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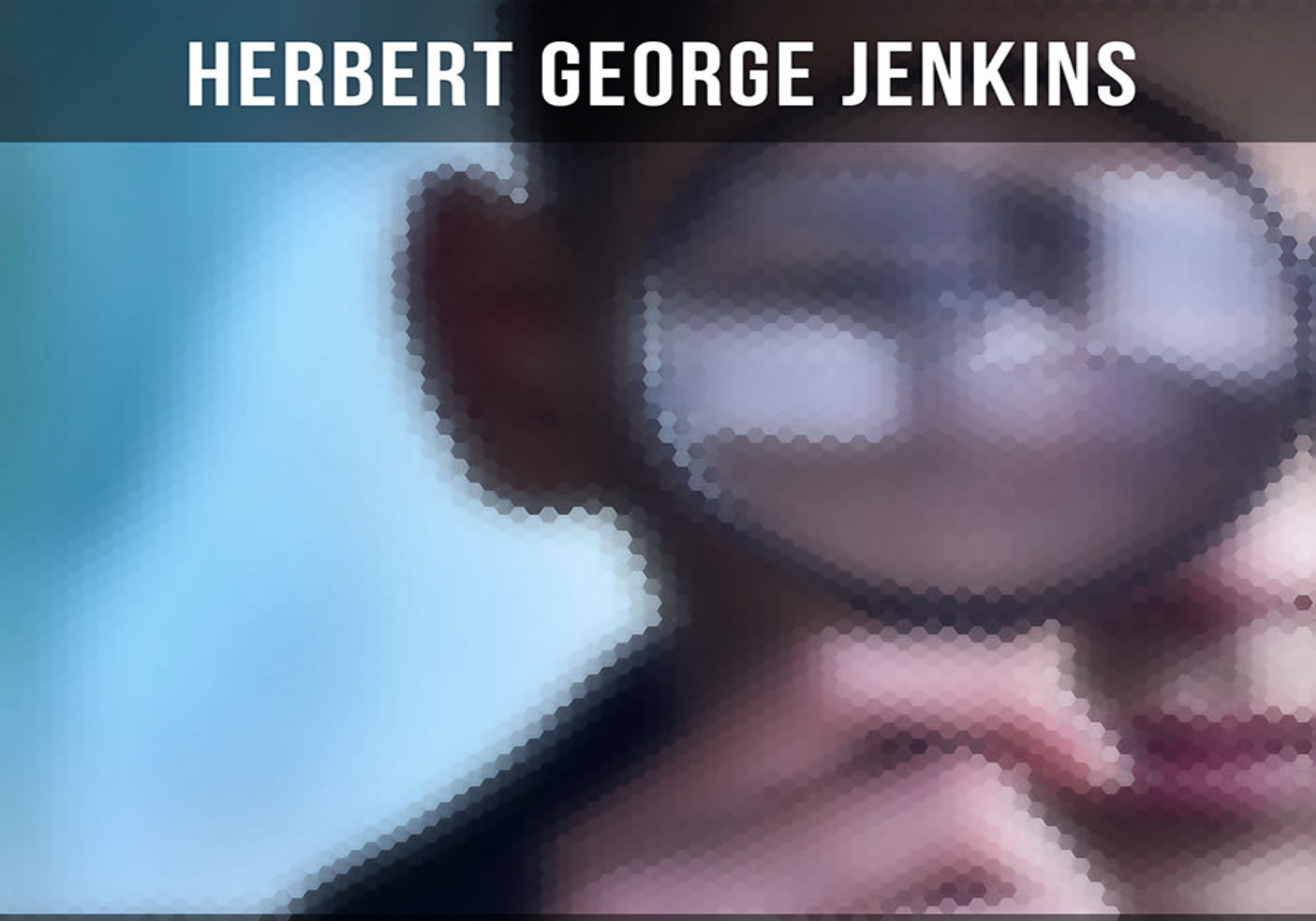

MALCOLM SAGE, DETECTIVE

MUSAICUM VINTAGE MYSTERIES

Herbert George Jenkins

Malcolm Sage, Detective

(Musaicum Vintage Mysteries)

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CHAPTER I SIR JOHN DENE RECEIVES HIS ORDERS

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"John!"

"Yeh!"

"Don't say 'yeh,' say 'yes,' Dorothy dear."

"Yes, Dorothy de——"

Sir John Dene was interrupted in his apology by a napkin-ring whizzing past his left ear.

"What's wrong?" he enquired, laying aside his paper and picking up the napkin-ring.

"I'm trying to attract your attention," replied Lady Dene, slipping from her place at the breakfast-table and perching herself upon the arm of her husband's chair. She ran her fingers lightly through his hair. "Are you listening?"

"Sure!"

"Well, what are you going to do for Mr. Sage?"

In his surprise at the question, Sir John Dene jerked up his head to look at her, and Dorothy's forefinger managed to find the corner of his eye.

He blinked vigorously, whilst she, crooning apologies into his ear, dabbed his eye with her handkerchief.

"Now," she said, when the damage had been repaired, "I'll go and sit down like a proper, respectable wife of a

D.S.O.," and she returned to her seat. "Well?" she demanded, as he did not speak. "Yes, dear."

"What are you going to do for Mr. Sage, now that Department Z is being demobbed? You know you like him, because you didn't want to ginger him up, and you mustn't forget that he saved your life," she added.

"Sure!"

"Don't say 'sure,' John," she cried. "You're a British baronet, and British baronets don't say 'sure,' 'shucks' or vamoose.' Do you understand?"

He nodded thoughtfully;

"I like Mr. Sage," announced Dorothy. Then a moment later she added, "He always reminds me of the superintendent of a Sunday-school, with his conical bald head and gold spectacles. He's not a bit like a detective, is he?"

"Sure!"

"If you say it again, John, I shall scream," she cried.

For some seconds there was silence, broken at length by Dorothy.

"I like his wonderful hands, too," she continued. "I'm sure he's proud of them, because he can never keep them still. If you say 'sure,' I'll divorce you," she added hastily.

He smiled, that sudden, sunny smile she had learned to look for and love.

"Then again I like him because he's always courteous and kind. At Department Z they'd have had their appendixes out if Mr. Sage wanted them. Now have you made up your mind?"

"Made it up to what?" he asked, lighting a cigar.

"That you're going to set him up as a private detective," she said coolly. "I don't want him to come here and not find everything planned out."

"He won't do that," said Sir John Dene with conviction. "He's no lap-dog."

"I wrote and asked him to call at ten to-day," she said coolly.

"Snakes, you did!" he cried, sitting up in his chair.

"Alligators, I did!" she mocked.

"You're sure some wife;" he looked at her admiringly.

"I sure am," she laughed lightly, "but I'm only just beginning, John dear. By the way, I asked Sir James Walton to come too," she added casually.

"You——" he began, when the door opened and a little, silver-haired lady entered. Sir John Dene jumped to his feet.

"Behold the mother of the bride," cried Dorothy gaily.

"Good morning, John," said Mrs. West as he bent and kissed her cheek.

She always breakfasted in her room; she abounded in tact.

"Now we'll get away from the eggs and bacon," cried Dorothy. "In the language of the woolly West, we'll vamoose," and she led the way out of the dining-room along the corridor to Sir John Dene's den.

"Come along, mother-mine," she cried over her shoulder. "We've got a lot to discuss before ten o'clock."

Sir John Dene's "den" was a room of untidiness and comfort. As Dorothy said, he was responsible for the untidiness and she the comfort.

"Heigh-ho!" she sighed, as she sank down into a comfortable chair. "I wonder what Whitehall would have

done without Mr. Sage;" she smiled reminiscently. "He was the source of half its gossip."

"He was very kind to you, Dorothy, when John was—was lost," said Mrs. West gently, referring to the time when Sir John Dene had disappeared and a reward of 20,000 pounds had been offered for news of him.

"Sure!" Sir John Dene acquiesced. "He's a white man, clean to the bone."

"It was very wonderful that an accountant should become such a clever detective," said Mrs. West. "It shows ——" she paused.

"You see, he wasn't a success as an accountant," said Dorothy. "He was always finding out little wangles that he wasn't supposed to see. So when they wouldn't have him in the army, he went to the Ministry of Supply and found out a great, big wangle, and Mr. Llewellyn John was very pleased. You get me, Honest John?" she demanded, turning to her husband.

Sir John Dene nodded and blew clouds of cigar smoke from his lips. He liked nothing better than to sit listening to his wife's reminiscences of Whitehall, despite the fact that he had heard most of them before.

"Poor Mr. Sage," continued Dorothy, "nobody liked him, and he's got such lovely down on his head, just like a baby," she added, with a far-away look in her eyes.

"Perhaps no one understood him," suggested Mrs. West, with instinctive charity for the Ishmaels of the world.

"Isn't that like her," cried Dorothy, "but this time she's right," she smiled across at her mother. "When a few thousand tons of copper went astray, or someone ordered

millions of shells the wrong size, Mr. Sage got the wind up, and tried to find out all about it, and in Whitehall such things weren't done."

"They tried to put it up on me," grumbled Sir John Dene, twirling his cigar with his lips, "but I soon stopped their funny work."

"Everybody was too busy winning the war to bother about trifles," Dorothy continued. "The poor dears who looked after such things found life quite difficult enough, with only two hours for lunch and pretty secretaries to be ——"

"Dorothy!" cried Mrs. West reproachfully.

"Well, it's true, mother," she protested.

It was true, as Malcolm Sage had discovered. "Let us concentrate on what we know we *have* got," one of his chiefs had once gravely said to him. "Something is sure to be swallowed up in the fog of war," he had added. Pleased with the phrase, which he conceived to be original, he had used it as some men do a titled relative, with the result that Whitehall had clutched at it gratefully.

"The fog of war," General Conyers Bardulph had muttered when, for the life of him, he could not find a division that was due upon the Western Front and which it was his duty to see was sent out.

"The fog of war," murmured spiteful Anita McGowan, when the pretty little widow, Mrs. Sleyton, was being interrogated as to the whereabouts of her husband.

"The fog of war," laughed the girls in Department J.P.Q., when at half-past four one afternoon neither its chief nor his dark-eyed secretary had returned from lunch.

"But when he went to Department Z he was wonderful," said Mrs. West, still clinging tenderly to her Ishmael.

"He was," said Sir John Dene. "He was the plumb best man at his job
I ever came across."

"Yes, John dear, that's all very well," said Dorothy, her eyes dancing, "but suppose you had been the War Cabinet and you had sent for Mr. Sage;" she paused.

"Well?" he demanded.

"And he had come in a cap and a red tie," she proceeded, "and had resigned within five minutes, saying that you were talking of things you didn't know anything about." She laughed at the recollection.

"He was right," said Sir John Dene with conviction. "I've come across some fools; but——"

"There, there, dear," said Dorothy, "remember there are ladies present. In Whitehall we all loved Mr. Sage because he snubbed Ministers, and we hadn't the pluck to do it ourselves," she added.

Sir John Dene snorted. His mind travelled back to the time when he had been "up against the whole sunflower-patch," as he had once expressed it.

"But why did they keep him if they didn't like him?" enquired Mrs.
West.

"When you don't like anyone in Whitehall," Dorothy continued, "you don't give him the push, mother dear, you just transfer him to another department."

"Like circulating bad money," grumbled Sir John Dene.

"It sure was, John," she agreed. "Poor Mr. Sage soon became the most transferred man in Whitehall. They used to say, 'Uneasy lies the head that has a Sage.'" She laughed at the recollection.

"But wasn't it rather unkind?" said Mrs. West gently.

"It was, mother-mine; but Whitehall was a funny place. One of Mr. Sage's chiefs went about for months trying to get rid of him. He offered to give a motor-cycle to anyone who would take him, it was a Government cycle," she added; "but there was nothing doing. We called him Henry the Second and Mr. Sage Becket, the archbishop not the boxer," she explained. "You know," she added, "there was once an English king who wanted to get rid of——"

"We'll have it the sort of concern that insurance companies can look to," Sir John Dene broke in.

"What on earth are you talking about, John?" cried Dorothy.

Whilst his wife talked Sir John Dene had been busy planning Malcolm Sage's future, and he had uttered his thoughts aloud. He proceeded to explain. When he had finished, Dorothy clapped her hands.

"Hurrah! for Malcolm Sage, Detective," she cried and, jumping up, she perched herself upon the arm of her husband's chair, and rumpled the fair hair, which with her was always a sign of approval. "That's his ring, or Sir James's," she added as the bell sounded.

"Now we'll leave you lords of creation to carry out my idea," she said as she followed Mrs. West to the door.

And Sir John Dene smiled.

II

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"In the States they've got Pinkerton's," said Sir John Dene, twirling with astonishing rapidity an unlit cigar between his lips. "If you've lost anything, from a stick-pin to a mountain, you just blow in there, tell them all about it, and go away and don't worry. Here you've got nothing."

"We have Scotland Yard," remarked Malcolm Sage quietly, without looking up from the contemplation of his hands, which, with fingers wide apart, rested upon the table before him.

His bald, conical head seemed to contradict the determined set of his jaw and the steel-coloured eyes that gazed keenly through large gold-rimmed spectacles. Even his ears, that stood squarely out from his head, appeared to emphasise by their aggressiveness that they had nothing to do with the benevolent shape of the head above.

"Yes, and you've got Cleopatra's Needle, and the pelicans in St. James's Park," Sir John Dene retorted scornfully. He had never forgotten the occasion when, at a critical moment in the country's history, the First Lord of the Admiralty had casually enquired if he had seen the pelicans.

For the last half-hour Sir John Dene, with characteristic impulsiveness, had been engaged in brushing aside all Malcolm Sage's "cons" with his almighty "Pro."

"We'll have a Pinkerton's in England," he resumed, as neither of his listeners took up his challenge, "and we'll call it Sage's."

"I shall in all probability receive quite a number of orders for shop-fronts," murmured Malcolm Sage, with a slight fluttering at the corners of his mouth, which those who knew him understood how to interpret.

"Shop-fronts!" repeated Sir John Dene, looking from one to the other,
"I don't get you."

"There is already a well-known firm of shop-furnishers called 'Sage's,'" explained Sir James, who throughout the battle had been an amused listener.

"Well, we'll call it the Malcolm Sage Detective Bureau," replied Sir John Dene, "and we'll have it a concern that insurance companies can look to." He proceeded to light his cigar, with him always a sign that something of importance had been settled.

Sir John Dene liked getting his own way. That morning he had resolutely brushed aside every objection, ethical or material, that had been advanced. To Malcolm Sage he considered that he owed a lot,* and with all the aggressiveness of his nature, he overwhelmed and engulfed objection and protest alike. To this was added the fact that the idea was his wife's, and in his own phraseology, "that goes."

[* See John Dene of Toronto for the story of how Malcolm Sage frustrated the enemies of Sir John Dene.]

Passive and attentive, his long shapely hands seldom still, Malcolm Sage had listened. From time to time he ventured some objection, only to have it brushed aside by Sir John Dene's overwhelming determination.

For some minutes Malcolm Sage had been stroking the back of his head with the palm of his right hand, a habit of his when thoughtful. Suddenly he raised his eyes and looked across at his would-be benefactor.

"Why should you want to do this for me, Sir John?" he asked.

"If you're going to put up a barrage of whys," was the irascible retort, "you'll never cut any ice."

"I fully appreciate the subtlety of the metaphor," said Malcolm Sage, the corners of his mouth twitching; "but still why?"

"Well, for one thing I owe you something," barked Sir John Dene, "and remembering's my long suit. For another, Lady Dene——"

"That is what I wanted to know," said Malcolm Sage, as he drew his briar from his pocket and proceeded to fill it. "Will you thank Lady Dene and tell her that I am proud to be under an obligation to her—and to you, Sir John," he added.

"Say, that's fine," cried Sir John Dene, jumping to his feet and extending his hand, which Malcolm Sage took, an odd, quizzical expression in his eyes. "This Detective Bureau notion is a whale."

"The zoological allusion, I'm afraid, is beyond me," said Malcolm Sage as he struck a match, "but no doubt you are right," and he looked across at Sir James Walton, whose eyes smiled his approval.

"It's all fixed up," cried Sir John Dene to his wife as she came out into the hall as the visitors were departing.

"I'm so glad," she cried, giving her hand to Malcolm Sage. "You'll be such a success, Mr. Sage," and she smiled

confidently up into his eyes.

"With such friends," he replied, "failure would be an impertinence," and he and Sir James Walton passed out of the flat to return to what was left of the rapidly demobilising Department Z, which had made history by its Secret Service work.

In a few days the news leaked out that "M.S.," as Malcolm Sage was called by the staff, was to start a private-detective agency. The whole staff promptly offered its services, and there was much speculation and heart-burning as to who would be selected.

On hearing that she was to continue to act as Malcolm Sage's secretary, Miss Gladys Norman had done a barn-dance across the room, her arrival at the door synchronising with the appearance of Malcolm Sage from without. It had become a tradition at Department Z that "M.S." could always be depended upon to arrive at the most embarrassing moment of any little dramatic episode; but it was equally well-known that he possessed a "blind-side" to his vision. They called it "the Nelson touch."

James Thompson, Malcolm Sage's principal assistant, and William Johnson, the office junior, had also been engaged, and their enthusiasm has been as great as that of their colleague, although less dramatically expressed.

A battle royal was fought over the body of Arthur Tims, Malcolm Sage's chauffeur. Sir John Dene had insisted that a car and a chauffeur were indispensable to a man who was to rival Pinkerton's. Malcolm Sage, on the other hand, had protested that it was an unnecessary expense in the early days of a concern that had yet to justify itself. To this Sir

John Dene had replied, "Shucks!" at the same time notifying Tims that he was engaged for a year, and authorising him to select a car, find a garage, and wait instructions.

Tims did not do a barn-dance. He contented himself for the time being with ruffling William Johnson's dark, knut-like hair, a thing to which he was much addicted. Returning home on the evening of his engagement he had bewildered Mrs. Tims by seizing her as she stood in front of the kitchen-stove, a frying-pan full of sausages in her hand, and waltzing her round the kitchen, frying-pan and all.

Subsequently five of the six sausages had been recovered; but the sixth was not retrieved until the next morning when, in dusting, Mrs. Tims discovered it on the mantelpiece.

CHAPTER II THE STRANGE CASE OF MR. CHALLONER

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"Please, sir, Miss Norman's fainted." William Johnson, known to his colleagues as the innocent, stood at Malcolm Sage's door, with widened eyes and a general air that bespoke helplessness.

Without a word Malcolm Sage rose from his table, as if accustomed all his life to the fainting of secretaries. William Johnson stood aside, with the air of one who has rung a fire-alarm and now feels he is at liberty to enjoy the fire itself.

Entering her room, Malcolm Sage found Gladys Norman lying in a heap beside her typewriter. Picking her up he carried her into his own room, placed her in an arm-chair, fetched some brandy from a small cupboard and, still watched by the wide-eyed William Johnson, proceeded to force a little between her teeth.

Presently her lids flickered and, a moment later, she opened her eyes. For a second there was in them a look of uncertainty, then suddenly they opened to their fullest extent and became fixed upon the door beyond. Malcolm Sage glanced over his shoulder and saw framed in the doorway Sir James Walton.

"Sit down, Chief," he said quietly, his gaze returning to the girl sitting limply in the large leather-covered arm-chair. "I shall be free in a moment."

It was characteristic of him to attempt no explanation. To his mind the situation explained itself.

As Miss Norman made an effort to rise, he placed a detaining hand upon her arm.

"Send Mr. Thompson."

With a motion of his hand Malcolm Sage indicated to William Johnson that the dramatic possibilities of the situation were exhausted, at least as far as he was concerned. With reluctant steps the lad left the room and, having told Thompson he was wanted, returned to his seat in the outer office, where it was his mission to sit in preliminary judgment upon callers.

When Thompson entered, Malcolm Sage instructed him to move the leather-covered chair into Miss Norman's room and, when she was rested, to take her home in the car.

Thompson's face beamed. His devotion to Gladys Norman was notorious.

The girl rose and raised to Malcolm Sage a pair of dark eyes from which tears were not far distant.

"I'm so ashamed, Mr. Sage," she began, her lower lip trembling ominously. "I've never done such a thing before."

"I've been working you too hard," he said, as he held back the door.

"You must go home and rest."

She shook her head and passed out, whilst Malcolm Sage returned to his seat at the table.

"Working till two o'clock this morning," he remarked as he resumed his seat. "She won't have assistance. Strange creatures, women," he added musingly, "but beautifully loyal."

Sir James had dropped into a chair on the opposite side of Malcolm Sage's table. Having selected a cigar from the box his late chief-of-staff pushed across to him, he cut off the end and proceeded to light it.

"Good cigars these," he remarked, as he critically examined the lighted end.

"They're your own brand, Chief," was the reply.

Malcolm Sage always used the old name of "Chief" when addressing Sir James Walton. It seemed to constitute a link with the old days when they had worked together with a harmony that had bewildered those heads of departments who had regarded Malcolm Sage as something between a punishment and a misfortune.

"Busy?"

"Very."

For some seconds they were silent. It was like old times to be seated one on each side of a table, and both seemed to realise the fact.

"I've just motored up from Hurstchurch," began Sir James at length, having assured himself that his cigar was drawing as a good cigar should draw. "Been staying with an old friend of mine, Geoffrey Challoner."

Malcolm Sage nodded.

"He was shot last night. That's why I'm here." He paused; but Malcolm Sage made no comment. His whole attention was absorbed in an ivory paper-knife, which he was

endeavouring to balance upon the handle of the silver inkstand. More than one client had been disconcerted by Malcolm Sage's restless hands, which they interpreted as a lack of interest in their affairs.

"At half-past seven this morning," continued Sir James, "Peters, the butler, knocked at Challoner's door with his shaving-water. As there was no reply he entered and found, not only that Challoner was not there, but that the bed had not been slept in over night."

Malcolm lifted his hands from the paper-knife. It balanced.

"He thought Challoner had fallen asleep in the library," continued Sir James, "which he sometimes did, he is rather a night-owl. Peters then went downstairs, but found the library door locked on the inside. As there was no response to his knocking, he went round to the French-windows that open from the library on to the lawn at the back of the house. The curtains were drawn, however, and he could see nothing."

"Is it usual to draw the curtains?" enquired Malcolm Sage, regarding with satisfaction the paper-knife as it gently swayed up and down upon the inkstand.

"Yes, except in the summer, when the windows are generally kept open."

Malcolm Sage nodded, and Sir James resumed his story.

"Peters then went upstairs to young Dane's room; Dane is Challoner's nephew, who lives with him. While he dressed he sent Peters to tell me.

"A few minutes later we all went down to the library and tried to attract Challoner's attention; but without result. I

then suggested forcing an entry from the garden, which was done by breaking the glass of one of the French-windows.

"We found Challoner seated at his table dead, shot through the head. He had an automatic pistol in his hand." Sir James paused; his voice had become husky with emotion. Presently he resumed.

"We telephoned for the police and a doctor, and I spent the time until they came in a thorough examination of the room. The French-windows had been securely bolted top and bottom from within, by means of a central handle. All the panes of glass were intact, with the exception of that we had broken. The door had been locked *on the inside*, and the key was in position. It was unlocked by Peters when he went into the hall to telephone. It has a strong mortice-lock and the key did not protrude through to the outer side, so that there was no chance of manipulating the lock from without. In the fireplace there was an electric stove, and from the shower of soot that fell when I raised the trap, it was clear that this had not been touched for some weeks at least.

"The doctor was the first to arrive. At my urgent request he refrained from touching the body. He said death had taken place from seven to ten hours previously as the result of the bullet wound in the temple. He had scarcely finished his examination when an inspector of police, who had motored over from Lewes, joined us.

"It took him very few minutes to decide that poor Challoner had shot himself. In this he was confirmed by the doctor. Still, I insisted that the body should not be removed."

"Why did you do that, Chief?" enquired Malcolm Sage, who had discarded the paper-knife and was now busy drawing geometrical figures with the thumb-nail of his right hand upon the blotting pad before him.

"Because I was not satisfied," was the reply. "There was absolutely no motive for suicide. Challoner was in good health and, if I know anything about men, determined to live as long as the gods give."

Again Malcolm Sage nodded his head meditatively.

"The jumping to hasty conclusions," he remarked, "has saved many a man his neck. Whom did you leave in charge?" he queried.

"The inspector. I locked the door; here is the key," he said, producing it from his jacket pocket. "I told him to allow no one into the room."

"Why were you there?" Malcolm Sage suddenly looked up, flashing that keen, steely look through his gold-rimmed spectacles that many men had found so disconcerting. "Ordinary visit?" he queried.

"No." Sir James paused, apparently deliberating something in his own mind. He was well acquainted with Malcolm Sage's habit of asking apparently irrelevant questions.

"There's been a little difficulty between Challoner and his nephew," he said slowly. "Some days back the boy announced his determination of marrying a girl he had met in London, a typist or secretary. Challoner was greatly upset, and threatened to cut him out of his will if he persisted. There was a scene, several scenes in fact, and eventually I was sent for as Challoner's oldest friend."

"To bring the nephew to reason," suggested Malcolm Sage.

"To give advice ostensibly; but in reality to talk things over," was the reply.

"You advised?" When keenly interested, Malcolm Sage's questions were like pistol-shots.

"That Challoner should wait and see the girl."

"Did he?"

Malcolm Sage was intent upon outlining his hand with the point of the paper-knife upon the blotting pad.

Again Sir James hesitated, only for a fraction of a second, however.

"Yes; but unfortunately with the object of endeavouring to buy her off. Yesterday afternoon Dane brought her over. Challoner saw her alone. She didn't stay more than a quarter of an hour. Then she and Dane left the house together, he to see her to the station. An hour later he returned. I was in the hall at the time. He was in a very excited state. He pushed past me, burst into the library, banging the door behind him.

"That evening at dinner Challoner told me there had been a very unpleasant scene. He had warned the boy that unless he apologised to-day he would telephone to London for his lawyer, and make a fresh will entirely disinheriting him. Soon after the interview Dane went out of the house, and apparently did not return until late—as a matter of fact, after I had gone to bed. I was feeling tired and said 'good night' to Challoner about half-past ten in the library."

For some time Malcolm Sage gazed upon the outline he had completed, as if in it lay the solution of the mystery.

"It's a pity you let the butler unlock the door," he remarked regretfully.

Sir James looked across at his late chief-of-staff keenly. He detected something of reproach in his tone.

"Did you happen to notice if the electric light was on when you entered the library?"

"No," said Sir James, after a slight pause; "it was not."

Malcolm Sage reached across to the private telephone and gave the "three on the buzzer" that always galvanised Miss Gladys Norman into instant vitality.

"Miss Norman," said Sage as she entered, "can you lend me the small mirror I have seen you use occasionally?"

"Yes, Mr. Sage," and she disappeared, returning a moment later with the mirror from her handbag. She was accustomed to Malcolm Sage's strange requests.

"Feeling better?" he enquired as she turned to go.

"I'm all right now," she smiled, "and please don't send me home, Mr.
Sage," she added, and she went out before he had time to reply.

A quarter of an hour later the two men entered Sir James's car, whilst Thompson and Dawkins, the official photographer to the Bureau, followed in that driven by Tims. Malcolm Sage would cheerfully have sacrificed anybody and anything to serve his late chief.

"And how am I to keep the shine off my nose without a looking-glass, Johnny?" asked Miss Norman of William Johnson, as she turned to resume her work.

"He won't mind if it shines," said the youth seriously; and Miss Norman gave him a look, which only his years

prevented him from interpreting.

II

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As the car drew up, the hall-door of "The Cedars" was thrown open by the butler, a fair-haired clean-shaven man of about forty-five, with grave, impassive face, and eyes that gave the impression of allowing little to escape them.

As he descended the flight of stone-steps to open the door of the car, a young man appeared behind him. A moment later Sir James was introducing him to Malcolm Sage as "Mr. Richard Dane."

Dark, with smoothly-brushed hair and a toothbrush moustache, he might easily have been passed over in a crowd without a second glance. He was obviously and acutely nervous. His fingers moved jerkily, and there were twitchings at the corners of his mouth that he seemed unable to control. It was not a good-tempered mouth. He appeared unconscious of the presence of Malcolm Sage. His eyes were fixed upon the second car, which had just drawn up, and from which Thompson and Dawkins were removing the photographic paraphernalia.

Peters conducted Sir James and Malcolm Sage to the dining-room, where luncheon was laid.

"Shall I serve luncheon, Sir James?" he enquired, ignoring Dane, who was clearly unequal to the strain of the duties of host.

Sir James looked across at Malcolm Sage, who shook his head.

"I'll see the library first," he said. "Sir James will show me. Fetch Dawkins," he said to Thompson, and he followed Sir James through the house out on to the lawn.

As they entered the library by the French-windows, a tall, sandy man rose from the armchair in which he was seated. He was Inspector Gorton of the Sussex County Constabulary. Malcolm Sage nodded a little absently. His eyes were keenly taking in every detail of the figure sprawling across the writing-table. The head rested on the left cheek, and there was an ugly wound in the right temple from which blood had dripped and congealed upon the table. In the right hand was clutched a small, automatic pistol. The arm was slightly curved, the weapon pointing to the left.

Having concluded his examination of the wound, Malcolm Sage drew a silk-handkerchief from his pocket, shook out its folds and spread it carefully over the blood-stained head of Mr. Challoner.

Sir James looked across at him, appreciation in his eyes. It was one of those little human touches, of which he had discovered so many in Malcolm Sage, and the heads of government departments in Whitehall so few.

Malcolm Sage next proceeded to regard the body from every angle, even going down on his knees to see the position of the legs beneath the table. He then walked round the room and examined everything with minute attention, particularly the key of the door, which Sir James had replaced in its position on the inside. The keyhole on both sides of the door came in for careful scrutiny.

He tried the door of a small safe at the far-end of the room; it was locked. He then examined the fastenings of the

French-windows.

Finally he returned to the table, where, dropping on one knee on the left-hand side of the body, he drew a penknife from his pocket, and proceeded with great care and deliberation to slit up the outer seam of the trousers so that the pocket lay exposed.

This in turn he cut open, taking care not to disturb the bunch of keys, which, attached to a chain, lay on the thigh, a little to the left.

The others watched him with wide-eyed interest, the inspector breathing heavily.

Having assured himself that the keys would not slide off, Malcolm
Sage rose and turned to Dawkins:

"I want a plate from the right, the left, the front, and from behind and above. Also an exposure showing the position of the legs, and another of the keys."

Dawkins inclined his head. He was a grey, bald-headed little man who had only one thought in life, his profession. He seldom spoke, and when he did his lips seemed scarcely to part, the words slipping out as best they could.

Happy in the knowledge that his beloved camera was once more to be one of the principal witnesses in the detection of a crime, Dawkins set himself to his task.

"When Dawkins has finished," said Malcolm Sage, turning to the inspector, who had been watching the proceedings with ill-disguised impatience, "you can remove the body; but leave the pistol. Give Mr. Challoner's keys to Sir James. And now I think we might lunch," he said, turning to Sir James.