can I go to the house this afternoon? After I’ve had some luncheon here?”

“Yes, surely. You’ll find Mr. Vincent a reserved and perhaps curt man, but you can depend absolutely on his sense of justice and his willingness to have you investigate his premises. He prefers to be left out of it all himself, as much as possible. But I assure you that he is ready to do his part, and usually, his bark is worse than his bite.”

“Gruff old codger?” asked Fibsy.

“Not a bit of it!” and Collins smiled. “A most polished gentleman. But bored by people and weary of the futile efforts of detectives.”

“We’re accustomed to that type,” the boy said, winking at Stone; “they come off their perch, though, when F. Stone really gets busy. Will this guy mind my goin’ along?”

“I think not,—but I assume you’d go just the same if he did.”

“Sure I would. F. Stone can’t do a thing without his little Fibsy by his side. He’s that dependent on me, you wouldn’t believe!”

“Why the cheerful nickname?” Collins couldn’t help liking the boy.

“That’s just it! ‘Cause I’m such a cheerful liar. Why, it’s no more trouble for me to tell a whopper than for F. Stone to tell the gospel truth!”

“There now, McGuire, keep quiet. You’re too chatty this morning.”

“Gotta stop!” and the lad made a wry face. “When he calls me McGuire, he means business. No more funny chatter from this baby. All right,—here’s where I shut up.” And from then on, the boy made no remark, but his sharp eyes showed perception and comprehension and his wise little head nodded now and then, as Collins discussed the matter somewhat further with Fleming Stone.

That afternoon the pair of detectives went to Greatlarch.

Collins was there before them and introduced them to Homer Vincent and Rosemary.

Fibsy was very quiet, acknowledging his presentation by a respectful nod of his red head, but Fleming Stone was a little more self-assertive than was usual for him.

Fibsy looked at his chief in silent wonder as Stone shook hands a little effusively with Homer Vincent, and said, “How do you do, my dear?” to Rosemary.

It was quite foreign to Stone’s custom to be so familiar, and when he followed it up by settling himself, unasked, in an easy chair, Fibsy’s self-addressed “Gee!” was almost audible.

“Wonderful house, Mr. Vincent,” was Stone’s appreciative comment, as he gazed around him.

They were in the reception room, which was also a Tower room, opposite the room that Vincent used for his own.

“Yes,” the host replied, a bit curtly, and waited for further speech from his guest.

Suddenly Stone’s manner changed.

“I am here, Mr. Vincent,” he said, “to discover, if I can, who killed your sister. But I am told by Mr. Collins, that you do not wish to pursue this inquiry further, because of supernatural revelations you have had. Is this true?”

“Quite true, Mr. Stone.” Vincent spoke courteously but wearily, as if wishing to be done with the interview. “I daresay you do not believe in the occult—”

“Pardon me, do you consider the occult and the supernatural synonymous terms?”

“I don’t care to go into the technical definitions of those terms,” Vincent returned; “my belief in the revelations I have received from the spirit of my dead sister is not based on study or research into these questions. It is solely based on the evidence of my own senses and an inner conviction that my senses in no way deceived me.”

“I am interested,” Stone said; “how were these messages received, may I ask? Through the assistance of a Ouija Board or a human medium?”

“Neither, sir. The messages were spoken to me by my sister’s voice in the dead of night—”

“You’re sure you were awake?”

“As wide awake as I am this minute. She spoke low but clearly to me, and begged me, for her sake, to desist from these futile delvings into what must ever remain a mystery. Now, Mr. Stone, I am not asking you to desist nor am I desirous of hindering your search,—only I do want you to understand my attitude, and be good enough to leave me out as a factor of your plans.”

“I will do so, Mr. Vincent, as far as I can, without too much hampering my own work. If, however, you give me your permission to examine the house, and grounds,—to interview your servants—and to ask you a

question or two, if and when necessary, I think I may safely promise you immunity from annoyance.”

“Thank you,” and Vincent looked relieved. “I will then, if you please, excuse myself now, and leave you to your own procedure. Touch the bell for my butler, and he will arrange for your interviews with the other servants.”

Homer Vincent rose and left the room, his slight limp appearing a little more in evidence than usual.

After Vincent’s departure, the detective sat a moment in deep thought.

Bryce Collins put this down to a desire to appear profound and weighted down by care.

Rosemary thought it was merely the habit of any detective to sit and ponder at intervals.

But Fibsy knew at once that, somehow, somewhere, Stone had seen or heard something indicative. Something had demanded immediate and serious thought. Not for worlds would the boy have spoken then. Nothing would have induced him to blurt out some of his saucy speeches. He watched the play of Stone’s features, he gazed eagerly in his face for a sign of what was passing in his mind. But though grave and preoccupied, the detective’s face gave no hint of the trend his thoughts were taking.

After a few moments, however, he roused himself and with a brisk air turned to Collins.

“Now, for an examination of the house,” he said; “though I fear I may become so engrossed in the marvels of architecture and decoration as to forget my main business here.”

“That’s what Mr. Johnson did,” Rosemary said.

“You didn’t see him?” and Stone turned to her quickly.

“No,” Rosemary was almost frightened at his suddenness, “no, the butler told me. He said Mr. Johnson was overcome with admiration and

wonder. Indeed, he must have been, to have wandered about nearly all night.”

“Where do you suppose he wandered?” Stone said, musingly.

“I don’t know, I’m sure, but he couldn’t have been in his room long, as it was so undisturbed.”

“Oh,” Stone sighed deeply, “if I’d only been here at once. I suppose all the rooms he might have visited that night, in his tour of admiration, have since been swept and garnished, dusted and polished to the last degree!”

“Yes, they have,” said Rosemary. “The detectives looked them all over and said Mr. Johnson left no clues.”

“Ugh-h-h!” Fibsy’s grunt was one of utter disdain for the detectives who could find nothing to detect. Without a word, he conveyed the idea that Fleming Stone would have found plenty of evidence from those cursorily examined rooms.

“Here’s one clue they found,” Rosemary said. She was anxious to help and she was deeply interested in the new detective.

Aside from his chivalrous courtesy, Fleming Stone had great charm when he chose to exercise it, and feeling exceedingly sorry for the girl, whose story Collins had already told him, he paid her such pleasant and deferential attention that she was glad to offer any information.

From a table-drawer she took the long-handled cigarette-holder which had been found out in the grounds.

“This is known to be Mr. Johnson’s,” she said, “and as it was found outside, we assume he strolled round the grounds.”

“Wasn’t it a cold, snowy night?”

“Not after midnight. I came home about twelve—or, nearer one,—and it had stopped snowing, though it was cold. But not too cold for a walk.”

“Yet remember he had on no hat or overcoat.”



“Oh, he may have had,” Collins interposed “He wore none when he went away, after the crime. But he may have strolled round the grounds before that, with his hat and coat on, and then he dropped his cigarette-holder.”

“Odd thing to do,” Stone observed. “Yet he may have thought he slipped it in his pocket and it fell to the ground. You’re sure it is his?”

“Yes, Mellish recognized it as the one he used after dinner,” Rosemary answered him.

“Let me see Mellish,” Stone said, abruptly, and the butler was called.

“Now, I don’t want a lot of information, Mellish,” Stone said, pleasantly. “Just tell me anything you can remember of Mr. Johnson’s conversation at dinner that evening he dined here.”

Mellish looked blank. Evidently he had expected quite different inquiries.

“Well, now, sir, I’m not sure I can remember much of that. I opine it’s as evidence you want this, and I must have a care that I do not undervalue its importance.”

Stone suppressed a smile at the rather grandiloquent air of the speaker and Fibsy stared at him, fascinated.

“Yes, it is important,” Stone assured him, “so tell it as accurately as you can. What subjects did the visitor choose for conversation?”

“Well, sir, he didn’t do much of the choosing. I should say Mr. Vincent selected the topics of dissertation. And, as I recollect, two or three times, Mr. Johnson began a sentence, and Mr. Vincent would say, ‘No, no, we must not discuss business at the table.’ It is a sovereign rule of Mr. Vincent, sir, never to talk on business or any serious matters at meal-times. He held that table-talk must ever be light and agreeable,—yes, sir, light and agreeable.”

“And you think the subject of Mr. Johnson’s business with Mr. Vincent was not an agreeable subject?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that, sir. I opine it was agreeable enough, but of a serious nature,—yes, sir, of a serious nature.”

“Just what did Mr. Johnson start to say, when Mr. Vincent asked him not to introduce the subject? Anything regarding rubies?”

“No, sir—it was more in the line of remingincence,—yes, sir, remingincence. Once, I recollect, Mr. Johnson said, ‘You see, I was his confidential clerk—’ he said that just as I was entering the room with my tray, and I heard that much, and then Mr. Vincent said, ‘No, no, my friend, no reference to business just now, if you please,’ or something like that.”

“Never mind the exact words of Mr. Vincent, but try to remember more of the speeches of Mr. Johnson. You see, Mellish, it is most important that we get a line on what sort of a gentleman he was. And I don’t want to trouble Mr. Vincent in these matters unless necessary.”

“Yes, sir, I see. Well, Mr. Johnson was remarking on the beauty of the house, you see, and he said, quite impressive like, ‘but it doesn’t make me forget my real errand here,—I am here for a purpose,—’ and then again Mr. Vincent told him to wait till after dinner to discuss the business that brought him here.”

“Any more?”

“Well, he spoke of a trust—”

“Do you think he meant a great jewel trust? Or Jewelers’ Union?”

“Oh, no, sir! Not at all. He meant a trust had been given to him—a sacred trust, he called it.”

“Oh, then that had nothing to do with the business in hand.”

“Well, I don’t know, sir. Mr. Vincent shut him off again, just the same way.”

“Perhaps it referred to Miss Anne’s ruby. Was that a trust to her for any one else?”

“Not that I know of, sir.”

## **Chapter XV**

### **A Few Deductions**

Fleming Stone and his red-headed assistant sat in their little parlor at the Hilldale inn.

They had not said much as yet about the Vincent mystery, but each was thinking deeply.

At last, Stone, with a straightforward glance at the boy, said:

“Find Henry Johnson.”

“Find Henry Johnson,” Fibsy repeated, but he added a prolonged wink, that left him with one blue eye staring wide open and the other optic tightly closed.

“Meaning?” asked Stone, meditatively, gazing at this expressive facial contortion.

“Meaning,” returned Fibsy, his closed eye once more opening to the world at large, “that Mr. Henry Johnson is going to be hard to find—very hard to find.”

“Meaning, again?”

“Why, that a man who has been tee-tum-tee-totally missing for something over six weeks, isn’t going to be picked up overnight, is he, now, F. Stone?”

“Perhaps not, Fibs, but the first move on our chess-board is to find him. Now, for a systematic search, let’s first observe his clothing,—which is, I believe, at the Police Station.”

“Eccentric guy, Henry,—isn’t he?” and Fibsy’s blue eyes stared out over his tightly closed fists, on which his cheeks rested.

“As how?”

“As to his occupation all through the night. Say, he pulled off his robbery and murder stunt at seven A.M., which is what the doctors put the time at. Then, as Mr. Vincent left his visitor at about eleven, that man was so

interested in the beautiful house that he prowled around it for eight mortal hours! Going some,—F. Stone,—going some!”

“All right, but what else did he do? We know he didn’t go to bed. He may have lain down on some sofa or couch for a nap,—and, remember the cigarette-holder,—that proves he went for a walk round the grounds.”

“Out back to that Spooky Hollow place, I s’pose. Investigatin’ the Spooky Harp and the Spooky Lady who plays on it. Well, I reckernize all that, but I still say he was a long time a pokin’ around especially as the night watchman never caught a peek of him.”

“Then it must be that he did drop down on some convenient couch for a nap. Lord knows, there are plenty of them here and there, all over that house. I saw a dozen.”

“Yes, Mr. Vincent is of a home comforts type. Why, the swivel chair in his private office room is all cushioned and upholstered.”

“And Johnson may have taken his doze in a chair. But it makes little difference where he spent the night, the point is, where is he now? and can we trace him from the clothes and clues he left behind him?”

“You can, F. Stone. That’s your business, isn’t it? Why, the man is as good as caught already!”

“That will do, McGuire, this is no time for foolery. Come along now to the Headquarters, and for Heaven’s sake, keep your eyes open. The trails are very stale, and we shall be hard put to it to read much from them.”

But when Stone was given the hat and coat of the missing man, his eyes lighted up with expectancy. “This hat tells us a lot,” he said, and Brown and Brewster, who had come to listen to the celebrated detective’s deductions, drew nearer.

“It is brand-new, it shows that Mr. Johnson has a large head, that he is slightly bald, that he had just had a hair-cut, that, though this is a Derby, he usually wore a soft hat,—that he didn’t like this hat at all,—and that may be the reason he didn’t wear it when he went away. It also tells us that Mr. Johnson is of a pronounced brunette type, with dark hair and eyes, and of a strong, vigorous vitality. But these descriptive bits are of

little use, for we already know the appearance and personality of the man. We are not trying to discover who owns this hat, but where he is.”

“All the same, your deductions are mighty interesting,” Brown said, his eyes shining with curiosity. “And, though it may seem a, b, c to you, won’t you tell us how you got those facts?”

Stone answered this categorically, saying, “His head must be large, because this hat is seven and a half, and yet it shows signs on the sweat-band of having been pulled down hard, to fit on his head. He had a recent hair-cut, because a few short hairs are caught in the tiny bow of silk braid inside the hat, and he was probably bald, because there is a faint odor of a certain lotion that I know is used in many barber shops as a hair stimulant. He was accustomed to a soft hat, for on each side of this crown you may see rubbed places, where he has absent-mindedly grasped it in one hand as one does a soft hat. I feel sure he didn’t like a hat that was too tight for him, and was stiff and uncomfortable compared to a Fedora, yet it doesn’t seem quite plausible to assume that as the reason for his leaving it behind him. I think it more likely, that he wore this hat when out strolling round the grounds, but he did not have it on when he committed the crime, and that he hastened away after that, in such a hurry, or in such a distraction of mind, that he did not then return to his room for his hat.

“Of course the deductions as to his personal appearance are based on these few short, strong black hairs, which naturally connote a brunette type and the dark eyes and physical vigor that accompany that coloring.

“But, as I say, these traits of Mr. Johnson are known to Mr. Vincent, and so are of no further importance. What we want is some clue that may suggest his possible destination on leaving Greatlarch. Let me see the coat.”

The coat proved to be an ordinary, fairly expensive overcoat,—new, and of good style. There was nothing in the pockets but a handkerchief, also new, and unmarked, a pair of new gloves, that had not even been tried on, and, in a small pocket, evidently meant for the purpose, less than a dollar in silver, doubtless to be handy for car-fare or tips.

“All just as we found it,” Brewster told him, and Stone looked regretfully at the gloves.

“What can anybody learn from new gloves?” he said, dejectedly, “except the size of his hands and the type of his haberdashery, which is in no way helpful. But why did the man have this entire new outfit merely to come up here on a business errand? The fact that all his things are so very new is a peculiar circumstance in itself.”

“Here’s his umbrella,” Brewster said; “this isn’t so new. You see it has his monogram on the handle.”

“A monogrammed umbrella is an unusual thing for any one,” Stone said.

“Probably given him by his Sunday-school class,” Fibsy put in.

“More likely by a rich maiden aunt,” Brown suggested. “Makers of synthetic rubies are not apt to be of a religious tendency. However, it’s a fine umbrella.”

It was, and Stone examined it closely. Of thick, rich black silk, it had a silver-mounted handle, which showed an H and a J intertwined in an elaborate monogram.

The ribs were of the best, and aside from the maker’s name, there seemed no other details to note.

“Observe the monogram, McGuire,” Stone said, quietly, passing it to the boy.

Gravely, Fibsy scrutinized the chased letters, and his round, freckled face drew itself into a frown of perplexity.

A quick glance at Stone showed him that there was something to be learned from the monogram, but, for once, Terence McGuire was dense or ignorant.

“I can’t see it, F. Stone,” he said, in a chagrined tone. “What is it?”

“Oh, nothing. Just get the monogram fixed in your mind,—carry away a mental picture of it.”

So Fibsy looked hard at the deeply engraved H and the long, slender J that ran down through the middle of it, after the manner of monograms,

and then declared he knew it so well he could draw it in the dark, with his eyes shut and both hands tied behind him.

“What about the monogram, Mr. Stone?” Brewster asked, but Stone only shook his head, saying: “perhaps nothing, perhaps a signboard pointing to the truth. As soon as I find out which, I’ll tell you. At any rate the umbrella, though well preserved and cared for, is not a brand-new one. Where’s his bag?”

The kitbag was brought, but if the audience expected any sensational deductions by Fleming Stone, they were disappointed. He ran over carelessly the few black rubber-backed brushes and the few new, unmarked pieces of underwear. He glanced at the necktie and handkerchiefs. All new, and all of fairly good quality, without being elaborate or expensive.

The atomizer interested him rather more.

“Isn’t there a bottle of lotion to go with this?” he asked.

“That’s what we wondered,” said Brown, eagerly, glad to have his thoughts coincide with those of the great detective.

“There’s almost nothing in it,” Stone went on, “and from the odor I gather it’s an antiseptic preparation,—doubtless for some catarrhal affection. Where’s the vial? There must be one, and it may have a chemist’s name on it.”

“There isn’t any bottle, Mr. Stone, and there was none in his room or his bathroom. He must have forgotten to bring it.”

“He forgot to bring anything indicative of his identity!” Stone said. “For a man on a short business trip, he had fewer personal articles of property than any one I ever saw! It would almost seem as if he were desirous of hiding his identity.”

“Yet there’s no rhyme or reason to that,” put in Brewster, “he sent his name in to Mr. Vincent, and his umbrella bears witness that it was his real name.”

“Who brought him up from the station to Mr. Vincent’s house?” asked Stone, suddenly.

“Prout, the taxi driver,” Brown said. “The Vincent butler told me so.”

“Has Prout been interviewed?”

“Yes, Mr. Stone, I questioned him myself,” Brewster stated; “he said nothing of interest. Merely described the man as we’ve already had his description, said he came up on the New York train—”

“That’s a New York timetable in his bag,” Brown interposed. “And it is the only scrap of paper he seemed to possess.”

“He took his money and papers with him,” Stone said; “but can I see this Prout for myself, Mr. Brewster?”

“Oh, yes, I’ll send for him at once.”

And when Prout arrived, he gave, practically, the same description of the brunette Johnson, that Stone had already heard.

“Tell me of his manner,” Stone said; “was he business-like?”

“Oh, Lord, yes. Spry and sort of up-and-coming, he was. Wanted to know a lot about Mr. Vincent, he did.”

“He had never seen him before?”

“Well, they say he hadn’t, and I dunno’s he had,—no, sir, I dunno’s he had. But he did ask me right first-off if Mr. Vincent’s leg had healed yet.”

“I noticed Mr. Vincent limped a little,” Stone said, “what’s the trouble?”

“He broke his leg some few years ago, sir, and they’ve never been quite the same length since. Jest a mite of a limp,—as you could see. But this man musta known that, ‘cause he asked me right outen a clear sky, did Mr. Vincent’s leg get well. So, I says to myself, he’s an old friend. Well, sir, then he asked me was Mr. Vincent married! Ho, ho,—to think of Homer Vincent bein’ married! Why there ain’t an unlikelier marryin’ man on the footstool than Homer Vincent! That there ain’t!”



“But Johnson could scarcely be an old friend without knowing that,” Stone observed.

“That’s jest it! And yet, he knew of Mr. Vincent’s brother and his sister and his niece.”

“You’re sure? He didn’t gather the facts of these relationships from something you said?”

“No, he didn’t. For I said somethin’ about Miss Vincent and he said did I mean Miss Rosemary.”

“Then he knew of the niece. What else did he say?”

“Not much else. Oh, yep, I spoke of Mr. Vincent as the old man,—not meanin’ no disrespect, but jest in a manner o’ speakin’, an’ he says, sharp like. ‘Why do you call him an old man?’ an’ I says. ‘Thasso, he can’t be more’n fifty.’ An’ he can’t neither.”

“This is all interesting, Mr. Prout, but it only proves that Mr. Johnson knew some things about Mr. Homer, which he might easily have learned from hearsay. There’s nothing, so far, to indicate that they had ever met before.”

“I dessay that’s so,—an’ yet, somehow, he gimme the impression that he had seen the man. Maybe he hadn’t, though,—maybe he hadn’t.”

“Mr. Vincent said he was an entire stranger,” Brewster stated; “I see no reason to doubt his word.”

“Me nuther,” said Prout. “An’ when I told Mr. Johnson that Mr. Vincent was an inventor, he was surprised and interested.”

“He would be,” said Stone, “because of his interest in the manufacture of his rubies. But I didn’t know Homer Vincent was an inventor.”

“Oh, he just putters about, making up odd tricks,” Brown said, smiling. “He isn’t an inventor by way of patenting things, or manufacturing them.”

“What line do his inventions take?” Stone inquired.

“Mostly electrical,” Brewster informed him. “Little contraptions to make bells ring in his house where he wants them. Speaking-tubes from his rooms to the servants’ quarters. I’ve seen them in use. They’re a little more elaborate and ingenious than other folks have. And they say he rigs them up himself.”

“Well, Mr. Prout,” Stone addressed him, “I think you have given me about all the information you can, and I thank you. Now, one more question. Merely as an observer of human nature, would you say that your fare that day was a man bent on a sinister errand, I mean on an errand of evil intent,—or merely on a matter of business?”

Prout considered.

“Well, sir,” he said, at last, “it’s sorter hard to tell. But, while I wouldn’t wanta say that Mr. Johnson was on any such devilish errand as he carried out before he left, yet I will say that he had a more personal interest in Mr. Vincent and his home and his family than I’d expect from a man comin’ on a plain matter o’ business. He was sorta excited an’ eager-like,—more’n you’d expect from a agent for a jewelry house.”

“I see,—he anticipated some pleasure or profit from his visit beside the business proposition he was to make.”

“That’s it, sir. And without meanin’ to do more’n I oughter in the way o’ deducin’—or whatever you call it,—I might make a guess that he was a bit interested in Miss Rosemary.”

Fleming Stone’s heart gave a sudden thump. Bryce Collins had told him that Mr. Vincent had hinted that the murderer might be some of the girl’s disreputable kinsfolk,—on her mother’s side. Suppose this were true!

“Why did you think that?” he asked, sharply.

“Oh, come now, I didn’t exactly think it,—only just the way he said Miss Rosemary’s name, made me think he might be sweet on her.”

“Oh, that!” Stone was relieved. “But how could he know the girl, when he didn’t know her uncle?”

“I don’t say he did know her—only, I sorta imagined he sounded interested in her.”

“Probably it was imagination,” and Stone declared the whole interview, at an end.

As he and Fibsy left the place, the detective proposed that Prout drive them out to the Vincent home, and as they went the trio chatted casually of the whole matter. But no detail of importance could Stone gain further, and when they reached their destination, he discarded the idea of the taxi driver as a source of information.

Before entering the house, Stone took a short walk round the grounds.

He found the place where, as he had been told, the cigarette-holder had been picked up.

It was perhaps twenty-five or thirty feet from the broken stone fence that marked off the dark glade known as Spooky Hollow.

“Don’t wonder at the name? Do you?” Fibsy said, shuddering at the dark and dense gloom of the tangled underbrush in the thicket.

“No, it’s an eerie place,” and Stone gazed thoughtfully into its depths. “I don’t want to get all messed up, but I wish, Terence, you’d go in there some time, and see just what’s inside. Probably nothing at all, and yet, you might get a pointer.”

“All right, F. S., I’ll tend to that same errand soon’s I can. Or shall I go right now, immejit?”

“No, tomorrow will do. Wear your oldest clothes.”

“Yes, sir. What’m I to look for?”

“I can’t think of anything,” Stone smiled. “But it seems a place to be explored, that’s all. A place called Spooky Hollow is suggestive of spooks, isn’t it? You might find a few.”

“ ‘Tis the same as done, sir,” and Fibsy nodded his red shock in a promissory way.

In the house they found Bryce Collins and Rosemary, in what seemed to be a desperate controversy.

The girl's lovely face was tear-stained and her lips quivered, as she greeted Stone.

Fibsy's tender heart was torn, for beauty in distress was one thing he could not bear to see. At heart the boy was a squire of dames, and his first sight of Rosemary had enlisted his whole-hearted sympathy in her cause.

"We've been looking at Spooky Hollow," said Stone, by way of a casual remark to dispel the awkwardness of the scene.

Rosemary controlled her voice and responded, "It's a shame to use that name for such a lovely place, don't you think so?"

"I do," Stone agreed, "unless there are really spooks out there. In that case, it's appropriate. Are there, Miss Vincent?"

"I've never seen any," she gave a half smile and then her face turned very serious. "But I have heard the Wild Harp, Mr. Stone,—how do you explain that?"

"Tell me of it,—describe it exactly, will you?"

"Why, there's little to tell—it's just a wave of faint music that sounds now and then."

"Like an æolian harp?"

"No—not exactly. It's more like—well, I may as well say that it sounds more like ghostly music than anything else I can think of."

"How do you know how ghostly music sounds?" and Stone smiled at her.

"Why, I don't—of course,—but it's so faint and sweet and—"

"Is there an air—a tune?"

"No, not a definite tune—more like a wailing strain, that has no beginning or end."

“And that makes it ghostly?”

“Now, you’re laughing at me, Mr. Stone,” and Rosemary’s color returned to her cheeks, and she was again her own charming self.

“Indeed, I’m not. And, I’m told that this Harp plays at certain times, in accordance with advices from the spirit world.”

“Oh, not quite that!” Rosemary looked surprised. “But they say when it does sound, it forbodes disaster.”

“And it sounded the night of your aunt’s death?”

“Yes, I heard it myself, between two and three.”

“Will you call your butler, Miss Vincent?” Mellish appeared in answer to a summons, and Fleming Stone turned to him at once.

“Mellish,” he said, “have you ever heard this Wild Harp?”

Though he tried to suppress it, a faint smile came to the face of the butler.

“Well, sir,—I may say I have. But, if you’re thinking seriously as to its being of a supernatural persuasion,—I opine sir, as it isn’t.”

“H’m, and what do you opine causes the music?”

“I’m not free of speech, not free to say, sir,—but ‘tis my notion that those who hear it have the imagination strongly developed.”

“Ah, you think it is a freak of their fancy?”

“Just that, sir.”

“Yes; and now, Mellish, I want to check up on something you said. You know we’re trying every possible way to find Henry Johnson.”

“Yes, sir, I am aware of your endeavors in that direction.”

“Very well. Now, you know he came here to see Mr. Vincent about making rubies?”

“Yes, sir,—that’s no secret, sir.”

“No, it is not. Mr. Vincent told it himself. But the making of rubies is not so common a business but that we ought to be able to trace a man who makes it his calling.”

“Common a business it may not be, but Mr. Johnson is the second man, within a month or so, to come here to see Mr. Vincent about it.”

“Doubtless the same man—”

“Oh, no, sir, the other man was quite different—”

“I mean, probably from the same firm of manufacturers.”

“It may be. The other man’s name was Markham,—or something like that—”

“Never mind that now,” Stone spoke a little impatiently, “what I want to know is about the Wild Harp. But, not now, Mellish, it’s later than I thought. I’ll see you about that tomorrow. You may go now.”

As the butler left the room, Stone said to Bryce Collins, “I suppose, Mr. Collins, I am to make my report of my findings to you?”

“Why, yes, Mr. Stone,—but if you have any developments of importance to tell of, it might be a good idea to ask Mr. Vincent if he wants to hear them. He—well, I don’t want to seem to neglect him.”

“That’s true, call him, if you like.”

Homer Vincent came at the summons. He looked anxious to hear the report and was most courteous and gracious to Stone.

“I haven’t learned very much,” Fleming Stone said, “but I have found out these things. The man who came here the day Miss Vincent died was not named Henry Johnson. His initials were not H. J. He didn’t come to see about synthetic rubies; he didn’t murder Miss Vincent, and he didn’t steal her famous jewel.”

## **Chapter XVI**

### **Fibsy Explores**

Rosemary and Bryce Collins looked at the detective in blank amazement. Fibsy sat listening, open-minded and receptive. He knew that if Fleming Stone said the missing man's name was not Henry Johnson, it wasn't. But he had no data on which to hazard a guess as to what the right name might be, so he waited.

Homer Vincent, however, showed a decided interest in Stone's statements.

"Do you know," he said, "I am not surprised to learn that the man used an assumed name. I suspected it from his little start of surprise when I called him Johnson, now and then. Just as a man would, if he were using the wrong name, and forgot it occasionally. But I don't understand why you say those are not his initials on the umbrella. Of course, it might be somebody else's umbrella—"

"No, Mr. Vincent," Stone said, "it is his umbrella all right. But the initials on it are J. H. and not H. J."

"Now how in the world do you know that?" Collins exclaimed. "How can you tell?"

"Because the H is a trifle larger. Monograms are invariably made with the initial of the surname larger than the initial of the Christian name, and the H in this case, though nearly the same size as the J, is, in fact, a little larger and more prominent. See for yourself."

Stone left the room a moment and returned with the umbrella, which he had borrowed from the police and left in the coat room of Greatlarch.

They all scrutinized the engraved letters and were forced to the conclusion that Stone was right.

"This complicates matters," Vincent said, thoughtfully. "He told me his name was Johnson and that he lived at the Walford, in New York. Perhaps that was also a fictitious address. And you think his errand about the synthetic rubies was also faked, Mr. Stone? Then he came purposely to murder my sister—"

Homer Vincent was staggered by the thoughts that rushed to his mind consequent upon these new disclosures of Stone's.

“But Mr. Stone says that man didn’t kill Antan!” put in Rosemary. “Do you know who did, Mr. Stone?”

“Not positively,” said Stone. “I shall have to go down to New York and see what I can do—”

“Perhaps he had an accomplice,” suggested Vincent. “I hadn’t thought of that before.”

“No, I hadn’t, either,” Stone said. “Perhaps he had. At any rate, I will go down to New York tomorrow, and I will ask you all to say nothing to any one of my findings. I speak confidentially to you here, because Mr. Collins is my employer, and Mr. Vincent and Miss Rosemary are the ones chiefly interested in avenging the murder.”

“Aside from the identity of the murderer, Mr. Stone, how do you explain the locked door?”

“That’s hard to explain, Mr. Vincent. The doctors state the murder was committed not more than an hour or so before the body was discovered. That makes it about seven o’clock or after. But I have talked with the little maid, Francine. and she vows no one was in or near Miss Vincent’s room after six, that morning. She says her room is next to that her mistress occupied and that she was awake from six o’clock on. She declares no intruder could have made his way in without her hearing him.”

“Then,” Vincent spoke seriously, “then do you still discard my suggestion of possible supernatural forces, Mr. Stone?”

“I most certainly do, Mr. Vincent. Had the lady been killed by shock or fright, there might be a reason to consider an apparition or a phantom visitant, but not even a spook from Spooky Hollow could stab its victim to the heart with a real dagger.”

“Of course not,” and Homer Vincent sighed and shook his head.

“Go on, then,” he continued. “Now that you have a definite proposition to work on and a hope of discovering the criminal, I renew my offer of funds for the enterprise. Go to New York, Mr. Stone, use every endeavor



to find out the real name of the man who called himself Johnson, and send all your bills to me.”

“Thank you, Mr. Vincent,” Bryce Collins said, gratefully. “You take a load off my shoulders! I’m willing enough to stand all the expense, but I haven’t your resources, and mine are running low.”

“That’s all right, Bryce,—the thing must be pushed through. And since Mr. Stone seems sanguine, I can only hope his quest will succeed.”

And then, with a murmured word of excuse, Vincent left the room.

“He’s often like that,” Rosemary said, looking affectionately after him. “He gets weary and sad at this continual discussion of Antan’s murder. Now, he’ll go and play the organ.”

Which is just what Vincent did. Soon, they could hear muted strains of soft music rolling through the house.

“Yes, he’s sad,” Rosemary reiterated, as she listened a moment to the chords. “Not worried or revengeful, so much as deeply sorrowful. I can always tell by what he plays.”

Fibsy, always interested in an unfamiliar phase of human behavior, went softly out into the marble vestibule that led to the organ room.

Stepping up into the balcony that overlooked the great church-like room, the boy listened to the music Homer Vincent produced.

Without musical education Fibsy had a natural appreciation of harmony, and as he raptly listened he felt almost as if he could read what was in the mind of the player. At least, he sensed the tragedy that filled the soul of the man at the keyboard, and realized in part, at any rate, what he suffered.

Fleming Stone, alone with the two young lovers, was so gentle, so sympathetic, that before they knew it they were pouring out to him all the details of the other tragedy of Rosemary’s birth.

“It must be looked into,” Stone said, with decision. “I’m sure, Miss Vincent, you would rather know the worst, than to live in ignorance of the truth.”

“Yes,” but the girl hesitated. “I’m not sure. Suppose my mother was—”

“Don’t look at it like that. Your own refinement and good taste point to an ancestry of the right sort of people. Don’t let yourself think otherwise.”

But this speech was not entirely sincere. Stone, always sympathetic in sorrow, merely said what he could to comfort the girl at the moment. After the murder business was settled, he proposed to take up the matter of Rosemary’s parentage. But he could not attend to both at once and he hated to have her grieve unnecessarily.

“And your uncle is right, to a degree,” he said, after she and Collins had told the details of Vincent’s restrictions. “I don’t know him as well as you do, but I can see he is a high-minded gentleman with a right appreciation of his family responsibilities. Also, I see how dependent he is for happiness on the creature comforts of life. A door left open or slammed shut, a delayed answer to his summons, an intrusion on his hours of privacy,—any such things would, I am sure, annoy him to distraction, when another type of man wouldn’t even notice them.”

“That’s just exactly Uncle Homer!” Rosemary cried. “You read him perfectly!”

“And I can read you too, my dear,” Stone smiled at her. “You love life and young society and parties and attentions from the young men. You’d love to entertain lavishly in this beautiful home,—to fill these great rooms with gay and merry guests, to have all sorts of wonderful clothes and jewels,—come, now, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes, indeed!” and Rosemary flushed with pleasure at his mere suggestion of such delights. “But I know I oughtn’t to think of such things and I ought to be deeply grateful to Uncle Homer because he lets me stay here.”

“That is true, Rosemary.” Stone spoke very gravely. “It might well have been his way to ask you to live elsewhere. And since he offers you a home here with stipulations, you should obey him, however unpleasant to you his restrictions are.”

“I know it,” but the girl’s lip quivered a little and her golden-brown eyes filled with tears at thought of her stained name as well as her uncongenial life.

“You’re sure your uncle has no further knowledge of your mother than he has told you?” Stone inquired. “He’s not the sort of man to conceal some fact that he thinks might make you even more sad than you are now?”

“No, I don’t think so,—do you, Bryce?”

“No, sir, I don’t. Mr. Vincent has been frank and outspoken in all of our discussions of the subject. I feel grateful to him, as Rosemary does, but I think he might allow her a little more freedom. However, as soon as I can persuade her to consent, I mean to marry her, and take her far away from all people who know her at all. We shall start a new life for ourselves—”

“No, we will not!” Rosemary said, decidedly. “I shall never marry anybody. An illegitimate child has no right to marry.”

“Tell me again,” Stone said to her, “of your homecoming that night. You saw no sign of a guest in the house?”

“No, but that is not strange. I didn’t look in the general coat room, of course, and he had left none of his belongings anywhere else.”

“You went around first, and peeped in at your uncle’s window. Why did you do that?”

“Partly to see if he was likely to hear me come in—it was late—and partly because I saw from the driveway a very bright light in that room. An unusually bright light, so that I thought the room was afire.”

“What caused it?”

“Oh, only that uncle’s open fire chanced to be blazing brightly. Then I saw him, and saw he was so engrossed in his papers and letters that I could take the chance of slipping in unobserved, and I did.”

“And you saw him putting away something glittering?”

“Yes, that was the key of the wine cellar. I suppose that he had Mellish get out some special wine for his visitor.”

“Well, my child, I will do all I can for you later on, but now the case of your aunt will demand all my attention. I want a little talk with your uncle before I go, but perhaps we’d better not call him from the organ. I also want to talk with the maid who assisted your butler in serving at the table the night Mr. Johnson was here. Will you call her, please, and leave us together?”

The waitress, Katie, was summoned; and, a trifle shy, she came in and stood before the detective.

“Sit down, Katie,” he said, kindly. “Now, I’m not going to ask you anything of great importance, just try to remember anything Mr. Johnson may have said at the table that night. Anything at all. I don’t suppose you pay much attention to the talk of the guests as you wait on them, but you may recollect something he said—try now.”

“I don’t remember a thing,” the girl declared, and she was so positive, Stone wondered at first if some one had forbidden her to speak.

But he discarded that idea when Katie, under the influence of his encouraging smiles, began to recollect a stray word or two.

“He said the house was pretty—” she vouchsafed at last, with a timid air.

“Yes,” Stone egged her on. “And did he say anything about his own home—where he lived?”

“Oh, yes,—he said he came from New York,—but I don’t think he lived there, because he said, ‘what fine hotels there are in New York.’ ”

“To be sure. And maybe he mentioned the one he was staying at—”

“Yes, he did that! He said he left his trunk at the Vandermore, and that was why he didn’t have any evening clothes to wear here. He said he didn’t expect to stay here overnight—but he was glad he did because he liked the house so much.”

“Just crazy over the house, wasn’t he?”

“Oh, he was, sir. And he said, if he ever had a voice in the matter he’d cut out a lot of trees,—he thought there were too many.”

“H’m, did he expect to buy the house?”

“Oh, no, sir, he was just joking,—you could tell that.”

“Of course. Anything else?”

“No, sir, but one time I heard him mention Miss Rosemary’s name.”

“As if he knew her?”

“No, sir, more as if he wanted Mr. Vincent or Miss Vincent to tell him something about her. More as if he had heard of her—”

“I see. Most natural, I’m sure. Well, Katie, you gathered he had never been here before?”

“Oh, no sir, I’m sure he hadn’t.”

“Well, run along,—Katie. If you think of anything more you heard the gentleman say, you can let me know. Tell Mellish to bring you to me, in such a case.”

“Yes, sir,—thank you, sir.”

With a shy little curtsy, Katie went away, and Stone went in search of the master of the house.

The organ music had stopped so Stone was not surprised to find Vincent in his Tower room.

The detective was really as much impressed and interested as the mysterious Johnson in the architecture and decoration of the house, but he felt he had no time to waste in idle enjoyment of its beauties.

“Wonderful place,” he said to his host, as he entered, after a knock at the closed door. “You found many secret hiding-places or sliding panels, perhaps?”

“Several,” Vincent told him. “Not so very secret, though. See, the one in this room opens by merely pressing this knob. And the knob is not hard to discern if any one looks closely for it.”

“That’s true,” and Stone watched as Vincent turned the little knob and the panel slid smoothly and noiselessly back.

It exposed a recess with two or three shelves,—merely a concealed cupboard, large enough to contain half a dozen good-sized boxes which evidently held papers of value.

“This is my safe-deposit vault, Mr. Stone,” Vincent said, smiling. “I have no other. I’m a man of simple habits, and all my papers or documents of any importance are in here. They are of no value to any one but myself—I mean they are of no money value. My stocks and bonds are at my banker’s. But here I keep my will, my deeds to this house, and my private correspondence.”

“And the papers regarding Miss Rosemary’s parentage,” Stone said. “May I see those?”

“Certainly,” and Vincent gave him the large bundles of his brother’s letters.

“It is a distressing subject,” Vincent said. “I have always known that Rosemary was Carl’s adopted daughter, but I did not know, until young Collins learned it in France, that she is also his illegitimate child. I feel that I have my share of sorrow, Mr. Stone.”

“You surely have, Mr. Vincent, and I realize the shock it was to you to learn this truth about your brother, just after the awful tragedy of your sister’s death.”

“Yes. And that is one reason why I cannot consent to have guests and laughter and gayety about my home. Rosemary is not without sensibilities, not without appreciation of the depth of my sorrow, but she is young and she is of an exceptionally volatile, light-hearted disposition. And, though, of course, she does not wish entertainment and frivolities now, yet she does want the companionship of her young friends, and I confess their very presence wears on my nerves so that I have to beg her to refrain from asking them here. You may not understand it, Mr. Stone,

but I am a peculiar man, and the life of a hermit best suits my tastes and inclinations.”

“I do understand, Mr. Vincent, and I see clearly that you could not live with any degree of peace and contentment with young visitors about.”

“And if Rosemary were my own niece,—I mean a legitimate Vincent, the case would be different. But as things are, I feel that I am not overstepping my rights to insist on conducting my household as I wish.”

“You certainly are not. I feel deeply sorry for you and your niece both. I could wish you had never learned the truth of her parentage.”

“I heartily wish that, too, but in a way it brings her nearer to me to know that she was Carl’s daughter, even though born out of wedlock.”

“It is a hard case, any way you look at it,” and then Stone went back to his quarters at the inn.

Late that afternoon, Fibsy told of his investigation of the jungle known as Spooky Hollow.

“Gee! it’s some place!” he exclaimed. “I’m glad I put on my old clothes, for I got well muddied up!”

“What did you find?”

“Mud, muck, and morass,” returned the boy, succinctly.

“Do you know what morass means?” Stone asked, smiling.

“You bet I do. I lived near one at home, when I was a kid. It’s a sort of swamp that’s mighty hard to walk on, and if it’s morassy enough it sucks you down in, and you’re a goner! That’s what a morass is.”

“Did you see any reason to think Mr. Johnson might have been sucked in?” Stone spoke seriously.

“No, F. S., no reason to think so. Of course, he mighta done so,—but I can’t see it. Why, even if he went strolling about the grounds and got stuck in the swamp, even got sucked in and sank down outa sight,—why, of course that would have been in the evening like,—and if he had done

that, he couldn't have killed the lady. It's impossible he could have done any strolling about after he killed her,—'long about seven o'clock in the morning. After that murder he had all he could do to hasten off to hide himself. And, anyway, I don't know's the morass is as bad as that. I tested it,—I took off my coat—it was my old one,—and I wrapped up a big stone in it. Then I flung it out into the softest-looking spot."

"What happened?"

"It went down,—it was sucked in. But that was, after all, only a small bundle compared to a whole man. And, too, if he had found himself sinking, in a place like that, he'd a set up a yell, wouldn't he? And somebody'd heard him, wouldn't they? No, I can't connect up friend Johnson's disappearance with that quagmirey place. I don't say a man couldn't sink there, but I say there's no theory of the crime that would take him out there after the lady was dead."

"That's perfectly true. And even if he strolled round the grounds late that night, it must have been before midnight, or the watchman would have seen him. And, too, I can imagine his strolling in the gardens, but late at night a man doesn't venture into such a messy place as you make out Spooky Hollow to be. See any spooks there?"

"Not a sign of one. It isn't such a bad place, you know. Except for a few mucky holes, it's fairly good going, and the tangle of vines and low evergreens is wild and weird in the extreme."

Stone suppressed a smile at the boy's diction, for he knew he was trying to improve his English, and if occasionally he erred on the side of stilted speech, it was wiser not to notice it.

"You heard the Wild Harp?"

"No, sir, I didn't, though I listened out for it. Also, I looked good for wires,—for I've been thinking it might be some rigged-up contraption. But nary sign of wires or æolian harp strings or anything but trees and shrubs and scrubs and general rank undergrowth."

"Well, McGuire, how do you size up the whole thing?"



Fibsy was flattered,—doubly so, at being called by his surname, and by having his opinion seriously asked.

He considered before speaking and then said:

“It’s no use, F. Stone,—I can’t size it up at all. It’s too many for me. I’ve sometimes had glimmerings of wit about deducing things, but this time, I’m up a stump for fair. But of one thing I am sure. That there wild and wicked harp must play, for so many people have heard it. From His Nibs and Miss Rosy Posy, down to the lowest and littlest of the servant-girls, most of them have heard it at one time or another.

“Except old Mellish. He vows he never has, and there’s a twinkle in his eye whenever he speaks of it. So, leave that Harp to me. I’m going to find out about it,—and, oh, gee! what a dunderhead I am! Why I’ve got it now! I see through the Wild Harp! Well, I *am* a dumb-bell, that’s what I am!”

“Suppose you stop your careful estimation of yourself and tell me your astounding discovery.”

“Not just yet,—oh, give me a chance to make sure. But I’ll tell you this, F. Stone, that harp is played by human fingers, and those same fingers are on the mitt of that dough-faced butler! That’s who’s responsible for them wailings and goings-on of that phantom harp! Phantom, indeed! If Mellish is a phantom!”

“So you think he manipulates the Harp. What for, may I ask?”

“Well,” Fibsy was very serious, “I should say as he rigged it up at first to tease his wife. She’s a scary sort of thing, and terribly afraid of ghosts. And having Spooky Hollow ready-made for him as you may say, I take it he just fixed up the harp arrangement for fun.”

“And after Miss Vincent’s death, you think he kept on with his joke?”

“I can’t see any other way out. Some people have a perverted sense of humor, sir, and he may have thought it added to the dramatic side of things to have the harp wailing and moaning out there.”

“Just how did he work it?”

“That’s what I’m going to figger out. I can do it, I know.”

“Well, go to it, Fibs. Now, I’m leaving for New York to-night, and I want you to stand by till I return. Don’t do anything definite, but keep your eyes and ears open and learn anything you can.”

“Yes, sir, and I’ll get next to the Harp player, and mark my word, it’ll turn out to be Mellish.”

“Very well, look into it, if you like. But I can’t feel that the Harp-playing, whether Mellish’s work or not, has any real bearing on the case. Here’s an address that will always reach me,—I may have to go further than New York. Go over to Greatlarch now and then, to keep in touch with what they are all doing. Otherwise, just hold the fort till I get back.”

“Yes, Mr. Stone, but for the land’s sake, do write me or wire me if you get on to anything. For I’m burning alive with curiosity.”

“So am I, Fibsy,” said Stone.

## **Chapter XVII**

### **Finch’s Story**

The first thing Fleming Stone did, on reaching New York, was to visit the two jewelers whose addresses were on the cards given him by Homer Vincent.

As he had expected, they both denied all knowledge of any one named Henry Johnson, and declared he must have been an impostor.

Both, also, referred to a man named Markheim, who had a secret process for manufacturing what are known as synthetic rubies. This man, they said, was an honest and honorable person, who made no claim for his goods beyond just what they were. He wanted to make imitation rubies and sell them for imitation rubies,—that was all.

At Stone’s request they willingly gave him Markheim’s address, and the detective went at once to see him.

He found the inventor a quiet, reserved, almost sullen sort of a man, but he roused to a real pitch of fury, when Stone told him of Henry Johnson's errand to Greatlarch in the interests of ruby manufacturing.

"What does he mean?" Markheim cried out. "He cannot make rubies! Has he my knowledge? Has he my secret? Why, sir, he is a terrible impostor!"

"But other men than you may have a formula,—may have invented a process—"

"Nevertheless, he is an impostor. The fact that he used those two jewelers' names, proves that! Those men gave me their cards as references out of their good will and confidence in my honesty. That's all they vouched for,—my honesty and good faith. I told Mr. Vincent that."

"Did you see Miss Vincent?"

"No. I saw no lady there,—only Mr. Homer Vincent, the owner of that great and wonderful house,—Greatlarch, the place is called."

"Yes,—now, we must admit there's a queer proposition here. How did this Mr. Johnson get hold of those two cards—"

"But any one can get jewelers' cards! Pick them up from the counter, or—"

"But is it not strange that he selected the very two that you used?"

"It is a coincidence, to be sure,—but they are first-class and representative firms,—it could be he would choose those—yet,—yes, it is strange. Still, it is so. He gave the names to Mr. Vincent—"

"How did Mr. Vincent treat you, Mr. Markheim? I mean, was he interested in your project?"

"Not at all. He treated me most politely, even courteously, but he would have none of my business. He said his money was all invested in the sort of securities he liked best, and he would not think of making any changes. Moreover, he said he didn't wish to enter into any business proposition. He said such things wearied him, the financial details bored him, and he far preferred stocks or bonds where there was no

responsibility or work involved. But he was very nice about it, and after our chat he invited me to remain for luncheon and I did so. My! what a house! I never saw its like! And the luncheon! It was fine—without being too elaborate or magnificent. I enjoyed myself, I can tell you!”

“You remember the butler?”

“Yes, somewhat. He seemed a character in his way,—but his principal thought,—I may say his life-work, is quite evidently to smooth the path of his master and keep it free of all thorns or obstacles to his comfort”

“You are a good deal of a character-reader. Mellish is just as you describe. Now, how did you size up Mellish’s master?”

“As a first-class fine gentleman. The real thing, you understand. No shoddy or *nouveau riche* there. A gentleman of the old school, scholarly, refined, musical, and used to the very best of belongings and surroundings.”

“And you saw no ladies at luncheon?”

“No; now that you mention it, I remember Mr. Vincent spoke of a sister and, I think, a niece, who were out for luncheon that day.”

“Yes. Well, Mr. Markheim, I am obliged to you for this interview. Oh, by the way, you left two rubies with Mr. Vincent?”

“No, I did not. I had a few with me, and I showed them to him, but I didn’t leave any with him.”

“You didn’t forget them,—or leave them by mistake?”

“I’m sure I did not. My rubies are of small worth compared to real stones, but also, they have considerable market value, and I certainly did not leave any around carelessly. I left the two cards only. One was a bit soiled—the other quite fresh.”

“H’m. Now, one last question. Do you know any one who could possibly be interested in marketing synthetic rubies, even though he did not himself manufacture them? I don’t mean Henry Johnson,—but, say, some one whose initials are J. H.?”

“No, sir. I don’t know of any one except myself who is interested in such things in my way. My process is my own invention and I have carefully guarded my secret. I suppose there are others on the same quest but I know none by name, nor do I think any one has the idea that I have. And I shall yet succeed. I have a patron who is about ready to finance my work, and I mean to make good.”

“I hope you will, Mr. Markheim, I sincerely do.”

As Fleming Stone went away from the interview, his thoughts ran swiftly over the situation.

“It’s very strange that two men should approach Homer Vincent on the same subject so near together. It’s even more strange that they gave the same two references,—that they both gave the jewelers’ cards. Why didn’t one of them merely give the firms’ names? But perhaps he did. Perhaps Johnson only mentioned them as well-known jewelers, and Vincent, having their cards, gave them up as memoranda. At any rate, Markheim is an honest man,—and, so far as I can see now, Johnson is a fraud. Yet maybe he only wanted to conceal his real name until he learned if Mr. Vincent would put his money in the business. Of course, these inventors with secrets keep mighty close about their affairs. But I still suspect Johnson—as he called himself—of double dealing somehow, and I must track him down. Guess I’ll try the Vandermore next.”

The room clerk at the big hotel was not anxious to help in the search for an unknown name with initials J. H., but impressed by the hint of a police investigation, he turned over to Stone the lists of names for the dates he mentioned.

Allowing that the man had registered a few days before he went up to Vermont, Fleming Stone set resolutely to work and found no less than six names during those days whose initials were J. H.

But running down those names was fairly easy, though tedious, and a few hours’ time showed him that two were respectable citizens of Boston, one was a visiting Englishman and one a San Francisco millionaire.

This left him with a James Harrison, of Mobile, Alabama, and a John Haydock, of Chicago.

A hasty telegram discovered Mr. Harrison to be a clergyman attending a convention, and Stone was left with only one more chance for success in his search.

Following a sudden flash of inspiration, he went to the Bureau of Missing Persons.

To be sure, Haydock, if he were the man, need not be missing from his own home,—but then again, he might.

The officials at the Bureau were most kind and helpful, and after a look at some out-of-town records, told Stone that John Haydock was a Chicago broker, was mysteriously missing, and the police had been searching for him several weeks with no iota of success.

“There’s my man!” Stone cried, “now, where is he?”

But he said this only to his inner consciousness, not yet ready to let the New York or Chicago police in on the job; He had his own interests in the case to look out for, and as it was a most unusual and peculiar case, he concluded to carry it a little farther by himself.

Getting all possible details of Haydock, Stone made for a long-distance telephone and called the office of John Haydock, in Chicago.

At last he was in touch with one Robert Finch, who said he was the chief and confidential clerk of John Haydock and was eager for news of him.

“Will you come to New York?” Stone asked, “or must I go out to Chicago?”

“I’ll come right over,” Finch promised. “I’m sure it’s the better plan. My, I’m excited at even hearing some word of Mr. Haydock! I can hardly wait to reach you,—but I realize you can’t say much over the telephone.”

But Stone was not so elated as the Chicago man was. It was a hundred to one that John Haydock should be the man he was after. Finch had said Haydock was a broker and had no interest in jewels or precious stones.

But Haydock’s interest might have been a secret one. Stone began to think now, that Haydock was not the ruby manufacturer, but merely the

representative of an inventor. In this case, the broker would, naturally, keep the matter secret even from his confidential clerk.

At any rate, Fleming Stone determined to try very hard to connect the missing Chicago man with the H. J. of the umbrella.

Too impatient to wait for Finch's word on that subject, Stone went to the haberdashery where the umbrella had been bought.

They could not trace the purchaser, as Stone had not the umbrella with him, but they declared the monogram had not been put on by them.

Also, as Stone described and drew a rough sketch of the letters they entirely agreed with him that the order of the two letters was J. H. and not H. J.

This satisfied Stone that the caller at Greatlarch used a fictitious name, whatever else his claims to honesty might be.

"And a clever duck, too," Stone mused; "used a name with the letters the other way, so his umbrella would seem to be marked right. Shows an ingenious mind,—and so, probably a crook mind. The fact that he's a well-known Chicago broker, is no real guarantee of his honesty and integrity. And I've checked up some of those rash statements I made to Mr. Vincent and young Collins. Let me see; I said the man who called was not Henry Johnson, his initials were not H. J., and his business was not about making synthetic rubies.

"I think that's all right, so far. But I said, further, that he didn't murder Miss Anne, nor steal her ruby. Some work to prove that! Guess I'll await the Finch person and see where he lands me up."

But his waiting hours were fraught with wild and hazy conjectures.

Where had John Haydock hidden himself? Why had he gone to Greatlarch on a secret errand? Did his whole ruby proposition merely cloak some other and greater intention? Did he go there with the sole purpose of killing Anne Vincent,—and if so, why?

Again came the idea of his being an old lover of the lady,—perhaps he had sworn to kill her, because of—pshaw! all too melodramatic. Miss

Vincent, as he pictured her from all he had heard, was a mild and inoffensive lady, with no dark past,—yet, who could tell as to other people's dark pasts? And the stranger had known Miss Vincent before,—the man Prout had disclosed that fact. Then, say it was the theft of the ruby that took him there. Ah, that was a little more plausible. Say he knew Miss Vincent of old, say he knew of the great ruby, and so, he went there, using an assumed name, and taking his time to compass his design. Probably he had no intention of murder, but that was necessary to save his own skin.

Stone had said that the man who called himself Johnson didn't commit the murder or steal the ruby,—but—the detective had learned a few things since then.

The next day Finch came. Stone had rooms for them both at the Vandermore, and as soon as the young man could get freshened up and eat some luncheon, they started in on their confab.

“Begin at the beginning,” asked Stone. “Tell me all you know of John Haydock, from your very first acquaintance.”

“It won't be a very long tale,” Robert Finch replied, as he lighted his cigar. “About three years ago, I chanced to hear, through a friend, that Mr. Haydock wanted a clerk. I applied for the position and got it. I tried my best to make good and did. He advanced my salary several times and looked upon me as his trustworthy and confidential clerk. I gave him my best efforts, and since his disappearance, I have carried on the business just as he always did. It's largely routine work, or I couldn't have left the office just now. But I have an excellent and able assistant who will look after things and I felt my duty was here, to find John Haydock if possible. Where is he?”

“I've no idea. But we'll come to that later. Tell me more about the man. Describe him, please. Was he dark?”

“Dark? I should say he was. I never knew a darker white man. But that did not mean he was anything but white in his dealings. As honest as the day, just, rather than generous, and so silent and reserved about his own affairs as to be considered secretive. He never chatted with me. He talked over the necessary business matters, he was pleasant, amiable, courteous,—but never chummy or confidential.”



“All right so far. Now tell me about the day he went away. Where did he say he was going?”

“To New York. Said he had worked hard and had earned a vacation. Said he would be gone maybe a week, but not more. Said I needn’t write unless something of unusual importance turned up, which wasn’t likely, for I know as much about the business as he does.”

“What did he take for luggage?”

“I don’t know. He rarely went off on vacation trips, but when he did he took little luggage. Probably a large suitcase and an ordinary overnight bag.”

“You mean a suitcase too big to cart around much?”

“Yes, that’s what I mean. He’d check that somewhere and go around with a kitbag. At least, that’s only my supposition, but it’s probably about right.”

“And you never heard from him after he left you?”

“Not one word.”

“Didn’t that surprise you?”

“For a week or so it didn’t, and after that, you bet it did! Why, I’ve been more and more surprised each day! And surprised isn’t the word! I’m utterly dumfounded, flabbergasted, stunned, shocked, down and out! I don’t know where I am at! And if you can give me a hint or a clue, I’ll follow it to the ends of the earth. Why, quite aside from my business acquaintance with him, I’m fond of the man. As I said, he’s not very friendly in a chummy way, but he’s a strong, staunch, loyal heart, and I’m grieving quite as much as I’m wondering.”

“You have no doubts then of his integrity of soul?”

“Oh, come now, integrity of soul means a lot. I don’t know Mr. Haydock well enough to talk like that about him. But I’ve no doubt of his business honesty or his honorable dealing toward me. After that, I know too little of him to discuss him. Why, you’ve no idea how reticent he was as to himself,—personally, I mean.”

“Where did he come from? Where was he born?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea. It isn’t that I was afraid to ask him of such matters, but we never met outside of business hours and as he was not informatively inclined, it would have been silly for me to pester him with questions.”

“I see. And you’ve no idea whether he lived in Chicago all his life or—”

“Oh, yes, I know that much. He came to live in Chicago about five years ago—”

“From where?”

“Don’t know that, except I have a dim idea it was from the West.”

“Was he like a Westerner?”

“Not specially. He looked more like a foreigner, with his dark hair and sallow skin. But he was one hundred per cent American, as far as I could see.”

“Well, details about him don’t seem to get us anywhere. Did you ever surmise that he had any secrets in his life? Any hobby he was following up, or any love affair?”

“I never heard or saw anything to base any such supposition or surmise on,” Robert Finch replied, slowly.

“You’re holding back something,” Stone said, intuitively.

“No, that’s the exact truth. His only hobby that I can think of was writing in his diary. He rarely did any of it at the office, but the few times he did, he worked at it like a man engrossed in his occupation.”

“Where is his diary?”

“He always kept it locked up—”

“But you know where.”

“If I do, I shall not tell, until I have more reason than I have now to think I shall never see Mr. Haydock again. What sort of a confidential clerk

should I be if I gave up his private papers because he went away and stayed a few weeks without writing to me? And, now, Mr. Stone, suppose you tell me what you know, and why you want to find him?”

Robert Finch was a good-looking, earnest-faced young man, of a type to be found by hundreds in the great business offices of our cities. But he was rather above the average in his appearance of sincerity and fealty to his trust. Stone sized him up for a faithful custodian of his employer’s secrets if he knew them, or of his private papers if he had them.

In as few words as possible the detective told Finch the story of the man who went to Greatlarch, and called himself Henry Johnson. He told of the various matters that pointed to this man’s really being John Haydock, and, though at first unwilling to believe it, Finch was finally convinced that it must be true.

“That umbrella!” he exclaimed as Stone described it minutely; “I know it well! I ought to, for I gave it to him myself, more than a year ago, on his birthday. I thought he’d like it,—and I guess he did, only—well, he seemed to think I was a bit presumptuous to do it. He made me feel a little ashamed and I never offered him a present again. However, he often carries it, and I think he likes it”

“Would he use plain black rubber-backed brushes, and only moderately fine underwear?”

“Yes, exactly. He had money enough, and he was not at all parsimonious, but he was—well, I think, frugal is the word. He was always well dressed but not at all extravagant.”

“All the things in his kitbag were brand-new,” Stone vouchsafed.

Finch smiled. “Probably found himself at low tide when he started away. Didn’t like to go to a decent hotel with ragged things in his bag, so he stocked up. Yes, I have to confess it all sounds like Haydock, and as your people mention his dark coloring, I can’t see any reason to doubt that it was he who went to Greatlarch and who introduced himself as Henry Johnson. Why, I cannot imagine.”

“You never heard him speak of any one named Vincent?”

“Never. But I never heard him speak of anybody outside our business lists.”

“What did he do evenings?”

“He lived in a good bachelor apartment, and he went into good society. He was moderate in everything. He went to the theatre and concerts now and then, he went to dinners and all that, but he wasn’t what you’d call a regular society man. I daresay lots of his evenings he spent quietly by himself. But I never asked him, of course, I’m judging only by my general knowledge of him and from such few remarks as he might casually drop while we talked business.”

“Where do you suppose he got hold of this ruby idea?”

“I don’t know. But if somebody put it up to him as a good money-making scheme and if he thought it was, I can imagine his going up there to interest a millionaire—”

“And using a false name?”

“Possibly.”

“And stealing a real ruby and murdering a good lady?”

“No—” Finch spoke cautiously, “I can’t say I imagine his doing that—I can only repeat I don’t know the man, and I can’t say what he would or wouldn’t do.”

“Mellish, the butler,—who, by the way, is no common personality,—says that the man he calls Henry Johnson has the face of a murderer.”

Finch smiled. “Is there such a thing,” he asked, “as the face of a murderer? As I said, Haydock’s face is as dark as a Spaniard’s, but that doesn’t imply a dark heart. I’ve been told a murderer oftenest has a clear bright blue eye.”

“I’ve been told that, too; in fact, I’m ready to say there is no such thing as the typical face of a murderer. And I believe that Mellish founded his suspicion on the fact of this man’s very dark effect.”

“How about suspecting the butler himself of the theft and of the murder? Is he entirely free from suspicion?”

“I think so. There’s no clue or evidence against him. In fact there’s none against anybody but Haydock,—as I shall now call him, for I am convinced of his identity. But it does seem to be a clear case against him. He appears from nowhere, gives a wrong name, offers a business proposition which is clearly a faked one, spends the night, and before dawn disappears. Almost as soon as he is gone, a murdered woman is found, and an enormous gem is missing. He is never seen again and his whereabouts cannot be traced. What’s the answer?”

“It looks black,” conceded Finch. “You know the Chicago police have been hunting him, but of course they never traced him to Vermont.”

“Then that proves he went there secretly. Had he gone with no attempt at concealment, he could easily have been traced. I’m sorry, Mr. Finch, but every detail we learn from one another seems to draw the net still tighter round the man who was your employer.”

“And how do you think he got away? Aside from the locked door,—and I cannot see how he had a mechanical device handy to turn that key from the outside, when he could not have foreseen the exact circumstances that would come to him,—aside from that, how did he get away from Hilldale, on a cold winter night, without hat or coat—”

“Oh, that he might have managed easily,—the getting out of Hilldale, I mean. But I don’t yet understand that locked door. And I do think that the solving of the mystery hangs on that.”

## **Chapter XVIII**

### **The Terrible Truth**

Robert Finch willingly accepted Stone’s invitation to return to Greatlarch with him. The clerk felt that he must do all in his power to ferret out the mystery of his employer’s disappearance, and surely his way lay in the direction of Hilldale.

On the journey up, Stone had told his companion of Fibsy, his young assistant, so Finch was not surprised to see the red-headed lad waiting for them on the steps of the inn.

“I have some finds,” announced Fibsy. “Have you any, F. Stone?”

“Well, yes, Terence, I think I may say I have,—though I haven’t yet quite made out what they mean.”

After the three were settled down in Stone’s sitting-room, and after Stone had told the boy a general sum-up of what he had learned from Finch and from the jewelers, Fibsy took his turn at recital.

“Well, sir,” he announced, “I found out who plays that Spook Harp, and as I just felt sure, F. Stone, it’s none other than Friend Butler.”

“Mellish!”

“The same. He has a wireless telephone—”

“From the house?”

“Yep, from the house, and, well, I can’t ‘zackly explain it, but it’s this way. He connected a phonograph with a wireless sending set in his workshop, and then he transmits the music to a large horn connected with an amplifier which is concealed in a tree down in that Spooky Hollow.”

“I understand,” Stone said, “you needn’t try to explain the details of the mechanism, Fibs; I see how it is done. But—Mellish never contrived that himself!”

“That’s what I think, F. S. I think His Nibs is at the back of it—”

“Mr. Vincent! Nonsense! More likely that chauffeur, he’s a clever mechanic. However, I’ve felt all along that the Wild Harp had nothing to do with the real mystery or the tragedy; so work on that, Terence, if it amuses you, but if you’ve any news of real importance, let’s have it.”

“Well, sir, I have. I found the bottle that belongs to that atomizer thing.”

“You did! Now that’s something worth while. Let’s see it”

Proudly the boy produced a small vial. It was half full of an antiseptic preparation, and its label bore the address of a Chicago chemist.

“That’s his,” Robert Finch said at once. “That’s Mr. Haydock’s—I’ve often seen him use it in his atomizer, during business days, when his catarrh troubled him. Where did it come from?”

Stone looked at Fibsy.

“Now that’s the queer part,” the boy said. “I burgled Greatlarch, you see—”

“How?” Stone asked.

“I took a chance when Mr. Vincent was playing on his big organ so hard he wouldn’t have noticed the German army if they’d marched through him! Yes, sir, he was just absorbed,—he was what you call it? improvising, yes, that’s it, improvising. And I slipped into his Tower room, it’s never locked, and I investigated that panel. You know he told us himself how to open that panel.”

“Yes, McGuire.”

“Well, sir, I felt sure there was more to it than he told us about. And there was. By pokin’ around good and plenty, I found another little weeny knob and I pressed it, and there was another secret panel,—you know—inside the first one, way at the back part.”

“And this bottle was in there?”

“Oh, Lord, no, sir, that bottle wasn’t in there! I got my yarn mixed up, I’m that excited! No, sir, that bottle was in Mr. Vincent’s own little medicine chest in his bathroom, just a settin’ there.”

“In Mr. Vincent’s chest, then what has it to do with the Johnson man?”

“Well, it’s a bottle of stuff that could belong to that atomizer thing. It’s a Chicago prescription, so maybe it ain’t Mr. Vincent’s, and it was sorta hidden away at the back, so I take it, it was meant to be concealed.”

“McGuire, your zeal has run away with you.” Fleming Stone smiled good-naturedly. “More likely, one of the housemaids saw this on Mr. Johnson’s washstand, and thinking it belonged to Mr. Vincent, she put it in his bathroom.”

“Maybe, sir,” Fibsy’s freckled face fell, “only, Mr. Vincent hasn’t one snipjack of catarrhal trouble,—I asked Mellish,—and the other man had. And there’s the Chicago label.”

“But what are you getting at? You can’t mean that Mr. Vincent concealed this thing, purposely—”

“Well, somebody did. That Chicago bottle, that just fits up with the atomizer, has no right to be in the back part of Mr. Vincent’s medicine chest—”

“That’s so, Fibs,” and Stone looked more thoughtful. “Well, what was in the back part of the inner secret cupboard?”

“Why, in there, sir, there was nothing but a lot of keys and tags and such things.”

“What do you mean by such things?”

“Well, there was a key to what is most likely a safety deposit box,—you know how they look. Then there was the key to the wine closet,—I know, for it was labeled. And a key to the big organ,—a duplicate, I suppose. And an old-fashioned watch- key,—oh, quite a lot of keys, mostly tagged with brass tags or pasteboard labels.”

“Any of definite importance to us?”

“There was, sir. That one, though, wasn’t a key at all.”

“Go on.”

“It was a check,—a metal trunk check, from the Hotel Vandermore.”

“Well, any one can have a check from any hotel, can’t he?”

“Oh, F. Stone, I thought it was a check Johnson had for his trunk, you know, and he brought it up here, and—somehow he—it had got hidden away in there,—and I sent for it—”

“You didn’t! Fibs, you’re crazy! Whom did you send?”

“I sent Prout, the taxi man—”



“Good Lord, child, I’ll never dare go off and leave you again! It’s probably a suitcase with Mr. Vincent’s dress clothes, that he keeps in New York to go to a party now and then. Lots of men do that.”

But Terence McGuire was so evidently on the verge of tears, that Stone tried to cheer him up.

“Never mind, old chap,” he said, “I’ll take the blame. If it’s Mr. Vincent’s property, as it must be, I’ll tell him! sent for it in an overzealous endeavor to find a clue!”

But Fibsy would not be comforted. He felt he had done a crazy, unpardonable act, and Stone knew he would brood over it for a time.

“All right, little chum,” the detective said, “you sit here awhile, and think out some more bright clues to follow up, and I’ll take a run over to Greatlarch.”

Though this speech sounded sarcastic to Finch, it comforted Fibsy, for he knew when his chief jollied him to that extent he was not displeased with him. So he sat thinking, while the other two started off for the Vincent home.

First of all, Stone went for the butler, as that worthy admitted the pair.

“So you’re the Spook that plays the Harp, are you, Mellish?” he said, and though his tone was light, he spoke in earnest.

“Well, yes, sir,—and yet, I may say I see no harm in it”

“No harm, of course, Mellish, but you never rigged up that contraption alone. Who did it for you? The chauffeur?”

“Not he! He hasn’t brains enough to play a jews’-harp. No, sir, I—I just did it by myself—to tease my old woman, you see.”

“And you turn it on and off as you like?”

“Yes, sir,—see, here’s the thing.”

Deeply interested, Stone and Finch followed the butler into a small entry, where, sure enough, was rigged up a rather elaborate bit of mechanism.

“Mellish,” said Stone, sternly, “you never did that yourself in this world! Moreover, only a very ingenious inventor could have done it. And I know who it was. It was Homer Vincent! He’s the man who rigged up the wireless and the phonograph, and he’s the man who makes the records on his organ! Too easy, Mellish,—own up.”

“Well, sir,—I may not be free of speech—”

“I’ve heard you use that phrase before. I know now what you mean by it. You mean you’re not free to tell—”

“Yes, sir, that’s it. My master, he’s a man of strict orders, and I am not allowed to babble, sir.”

“Your master is a strange jumble of talents,” and Finch looked curiously at the wires and strings of the device.

“Mr. Vincent is a man of luxuriant temperament, sir,” and Mellish raised his hand as if to ward off further remarks. “And nothing disturbs him more than to have me chatter. So, if you will excuse me, gentlemen,—” and Mellish simply faded away.

As Stone had supposed, he found Homer Vincent in his Tower room, and unannounced, he led Finch there.

“I know you will be glad to meet this man, Mr. Vincent,” he said, “for he is the confidential clerk of the man we have been calling Henry Johnson, but whose name, as it turns out, is John Haydock.” Vincent looked up interestedly.

“Take seats, gentlemen,” he said, pleasantly, and then acknowledged Stone’s more definite introduction of Robert Finch.

“John Haydock,” he repeated, and it was plain to be seen from his manner that the name meant nothing to him. “And why did your employer, my dear sir, come to me under an assumed name?”

“That’s what I’m here to find out,” returned Finch, not so much bluntly as determinedly. “Suppose, Mr. Vincent, we all put our cards on the table, and see what conclusions we can come to.”

“By all means, Mr. Finch. Only, I may say, I have already put all my cards on the table. If I haven’t, ask any questions you like.”

“I’ll do that, then,” Stone said, quickly. “Why did you not tell us that you were responsible for the music of the Wild Harp?”

Vincent gave a little smile.

“That’s true, Mr. Stone, I haven’t been quite frank about that. But it is a case of in for a penny, in for a pound. I rigged up that thing merely for the amusement and bewilderment of my friends and my servants. There were stories of hauntings and weird sounds and sights in the wild garden they have named Spooky Hollow, and I thought I’d just give them a jolt now and then. And, later, when it began to affect my household and family, I still kept on, to surprise and astound them. Mellish helped me, he turned on the instrument when I ordered him to. And he enjoyed his wife’s thrills at the seemingly supernatural music.

“Then, Mr. Stone, when tragedy came to me, I didn’t feel like revealing the secret of my joking deceit, so I let the matter rest, even using it now and then when I felt inclined, I am a strange man, Mr. Stone, many call me a freak or an eccentric But, really, all I ask is to be let alone, all I wish to do is to enjoy myself in my own way, which never interferes with the doings of any one else. I am perhaps a slave to my creature comforts, I own I like luxurious living and beautiful appointments, but surely those are innocent hobbies if a man can afford them.”

“Entirely so,” Stone said; “now, Mr. Vincent, we are striving to find this Haydock, as we now call him. You never heard of John Haydock?”

“Never, Mr. Stone. Who is he?”

“A Chicago broker. Will you please let me see those cards he brought you?”

“Certainly, here they are.”

Stone scrutinized them and noted that one was considerably soiled, the other comparatively fresh.

Mr. Vincent,” he said, “these cards were given you by Mr. Markheim, who came first to see you about synthetic rubies. Not by Mr. Johnson, as he then called himself.”

“I daresay,” Vincent spoke disinterestedly. “I don’t remember saying that Johnson left the cards here. I only said Johnson gave those references, and I gave the cards to the detectives as a memorandum of the jewelers’ addresses.”

“I see. Now, as John Haydock was not interested in making rubies, so Mr. Finch tells me, and as he gave you a wrong name, do you not think the man’s motive in coming here was something other than ruby making?”

“Good heavens, man, of course I think so. He came here to kill my sister, to steal her ruby, and perhaps to kill me, too! Of course, his ruby story was a blind! Probably in order to induce my sister to exhibit her wonderful jewel.”

“But I think he knew you before he came, Mr. Vincent.”

“Impossible, or he would never have given the wrong name.”

“Perhaps you knew him by both names.”

“I never knew him by either name. He was a total stranger to me. They say he knew of my broken leg, some years since. That he knew of my sister and my niece. These things may all be so, but he never knew me, nor did I know him.”

“Well, here we are!” and a young voice announced the arrival of Fibsy, accompanied by Prout, the taxi man, lugging an enormous suitcase.

They were followed by Rosemary and young Collins, who were anxious to learn the cause of the excitement

Prout set down the suitcase, which bore the initials J. H., and Finch said, at once, “That is Mr, Haydock’s.”

“Aha,” said Fibsy, with a side wink at Stone, knowing full well that if the thing turned out to be of importance, Stone would be the first to praise him.

“It’s locked,” said Stone, “call your butler, please, Mr. Vincent.”

Homer Vincent pressed a button, and Stone dismissed the taxi man, saying he would be paid for his time and trouble later on.

“We don’t want him about,” he said, “this may be of importance as evidence.”

Without asking permission, he ordered Mellish to bring a wrench and hammer, and in a few moments the suitcase was opened.

It appeared to be filled with the ordinary clothing of a plain business man, and nothing of interest was seen until near the bottom they found a small thick book.

“That is Mr. Haydock’s diary,” Finch said. “Give it to me.”

Without a word, Stone handed it over, but he gave a look at Finch that said volumes.

In a moment Finch was absorbed in the contents. “I feel,” he said, “that though this is not meant for other eyes than his own, yet because of the stigma already cast upon him, and his inability to speak for himself, this diary,—some parts of it at least, should be read aloud”

“By all means,” said Homer Vincent, seeming truly interested at last, “let us hear it.”

The portions that Finch read were written during the days just preceding Haydock’s late departure from Chicago for New York.

And to the amazement of everybody, he had gone to New York, and from there to Hilddale, to see Rosemary Vincent!

It transpired that five years ago, at the time of Carl Vincent’s death, Haydock had been Carl Vincent’s clerk. He had seen and admired Rosemary, though she had never specially noticed him. He was eight or ten years older than the girl, but he had never outgrown the infatuation

that he felt for her. He determined to work hard and earn a fortune, and when this was accomplished, he proposed to go in search of Rosemary and try to win her for his own.

All this he did, and the diary detailed his journey to New York, his outfitting himself with new clothing, and his departure for Vermont.

He had left the diary in his large suitcase, checked at his hotel, and it was the check for this that Fibsy had found in Homer Vincent's second secret panel and had sent down to the hotel by Prout.

The advent of John Haydock was explained. There was no further doubt about that. For nobody could question the sincerity of those entries in the diary that told of his never-forgotten admiration and his hopes of yet winning sweet Rosemary Vincent.

The tears came to the girl's eyes as she heard the simple, homely tribute to her charms. She almost wished she could see and thank the man who admired and loved her like that.

Bryce Collins looked stupefied. Who was this man coming to seek his Rosemary? But even these thoughts were quickly supplanted by Fleming Stone's stern query, "How came the check for this suitcase in your secret cupboard, Mr. Vincent?"

"Bless my soul, I don't know!" and the man looked utterly bewildered. "I can only suspect some of my servants—or some intruder—"

"The same one that put the Chicago man's bottle of medicine in your bathroom, maybe," suggested Fibsy.

"Here's another reference to your father, Miss Vincent," Finch said, as he skimmed through the diary.

The item referred to some papers of Carl Vincent's that Haydock had only recently found. He mentioned coming across an old box, that he had thought contained merely old check-books, but on turning them out, he had discovered underneath a packet of papers which he thought would be of interest to Rosemary and he proposed to take them to her.

"Where are they?" asked the girl, looking wonderingly about.

“That’s what I’d like to know,” her uncle said. “I, too, am interested in anything pertaining to my brother, Rosemary.”

“Yes, Uncle, of course you are. Oh, where do you suppose Mr. Haydock is? Uncle, the man that wrote that diary, never could have killed Antan!”

“It doesn’t seem so, certainly,” said Vincent, seeming nonplussed. “Mr. Stone, here’s a big problem for you now. Can you work it out?”

“I can,” cried Fibsy, “at least, I can help. I can tell you where Mr. Haydock is,—probably.”

The lad looked solemn, and Stone gazed at him curiously. Was he getting greater than his master? This was no feeling of jealousy or rivalry on the part of the older detective. He loved the boy, and took pride in all his successes. But he was afraid, in his eagerness and intrepidity, Fibsy might over-reach himself.

“He’s down in Spooky Hollow,” he said, with such a lugubrious face that they all felt horrified.

“Sure, McGuire?” asked Stone.

“No, sir, I ain’t quite sure,—but I don’t see where else he can be. First off,” he looked round solemnly at his hearers, “there’s a fearful quagmire down in that hollow. It’s about six feet from the east border. And, you remember, that cigarette-holder was found on the east lawn.”

“What’s that got to do with it?” exclaimed Collins.

“Well, now,” Fibsy went on, too earnest to note the interruption, “I tried tying up a stone in my coat, and it sunk in the place. Yesterday after dark, I—” he seemed to hesitate to tell of his deed,—“I bought a whole pig of the butcher, as big a one as I could manage, and I pushed that in. It went down in the quicksand of that swamp in less time than it takes to tell it! The muck is all dark-brown and quivering. The approach to it is slippery and treacherous, but there it is. Now listen here. After Mr. Vincent left that man to go to bed that night where’d he go? He never prowled the house all night long. He went out in the grounds and he—he fell into that place. As he went down, he flung his cigarette-holder as far as he could, as a sort of guide to where he met his death.”

“That’s why he had no hat or coat,” Stone said, musingly. “Probably stepped down off the verandah, not meaning to stay out long.”

“Poor fellow!” said Vincent, “how horrible. I had no idea that pit was as bad as that! I’ve been intending to have it drained and dried; I shall certainly do so. At least, we can avert another such tragedy.

“But, do not avoid the issue, gentlemen. Did not Haydock necessarily come to his death after he had killed my sister?”

“Mr. Vincent,” Stone said, “you know I told you the man who came to see you was not named Johnson, was not initialled H. J., did not come to discuss making rubies, did not kill your sister, and did not steal her ruby. To all of those statements I adhere.”

“You do? Then find the murderer! Find the man who killed my sister! Can you do that?”

“I think I can,” and Stone nodded his head, thoughtfully.

“Listen, please, all of you. This murder of Miss Vincent is in every respect the worst I have ever known—the most fiendishly contrived and the most brutally carried out. The murderer is—Homer Vincent.”

Vincent stared at the speaker, but smiled a little indulgently, as one might at a harmless maniac.

“Then,” Fibsy spoke in an awed whisper, “then he’s a double-dyed dastard, for he murdered John Haydock!”

“What?” cried Finch.

“Yes, he did. Out there beside the quagmire is a piece of planking that has footprints on it. Those are Mr. Vincent’s prints, but Lord, there’s enough else to prove everything!”

“There is indeed,” Stone added, “and here is the motive. After you found the second secret panel, McGuire, I thought there might be a third. There is. The tiniest speck of a pinhead knob, when pressed sideways, opens a third concealed recess, and in it I have found,—first, Miss Vincent’s ruby, now Miss Rosemary’s property, and what is even more valuable to her,—is this.”



He gave her a folded paper, while Homer Vincent sat as if turned to stone.

“You fiend!” he said to Stone, “you devil incarnate!”

“Keep those epithets for yourself,” the detective said, coolly. “Are you going to confess?”

“I am.” Homer Vincent’s voice rang out. “I’m going to tell the truth for the last time in my life. I did kill John Haydock, because he knew the secret of my niece’s birth—knew that she is the legitimate daughter of my brother and his wife, Mary Leslie. They were married twice, really. The first time, secretly, because her mother objected. Her little girl was born and baptized, also secretly, but entirely legally, in France, and put in an asylum there, because Mary’s mother would not have forgiven them had she known of it.

“Later the mother died, and my brother and his wife were married again, publicly. Then, when their baby was born and died, they adopted from the asylum the little Rosemary, who was their own legitimate child. But, when my brother died, five years ago, and left me trustee of Rosemary’s fortune, I was tempted and fell. I took it all myself, bought this splendid house, and have lived here in the luxury I love ever since.

“When Haydock came,—yes, the ruby story I made up entirely myself,—Haydock never spoke to me of rubies,—he talked only of Rosemary’s parentage, so I, remembering the other ruby man, pretended Johnson came on the same business. He told me himself that he sent in his name as Johnson, for fear I would refuse to see Haydock. Lord, I had forgotten him entirely! Well, when he told me that he knew all about Rosemary, and threatened to expose the whole story unless I forced her to marry him, I couldn’t see any way to keep my beautiful home and to save the girl from a loveless marriage except by putting Haydock out of the way.

“It was not difficult. We strolled in the garden, went down to inspect Spooky Hollow, and—I pushed him in. He struggled like fury,—flinging his arms about. You know the more they struggle, the quicker they sink.”

“And your sister?” said Stone, hardly able to overcome his repugnance at speaking to this creature, scarce human he seemed.

“Well,” Vincent looked reminiscent. “I didn’t want to—but she declared she was going to tell the truth about the girl. I couldn’t have that,—can’t you understand”—he spoke almost pettishly—“I couldn’t live elsewhere than in this house,—and of course I couldn’t live here if Rosemary took all her money. I have no money at all. I spent all mine for this place; it is what my brother left that runs the establishment.”

“How did you kill your sister?” asked Stone, his dark eyes fixed inexorably on Vincent’s face.

“That you will never know,” and, with a smile of diabolical cunning, Vincent slipped into his mouth a small object which Stone knew to be a poison tablet.

But it was too late to stop him, and Stone thought pityingly of Rosemary. Perhaps that death for her uncle was easiest for the niece.

And while there was yet life in the body of the wicked man, Stone shouted the truth at him.

“I do know. You stabbed her yourself, after the door was burst open. You gave her extra sleeping drops to be sure of her sleeping late in the morning. When they couldn’t waken her, you broke through the door, rushed in, and bending over the living woman, stabbed her to the heart, and with the protection of her long, heavy bed-curtains, you were able to draw out the knife unseen. The knife you probably threw into the quicksand. Also, you stole her ruby! Am I right?”

And with a smile, still horrible, even demoniacal, the dying man murmured, “You are right” He never spoke again.

At a gesture from Stone, Bryce Collins led Rosemary away.

“Don’t cry so, dearest,” he said, tenderly. “Such a fiend isn’t worth your tears. Come, I will take you at once to my mother—oh, darling, just think, there is no reason, now, why she won’t receive you!”

“Thank God for my birthright,” said the girl, reverently. “And,” she added, looking into his eyes, “for your love, dear heart”

“My beloved,” he whispered, as he held her close, “as you know, I wanted you with any name or no name, but I am glad,—glad, dear, that we can give our children a goodly heritage. Bless you, my Rosemary, my darling.”

**THE END**

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