



School of Law

FORE-SHADOWED: WHERE REX STOUT GOT THE IDEA FOR *FER-DE-LANCE*

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***Green Bag Almanac and Reader*
2012, pp. 151-214**

**George Mason University Law and Economics
Research Paper Series**

11-49

FORE-SHADOWED

WHERE REX STOUT GOT THE IDEA FOR *FER-DE-LANCE*

Ross E. Davies & Cattleya M. Concepcion[†]

SPOILER ALERT

If you have not yet read *The Last Drive* — it appears in its entirety on pages ___-___ below — and you enjoy trying to solve a murder mystery along with the sleuths in the story, you might be annoyed by some of the disclosures made here. If you are of that type, you should postpone reading this little essay until you've identified the killer of Carson Phillips. You have until page ___, at the latest . . .

Researchers describing the discovery of something they are not equipped to fully understand run the risk that their reach will exceed their grasp. And so, as mere enthusiastic newcomers to the study of author Rex Stout, we will limit ourselves to: (1) reporting that we have run across an early (1916) detective story written by Stout and (2) sharing a few thoughts that would likely occur on first reading to anyone — and especially a lawyer — familiar with Stout's later (beginning in 1934) detective stories featuring his Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin characters.

THE FIRST STORY: THE LAST DRIVE

From July to December 1916, *Golfers Magazine* serialized *The Last Drive*, a murder mystery written by "Rex T. Stout." The story revolves around the killing of a well-respected figure (Colonel Carson Phillips) by means of a poison dart that entered his chest at an upward angle while he was playing golf with his lawyer (Fraser Mawson) and two nephews and heirs (Harry and Fred Adams). Phillips's friend, amateur detective Canby Rankin, is called on to investigate because, as the president of the club where the killing

[†] Ross Davies is a professor of law at George Mason University and the editor-in-chief of the *Green Bag*. Cattleya Concepcion is a 2011 graduate of the George Mason University School of Law and the 2011-12 Green Bag Fellow. She was named for the flower, by an orchid-lover: "I easily could have come to resent the various *Cattleyas* that filled my childhood home, since my mother insisted on watering them before she fed me any dinner, but her love of orchids has passed on to me. My favorite is the *Cattleya labiata*, which I find grows better when you take the time to talk to it." The authors thank Ira Brad Matetsky for his counsel and comments.



Photo by Photostar

THE 1915 WOMAN'S NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP ONWENTSLA COUNTRY CLUB.

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Published monthly on the 1st. \$2.00 a year, 20 cents a copy. Postage free. Canada, 50 cents extra; other countries, \$1.

TO ADVERTISERS:—All forms close on the 29th of the month preceding date of issue. (Advertising rates upon application.)

Entered as second class matter, February 19, 1903, at the Post Office at Chicago, Illinois, under act of March 3, 1879.

THE GOLFERS MAGAZINE COMPANY

MONADNOCK BLOCK

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

NEW YORK OFFICE: 303 FIFTH AVENUE

CRAFTS W. HIGGINS, President
H. B. McMEAL, Vice-President

H. D. FARGO, Treasurer
J. R. HASTIE, Secretary

took place explains, “the Lord knows we don’t want the village police here. They’re no good, anyway.”

Rankin accepts the challenge. As he begins his investigation, he insists that in light of the inexplicable entry of the dart into Phillips, “it isn’t a question of who did it or why, but how it was done.” Rather than the typical find-the-motive-find-the-murderer mystery, this one is find-the-murder-weapon-find-the-murderer. In one day (give or take a few hours) — a day filled with a good deal of talking and walking and watching — Rankin catches the villain. It is Mawson, the lawyer. Having embezzled a small fortune from Phillips and then lost it in the stock market, he committed murder to conceal his misdeeds. Mawson’s murder weapon of choice was a modified golf club, which he had smuggled into Phillips’s golf bag. As Rankin explains at the end of the story,

The spring concealed in the shaft was so arranged that it could be released only by the impact of the ivory inset in the face of the club against the ball; and the force of the released spring ejected the needle from the upper end of the shaft. Of course at the moment of impact the butt end of the shaft was aiming at the Colonel’s stomach, upwards, and the needle found its mark.

THE NEXT STORY: FER-DE-LANCE

Mawson’s “devilishly ingenious” device is nearly identical to the murder weapon at the center of *Fer-de-Lance*, Stout’s first murder mystery starring Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin. As best we can tell, no one noticed at the time *Fer-de-Lance* was published (in 1934) or later that Stout had borrowed from *The Last Drive*, or even that he had ever written *The Last Drive*.¹ Indeed, *The Last Drive* is not listed in the seemingly comprehensive *Rex Stout: An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography*.²

Even more tellingly, there is no mention of *The Last Drive* in John McAleer’s authoritative and award-winning 1977 biography of Stout.³ Seeking to explain the roots of Stout’s extraordinarily successful entry into the world of detective fiction, but ignorant of *The Last Drive*, McAleer speculates that *Fer-de-Lance* was a partially derivative work:

¹ Nor, when Stout’s second Wolfe-Goodwin novel (*The League of Frightened Men*) appeared in 1935, did anyone make the more attenuated connection between the collegiate-mishap indebtedness that was central to that story and the similar subplot in *The Last Drive* involving Harry Adams and Gil Warner, a former college classmate of Adams.

² REX STOUT: AN ANNOTATED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY BIBLIOGRAPHY (Guy M. Townsend, et al., eds. 1980).

³ JOHN MCALEER, REX STOUT: A MAJESTY’S LIFE (1977; Millennial ed. 2002).

The idea of using a golf course for the setting of a murder may have been suggested by Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Links* (1923) or Ronald Knox's *Murder at the Viaduct* (1926), both of which feature golf course killings. At one point in *Golden Remedy* [a Stout novel published in 1931], Marvin Trask had deliberated murdering his girlfriend, Nell McDonnell, on a golf course, when he found out that she was a lesbian.⁴

McAleer, who was an avid admirer of Stout, as well an expert on Stout and his work, would have been⁵ pleased to learn that he had his speculations backwards: The question is not whether Stout's *Fer-de-Lance* was inspired in part by the works of Christie and Knox, but, rather, whether Christie and Knox were inspired in part by Stout's *The Last Drive*.

Stout, too, probably would have been pleased at these revelations, or at least at their juxtaposition with his later, greater work. After all, there is a pleasing symmetry in the fact that not only does publishing history suggest that the primary literary inspiration for Stout's greatest characters (Wolfe and Goodwin) was his own earlier story, *Justice Ends at Home* (1915),⁶ but also that the primary literary inspiration for the plot of his first great detective story (*Fer-de-Lance*) was his own earlier story, *The Last Drive* (1916). Stout was, in other words, demonstrably his own best source of inspiration.⁷ It is difficult to imagine a more pleasing validation for a creative writer.⁸

FOR THE LAWYERS

It is both appropriate that *The Last Drive* should be republished in an almanac devoted to good legal writing, and discomfiting — at least for lawyers — that it should be so very appropriate. The villain, after all, is a lawyer. Not just any lawyer — a lawyer with “thirty years of experience at the New York bar,” who was “one of the most popular men among his own profession,” and a counselor whose unfettered access to Phillips's substantial fortune showed “the complete confidence in which the dead man had held his attorney and lifelong friend.” Not a character likely to be created by an author unsceptical about the professional ethics of leaders of the bar.⁹

⁴ *Id.* at 234.

⁵ He died in 2003.

⁶ See Ross E. Davies, *Their Famous Successors*, in 2012 GREEN BAG ALM. ____.

⁷ What inspired Stout to select golf as a theme for both *The Last Drive* and *Fer-de-Lance* is a puzzler, in light of his daughter's recollection that, “My father did not like golf!” Email from Rebecca Stout Bradbury to Ross E. Davies, Nov. 17, 2011. Then again, the action on the links was not nice — those were murders, after all.

⁸ Cf. *Ecclesiastes* 1:9, HOLY BIBLE (KJV) (“there is no new thing under the sun”).

⁹ Compare Rex Stout, *Justice Ends at Home*, in 2012 GREEN BAG ALM. ____ (orig. 1915).

For intellectual property lawyers, however, there is a bit of amusingly ironic background to this story. *Golfers Magazine* published *The Last Drive* in 1916 (with a proper copyright notice affixed), and then it made the corresponding filing with the U.S. Copyright Office. As a result, the magazine acquired a 28-year copyright in *The Last Drive* (that is, until 1944), with a right to renew for a second 28-year term.¹⁰

How then did Stout get away with publishing *Fer-de-Lance* — which so obviously drew heavily on *The Last Drive* — in 1934, without either getting *Golfers Magazine's* permission or infringing the magazine's copyright in *The Last Drive*?¹¹ Two possible reasons come immediately to mind. First, the question of what counted as infringement and what did not could be a messy business,¹² and it may well have been that either (a) *Fer-de-Lance* did not cross the fuzzy boundary between innocent inspiration and unlawful duplication with respect to *The Last Drive* or (b) the likely outcome of litigation over the question would have been too uncertain for anyone with an interest in the matter to pursue it. Stout may have felt safe on one or both of those grounds alone, especially since there were at least as many differences between the two stories as there were similarities. Second, the question of who held the right could be messy too. Surely it did not hurt that the original copyright holder, *Golfers Magazine*, had ceased publishing in 1931.¹³ And so it may well have been that (a) the identity of the copyright holder was not clear or, at the very least, (b) there wasn't anyone paying sufficient attention to the matter to quibble about copyright in a forgotten serial printed almost two decades previously.

Stout's timing, like his judgment and his writing, was good.

THE DISCOVERY

Finally, there remains one more mystery: How did McAleer — an able and diligent researcher with the nearest thing to comprehensive knowledge of Stout ever achieved by a non-family-member — miss such a significant milestone in Stout's development as a writer of detective stories? And not just McAleer, but every Stout-Wolfe scholar we know of. This may well be a mystery that defies solution. The best we can do is offer co-author Cattleya Concepcion's account of how she discovered *The Last Drive*:

¹⁰ See Copyright Act of 1909, ch. 320, 35 Stat. 1075 (Mar. 4, 1909).

¹¹ We have found no evidence of any copyright-related agreement or litigation involving *The Last Drive*.

¹² See, e.g., *Eggers v. Sun Sales Corp.*, 263 F. 373 (2d Cir. 1920); GERALD GUNTHER, *LEARNED HAND: THE MAN AND THE JUDGE* 268-80 (2d ed. 2011); see also, e.g., *Fogerty v. Fantasy, Inc.*, 510 U.S. 517 (1994).

¹³ See SARAH FABIAN BADDIEL, *GOLFING EPHEMERA* 41 (1991).

My co-author, Ross E. Davies, sent me to the Library of Congress to track down a missing work by Rex T. Stout. We learned about it from a 1915 author note that listed several of Stout's previous works. One of them was unknown.

Davies had a hunch about which publication the missing work originally appeared in and when it might have been published. His suspicions pointed to a publication from the early 1900s, and he asked me to check every issue within a six-year period. Over two days, I scrolled through approximately 2,200 feet of microfilm in the Microform Reading Room. I looked page by page at 115 issues. The missing work was not there.

My search, however, was not at an end. About two years of issues were absent from the Library of Congress's collections, as a few microfilms had been loaned to another institution. It was going to be at least another month before the reels would be returned. I had a strong feeling that Stout's missing work was reproduced on one of those reels. Among the pages of the 115 issues I checked, I found two other works by Stout which were also mentioned in the author note that drove Davies to send me to the Library of Congress in the first place.

The month-long setback was frustrating. I sought a faster way to locate Stout's missing work and soon had a new plan. If I could narrow down the two years of issues to the specific issue in which Stout's work was included, then I could request the issue from another library that carried the 1900s publication. My plan raised an obvious question: how could I determine in which issue Stout's work was published?

It occurred to me then that Stout might have registered his missing work with the U.S. Copyright Office. If he did, the registration record would probably indicate when and where the work was first published. This led me to the Copyright Office's Public Records Reading Room, where I searched for a registration for the missing work. I did not find what I was looking for — but I found something else.

The Copyright Office's card catalog included a registration for a work by Stout entitled *The Last Drive*, which had been published as a serial from July through December of 1916 in *Golfers Magazine*. Davies and I learned from Ira Matetsky, a Stout expert, that the serial was not included in the authoritative bibliography of Stout's works. It, too, was missing.

The object of my search for a missing Stout work changed. Unlike the work I originally set out to find (and still hope to find), *The Last Drive* was surprisingly easy to locate. A search of the Library of Congress's online catalog revealed that several volumes of *Golfers Magazine*, including the volume from 1916, had been digitized and were available electronically through the HathiTrust Digital Library. In just a few minutes, I was looking at digital copies of the lost chapters that made up *The Last Drive*. I had found a missing work by Rex T. Stout.



The Last Drive

The Opening Chapters of a Golf Mystery Story, of Absorbing Interest, Which Will Continue Throughout the Year.

By REX T. STOUT

Author of "Ask the Egyptians."¹

There had been a friendly argument before the foursome got started that Saturday afternoon in June. Carson Phillips, retired from the army with the rank of colonel, and possessor of a fortune ample enough to allow him to regard the monthly check from Washington as just a little added pin money, had hotly resented the insinuations of his two nephews, Harry and Fred Adams, concerning the relation between a man's age and his golf score.

"So you'll be kind enough to divide yourselves between us!" he snorted. "Do you hear that, Fraser? A wonder their impudence doesn't choke them. I'm hanged if I wouldn't play their best ball — I've tamed wilder lads in the service —"

Fraser Mawson smiled and nodded his head, held with the poise and air of authority acquired by thirty years of experience at the New York bar.

"As a matter of fact, Colonel," he agreed, "you'd probably give them a run for their money. I'm rather a better lawyer than golf

¹ This story was serialized in *Golfers Magazine* in 1916. The "Opening Chapters" appeared on pages 44-52 of the July issue, Chapter II in August (pp. 48-56), Chapter III in September (pp. 34-42), Chapter IV in October (pp. 45-50), Chapter V in November (pp. 46-54), and Chapter VI in December (pp. 42-46). It is reprinted here with the blessing of Stout's family. Illustrations and captions are from the original series. Only obvious typographical errors have been corrected. Internal inconsistencies and oddities have been retained, as have offensive archaisms; most superfluous summary and transitional matter typical of serials has not.

player, but — impertinence! So you want to let us old fellows down easy, do you, boys? We'll show you! Won't we, Carson? Shall we give them a trimming?"

The soldier nodded, and straightway produced a silver coin from his pocket and sent it spinning in the air, with a "Call it, Harry," directed at one of the young men, who stopped laughing long enough to pronounce the word:

"Heads!"

But it fell with the eagle up, and, having thus won the honor, the Colonel motioned to the waiting caddies and turned to lead the way to the first tee.

They found a crowd there ahead of them, for it was a clear, brilliant June day, and the links of the Corona Country Club was one of the most convenient and best patronized within easy motor distance of New York. For the most part they were men, and you might have found among them the possessors of many well-known names in the business and professional world of the metropolis. Not the least prominent were the members of the foursome with which we are especially concerned. Colonel Carson Phillips, fifty-six and straight as an arrow, was a fine figure of a man with his clear-cut, bronzed features, steady gray eyes and military bearing; Fraser Mawson, also a little more than fifty, one of the most popular men among his own profession as well as a welcome addition to a jolly corner in any of the exclusive clubs, was perhaps a little less distinguished in his appearance, but still a handsome man; and Harry and Fred Adams, brothers, and nephews and heirs of the Colonel, twenty-four and twenty-six respectively, were engaging young fellows with a great deal of foolishness still clinging to them, and all their accomplishments so far developed of a purely social nature. They were spending a week at their uncle's country home, not far from the Corona club, back in the Jersey hills; and Fraser Mawson, who had handled the Colonel's business and legal affairs for the past twenty years, was down for the week end.

Silent nods and low-spoken greetings, not to disturb the pair who were driving off, were exchanged as they reached the first tee. Everyone knew Colonel Phillips, open-handed and good-natured old warrior that he was; and there were friendly smiles for him from men like Bolton Cook, the Colorado millionaire who was waking up a section of Wall street, Harrison Matlin, corporation attorney; John Waring, widely known as a travel lecturer, and Canby Rankin, a wealthy southerner, who had become interested in the detection of crime as a pastime and performed it so well that his talents had more than once pulled the New York Police Commissioner out of a hole. The Colonel and Rankin were old friends, and now they joined each other for a low-toned conversation while

most of the others in the crowd swung drivers and irons at blades of grass to limber up.

In thirty minutes or so the foursome's turn came, and Mawson and the Colonel teed up. With a short, nervous swing, all forearm, Mawson got a ball 180 yards straight down the middle of the fairway. Then the Colonel. His style was slashing and business-like; you might have thought he was using a cavalry sword on an adversary in the heat of battle. A slice carried him into a trap on the right, 200 yards away. His two nephews followed, with the gracefulness and assumed carelessness of a generation who plays thirty-six holes in the daytime and dances thirty-six numbers at night; they got long straight drives. As the four men started off down the smooth turf side by side the Colonel turned to call over his shoulder to those assembled at the tee:

"We're going to show these youngsters! The match will end on the fourteenth green!"

And with a wave of his hand and a smile he strode ahead beside Mawson. With what suddenness would the answering smiles and shouts have died away if they had known what the next hour held in store!

The Colonel's optimistic enthusiasm was reinforced by an astonishing 3 for the first hole by Mawson, who reached the green with his second, a long iron over a trap, and sunk a twenty-footer. The two young men took fours; Colonel Phillips needed six.

"That's alright," observed the old soldier cheerfully as they headed for the second tee. "If I don't do it my partner will. One under par! Do you still think we're too old to make it interesting, Fred?"

"A miracle, sir," laughed the elder of the two young men. "To my certain knowledge Mr. Mawson never made that hole in less than five before in his life. Confess it, Mr. Mawson!"

The lawyer was nervously swinging his putter back and forth, nipping the tops of the blades of grass. "That three was a little unusual," he admitted. "But it's the Colonel I'm looking to. Slicing is something new for you, Carson."

"Been at it for a week," frowned the soldier in reply. "Some devilish trick that's caught me unawares. Totally undiscoverable. I had Mac go around with me yesterday, but he could find nothing wrong; advised me to try my brassie off the tee. I am doing so. You saw. Worse than ever."

"The honor is still yours, gentlemen," came from Harry Adams as they reached the tee. "Let's take this one, Fred, miracle or no miracle."

It was a short hole, a midiron over a lake, and three of them laid their balls neatly on the green. It was a half in three, with the Colonel barely missing a fifteen-footer for a two. On the next, a

two-shot hole, the Colonel used his brassie again from the tee, and again he sliced badly, into the rough. No miracle came to assist Mawson, and the elder pair lost the hole four to six. The fourth was something over five hundred yards. Once more the Colonel went far to the right; he chopped out of some underbrush, gritted his teeth, called for his brassie, — and sliced out of bounds. They lost the hole by two strokes, and became one down.

On the way to the fifth tee the Colonel grew highly voluble. "I've been led forty miles on a false trail out in Luzon," he declared in deliberate disgust, "and I've seen twelve-pounders suddenly kick up their heels and grin in your face. Also I've had experience with women. But for pesky, petty, unholy tricks, nothing can equal golf. Incomprehensible. Satanic. All at once, from nowhere, I acquire this damnable slice. Cause not to be found. For fickleness women are hopeless amateurs compared to a golf club."

"Use an iron, sir," suggested young Harry Adams respectfully.

"You should have fought it out with the driver," put in Fraser Mawson, busying himself with the selection of a new ball. "Don't give in to their whims. You see that the brassie is even worse. Something in your stance or grip or stroke."

"I didn't suppose it was the way I combed my hair," observed the Colonel in wrathful sarcasm.

The younger pair had the honor now, and each got a long straight one from the tee. Mawson's nervousness appeared to have increased, and he topped badly, dribbling along into a hazard. The Colonel hesitated a moment, took out his brassie, then handed it back and called for his driver. As he teed up and took his stance his jaw was set and his eyes were grim. He did not take his golf with the poignant earnestness with which the famous Mrs. Battle played bridge, perhaps, but he had sworn to beat "the youngsters" and like a good soldier he put his brave old heart into it. Slow back, an easy, welltimed swing, and away went the ball, straight and true as a bullet, 220 yards down the fairway. The Colonel watched it tensely till it came down, then relaxed, straightened and grinned happily.

"A beauty, sir!" Harry called out.

"Longer than ours," Fred agreed.

The Colonel waved his driver valiantly in the air. "The weapon of a gentleman," he announced vaingloriously. "I retract my remarks of a moment ago. After Fraser recovers from that trap you boys may play the odd. Permit an old man to exult."

They tramped together down to the bunker, on their way meeting and exchanging greetings with another foursome coming back on the fourteenth hole. It might have been thought a pity that their interest in the game kept them from appreciation of the lovely landscape that spread itself out in four directions: woods and a

winding ribbon of road to the left, a bubbling merry brook in front, and on the other two sides the gently swelling green hills, smiling in the sunshine, with the smooth turf of the links dotted here and there with thick clumps of underbrush, a solitary tree or a miniature grove; and all made alive by a group of players at a tee here or scattered there along the fairway, the caddies with their bright yellow caps making little dots of color in the most unexpected places, as though a painter had carelessly thrown drops of ochre about from the point of his palette knife.

Fraser Mawson, standing in a sand pit, niblick in hand, was certainly not thinking of the landscape. He took three to get out, and his fifth was played before they came up to the other balls. The two young men took brassies to make the green, just over a deep ditch two hundred yards away; one reached it nicely, the other hooked a little to the left into some deep grass. The Colonel, with twenty yards less to go, used a driving mashie; again his jaw was set firmly, down came the heavy iron head, and the ball sailed through the air, just clearing the top of the ditch and dropping dead on the sloping green. Again the Colonel grinned.

"Nice approach, sir," came from Fred Adams; and he added to his younger brother in an undertone, "We'll have to go some, Harry; the old boy's back on his game."

Then he turned quickly at a swift expression of alarm in Harry's eyes, and the two young men stepped forward together, calling out:

"What's the matter, sir?"

The cause of their alarm came from their uncle the Colonel. He had let his mashie fall to the ground, and he stood with white face and eyes drawn close in pain, trembling visibly, while a half comical expression of surprised dismay parted his lips.

"What the deuce — what — " he stammered, moving his hands uncertainly upwards to his chest, while his two nephews ran forward, crying out, "What is it, sir?" and Fraser Mawson stood still, opened his mouth and let out in a high-pitched voice the one word:

"Indigestion!"

Suddenly the Colonel straightened himself up with an apparent effort, and made his voice steady:

"Most curious sensation in my chest — no, here, lower down — I don't think — indigestion — quite acute and — and painful — ."

By that time the two young men had him by the arm, one on either side, and were trying to lead him toward the seats at the sixth tee, but he shook them off impatiently and stood still on the green turf, swaying a little from side to side with his hands pressed tightly on his breast. Harry turned to Fraser Mawson with a frightened look:



“Maybe it’s his heart — I’d better — .”

As he spoke there came a cry from his brother, and again they sprang forward as the Colonel suddenly thrust his hands straight in front of him and sank to the ground. They caught him and let him gently onto the turf, while Fred knelt to hold his uncle’s head in his arms, calling frantically to the others:

“Run — quick — a doctor! Wortley’s around somewhere — for God’s sake hurry!”



Harry was off like a shot in the direction of the clubhouse. Fraser Mawson stood as one helpless with astonishment, his eyes staring. The caddies, who had gone on toward the green, came running back at sound of the young man's shouts, and were speedily scattered over the links in every direction in search of Doctor Wortley, as were several other golfers who hastened over from nearby tees and greens. Their shouts for a doctor soon filled the air over all the June landscape; meanwhile Fred knelt with his arms

around the shoulders of his uncle, whose eyes had assumed a glassy, fearful stare, while unintelligible sputterings came from his lips and his fingers tore nervously at the grass. Fraser Mawson had knelt down beside him and was saying over and over, "What is it, Carson, for God's sake what is it?" finally causing the young man to exclaim half angrily, "Shut up, don't you see he can't answer you?"

All at once a great shudder ran through the Colonel's form and his hands were clenched tightly against his sides; a line of white foam appeared between his lips as his voice became articulate, barely so, a mere series of gasps:

"Fred — here, so I can see you — that's right, my boy — good-bye — tell Harry — and you, Fraser — I don't know what this is, but it's the end — all on fire inside — water — cool me off a little, you know —"

The words gave place to meaningless sounds, little noises that escaped the old warrior in his terrible agony despite the tremendous effort he was making to control himself. His eyes were the eyes of a tortured man, rolling from side to side, and froth covered his lips; he had seized Fred's arm with his right hand, and the crazy force of the grip crunched the bones so that the young man had to set his teeth on his lip to keep from crying out. Fraser Mawson had disappeared and now came running back with a pail of water from a nearby drinking tank; they tried to get the Colonel to drink, but he was beyond sensible action and the water ran over his neck onto the grass with little splotches of white in it. Shouts were heard, "The doctor!" and men seemed suddenly to appear from all sides, while from the direction of the clubhouse an automobile was seen dashing over the smooth fairway and leaping across the rough. By the time it arrived a crowd of twenty or thirty golfers had gathered; three or four of them had knelt down to assist Fred in his efforts as the Colonel's body writhed and twisted horribly about in his pain. As the automobile jerked up suddenly with a grinding of brakes they made room for Doctor Wortley and he leaped out toward the group. Just as he arrived a mighty convulsive shudder ran over the prostrate form from head to foot, and then it lay still.

The doctor leaned over with an ejaculation of amazement, and silence fell over the crowd as he knelt to unbutton the old faded army shirt that the Colonel had always worn on the links. Mutterings and whisperings from forty throats accompanied his quick, deft movements, lasting for the space of two long minutes; then absolute silence again as he slowly rose to his feet and turned about. A glance to one side, a clearing of the throat, and he spoke in an undertone:

"Gentlemen, Colonel Phillips is dead."

There was a gasp from the crowd and two muttered words of dismayed unbelief from Fraser Mawson as he stood whitefaced beside the doctor:

"My God!"

Then a boyish cry of despair from Harry Adams as he threw himself down beside his uncle's body and seized the hand that lay there on the grass in his own; his brother Fred was supporting the grey head on his knees and was trying to close the eyes with pathetic little strokes of his fingers. Stammering amazed whisperings passed around, and suddenly a direct question was put to the doctor by somebody. He seemed to hesitate, then turned again to the bareheaded group.

"Gentlemen, you are all members of the Corona club, and you have a right to know; the Colonel was poisoned. I tell you this at once that there may be no gossip about it. The nature of the accident will have to be investigated, and it will be well if no silly rumors are circulated, both for the sake of the Colonel's memory and the reputation of the club. I think you may be trusted in that respect. I'll leave it to you, Matlin, to see that the caddies do no talking. Call it heart disease. — Here, some hands, if you please. Cook, will you kindly run your car a little closer."

There was a tug at Doctor Wortley's arm, and he turned to look into Harry Adams' set face and staring eyes.

"Doctor — did you say — my uncle was poisoned — "

A nod answered him, and he spoke again, stammering:

"But what — what was it — "

The doctor threw his arm across the lad's shoulder. We'll find that out later, my boy. Keep steady. The thing now is to get him home. — Here, you men — "

Carefully and gently the still body was lifted and carried to the automobile and covered with a robe. The faces of the crowd, filled with the fearful solemnity that always accompanies the presence of death, no matter whose, also bore the finer imprint of the hand of real sorrow, testifying eloquently to the quality of the man who had just left them.

The caddies were permitted to approach now, and one of them, a little brightfaced fellow with his eyes filled with tears, came sidling up with a timid query as to what he should do with the Colonel's bag of clubs, which he carried on his shoulder. Mawson bestirred himself at that and reached out for the strap, but it was grasped by Harry Adams, who tucked the bag under his arm as though it had been some sacred thing. "I'll take it, Harry," Mawson called, but the young man paid no attention to him. The little caddie had meanwhile made his way silently to the automobile, where he stood gazing tensely at the robe over the form in the tonneau; now he suddenly burst into tears and turned away with

his hands over his face. Perhaps the Colonel would have appreciated that tribute more than any other if he could have known of it.

The automobile started slowly in the direction of the clubhouse, with the group of golfers trooping silently, heads bare, in the rear. Bolton Cook, the Colorado millionaire, was at the wheel, and beside him sat Fraser Mawson, the dead man's attorney, business adviser and friend. Among those who walked behind there was one face in which the general shocked expression of grief and solemnity was overshadowed by another — a look of keen professional interest and speculation. Throughout the scene at the fifth hole this man had remained silent, in the background, but his steady penetrating eyes had not missed a word or glance or movement among the actors in the tragedy; and now they were fastened on the backs of Harry and Fred Adams, the dead Colonel's nephews and heirs, as the two young men trudged along beside the slow-moving car.

The face was that of Canby Rankin, the Southerner, who had turned detective.

CHAPTER II: AT GREENLAWN

Rankin did not immediately follow the procession to the clubhouse. Instead, he moved across to the spot where Colonel Phillips had lain on the ground, and stood there for some time gazing at the crushed and trampled blades of grass with an absent expression in his eyes and a wrinkled brow. The Colonel had been one of his dearest friends; Rankin, a man not lavish of his affection, had sincerely loved him; but beyond a shocked tightening of the lips there was no indication of deep feeling on his countenance. He was in the habit of keeping his emotions sternly within; and, besides, a problem was trying to set itself in his mind. Finally he turned with an impatient shrug of his shoulders and strolled off slowly in the direction of the fifth tee, casting his eyes from side to side over the green turf, half curiously.

"Probably absurd," he muttered to himself. "Some constitutional secret, no doubt. Wortley says poison — symptoms, that's all. Indiscreet. Still, he knew the Colonel. And there's this devilish feeling I get, as though out of the air, like a dog with his nose full of fox-smell; it's never yet played me false. Drives me to wonder * * * but who the deuce would harm Carson Phillips? Fine young fellows like those boys! No. Positively no one. It's absurd. I must talk with Wortley."

But for all that, when Rankin had hastened his step somewhat and made his way across the fairway and the rough to the sloping terraces alongside the eighteenth tee he did not go at once to the clubhouse. Instead, he sought one of the smaller buildings set in a

STOUT, THE LAST DRIVE

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"The face was that of Canby Rankin, the Southerner who had turned detective."

group of trees off to the right, around the door of which a number of boys in brown uniforms and yellow caps were scattered, engaged in a general discussion with a show of great animation and excitement. The greater part were gathered in a circle around some central object of interest near a corner of the building, and as Rankin approached he sighted the object of his search in the midst of this group. It was the little caddie who had turned the dead Colonel's bag of clubs over to Harry Adams and later turned away from the automobile in a flood of tears.

The detective beckoned to him. "Come here, Jimmie."

The lad separated himself from the throng, and Rankin led him over toward the terrace out of earshot of the others.

"What are they talking about over there?" he began, abruptly.

"About Colonel Phillips, sir," replied the boy. The excitement of his sudden elevation to supreme importance among the other

caddies had evidently somewhat submerged his grief, but the tear stains on his cheeks made two whitish lines down to his chin.

"What are they saying?"

The reply was rather vague, mostly to the effect that they were "just talking."

"I see." Rankin looked down at him speculatively. "You know, Jimmie, Colonel Phillips was stricken with heart disease. Doctor Wortley says so. I want to ask you a question or two, but you must promise not to say anything to the other boys. I think I can trust you. For the Colonel's sake, Jimmie."

"Yes, sir." The lad's brown eyes flashed up. "I'd do anything for the Colonel. I won't say anything, sir. Is he —"

"Well?"

"Is he really dead, Mr. Rankin?"

Jimmie's lips quivered a little as he put the question; then, at the detective's somber affirmative nod, he closed them tight again.

"Yes. I want to know, Jimmie, if you noticed anything at all unusual during the match this morning."

The boy thought a minute. "No, sir, nothing unusual. Except that Mr. Mawson got a three on the first hole."

Rankin smiled a little in spite of himself. "You're sure there was nothing? Think hard."

"No, sir, not as I remember."

"Did they stop at the water tank on the fourth for a drink?"

"No, sir."

"Anybody smoke?"

After a second Jimmie replied that the two young men had lit pipes at the second tee.

"Not the Colonel? Nobody gave him a cigar?"

"No, sir. Nor Mr. Mawson, either."

"And the Colonel seemed well and in good spirits up to the time — up to the fifth hole?"

Jimmie's yes was quite positive, and then he added: "Except that he was mad on account of his driving. He's been slicing awful for a week. Yesterday he used his brassie, and he used it today too; but it wasn't any better. Only on the fifth hole today he took the driver again, and got a beauty. I was so glad because I thought — and then just five minutes later —"

Rankin nodded. "And then drives didn't matter any more. Now, Jimmie, look back and think carefully. Was there anything peculiar about the actions of any of the other three gentlemen? At any time?"

"Why — Mr. Mawson was awful nervous about the Colonel's driving, sir. Of course, he was his partner —"

"No, no; I mean anything unusual, suspicious."

The boy's brow wrinkled in the effort of memory. "No, sir,

□



"Is he really dead, Mr. Rankin?"

nothing," he replied at length.

Then, prompted by questions from the detective, Jimmie described in detail the actions of the other three members of the foursome when the catastrophe came. It was necessarily a meager recital, since the caddies had been a hundred yards in front at the time, and on running back had been sent off immediately in search of the doctor; and boys are not observing in the pressure of excitement. The detective got all he could out of him, then handed him a dollar bill and left him with a final warning not to repeat the conversation to the others. Then he turned toward the club-house.

The Saturday crowd was all over the place — in the library, the bar, the dining-room, the piazzas, and, of course, the one topic of conversation was the tragic end of one of their best loved members, whose body was at that moment lying in some room upstairs. Everybody had come in from the links; all playing had ceased. In the dining-room members had left their luncheon to get cold on the tables, and then returned to sit and talk in hushed tones. There was a buzz everywhere. The mystery of the thing had grasped everybody. The word "poison" was being whispered around, and there was a rumor that police had been summoned from Brockton, the nearest village. Rankin, with his eye open for Harrison Matlin,

the president of the club, was making his way from group to group through the throng in the library, when he suddenly heard his name called from behind and a hand came down on his shoulder.

"Looking for you, Rankin. You're wanted upstairs. Cortwell's room. There's the devil to pay."

It was John Waring, the travel lecturer. Rankin followed him through to the back rooms and up the rear staircase to the floor above. Half way down the long, wide hall they stopped in front of a door and Waring knocked lightly.

"It's Waring. I've got Rankin," he called, and an instant later there was the sound of a key turning in the lock and the door swung open.

As they entered and the door closed behind them again Rankin's quick glance showed him two or three men gathered about a table in the center of the room; others were seated on chairs and on the bed over against one side; Harry and Fred Adams were standing near an open window with their backs turned, talking together in low tones. Harrison Matlin, the president of the club, was there, and Bolton Cook and James Cortwell, and Fraser Mawson and Doctor Wortley. The eyes of all were turned on the door as the two newcomers entered.

"There's a problem here, Mr. Rankin," Matlin began, abruptly, "and we want to put it up to you. Doctor Wortley called us in to show us — you tell him, Wortley."

"Just this," explained the Doctor, "that the examination of the body, together with what I learn from Fred Adams of the nature of the attack — spasmodic rigidity, pronounced dyspnoea — verifies beyond all doubt that Colonel Phillips was poisoned."

Rankin frowned. "It's a certainty, then. What agent?"

"The motor nerves were paralyzed and death resulted from suffocation. Some virulent neurotic, most probably curare. *Strychnos toxifera*."

"Ah!" Rankin's frown deepened. "That must enter through a wound. How —"

"Look here," was the Doctor's answer to the unfinished question. The men about the table moved to one side, disclosing to view a lumpy, oblong form covered with a dark cloth; and Doctor Wortley, stepping forward, removed the covering from the body of Colonel Phillips. The clothing had been cut away, leaving it nude to the waist; and Rankin's gaze, directed by the Doctor, fell on a spot some three inches below the terminal of the breast bone. There was a tiny puncture of the skin, which was inflamed and slightly puffed, with a greenish tinge extending over a circular spot about the size of a silver half dollar.

"So that was the way," breathed Rankin at length, straighten-

ing up. "But what did it?"

"That's what we want you to find out," replied Matlin, keeping his eyes away from the table, where Doctor Wortley was readjusting the covering.

Rankin was silent.

"We don't want any scandal about it," the club president went on anxiously, "but we feel — of course, it wouldn't be right to try to hush the thing up, even if it were possible. It must be investigated, but the Lord knows we don't want the village police here. They're no good, anyway. We feel we can trust you to do as much as anyone could do, and there will be no publicity. Colonel Phillips would want it that way himself."

Still the detective was silent. Suddenly another voice came, and all eyes were directed at Fred Adams, the elder of the two brothers. He had turned from the window and was facing them with his countenance pale and grief-stricken.

"I only have this to say," he remarked, quietly and distinctly, "that I don't want publicity and scandal any more than the rest of you, but nothing shall be left undone to punish the man that murdered my uncle."

"I tell you, Fred, we don't know he was murdered," Harry Adams put in, and the sentiment found echo in two or three other voices:

"Yes, how do you know he was murdered?"

They were silenced by Rankin:

"Gentlemen, for my part, I agree with Fred. You have requested me to solve this thing. Very well. I'll do my best, but only on condition that it is left to my discretion to notify the authorities at any time. Meanwhile, everyone of you must keep absolute silence on this affair. There must be no hint of crime in your discussions with those outside. Already the atmosphere is electric all over the place. Dispel it. And now, you will kindly leave me here with Doctor Wortley. You, Mr. Mawson, and Fred and Harry, will remain also, if you please."

There were mutterings as the men began a general movement toward the door, and Harrison Matlin stepped up to whisper in the ear of the detective, who nodded impatiently in reply. Slowly they trooped out, with backward glances at the covered form on the table, and as the last of them disappeared into the hall Rankin stepped to the door and closed it. Then he turned to the four men who had remained behind at his request. Doctor Wortley stood with his hand resting on the table; Fraser Mawson had sunk into a chair, while the two Adams brothers still stood together near the window. The faces of all were lined with gravity.

"You've heard what Doctor Wortley has declared to be the cause of Colonel Phillips' death," began Rankin, abruptly, glancing

from Mawson to the two young men. "A virulent neurotic poison, probably curare. Curare is an arrow poison, without serious effect when taken internally, but almost instantly fatal when introduced into the blood through a wound. It was used by South American Indians to infect the tips of arrows; tiny arrows shot from blow-pipes. The abrasion of the skin on the Colonel's chest is final proof of the agent. The point is, how did it get there? It must have been done sometime within the ten minutes immediately preceding his collapse. Who did it, and how?"

Silence greeted the detective's pause. Mawson glanced at Doctor Wortley, then at the window; the two brothers had their eyes fixed on the detective. Nobody spoke.

"Did anything unusual happen during that time?" Rankin continued. "Was there anyone about except you four men and the caddies?"

There was a simultaneous "No" from the two young men, and Fraser Mawson shook his head in negation.

"No one," the latter declared. "Nothing unusual occurred, absolutely nothing, until poor Carson suddenly cried out and fell to the ground. To me, Mr. Rankin, the whole thing is incomprehensible. There was absolutely no way it could have happened. And I can't believe — why, Carson Phillips hadn't an enemy in the world."

"Nevertheless, it did happen." The detective's tone was grim. "And I don't suppose you intend to suggest suicide, Mr. Mawson."

"Good heavens, no!" the lawyer protested. "I simply can't understand it."

"One of the caddies was a West Indian," Fred Adams put in suddenly.

Rankin sent him a quick glance. "Which one?"

"Mine. His name's Joe; that's all I know about him. Never had him before."

"M-m-." Rankin didn't seem particularly interested. "I'll talk to him. You can never tell. But as a matter of fact, I expect to find nothing here. The sooner we're away the better. Doctor, I'll ask you to go with us. An examination should be made of that wound. Telephone to Brockton for a conveyance for the body. It can follow."

The detective paused, then turned to Fred Adams:

"I'll spend the night with you at Greenlawn, if you don't mind. And Doctor Wortley —"

"Very well, sir. But I don't see how you expect to find out anything there." The young man was plainly surprised, as were the others.

"Perhaps I won't. We'll look around a bit, though. Will you do

that telephoning, Doctor? It would be best to go down at the rear; no use running past all those curious eyes." He turned to the others. "You came over in the Colonel's car, I suppose. Run it out on the drive and wait for me there. I'll be only a minute or two."

Downstairs again, Rankin observed that the excitement was beginning to quiet down a little. Groups had broken up and scattered, and when he reached the piazza he saw several pairs and foursomes making their way to the first tee. On the lawn he found Harrison Matlin and surprised the club president by informing him of his decision to depart at once for Greenlawn, Colonel Phillips's country estate; then the two men proceeded together to the caddie-house. Joe, the West Indian mentioned by Fred Adams, proved to be one of those indolent, ignorant half breeds who seem to consider the process of breathing an unwarranted tax on human energy; he had been with the club now for more than two seasons, and the caddie-master declared him to be inoffensive and fairly competent. Rankin asked him a few guarded questions, then dismissed him with a shrug of the shoulders; clearly there was nothing to be suspected here.

He found the motor car on the drive near the gateway, with Fred Adams at the wheel and Harry seated beside him with a bag of golf clubs between his knees. To an observation of Rankin's as he climbed in the young man responded:

"They're not mine, sir. Uncle Carson's. I didn't want to leave them. . . ."

The detective seated himself in the tonneau beside Fraser Mawson, and the four men sat in silence, waiting for Doctor Wortley. He soon put in an appearance, with the information that conveyance would arrive from Brockton for the body in half an hour. Rankin merely nodded, sliding over on the cushions to make room for him.

"All ready, Fred."

The engine whirred and the automobile shot forward, with two hundred pairs of curious and sympathetic eyes gazing after it from the piazza and lawns.

Twenty minutes later they entered the gateway of Greenlawn, nestling in a wooded valley among the Jersey hills. Down a long avenue of lindens, with well-kept park on either side, the car rolled smoothly, then curved round a large sunken garden to bring up before the main entrance of the house. It was one of those summer castles that have been appearing throughout the east in ever increasing numbers in the past decade, low and rambling, of grey stone brought from Colorado, with extensive lawns and gardens dotted here and there with fountains, gravel walks in every direction, terraces descending at one side to a miniature lake and a broad driveway leading circuitously to a garage, constructed of the

same material as the house, in the rear. Some comment had been excited among Colonel Phillips's friends when he bought the place a few years before, for what use can an old bachelor make of a castle? He had merely smiled good-humoredly at their sly insinuations and proceeded to make Greenlawn one of the show spots of the hills. An old man's whim, he said; and his nature was incapable of guile.

Together the five men left the car and ascended the granite steps of the wide shady portico. From the rear of the house a chauffeur appeared, advancing inquiringly, but Fred Adams dismissed him by a wave of the hand. At the door of the reception room they were met by Mrs. Graves, the housekeeper, and the five men glanced at one another: Here was an unpleasant duty.

"You tell them, Mr. Mawson," Fred pleaded; and the lawyer was left behind to call the servants together and announce the death of their master. The others went on to the library, where Harry Adams finally freed himself of the burden of the Colonel's golf bag, leaning it against a corner of the fireplace. They watched him in silence, with the thought in their eyes: He has played his last game.

"Now if you young men will be good enough to leave me alone with Doctor Wortley," said Rankin abruptly.

Harry turned and started to go without a word. Fred hesitated, and finally blurted out:

"I know you have charge of this thing, Mr. Rankin, but I must say that I don't see why you run away from it. What can be done here at Greenlawn? I know you're older and wiser than I am, and I don't want to criticize, but Harry and I feel we have a right to know —"

"You have," Rankin put in, stopping him with a gesture. "But as yet there's nothing to tell. I hold myself responsible. I am doing what I think best. But of course you're in authority here now, and if you think —"

"No, sir, it isn't that," the young man declared hastily. "I suppose I shouldn't have said anything. But you — you know how we feel."

"I do, my boy."

Fred turned and followed his brother out of the room, closing the door behind him.

The doctor and the detective, finding themselves alone, glanced at each other, and then away again. Rankin's eye happened to light on a large bronze clock above the mantel, and stayed there; the hands of the clock pointed to a quarter past two. Doctor Wortley walked to a window looking out on the garden and stood there a moment, then crossed to a chair near the table and sank down in it, his fingers moving nervously along the arm. Neither said a word.

"Of course, I know what you're thinking, Rankin," the Doctor finally observed, breaking into speech all at once. "I know why you thought there was nothing to be done over there. But — well — it seems preposterous. Fred? Harry? Mawson? Why, it's preposterous!"

The detective turned from his contemplation of the clock.

"If you know what I think you know more than I do," he said at last, slowly. "And you do as a matter of fact know more than I do. That's why I want to talk to you. But certain conclusions are inevitable. We know how the Colonel was killed. A tiny arrow or steel needle cannot be sent from any considerable distance. From the fifth tee to the spot where the Colonel fell there is no shrubbery anywhere, nothing that could have served as a hiding place for the murderer. That is certain. Then it is equally certain that the murderer was not hidden. He was there, and he was not hidden. The caddies are out of the question. They were the two Simpson boys, Jimmie Marks and Joe, the West Indian Fred spoke of. Absurd to suspect any of them. That leaves only the members of the foursome. First the Colonel himself. Suicide must be considered, though the circumstances render it highly improbable. You were his friend and physician for thirty years. You knew him more intimately than anyone else. Your opinion?"

"Carson Phillips did not kill himself," declared the doctor with conviction. "There was absolutely no reason — I knew every detail of his life — and besides, he wasn't the man to sneak out of a thing. No."

"Then the other three are left. The thought is repugnant to us. Admitted. Also, the hypothesis is difficult. It seems impossible that the thing could have been done without attracting notice. They all swear nothing unusual occurred. Can they be in league? I dismiss that as incredible. Then it *was* done, somehow, without attracting notice. How? And by whom? There motive enters. But the point is, how? If only I had been in that foursome! The blowpipe is out of the question as requiring extraordinary skill. There was some devilish trick somewhere.

"You know," said the doctor slowly, "it's my opinion you're on the wrong track, Rankin. I can't believe —"

"It's the only open track," the detective retorted. "No other way to turn. Disagreeable as it is, we must follow it. There's one other thing I haven't spoken of. — Hello! What's up?"

As he spoke the whirring of an engine had made itself heard, and now, through the window, an automobile, the one that had brought them to Greenlawn, was seen to turn about on the drive outside and head for the outer gate with a sudden leap forward. Fred Adams was at the wheel. An instant later Harry appeared on one of the gravel paths at the edge of the garden.



"I know you have charge of this thing, Mr. Rankin, but I must say that I don't see why you run away from it."

Doctor Wortley, who had joined Rankin near the window, threw it open to call to the young man:

"What's up, Harry? Where's Fred going?"



"Down to Morton's," came the reply. There was a touch of disapproval in the tone. "Said he'd be right back in case you asked for him."

The doctor had closed the window again before Rankin's query came:

"Morton's? Where's that?"

"Over west a few miles," replied the doctor. "There's a girl. Dora Morton. Rather odd he should run off there just now."

Something in the tone caused the other to pursue the inquiry.

"Why?"

"Why — Carson didn't approve of her. There's been a quiet sort of row on about it for some time. She's a daughter of Morton the cheese man, and well — Carson's ideas were somewhat aristocratic, you know. I believe he even threatened to disinherit Fred if he didn't give her up."

"Ah, I see," said the detective softly.



The Last Drive

The Third Chapter of a Golf Mystery Story Begun in the July Number, and Which Will Continue Throughout the Year

But Doctor Wortley did not permit the insinuation in the detective's tone to go unchallenged.

"Good heavens, Rankin," he exclaimed, "you can't believe that Fred Adams would take his uncle's life for such a reason as that!"

"I don't believe anything," the other returned impatiently. "Right now it isn't a question of who did it or why, but how it was done. We don't even know that. But to put it in plain words, I am convinced that one of the four members of that foursome is responsible for the Colonel's death. It's the only possible solution."

As he spoke the sound of wheels was heard on the driveway outside. It was the conveyance that had been sent for to Brockton to carry the body of the Colonel to Greenlawn. Doctor Wortley went out to superintend the removal to the room that had been prepared upstairs, while Rankin went in search of Fraser Mawson.

He found the lawyer in a small room at the further end of the lower hall. This room was the place that Colonel Phillips had set aside for the transaction of business; it contained a desk and a safe

and files filled with letters and documents of various kinds, all kept neatly and methodically after the Colonel's custom. As Rankin entered Mawson was in the act of taking a large book from a shelf in the safe, the door of which stood open.

"You seem to be acting on a thought that has occurred to me also," observed the detective, stopping beside the desk.

The lawyer looked up at him inquiringly.

"I was just looking to see if there is anything out of the way," he explained. "You know, I came down here from the city once a week to confer with Carson on his affairs. We were to have attended to it tonight; that was our custom."

Rankin, nodding, found a chair, while the lawyer placed the book on the desk beside another that was lying there open. The fact of his having been entrusted with the combination of the safe, containing private documents of every description, was evidence of the complete confidence in which the dead man had held his attorney and lifelong friend.

"He kept everything here, I suppose," observed Rankin presently.

The other nodded. "Everything. Except, of course, what was needed for any specific purpose, temporarily, in New York. Such were kept in my office."

Silence, while the lawyer compared entries in one of the open books before him with those in the other, occasionally writing something in the latter. From the other end of the hall, through the open door, came the sound of many slow and heavy footsteps, those of the men who were carrying into Greenlawn the body of its dead master. Rankin, craning his neck a little, could see their straining forms framed in the outer doorway, with Doctor Wortley in front directing them.

"One thing I'd like to ask, Mawson," resumed the detective after a moment. "Had the Colonel indicated an intention lately of making any change in his will?"

The question appeared to surprise the lawyer a little.

"None whatever," was the reply. "Why, do you know of any reason?"

"Nothing in particular," Rankin returned, "except that Doctor Wortley tells me that he had been having a difference of opinion with Fred concerning a certain young lady named Morton, I believe."

"Oh." The lawyer looked up from his writing. "Yes, there has been something said about it. Carson was much put out, and Fred was — well — obstinate. There were some pretty warm words, I believe — you know, Carson had a temper — but I don't think he ever seriously contemplated changing his will."

"But Fred might have thought so."

The lawyer frowned. "Of course. He might think anything. But it seems to me a pretty weak thread to hold a suspicion like that against a boy like Fred." A moment's pause, then he added, "If you want my opinion, Mr. Rankin, it appears to me you're pursuing a delusion. If I am a little diffident about speaking it is only because I see that I am included in your thoughts as well as the two boys. Of course, you may have reasons that I know nothing of —"

"I haven't," the other interrupted. "All that I know, you know."

"Then I don't see what you expect to find at Greenlawn, unless you look for something among Carson's private papers. They are all in this room, and I am willing to stretch a point and submit them to your inspection, but I can tell you beforehand that your search will be in vain. As for Harry and Fred, it seems to me absurd even to entertain the possibility of their guilt of so black a crime."

"Then just what is your opinion, Mr. Mawson?"

"One that I dislike to utter," returned the lawyer with some hesitation. "At least, part of it, and that the most likely. It is forced on me by circumstances. It seems to me that there are just two possibilities. In the first place, I reflect that Colonel Phillips spent several years of his life in the Philippines and other parts of the Far East, and it isn't only in novels that the Orient is filled with strange enmities and mysterious crimes. Some act of Carson's, official or personal, some wrong, fancied or real, of many years ago, may have found its tragic sequel here on the Jersey golf links. Secondly, my long legal experience has taught me that any man's life is apt to contain a secret, a dark and shameful secret sometimes, that remains unsuspected even by his oldest and dearest friends, and that may drive him to any desperate deed, even the most desperate of all, to bury it."

"Then you admit the theory of suicide?"

"Merely because as a possibility it cannot rightfully be excluded. Before Fred and Harry I rejected it, not to wound their sensibilities; and to me also the thought of self-destruction in connection with Carson Phillips is — well — distasteful. But reason requires me to admit it. The point is, the motive."

"There is nothing here?" Rankin waved his hand about the room.

"Nothing. Everything is in the best possible condition, with the exception of one unfortunate financial deal, and that was hardly a serious inconvenience; it certainly was not vital enough to serve as the cause of tragedy. There is a lawsuit on with an estate in Connecticut; nothing serious."

"What was the financial deal? A speculation?"

"Yes. Against my advice. United Traffic. Of course, you know

the circumstances; the bottom fell out of it two weeks ago. I just got rid of the last of it yesterday; you see what it amounted to."

The lawyer pointed to an entry in one of the books before him, on which the ink was scarcely dry:

2000	United Traffic	57	\$114,000.00
1000	United Traffic	56	56,000.00
2000	United Traffic	52	104,000.00

"He bought around a hundred and twenty, so the loss amounted to something over three hundred thousand," Mawson explained. "But, of course, it was only a temporary inconvenience."

"Of course." Rankin agreed. "Mighty imprudent, though, for Carson Phillips — but financial difficulties are beside the question. There is nothing else?"

"No. The best way, perhaps, would be to look yourself, but I know every paper in the room, and there is nothing. That isn't to be wondered at. If there were anything in Carson's life that might have led — as it did lead — to this, he wouldn't have left evidence of it lying around where even I could see it. No, if my theory is correct, Mr. Rankin, the mystery of our friend's death isn't going to be easy to solve. For my part, I am not even convinced that it came from that little green spot that Wortley showed us. I'll have to have better proof than that little spot on his skin."

"The symptoms were conclusive."

"In a way. Second-hand. Wortley didn't get there till it was over."

"The examination of the organs will settle it."

"By Wortley?"

"Yes. He's at it now."

"Of course, that will settle it," agreed the lawyer. "I don't dispute the probable correctness of his diagnosis, but I wait for proof. Anyway, you have my theory. You understand my position in the matter. As the representative of the Colonel's heirs, I feel it my duty to defend them against what seems to me unjust suspicion. I thought it best to be entirely frank with you . . ."

"Then you think I am merely wasting my time here at Greenlawn?"

"I do. Not that I regard the time as particularly valuable. I doubt if any direct evidence will be discoverable anywhere. It is my opinion that if the mystery is solved it will be only after a most minute and thorough examination of the Colonel's life. I feel that the roots of this tragedy are buried somewhere deep in the past."

"I wouldn't be surprised if you're right, Mr. Mawson." The detective got to his feet. "But as you say, in that case the present time is of no peculiar value, and I believe I'll use some of it snooping around here just to satisfy an idea I've got. You've no objection to

my looking through the safe?"

For reply the lawyer handed him the bunch of keys to the several compartments. Rankin prosecuted his search in a leisurely and deliberate manner, still his eye was alert. Mawson turned to his books and resumed his writing.

The search revealed nothing. In these papers and books that the detective examined the simple straightforwardness of Carson Phillips's life was revealed logically and in order, like the lucid march of a geometrical proposition to its Q.E.D. The mistakes of his youth were chronicled in letters of thirty-five years ago by his father; the brilliancy of his early army career in medals and copies of dispatches; his one affair of the heart in a bundle of blue-tinted envelopes; the generosity and charity of his maturity in innumerable letters and receipts and documents of various kinds. Here, too, were copies of affidavits, since proven forgeries, on which a famous breach of promise suit had been based; Rankin knew of it, though it had been before his time. The only note of hardness was a reminder here and there of the sternness with which the Colonel had insisted on the same standard of strict loyalty in others as he imposed on himself. To him treachery and deceit had been the deadly, unforgivable sin; his detestation of these qualities had at times smothered his charity.

Rankin had about finished when a servant appeared at the door with a message that Doctor Wortley wished to see him in the library. He went at once, leaving Mawson still poring over the account books. In the hall he saw the two Adams boys at the foot of the great staircase; Fred had returned from the Mortons, then. They were talking in low tones with Mrs. Graves, the old housekeeper, whose eyes were red with weeping.

Doctor Wortley was alone in the library, standing by a window overlooking the garden. As he turned at the detective's entrance the latter saw at once by the expression of his face that he had made some new discovery. Immediately and hastily he came forward, holding out some small object in his hand.

"I've probed," he said, abruptly. "See what I found."

Rankin took the small object and examined it. It was a tiny steel needle, little more than an inch in length, with the blunt end filed off square; there was no eye. Rankin tried the sharpness of the point against his finger.

"Take care!" called the Doctor sharply, stopping him. "There may be poison left on it."

Dusk was coming on, and the detective moved nearer the light of the window. "So this is what did it," he breathed slowly. "A little thing like that to bring a man like Carson Phillips to the ground! You found it beneath that spot on the abdomen?"

The Doctor nodded. "Straight in, buried half an inch beneath

the skin, but pointing a little upward toward the breast bone. It must have entered at that angle, for there was nothing to deflect its course. Its velocity was not very high, or a sharp pointed needle like that would have penetrated much deeper."

"You say it pointed *upwards*? Are you sure of that?"

"Absolutely. An angle of about twenty degrees from the horizontal."

The detective seated himself and thoughtfully turned the needle over and over in his hand. During a long silence his brow was wrinkled and his eyes half closed in speculation.

"It is incomprehensible that it should have been pointing upwards," he said at last, turning to the Doctor.

Admitting that it was difficult to understand, the other maintained that such was the fact. "To tell the truth," he added, "it takes a load from my mind. In spite of my conviction to the contrary, I have been forced to confess inwardly that it might have been suicide. This removes that possibility. That needle was shot from a gun of some kind — possibly a blow-gun — it must have been noiseless —"

"Undoubtedly. A report would have been heard. But that doesn't explain —" The detective got up from his chair. "See. You stand there. I here. Now how would it be possible, with any kind of a gun, for me to fire that needle at you so it would enter your breast pointing upwards?"

"If you were on the ground, and a little closer —" the Doctor suggested.

"But I'm not. Remember, concealment was out of the question. There was no place for it."

"It might have been deflected by something — a button on his shirt, for instance."

"A bullet, yes. But hardly a thin sharp needle like this. The deuce of it is, we can't know the exact moment it happened. It's evident that the Colonel didn't feel the thing at all when it struck him. You say it would take from five to fifteen minutes for the poison to work. Then it might have been anywhere from the fourth green to where he took his second on the fifth. What I can't understand is how it could possibly have been done without one of those men seeing it — or one of the other two, if one of the three is the murderer."

Again the detective thoughtfully turned the needle over in his fingers, as though he would extract the stubborn secret somehow from the slender piece of steel. There was a long silence. Doctor Wortley, wandering to the closed fireplace, found himself regarding the Colonel's golf bag, left standing there by Harry Adams on their arrival at Greenlawn. The Doctor took out the driver and passed his hand slowly up and down the shaft. "Poor old Carson,

□



“You found it beneath that spot on the abdomen?”
The Doctor nodded.

he’s had his last drive,” he breathed. At that moment the dinner belt rang.

At the table the subject of Fred’s visit to the Mortons was brought into the conversation by a remark of Harry’s and the elder of the two young men defended himself by explaining that he had had an engagement to play tennis with Dora Morton that afternoon, and had driven over merely to break it. Furthermore, he announced his intention of remaining away from her for a time, out of respect for his uncle’s memory. Fraser Mawson and Doctor Wortley signified their approval of this. Nobody ate much, and the conversation was by fits and starts. Fred, grave and thoughtful, seemed a different person from the young man who had so gaily chaffed his two elders only that morning; Harry seemed to be irritable and nervous, to an extent that caused the old doctor to turn a

solicitous eye on him. At the end, over the coffee, the Doctor announced that in accordance with the boys' request he had made the preliminary arrangements over the telephone for the funeral to be held on Monday morning; the services were to be military. The young men acquiesced with silent nods.

Afterwards — and it was quite dark when the meal was finished, for they had not sat down till late — Rankin and the Doctor went to the piazza with their cigars, while Mawson, observing that he wanted to have everything straightened out that night, returned to his books and papers in the little office at the end of the hall.

Half an hour later the detective, having left the Doctor below on the piazza, made his way upstairs to the room at the front of the house where the blinds had been closed since early in the afternoon. The door was shut. He turned the knob softly and entered; then, as he heard the sound of smothered sobbing from the further side of the room, where a dim light burned above the motionless form on the bed, he would have turned back. But already he had been seen: the young man who was kneeling there had lifted his tearstained face to gaze at the intruder. It was Fred Adams.

"I'm sorry," Rankin apologized. "I didn't know you were here."

"It's all right, sir. It doesn't matter." The young man barely managed to control his voice.

Rankin moved across to the bed and stood there looking down at the face to Colonel Phillips, set in death. The other remained on his knees beside him.

"I haven't prayed for ten years," said the young man presently, in a voice now almost calm. "And I can't now. I don't know what to pray for. I suppose you think I'm a baby, Mr. Rankin, but you don't know . . . Only yesterday I had a quarrel with him . . . I said things . . . I'd give anything in the world to have those words back. And he was so good. He let me have my way. It was about Dora — Miss Morton. He was going with me to see her tomorrow."

Rankin looked at him, and nodded. "Then it's no wonder you feel badly, my boy. Your uncle was a noble and good man. Tears for him are nothing to be ashamed of."

"No, sir. I know how good he was. He was father and mother to Harry and me. Better than we deserved. And we didn't — we treated him —"

The voice broke again, and silence followed. Rankin felt vaguely uncomfortable, and after a minute he turned and tiptoed silently out of the room.

He left the house by a side door and strolled into the garden. The night was cool, with a fresh breeze from the east, and the light of a full moon shed its silvery radiance everywhere. The fragrance

of the blossoms, stirred by the breeze, filled the air; the soft music of the fountain came from the terraces at the other end. Rankin, lighting a cigar, wandered about the gravel paths for a time, and finally sat down on a bench in the dark shadow of a great spreading laca bush.

His thoughts were for the most part confused. Try as he might, he could fasten on no theory that would fit the circumstances of Colonel Phillips's mysterious death; he could not even evolve a satisfactory explanation of the manner in which the crime had been committed. For the twentieth time he pictured to himself the scene on the golf links that morning, trying to discover some possible combination of events that would answer to the known facts. He, himself, had seen the foursome drive off from the first tee. He went over again the answers of the Colonel's caddie to his questions. He tried to deduce the solution from what was known; he tried to arrive at it by elimination; he tried to visualize it. Without success. His brain whirled. Finally he rose to his feet with a sigh, pulling out his watch, and was surprised to see that it was past eleven o'clock. Probably the others had gone to bed, with the exception of Doctor Wortley, who was to sit up with the dead. He had been in the garden over two hours. A glance showed him that all the windows on that side were dark.

He turned toward the house, but before he had taken two steps he saw something that caused him to draw back hastily into the shadow of the laca bush. Someone was moving on the piazza, and this someone suddenly leaped over the rail onto the driveway and stood there in the moonlight glancing furtively about him in every direction. It was the furtiveness in that look that caused the detective to draw back.

Suddenly the man turned and moved swiftly down the driveway. Rankin thought it looked like one of the Adams boys. He waited till there was a hundred yards between them, then followed, being careful to keep on the soft turf at the edge of the drive. The man ahead moved so swiftly that he was forced to trot to keep up. Down the length of the driveway he was led, until finally the great entrance gate was reached; there the man turned to the right without hesitation and continued on down the road. A moment later Rankin emerged from the gateway and, seeking the shadow of the trees along the opposite side, followed warily. The man ahead kept to the center of the road, full in the moonlight, pounding along at a rapid walk.

They had gone perhaps two hundred yards from the gate when the detective, happening to glance back over his shoulder, saw the figure of still another man emerge from the entrance of Greenlawn and turn up the road toward him.

He, too, was being followed!



The Last Drive

By REX T. STOUT

Illustrations by J. H. Crank

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

The violent and mysterious death of Carson Phillips, retired Army Colonel, occurs during a foursome in which he is paired with Fraser Mawson, his lawyer and man of business, against Harry and Fred Adams, the Colonel's nephews and heirs. Canby Rankin, amateur detective, investigates. Dr. Wortley discovers a tiny abrasion on the abdomen of the dead Colonel, from which he extracts a small steel needle; it had been poisoned. At Greenlawn, the dead Colonel's country home, Rankin is told by Fraser Mawson that the Colonel had recently lost a large sum in United Traffic. Late that night Rankin sees Harry Adams leave the house and, following him to the nearby village of Brockton, overhears a conversation between him and another man. Rankin is discovered and there is a fight; the stranger escapes. On the way back to Greenlawn Harry Adams tells Rankin that he has lost a big sum in United Traffic and that the other man, Gil Warner, is in trouble in connection with it. Just before they reach Greenlawn they discover that they are being followed.

As Rankin turned he saw the man in the rear dodge hastily into the shadow of a tree. With a mental shrug of the shoulders the detective turned again and strode on. His chief concern was with the man in front; if the other came along, so much the better.

In the bright moonlight the straight macadam road stretched ahead like a pale silver ribbon, embroidered at more or less regular intervals with the bunchy shadows of bordering trees; and so still was the nocturnal countryside that the footsteps of the man two hundred yards in front rang sharply out, staccato. Rankin, keeping to the turf at the edge of the macadam, followed noiselessly. An automobile passed, honk-honking at the man in the road, its lamps piercing the moonlight with two cones of yellow fire; and they had gone perhaps a mile when a dog came out from a gate and ran barking after the pedestrian. Rankin crossed to the other side of the road to escape the dog's observation, and got safely by.

At the crossings, a little further on, the man turned to the east. This, Rankin knew, was the detour to Brockton, three miles away. He kept straining his eyes ahead in an effort to guess the identity



of the man he was following, but all he could certainly discern was that the youthfulness of his figure and gait made it probable that it was one of the Adams boys, if anyone who belonged at Greenlawn.

A mile beyond the crossing a quick glance over the detective's shoulder showed him the man in the rear trudging doggedly along. Thus the queer procession wound its way along the country

STOUT, THE LAST DRIVE



He turned toward the house, but before he had taken two steps he saw something that caused him to draw back hastily into the shadow of the laca bush.

road. Now and then, even at that late hour, an automobile whizzed by in one direction or the other; in the tonneau of a big touring car Rankin fancied that he recognized Harrison Matlin, president of the Corona Country Club, which was not improbable.

Finally lights shone ahead, and the houses began to come closer together; they were entering the village of Brockton.

Rankin quickened his step and drew a little closer to the man in front, who kept straight ahead as one who knew where he was going and wanted to get there. Reaching the main street of the town, he turned swiftly to the right and went on past a block of business buildings to the next corner, where stood an old three-story frame hotel, the only one in the place. It was past midnight now, and save for one or two stragglers the street was deserted, with the bright moonlight over everything, like sunshine strained through a silver cloth. In front of the hotel stood a racy-looking roadster. Rankin was on the heels of his man as he sprang up the steps of the hotel porch and entered the door; but there the detective stopped and tiptoed to a window a little distance to the right, through which he could observe the interior.

The man was indeed one of the Adams brothers: Harry, the younger. He advanced a few steps into the room, a typical country hotel office, with wooden chairs and a fly-specked cigar case, then stopped and turned at sound of a voice.

"Harry! Thank God!"

Rankin, too, heard the voice from his vantage-point outside the window. It came from a man who had been seated in one of the chairs by the windows at the front of the room, and who now sprang forward toward young Adams with an eager and anxious countenance. He was a young fellow about Harry's age, but of a very different mould. The quick, shifty eyes, the whitish cheeks, already too often shaven, the nervous oiliness of his manner even in his excitement, were all quite familiar features to one who had had opportunity to observe a certain type of young man who infests Wall Street.

"Have you got it?" came from his eager lips before the other had time to return his greeting.

Harry Adams shook his head.

"No, I haven't. I — "

"You haven't! But, man, you must have! You promised! Why, I came — my God! You promised, Harry!"

Young Adams took him by the arm. His voice was commanding:

"Don't shout so. I'll explain. I don't want to talk in here. It was risky your sitting in here where everybody could see you from the street. Come outside."

As they turned toward the door the detective retreated hastily from the window and dropped noiselessly over the porch railing onto the grass below. As he crouched there in the shadow he heard their feet descending the steps and saw their shadows on the lawn. The unknown's voice came:

"I've got my roadster. Shall we — "

"No," came Harry's reply. "We'll walk a little."

He continued in a lower tone, and Rankin, straining his ear, couldn't catch the words. The two young men turned down the sidewalk to the left. Rankin prepared to follow. As he straightened up he caught sight of a form disappearing in a doorway a little down the street. "Probably the man that followed us from Greenlawn," thought the detective. "Who the devil can he be and what is he up to? Well, we'll attend to him later."

The two young men continued on down the street, talking earnestly in low tones; their voices came, but not the words. Rankin stepped cautiously after them at a distance. If only he could hear what they were saying! He drew a little closer; the sidewalk here, flanked by trees, was in heavy shadow, which made it less risky; but though he got within thirty feet of them he could only catch a meaningless word now and then. Otherwise, the silence of the night was almost unbroken; the call of insects sounded occasionally, the hoot of an owl came from the woods toward the river, and the horn of a motor car tooted faintly somewhere far down the road. Subconsciously the detective noted the curious resemblance between the two latter sounds, as if one were answering to the other.

At length the two young men halted and, half turning, stood still talking. The detective crept closer. The nearest street lamp was a block away, and the moonlight tried in vain to penetrate the thick foliage of the trees. Rankin moved cautiously and silently from one protecting trunk to another; he was quite close now. One more advance — his foot bent a twig, but it was unheard — and he stood behind a tree so close that he could almost have put out his hand and touched the unknown, who was nearest him.

Harry's voice came, scarcely more than a whisper.

"I simply don't see how I can help you, Gil, but as I say, I'll try. You can see it's not my fault. It's a horrible mess, and that's all there is to it. I'll telephone you tomorrow morning, at Migg's at ten o'clock. You go back there and stay there, and whatever you do don't show your face anywhere, or you're a goner; they may be after you now. I've been thinking it over — "

The interruption came from the street. An automobile had come up from the other end of the village and through it with dimmed lights. Here it was approaching the country again, and the lights, turned on suddenly, blazed forth with startling brilliancy. Like two monstrous flaming eyes they glared down the road and, as the wheel turned a little, in among the trees flanking the sidewalk; and the form of Canby Rankin, behind one of the trees, was revealed as in the light of noonday.

Young Adams saw him, not ten feet away, stopped, and sprang

forward.

"What the — who — why, it's Mr. Rankin!"

Feeling profoundly foolish, the detective stepped out. The unknown, who had leapt away like a scared rabbit, halted and turned, holding himself in readiness for flight.

"Who's Mr. Rankin?" he demanded in a voice that rasped.

"Why — " Harry stammered — he's a friend of Uncle Carson's — that is, he's a detective — "

"A detective — damn you, Adams!"

With the first word the unknown was off down the sidewalk at a bound. Rankin leaped after him. Harry called out:

"It's all right, Gil! Come back! He's not after you!"

The last was a rather absurd remark, since as it was uttered Rankin was quite obviously after Gil in the most literal sense of the word. Heedless of Harry's shouts, repeated from the rear, the unknown rushed madly down the street, his feet pounding on the brick sidewalk as he leapt forward like a stampeded steer; and fifty feet behind was the detective, running low on his toes, almost silently. A window went up in a house as they passed, doubtless that of some sleeper awakened by Harry's shouts, and a call came through the night, unheeded. A block ahead shone the lights of the hotel; at sight of them the unknown bounded forward with fresh energy, increasing a little the distance from his pursuer. He made for the front of the building, where stood the racy-looking roadster; and Rankin, guessing his purpose, strained every muscle. Reaching the roadster, the unknown jumped to the seat; almost instantly came the buzz of the engine; a lever clicked; the car started, jerked, and started again. But too late. Rankin, leaping through the air, was beside him.

There was a short, sharp struggle over the levers, and the car jerked to a stop and stood still with the engine whirring madly. Yelling an oath, the unknown stooped and, rising again with a heavy wrench in his hand, swung it at the detective's head. Rankin parried the blow, catching his arm, but in doing so lost his balance and tumbled from the car to the ground, dragging the other with him. At that instant Harry came running up.

"It's all right, Gil — for God's sake, Mr. Rankin, let him go!"

But Rankin's blood was up now, and even if he had heard he would not have heeded. The murderous look in the other's eyes as he struck with the wrench had roused him to fury; and he loved a fight. He got one.

He had landed on his knees on the pavement, with Gil, pulled after, tumbling on his shoulders. The impact knocked Rankin prostrate, with the other on top, raining wild blows on his face and neck. With a mighty heave of his body the detective half unseated him, twisted about and caught his arms. Holding with a grip of

steel, he worked to his knees, then one foot to the ground, then both. He was upright. With a desperate effort the unknown got an arm loose and swung, but Rankin sprang forward to clinch before the blow could land. Breathing heavily, grappling fiercely together, they swayed back and forth over the pavement; and with the superhuman strength of fear in him, Gil was holding his own. Harry Adams stood on the sidewalk, starting forward and then halting again, as if unable to decide which man to help; and all the time calling frantically to Gil that it was "all right," and to Rankin to let him go.

They lurched back and forth across the sidewalk, struggling silently; then suddenly Rankin's foot caught on the edge of the curb and he stumbled, loosening his hold. On the instant Gil jerked away, then hurled himself forward and bore the other to the ground, knocking the breath out of him; and then jumped to his feet and sprang for the car with a triumphant oath. Swiftly Rankin was back on his feet and after him, dragging him from his seat, though his head was dizzy and stunned from the impact of the pavement. Gil clung to the edge of the car; Rankin tugged at him, and when the hold was suddenly released they tumbled backwards together. Gil was up first; his eye caught something on the ground; a quick swoop, and he straightened and turned with the heavy iron wrench in his hand. "Now, damn you!" he screamed, and rushed forward.

Rankin dodged swiftly, and got a glancing blow on the shoulder. Again the wrench was raised, but the detective leaped forward and caught the arm before it could come down. There was a sharp pain in his shoulder, but he grappled and held on, jerking at the wrench with one hand, and finally got it loose and sent it spinning through the air. Then he drew back and swung his clenched fist at the others' jaw, unexpectedly and successfully. He felt his knuckles crunch on the flesh and bone, and the unknown went down like a log. Rankin sprang astride of him and sat on him; and then Harry Adams's agitated voice came:

"Let him go, Mr. Rankin — please let him go. He's done nothing — that is, not what you think. You must let him go, sir."

The detective merely grunted, pinning down his captive's arms.

"You must, Mr. Rankin — he meant no harm to you — "

"Of course not," panted the detective. "He just wanted to see how close he could come with that wrench without hitting me."

"You were after him."

"And I got him."

"You must let him go."

"Don't be a damned idiot, Harry. Of course I won't let him go."

The unknown stirred a little. The detective tightened his hold,

resting for breath.

"But I say you must." Young Adams moved so that he stood directly over the two men on the pavement, and spoke rapidly. "Listen, Mr. Rankin. It's a question of my honor. Gil came down here to see me. It would be the same as if I'd betrayed him, when I'd promised to help him. You must let him go. It's a matter of honor."

"Your honor is your own lookout, my boy. As for me, I'm going to have a good long talk with your pleasant-mannered friend and find out why he's so free with his wrenches."

"Mr. Rankin, let him go."

Silence. The detective shifted his hold a little and, leaning over, saw the shifty eyes open, and simultaneously felt a reawakening of the muscles of the man beneath him; and then he felt something else: two strong hands gripping him from above.

"I'm sorry, sir — "

"Keep off, Harry!"

The detective sat harder. Gil's body twisted feebly about. Young Adams seemed to hesitate an instant, then he stooped swiftly and encircled Rankin with his arms. The detective struggled, but in vain; he was still all but exhausted, and the strength of the young athlete was too much for him. Inexorably he was dragged from his captive and across the sidewalk; he tried to twist about, but the arms held him in a grip of steel. The unknown, left free, stirred and turned, lifting himself to his knees; there he stopped for a moment, swaying as if dazed, then hastily scrambled to his feet. Young Adams was calling to him quietly:

"Get in the car, Gil, and beat it. Quick! Come on, pull yourself together! Beat it, I say! You might have known — I'll phone you in the morning. Lay low till you hear from me."

The unknown lost no time, nor wasted breath in speech. For a second he stood uncertainly in the attitude of a man who asks "Where am I?" then turned without a word and staggered to the roadster and pulled himself in. The engine was still running. A jerk of a lever, and the car leaped forward into the night.

Harry waited till the red light had completely disappeared in the darkness, then released his hold on the detective and stepped aside.

"I'm sorry, sir — "

Rankin made no reply. He was feeling gingerly about his shoulder for broken bones, and moving his arm cautiously up and down. It seemed to work all right. Now that the passion of battle was leaving him, he felt a little silly as he looked at the young man standing there quietly before him in the peaceful moonlight.

"Who the deuce is Gil?" he asked abruptly.

Then as Harry hesitated with his reply the detective looked at

his watch, shook himself together and brushed the dust from his clothing.

"Nearly one o'clock," he observed. "No use standing here. Let's get back to Greenlawn. You can tell me about it on the way."

So it was as they trudged back along the moonlit country road, side by side, that Harry explained. Until they reached the border of the village he was silent, and when he began to speak his words came jerkily.

"I'll have to tell you about it, I suppose," he said slowly, "so you'll understand my position. Not that there's anything really wrong about it as far as I'm concerned, but I — well, I'm not very proud of it."

They walked on a moment in silence, then he continued:

"Gil — Gil Warner — was a classmate of mine at college. He did me a mighty good turn one night — in fact he saved my life and more, too. But that hasn't anything to do with the worst part of the business — that is, my worst part — the beginning.

"I never really liked Gil, but I was under a great obligation to him, so when he came to New York I saw more or less of him — got him invited places and so on. Finally, about four months ago, he started after me to go in on a stock speculation with him. At first I wouldn't listen, but he talked it up and it really sounded good. He wanted me to interest Uncle Carson in it, and at length I consented; but I didn't have much success. Uncle looked into it a little and turned it down cold; said it wasn't worth a cent."

"Did the Colonel meet Warner?" the detective put in.

"No. I didn't mention Gil's name. Then Gil got after me to go in on my own hook. You know, I have — *had* — about a hundred thousand left me by father, in good securities. I refused twenty times, but he kept after me, and at last I gave in. That's where I was a blanked ass. But it really looked good to me. I went to Mr. Mawson —"

"What did you go to Mawson for?"

"He handled things for me. He has since father's death. I told him all about it, and he agreed to help me realize on the securities without telling uncle. I got it and put it all in United Traffic. We —"

"In what?"

"United Traffic. What's the matter? Oh, you've heard how it blew up, of course. I said I was a blanked ass."

The detective had stopped short with an expression of surprise on his face. Now he whistled a little, as the surprise deepened into perplexity.

"Yes, I've heard how it blew up," he replied as he moved on again. "But it wasn't that. It was — nothing. Go on."

"That's all. It blew up. The bottom fell out. And then Gil came

to me and said he had embezzled a big sum from the brokers he works for and sunk it in United Traffic. He was frantic. This was only day before yesterday. As I said, I was under a great obligation to him. I promised to see uncle and try to get a loan to help him out. I meant to do it tonight — and this afternoon — and uncle's dead. I had an appointment to see Gil at Brockton. He's — you saw what condition he's in. They're onto him and he's laying low. I don't know what to do — I'm all broken up about Uncle Carson and I can't think anyway. I thought maybe I'd see Mr. Mawson in the morning."

The young man finished and the detective began to ply him with questions. All of them he answered readily and consistently. About them was the soft silence of the countryside, broken only by their voices and the rhythmic pat of their feet on the macadam as they swung along side by side; the moon was dropping to the horizon now, and there was a new ghostliness in the long narrow shadows of the trees as they stretched into the fields and moved their lazy fingers to and fro over the quiet grass. The two men became silent, walking more swiftly; an abrupt question now and then, and its answer, was all that was heard for half an hour.

"The best thing you can do is to drop this Gil Warner entirely," Rankin observed as they came within sight of the gate of Greenlawn. "Obligation is one thing and common sense is another. He's a crook anyway, and the more you do the more you'll have to do. You say you think he's not been in this neighborhood before. I'll find out about that. He may know —"

The detective stopped short.

"By Jove, I'd forgotten!" he exclaimed after a moment.

Harry turned inquiring eyes on him.

"There was a man following me," Rankin explained. "He came out of the Greenlawn gate and followed us all the way to Brockton. I saw him there in a doorway. In the excitement I forgot all about it."

"He came out of Greenlawn?"

"Yes. Not far behind me. He followed all the way." Half involuntarily the detective wheeled and looked back down the road. The next instant he grasped Harry by the arm.

"There he is now!" he cried.

CHAPTER V

Harry turned and gazed back down the road.

"Where? I don't see anyone."

"No. Not now. He jumped into the shadow — that clump of trees on the right."

"But who can it be?"

"I don't know." The detective stood peering intently toward the clump of trees two hundred yards away. "It looks as though you'd got mixed up in a dirtier piece of business than you bargained for."

"What — you don't mean Uncle — "

Rankin interrupted him:

"Ah, there he is!"

With the words the detective was off toward the trees with a bound, and without an instant's hesitation Harry was at his heels. Back down the road they raced at the top of their speed; and when they had traversed half the distance, in the dim glow of the waning moonlight they saw a figure dart suddenly out of the shadow across the road, scramble over the fence and start at a dead run across the fields like a startled rabbit. Rankin swerved aside, squeezed between the wires almost without halting and took after him. Harry, not far behind, was calling as he ran:

"Cut across! He's making for the woods!"

Rankin had already seen and was straining every muscle to intercept the maneuver, but Harry, with his youthful athletic stride, soon passed him. The man ahead bounded frantically across the furrows without looking back; his goal was evidently the fringe of woods bordering the river some five hundred yards from the road, and the advantage was his, as the two converged at a point half a mile down. Rankin, seeing himself outdistanced by Harry anyway, took it easier, as his injured shoulder was causing him considerable pain; then, seeing their quarry finally reach the edge of the woods and disappear, he pushed forward again. When at length he reached the spot he could see nothing, for the waning moonlight stopped at the barrier of the thick foliage and left all in darkness. Young Adams, too, had disappeared.

From the woods, some distance within, came the sound of rushing footsteps and rustling branches, and the detective pushed forward in that direction, calling meanwhile:

"Harry! Harry! Where are you?"

An answering shout came:

"Here! This way!"

Rankin went on, stumbling over hollows and fallen trees and scratching his face and hands on the low-hanging branches. The sounds ahead of him grew fainter, then suddenly swerved to the left and seemed to be approaching. Here in the midst of the woods the night was black, though now and then, through the interstices of the leaves, could be seen the faint shimmer of the last rays of the moon on the surface of the nearby river.

"Where are you, Rankin?"

The detective answered and thrust his way blindly toward the voice. The sounds of commotion had ceased. Two minutes later he

came suddenly upon Harry at the edge of a small clearing.

"Is it you, Harry? Have you lost him?"

The young man nodded. "Keep still a minute."

They stood there motionless, listening, enveloped in darkness and silence. The woods were still as the tomb; there was not so much as the sound of a rustling leaf; from a distance there came faintly on the air the murmur of the river in the shallows half a mile below.

"He got through the thicket to the bank," said Harry at length, "and started downstream. Then he dived into the underbrush again and I couldn't tell which way he went. I thought I heard him again, but it was you. He's lying low not far from us right now."

They listened another while, but no sound came.

"No use; he's given us the slip," the detective finally observed.

They turned reluctantly and made their way back through the woods. A match showed Rankin the face of his watch; twenty-five minutes past two. When they got to the open they found that in the short interval of their search the moon had dropped below the edge of the hills to the east, leaving the sky light and the earth dark. Tramping across the stubble, they crossed over the fence into the road, and five minutes later were at Greenlawn.

"You're sure the fellow came out of here?" Harry was asking as they turned in at the gate.

Rankin replied that he was.

"That's funny. I thought it might have been Fred, but of course he wouldn't have run. I can't understand it."

A dim light could be seen in one of the upper windows of the house, in the room where Dr. Wortley was keeping his lonely vigil with the earthly remains of the dead Colonel.

All within the house was quiet. Rankin and Harry mounted the stairs together, without speaking; after the excitement of the past four hours the gloom of the house of death had dropped its heavy mantle over them at the threshold. At the first landing they parted, Harry to mount another flight and the detective to continue down the hall to his own room at the further end.

There he halted with a sudden appearance of alertness. He heard Harry's footsteps traversing the hall above, and the soft opening and closing of a door. Then, instead of entering his room, the detective stepped noiselessly back down the hall and stopped before a door near the stair landing. He stood there listening intently for a full minute, then all at once raised his hand and rapped softly on the panel. When a second knock brought no response he noiselessly turned the knob and entered.

The room was pitch dark. Rankin stood motionless just inside the door, without having closed it, straining his ear. When the utter silence had convinced him that the room was unoccupied he

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He stood there listening intently for a full minute, then all at once raised his hand and rapped softly on the panel.

moved to the electric switch and turned on the light. One quick glance at the bed showed him that it had not been slept in, and with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes he turned the light off again and left the room.

He stood hesitating for a moment at the top of the stairs, then turned down the hall to the door of his own room, and entered. The first thing he did after turning on the electricity was to take off his coat and shirt and have a look at the injured shoulder. An examination convinced him that it was nothing worse than a painful bruise. His movements were slow and mechanical, like a man lost in thought; and at length, with his hand still moving slowly back and forth over the bruised shoulder, he stood and stared fixedly at nothing with wrinkled brow.

Finally he pulled himself up. "Yes," he muttered to himself, "but how the devil did he do it?"

Then, instead of undressing for bed — though it was nearly three in the morning and he had had no sleep — he turned with sudden decision and put his shirt back on, and his coat. A snap of the switch, and the room was in darkness. Placing a chair just inside the threshold (he had left the door open), he sat down to wait.

At the end of a minute or two he fancied he heard a sound in the hall, but peering cautiously out toward the dim night light at the other end, saw nothing. He settled back in his chair. It was upholstered in leather and very comfortable; after all the exertion and excitement of the preceding four hours his muscles found it restful and soothing. He twisted around to an easier position and stretched his feet out till they rested on the jamb of the threshold. He yawned. The sharp pain in his shoulder subsided a little and became a dull ache, throbbing rhythmically and not all unpleasantly. There seemed to be something restful even in that throbbing. He allowed his head to fall back against the soft leather and stay there. A dozen times he closed his eyes and opened them again . . . and closed them . . .

The next thing he knew he heard himself snoring.

He came to with a jerk and a snort, and got to his feet, telling himself that he had dozed off a second and that he mustn't do it again. Perhaps he'd better look at his watch . . . it was twenty minutes to four! He had slept nearly an hour.

Cursing himself inwardly, he pushed the chair out of the way and entered the hall. Not a sound was to be heard — but yes, a faint, almost indistinguishable murmur of voices came from somewhere at the front of the house. Rankin stepped softly down the hall to the stairs; the murmur became louder, though still faint, drifting up the corridor leading to the right wing. Down it he went, less cautiously now, until he reached an open door through which a dim light shone from the interior. It was the same room in which he had found Fred Adams, early the previous evening, kneeling beside the body of his dead uncle and guardian. Rankin entered. By the light of the candles at the other end he saw the silent figure shrouded in white stretched out on the bed; and nearby, seated in easy chairs drawn side by side, and conversing in low tones, were Dr. Wortley and Fraser Mawson.

They looked up and nodded as the detective entered.

"Up so early?" the little doctor wanted to know with an air of relief at sight of him. To those who watch with the dead anything is a relief.

Rankin nodded and sat down.

"Couldn't sleep. Soon be morning now." He turned to Mawson. "You been up long?" His tone was that of one who makes conversation.

The lawyer had taken out his eyeglasses and was rubbing them

with the corner of a handkerchief as he replied that he had been unable to sleep. "So I thought I might as well come in and keep the Doctor company," he continued. "Though when I got here — it was three hours or more ago — a little after midnight — I found him dozing very well alone."

"To tell the truth, I had dozed off," Dr. Wortley put in somewhat shamefacedly.

"It was inexcusable. But it's been a strenuous day, and I'm not as young as I used to be. I suppose I should have allowed Fred to divide the night with me — he wanted to — but the boy was completely worn out, and anyway I felt I owed it to Carson . . . And I went off like a log. When I woke up half an hour ago Mawson was sitting there."

As the Doctor spoke Rankin was regarding Mawson from a corner of his eye. The disarranged hair, the soiled collar, the general air of untidiness about his attire, all these were natural enough in a man who had been up all night in a house of bereavement; but what was the explanation of those two long scratches, one on his forehead, the other on his cheek, from which the blood had been carefully wiped away? Such scratches as might come, for instance, from low-hanging branches when making your way hastily through the woods at night.

For a while the three men conversed together, turning naturally to the virtues of their departed friend whose still form lay there beside them. The windows became grey squares as the dawn arrived, and when the light began to dim the rays of the candles the Doctor arose and pulled down the shades. At length Rankin left them and returned down the corridors to his own room; from below came the faint stirrings of the waking household.

"Yes, but how the devil did he do it?" muttered the detective once more as he took off his coat and shoes and got into a dressing-gown. Then he stretched himself out on the bed and slept.

When he awoke it was broad day. Going to the window and letting up the shade to look at the sun, he saw that the morning was half gone. In the rear of the grounds near the garage a man was playing a hose on an automobile; nearer, in the driveway, a dismal black conveyance proclaimed the presence of the undertaker. The blossoms of the garden were smiling in the sunshine, all unconscious of anything but beauty and virtue and happiness in the world they adorned. The detective turned away, his mind attacking freshly the problem of the day before as he began to dress.

Downstairs he found Fraser Mawson and Fred Adams and Dr. Wortley still at the breakfast table. Over the steaming coffee they discussed the details of the military ceremony to take place on the morrow; an officer from Governor's Island was expected sometime during the day to confer with them. Mawson entered into the dis-

cussion with a naturalness and freedom that caused Rankin to wonder a little. Could he be mistaken? Had the lawyer really been sitting in that room upstairs during the chase in the woods the night before? If only he had gone there at once on his return to Greenlawn!

After breakfast the detective went in search of Harry Adams, and at length found him seated on a bench in the gun room with a bag of golf clubs at his side and an assortment of emory paper, cloths and oil; he was industriously polishing a midiron. The detective's surprise at finding him thus occupied must have been apparent on his face, for the young man explained:

"They're Uncle Carson's, sir. I wanted — I just thought I'd polish 'em up a little. Don't you remember how he always said a good soldier could shoot better with a clean gun? He used to keep after Fred and me because our irons were always rusty."

The detective nodded and stood watching the gritty paper slide to and fro over the shining metal. But he had sought out the young man for a purpose, and presently broached it. Harry was surprised at first, and then, as he caught the other's meaning, incredulous. Readily he agreed to follow instructions.

A little later, accordingly, the two men went in search of Fraser Mawson. They found the lawyer in the room at the rear of the lower hall that had served as Colonel Phillips's office, arranging some papers, spread over the desk in confusion. It was with an expression of amiable inquiry that he turned to them and waved his hand toward chairs near the window.

Harry began abruptly:

"Mr. Mawson, I've come to see you about that United Traffic."

The lawyer sent him a quick glance.

"What about it? I thought that unfortunate affair was settled."

"It is as far as I'm concerned, sir. As far as I'm directly concerned. But you remember I told you about a chap named Warner that got me in on it in the first place."

"Well?"

"Well, he's in trouble. He got in too far and in trying to get out again he used some money that wasn't his. Then the whole thing collapsed, and he's up against it. They're onto him."

"What has that got to do with you?"

The young man explained, telling of the obligation he had been placed under to Gil Warner at college. He recited the circumstances in detail, while Mawson sat regarding him impassively and the detective gazed absently at nothing.

"I've got to do it, that's all," Harry finished. "Of course if I help him out of this scrape I'm through with him, for I see now he's nothing but a crook, but I was mixed up with him in this United Traffic thing, and it's up to me to stick — not of course that I knew

anything about his using money not his own."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Why, sir, I thought you might advance me enough cash to fix the thing. It would take a little over fifty thousand."

The lawyer was silent, frowning. He turned his keen eyes first on Harry, then on Rankin, and finally let them rest on the papers before him. With the fingers of his hand lying on the desk he was lifting a lead pencil an inch or so and letting it fall again with a series of sharp clicks.

Suddenly he demanded:

"What has Mr. Rankin got to do with all this?"

Harry replied imperturbably that he had gone to the detective for counsel and had been advised to make an appeal to Mawson for the necessary funds. Another silence, shorter than before, and the lawyer turned eyes that had suddenly grown hard on the young man, and said abruptly:

"Either Rankin is extremely clever or you're an awful fool, Harry. It doesn't matter which, since the result is the same. I had feared this — the fact, not the discovery of it — and yet it stuns me."

The young man looked at him in puzzlement. "What do you mean, Mr. Mawson?"

The lawyer shook his head. "It's useless, my boy. I can't understand why you ever — did you think Rankin was so blind he wouldn't see the coincidence between your urgent need for a large sum of money and the — the means of getting it?"

"What — you don't mean —"

"I mean that if you attempted to leave this house now, or even this room, Mr. Rankin would probably insist politely but firmly on accompanying you. I don't blame him. That's his business. You have asked me to advance you fifty thousand dollars. That's my business. Inasmuch as your uncle is dead, and as one of his heirs you are worth more than fifty times that amount, I can easily do so. I can get the money for you tomorrow morning in New York."

Harry had risen to his feet and then sank back again into his chair as one stupefied.

"What — " he stammered, speechless at the horror of the thought, "you can't mean to accuse me — my uncle —"

"I don't need to. You accuse yourself."

"But I — why —"

Another voice interposed, the voice of the detective. With a gesture of command he motioned Harry to be silent, then turned his eyes on the lawyer authoritatively. They were the first words he had uttered since entering the room:

"Mr. Mawson, let's understand just what you are driving at. Do you accuse Harry here of murdering Colonel Phillips?"

The lawyer's answering gaze was steady.

"I didn't say that," he replied calmly.

"Do you accuse him of being implicated?"

Mawson swung around in his chair.

"I'll answer your question with another, Mr. Rankin. Do *you* accuse him of being implicated?"

"I'll waive the precedence. I do not."

"Then I don't either," replied the lawyer abruptly, and swung back to his papers as if the subject were closed.

"But I think I know who is implicated," the detective went on, and stopped. Mawson kept his eyes on his papers, and Rankin resumed:

"This whole United Traffic deal looks suspicious, though I believe Harry to be innocent. It's United Traffic we came to talk about. First, to relieve Harry's mind, you will advance that fifty thousand dollars?"

"I've said I would," replied the lawyer without looking up.

"That's all right then. Now, Harry says he came to you for assistance in realizing on his securities for that speculation, and that you helped him. That's right, isn't it?"

Mawson shoved his papers aside and raised his head to meet the detective's eyes. There was a second's pause.

"That's right," he said finally.

"Good. Harry also told me that he had previously gone to his uncle for assistance, and that Colonel Phillips had firmly refused to have anything whatever to do with United Traffic. Also, he advised his nephew to follow his example. That's right, isn't it, Harry?"

The young man nodded. "Yes, sir."

"Harry also told me that when he came to you for assistance he informed you of his uncle's position in the matter and asked you to keep the transaction a secret. He did so inform you?"

"I don't remember."

"Well, it's unimportant anyway. Here's what I can't understand. If the Colonel was so firmly convinced that United Traffic was a worthless speculation, why did he invest over half a million in it himself?"

A murmur of surprise came from Harry. Mawson's eyes flashed into those of the questioner with a gleam of something that may have been anger. He made an evident effort to control himself, and succeeded.

"I'm sure I don't know," he replied calmly.

"You told me yesterday that he lost about three hundred thousand dollars," pursued the detective. "You showed me the entry in one of those books recording the loss. Was that entry made by Colonel Phillips himself?"

"It was not." Again the lawyer's eyes flashed, and again he visibly restrained himself. "All the entries in those books for the past twenty years, with very few exceptions, were made by me. This one also."

"I see. Now, Mr. Mawson, I'd like you to tell me one thing. *When* was that entry made?"

This time the restraint failed. Mawson rose swiftly to his feet, pushing back his chair so violently that it teetered and nearly upset. His face was pale and his eyes flashed fire, but there was nothing exactly threatening in his attitude to account for the suddenness with which the detective also got to his feet and advanced to the desk, just across from Mawson. The eyes of the two men met, and it was like the crossing of steel blades. They stood, silently . . .

At that instant the telephone bell rang.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Mawson and Rankin both started a little at the jingling of the bell, but it was Harry, who stepped to the instrument and picked up the receiver.

"Hello. Yes. This is Harry Adams speaking."

During the time that Harry talked into the telephone the two men remained silently facing each other from opposite sides of the desk. Harry's part of the conversation consisted mainly of monosyllables and ejaculations. Finally, he asked the other end of the wire to "wait a minute," and placing his hand over the transmitter turned to Rankin with a worried countenance and an air of excitement:

"It's Gil Warner. They've got him — this morning, on Broadway. He wants me to go bail for him."

"Nothing doing," the detective replied, with instant decision. "No use. Nothing can save him now. Drop it. You're done. Tell him so."

The young man hesitated a moment, then turned again to the instrument and followed the other's advice. This evidently provoked an explosion at the other end, but Harry remained firm, and at length banged the receiver on the hook with a gesture of finality. The look on his face as he turned away showed plainly how little he had relished it. He was still young. He started to return to his chair near the window, but Rankin's voice interposed:

"Good riddance. You've done all you could for him. Now, if you'll leave Mr. Mawson and me alone a few minutes —"

"Certainly, sir."

"And say nothing to anyone of what has passed in here —"

"Certainly, sir."

No one spoke as the young man passed out of the room and



The eyes of the two men met, and it was like the crossing of steel blades.

closed the door behind him, and for a long moment after he had gone the two men stood regarding each other silently. At length the detective turned, pulled a chair up to the side of the desk and calmly seated himself. When he spoke his tone was easy and amiable.

"To go back to where we were interrupted, Mr. Mawson, would you mind telling me *when* that entry was made?"

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The lawyer, too, had reseated himself, and seemed to have entirely recovered his composure. He sat for a moment as if calmly meditating his answer, then moved his eyes to meet the other's gaze with a look that would have been a challenge if it had been less quiet and unconcerned.

"You remember, Mr. Rankin, that I showed you that entry yesterday morning?"

The detective nodded.

"Well, I had just finished blotting it. The entry was made not

five minutes before you entered the room."

Again Rankin nodded, and for an instant his eye gleamed. He was silent a moment before he replied.

"You seem pretty sure of yourself, Mawson?"

"Sure of myself? I'm afraid that remark is too cryptic for me. You asked when that entry was made. I told you."

"Perhaps you will also be good enough to tell me," replied the other, abruptly, "just when that poisoned needle entered Colonel Phillips's stomach."

There was a quick movement of Fraser Mawson's hand and a sudden flash of his eye — then suddenly he was calm again. He replied quietly:

"But I thought that was what you were trying to discover."

"It is."

"Discover it, then."

"I intend to. I ask you."

"And I regret my ignorance."

These words passed back and forth with the speed and crack of rifle shots, and left the two men leaning forward in their chairs a little toward each other, their eyes meeting like those of two boxers in a prize ring. Those of Mawson were confident, with a little excitement behind the confidence. The detective's gaze was steady and determined. There was a short silence.

"You're pretty sure of yourself, Mr. Mawson," repeated Rankin, at length, slowly. "When I do discover it I am certain you will be much interested."

"I will," agreed the lawyer. He suddenly pushed his chair back a little and threw one leg over the other in an easy position. "I suppose I know what you mean when you say I'm sure of myself," he continued, amiably. "The legal mind is accustomed to piercing obscurity. But for once I feel that I would enjoy plain words. It rather amuses me to hear myself say that I am accused of being a murderer. I take it that's your meaning?"

Rankin frowned a little. "I haven't said so."

"But it is?"

The frown deepened, and there was a pause. "It is," said the detective, abruptly.

The lawyer's mouth twisted into a grimace. "That's pretty good," he said slowly. "And frank. I must say, Mr. Rankin, you shift your attack in a manner that leaves me breathless. First, it was Fred — because he wanted to get married. Then Harry, because he made a foolish speculation. And now me. I suppose poor old Wortley will be next — but, of course, he wasn't there."

"What makes you think I suspected Harry?" asked the detective, quickly.

"Why — " The lawyer's eyes shifted, and he hesitated. "You

had evidently been questioning him — "

"And I followed him last night?"

"I don't know. Did you?"

"I did." Rankin stopped, opened his mouth to continue, then closed it again. "And you know I did," he went on at length. "You see, Mr. Mawson, I do intend to be frank. For a moment yesterday I did suspect Fred, but I was groping in the dark, then, and grasping at straws. Last night, when I saw Harry leave the house in a furtive and suspicious manner, I followed him to Brockville. There he unwittingly led me onto another false trail — this man Gil Warner. Warner is a crook, but evidently he isn't a murderer. And Harry is neither. I say I intend to be frank. Can you explain these two facts: First, why did you follow me to Brockville last night, and second, why did Colonel Phillips sink half a million in United Traffic, after warning his nephew to keep out of it?"

The lawyer's eyes were on a paper weight on his desk as he turned it over and back again with long, white fingers that seemed somehow, without actually trembling, to lack a little in steadiness. At length he looked up.

"What makes you think I followed you to Brockville last night?"

"I don't think you did. I know it."

"Well, you're mistaken. I followed Harry. The fact that you were between us was not of my choosing. The boy is my client, my ward in a way now — and I knew he was mixed up with this Warner."

"And your excursion into the woods?"

The lawyer frowned. "You know, I don't relish this questioning, Mr. Rankin. I submit to it as a matter of courtesy, though you stretch the bounds yourself. Naturally I didn't want the boy to know I was trailing him about the country at night."

"So you ran and hid in the woods."

"I — yes, I ran and hid in the woods."

Was Rankin's shifting movement one of surprise at this admission? His face remained expressionless. Through the open window came a faint rustling sound, rapid and rhythmical — it was Harry returned to his task of polishing his dead uncle's golf clubs.

"And the deal in United Traffic?" asked the detective.

Mawson frowned a little. "It seems to me," he observed slowly, "that you forget you are asking a lawyer for confidential information of his client."

"I am," the other agreed. "You may withhold it if you choose."

"And not only that, but you are asking for information I do not happen to possess. My client instructed me to invest a certain amount in a certain stock, and I obeyed."

"Have you the order — or a check or draft to cover it?"

At that the lawyer rose to his feet with a violent push of his chair. "Mr. Rankin, you are going too far," he exclaimed angrily. "I have borne your insinuations —"

"You may refuse to answer whenever you choose," was the tranquil reply.

"There is only one answer to an insult!"

"Then you do refuse?"

Their eyes met, and all at once Fraser Mawson was calm again. He resumed his seat. There was a new air about him as he did so — an air of resolve that seemed to have in it something of bravado; and it was reflected in his voice as he spoke:

"No. To both questions. You do not understand the nature of the relations between Colonel Phillips and myself. It has been ten years and more since he gave me any kind of an order in writing; that statement may be verified in a hundred ways. I had his power of attorney, and I myself drew all checks against his account in the National Park Bank — his personal account, of course, was separate. I handled all his business, speculations, investments, everything — directly, subject of course to his advice and instructions, which were always verbal. The United Traffic deal was handled the same as many others; he simply instructed me to take on a certain amount of that stock, and I did so; and when he finally told me to unload — I obeyed. That was last Wednesday. The loss was the figure I showed you yesterday in this book."

The lawyer laid his hand on a loose-leaf volume, bound in leather and canvas, on the desk.

There was a moment's silence.

"I see," observed Rankin at length, slowly. "Carson trusted you implicitly, then."

"He did."

"And he has paid for it."

There was no resentment, almost no feeling, in the smile with which the lawyer met this remark. And there was even a touch of indifferent condescension in his tone when he spoke after a moment:

"If you choose to think he has paid for it, Mr. Rankin, I shan't argue about it. I am even willing to help you get the case a little clearer."

He stopped, cleared his throat, and went on:

"What you are trying to do is to discover the murderer of Carson Phillips and bring him to justice. Very well. It is a difficult task. I know you have been successful in a few minor cases which interested you, but to speak frankly, Mr. Rankin, I'm afraid you're in a little beyond your depth here. To get to the bottom of this will require something more than a curious dilettantism.

"Why do I say that? Look at the facts. Neither Fred nor Harry,

according to your own statement, is to be considered. I will say in parenthesis that I agree with you. Leaving myself also out of it for the moment, you then have eliminated everyone who was present at the scene — and you are lost. The mystery is buried in a darkness which I think you would find impenetrable. Quite naturally you turn from that darkness to what you consider a ray of light. You suspect me."

The lawyer paused to recover a sheet of paper that was being blown across the desk by the breeze from the open window, through which still came the sound of emory paper on steel as Harry Adams rubbed away at the golf clubs.

"Well?" said Rankin dryly.

"You suspect me," the lawyer repeated. "But it seems to me your ray of light is obviously deceptive. Granting as a postulate that your suspicion is just, that I am in fact guilty, what then? As a motive you accuse me of embezzling half a million dollars. But granting that I did so, you can't possibly prove it. What I have just said of the manner in which the Colonel and I transacted business has shown you that. There would be one hope left — if you could connect me with the actual deed. But you don't even know how it was committed; all you know is that a poisoned needle was found in the Colonel's abdomen; you have no idea how it got there, and no likelihood of finding out."

The lawyer stopped abruptly, deliberately seeking the other's eye. "And so," he finished calmly, "admitting — which of course I do not admit — that I am the criminal, how the devil are you going to prove it?"

The detective returned his gaze without replying.

"By Jove, Mawson," he said at length, "you've more nerve than I gave you credit for." Suddenly his lips came together. "It won't save you," he added grimly and rose to his feet.

"Nerve? Merely logic."

"Nor will logic save you."

"I am not aware of being in danger."

"We shall see."

With that Rankin turned abruptly and left the room.

The question remained as before: "How the devil did he do it?"

Rankin pounded his brain with it for two hours.

Returning to the house, he encountered Harry Adams in the hall with a bag of golf clubs under his arm. The detective wanted to know where Fred was, and was answered by a voice from above on the stairway.

"Here, sir. Did you want me?"

"Yes. You two come with me to the library a moment."

When they were inside, with the door closed, Rankin asked them to recount once more the incidents of the foursome on Satur-

day afternoon. Again they went over each detail, and back and over again, from the time they had driven off at the first tee until the Colonel's second at the fifth, when all had ended in abrupt tragedy. Rankin bade them cudgel their brains for the minutest recollected fact, the slightest suspicious circumstance; every shot, every movement almost, of each member of the foursome was repeated, and considered — and it all came to nothing. They could recall no unusual action on the part of Fraser Mawson at any time; at the fifth hole he had taken four to get out of a bunker, just before the catastrophe, so all they could remember of him at that particular moment was a marked indulgence in profanity. He had not been near Colonel Phillips, then, just before the attack? As they remembered it, no.

Rankin at length falling into silence, the two young men began discussing the poisoned needle and the curious fact that it had entered the Colonel's abdomen pointing upward; Harry appeared to hold some absurd theory in the matter and Fred undertook to explode it.

That done, they too became silent. Fred strolled across to a window. It was swinging open, and from the garden the hot summer breeze brought a mingling of heavy odors sifted through the sunshine. From somewhere in the rear of the grounds came the sound of a whirring engine, and a moment later an automobile rolled down the driveway — one of the men going to Brockville to meet the officer from Governor's Island. Fred turned away from the window, moved across to the mantel and idly began to inspect an old portrait of some former Phillips that hung there; then his eye fell on the Colonel's bag of golf clubs which Harry had set in a corner as he entered the room. Fred crossed to it and passed his hand back and forth over the shining irons. Mechanically he pulled out one of them and waggled it back and forth in front of him; and then, with a glance overhead and to either side to make sure of room, he swung the club far back of his head, raising on his toe, and brought it around with a mighty swing.

As he did so two things happened.

Canby Rankin leaped swiftly to his feet with an ejaculation of astonishment and triumph.

The door of the room opened and Fraser Mawson appeared on the threshold.

Rankin, who had started forward, his eyes flashing with excitement, stopped abruptly. Harry and Fred regarded him in inquiring wonder. Mawson glanced at each of them, then came quietly forward.

"About that loan, Harry," he said to the younger of the two brothers. "I'm going to town for an hour in the morning. Since your friend — I didn't know —"

"He won't need the loan, Mr. Mawson." It was Rankin who spoke, in a voice that seemed to tremble a little. He had turned to face the newcomer with gleaming eyes.

"You're just in time," he went on more evenly. "To witness the lucky achievement of a curious dilettantism. Fraser Mawson, you are under arrest, charged with the murder of Carson Phillips."

There was a gasp of amazement from Fred Adams, and Harry got excitedly to his feet. For one swift instant the color left Mawson's face — then he smiled and bowed.

"Ah! You try to force your way through the darkness then. What can I do but humor you?"

"Quite commendable," replied the detective grimly. "I'll begin forcing my way by searching you. You may have another of those little needles in a handy pocket. Better still, I'll fix you so you can't use it."

He stepped forward swiftly, seized Mawson's arms from behind, and pinioned him.

"Mr. Rankin!"

"Fred! Harry! Help me here."

And despite the lawyer's protests his arms were tied firmly behind him and he was led to a chair.

The detective, crossing swiftly to the bag of golf clubs in the corner, paid no heed to him. One by one he lifted out the clubs and examined the butt of the shaft. Next to last was the driver. He glanced at it, held it closer, then straightened up and turned with an expression of triumph.

But the look on Fraser Mawson's face made it unnecessary to say anything. During the few seconds that Rankin had been inspecting the clubs the lawyer's countenance had gone from purple to white; the blazing light had gone from his eyes and left a dead despair; his whole form trembled, and though his lips moved no words came. As Rankin turned to face him he got halfway to his feet, then sank back again into the chair, ashen grey, limp, inert.

Two hours later he was lodged in the Brockville jail, and the New York dailies were preparing extra editions with sensational headlines six inches high across the front page.

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That night Canby Rankin was explaining the mechanism of the driver to Doctor Wortley.

"Devilishly ingenious, Doctor. The spring concealed in the shaft was so arranged that it could be released only by the impact of the ivory inset in the face of the club against the ball; and the force of the released spring ejected the needle from the upper end of the shaft. Of course at the moment of impact the butt end of the

shaft was aiming at the Colonel's stomach, upwards, and the needle found its mark."

"Then why didn't it happen at the first tee?" demanded the doctor.

"Because he was using his brassie. Harry told us that yesterday. He took out the driver for the first time at the fifth tee. Mawson of course had contrived this thing as an exact replica of the Colonel's own driver and substituted it in his bag. Staying here at Greenlawn, he wouldn't lack an opportunity for that."

The doctor was silent, examining the tiny hole in the butt of the shaft with speculative eyes.

"I don't see how you ever got onto it," he observed finally.

"Nor I," admitted the detective. When I saw Fred swinging that iron the idea simply struck me from nowhere." He smiled a little as he added:

"Perhaps it was curious dilettantism."