

Fred M. White



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I. — A MAN OF LETTERS

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A pool of light cast by the shaded lamps on the dinner table picked out the points of old silver and the ruby lakes in the cut-glass decanters. A pile of filberts stood up russet warm against gleaming mahogany. The cloth had been drawn, as was the post-prandial custom at Broadwater. Narcissus might have lingered lovingly over that polished, flawless board. Lancelot Massey put his claret down somewhat hastily, and Sir George sighed. The thought of a scratch on that mahogany poisoned his after-dinner cigarette.

"My dear boy," Sir George said, plaintively, "it cannot, must not be. Excuse me; your glass seemed to grate somewhat. I hope you haven't—"

Lance hastened to assure his uncle and his host that no damage had been done. The thin, handsome, white face opposite relaxed into a smile. Sir George looked upon himself more as the curator of a priceless gallery of art than the master of Broadwater. The big oak-panelled dining-room might have been looted for the Wallace collection, with advantage to the latter. Five generations of Masseys had been collectors. There were pictures beyond price, china with a history, intaglios of spotless pedigree. The prints and engravings at Broadwater had a national reputation. And Sir George was a man of letters. He published slim volumes of essays, poetry faintly clear on large margins. At present he was engaged on a play that would revolutionise the stage.

That his mind was slightly going only Lancelot and the family physician knew. At 65 most of the Masseys became insane, in a highly-bred, gentlemanly way, the result of too much inter-marrying. Lance's mother had been a robust North Country girl, and Lance was very little of a Massey, as Sir George frequently reminded him. Still, he had all the refinement and artistic sense of the race; his novels were slowly lifting him to the front rank, and a recent comedy had brought him a reputation. And now he was down at Broadwater, re-writing a drama that had been going the rounds in England and in America for years.

It would not go begging now, though it required considerable alteration. Lance could see that in the light of recent experience. But the great novel idea was there. Some day that play was going to become classic.

"I tell you it cannot be," Sir George repeated.

Lance started guiltily. His blue eyes had gone far beyond the room. With his keen, delicate, and yet strong, clean-shaven face, he was not unlike an actor of high class.

"What is it that will not do, sir?" he asked.

"Why, this suggested marriage between you and our young relative, Lyn Verity. Now I am very fond of Lyn. She is beautiful and accomplished. She suggests Greuze to me, and Carnova, and, to a certain extent, Gainsborough. Physically speaking, there would be no more perfect chatelaine for Broadwater after I have gone. But the Veritys have allied themselves to the Masseys far too long. Lyn's father murdered her mother in America. I took my old friend's child into the house, and here she has been ever since. I am going to provide handsomely for Lyn. All the

same, I have made up my mind that you are not to marry her."

Sir George spoke nervously, but with all the mulish obstinacy of the weak man. Lance's thin, clear-cut lips were pressed a little closer together.

"And if I make up my mind to please myself in this matter?" he suggested.

A quick ruby flush, like the bloom of a peach, came into Sir George's cheeks. His usually clear voice sounded a little cracked now, like the enamel on his Limoges plates. The words carried far. Few of the oak floors at Broadwater were carpeted.

"Then I should have to please myself," he said. "I cannot deprive you of the title; nobody can. But I may remind you that the property is not entailed. I can leave Broadwater and all its priceless possessions to whom I please. You are artistic, refined, a gentleman, and, like myself, a distinguished man of letters."

Lance smiled behind his hand.

"Very well. Here is an ideal place to do good work in. Look whatever way you will, and the eye is pleased, and the senses elevated. From early days you have regarded yourself as heir to all this. And it is in your power to become Sir Lancelot Massey of Broadwater. But if you defy me in this matter I will turn you out without a single shilling."

Again the travelling voice rose high and clear, again the faint red was lined on the speaker's cheeks. The madness was coming nearer and nearer. And Lance was discreetly silent. What was the use of arguing against a fixed principle

like this? The time of monomania had arrived. And that had been a terrible business in America.

"I will think over what you say, sir," Lance murmured.

Sir George smiled. His face was transformed altogether. There was a certain wistful tenderness in his glance. He patted Lance's hand with his slim jewelled fingers.

"I'm glad," he said. "I am very fond of you, my dear boy. There is the painful suggestion of a scratch made by your glass. But it's nothing at all."

It was a great concession; there was something quite pathetic in the touch of comedy.

"And now I'll go and do an hour on my play," Sir George said. "I feel in the mood for it."

The play might have been a play at one time, but now it was little more than meaningless nonsense, as Lance knew. It was beautifully written, page by page, on sheets of Sir George's best vellum notepaper, one page corrected and passed approved every day, and carefully dated. There was even a one-time actor-manager on the premises, who acted as standing counsel for the great work. There was no harm in all this, but it would have given Lancelot exquisite pleasure to have kicked Malcolm Stott off the premises with great damage to that histrionic light.

Malcolm Stott was smoking cigarettes in the library. A short, fat man, with a round face and blue eyes of a slightly dissipated child. He looked so round and chubby and innocent that most people were apt to treat him quite as a boy. But there were deep lines under the blue eyes, the hair was white, and the plump fingers shook in the queer staccato way that tells its own tale to a man of the world. At

one time Stott had climbed high in the profession; he had been the victim of a deep-seated conspiracy in two hemispheres, he said. As a matter of fact, he had washed his genius and his nerves out with whisky, and the innocent-looking boy was one of the most cold-blooded and unscrupulous rascals who ever smiled into the face of an honest man.

"I thought you'd come," he said. "I have a suggestion to make—a suggestion to improve the play. You recollect where George Martin is on the point of leaving home?"

Sir George assented eagerly. Stott pressed his hand to his side and groaned.

"The old weakness," he said faintly. "But do not mind me. It will pass."

Sir George suggested that there was brandy on the dining-room buffet. He would fetch a glass. Stott could not tolerate the idea of giving his worthy host so much trouble. He must fight down this weakness—the doctors had told him as much. In the dining-room he poured out half a tumbler of brandy, and tossed it down. Then he returned to the library with the decanter, and helped himself to a thimbleful with the air of a shuddering martyr.

"A good medicine, Sir George," he said, "especially to abstemious men like ourselves."

His eyes roamed round the room; he talked of the play and dramatic art in a trickly stream of words. An observing man would have said that the fellow was miserably ill-at-ease. But Sir George was too full of the new suggestion to think of anything else. He failed to note that Stott's eyes were ever on the door. Once the butler entered, and the

little man shook as if he saw a warrant in the old servitor's glance.

"Black should be here with the letters from Swanley," he said. "I am expecting—"

"Yes, yes," Sir George interrupted. "I told Long to bring them in directly they came. Now as to that note left by George Martin when he is going to destroy himself. I rather fancy that was your brilliant idea, Stott?"

Stott modestly disclaimed the credit—which was soothing to the baronet's vanity. He sat under the glare of a reading lamp, with a litter of those thick sheets of paper about him. A footman came in with a pile of letters on a salver, and Sir George glanced at them in an absent way. Stott was looking at them, too, in a frightened, gasping fashion. A blue envelope with four flaring American stamps lay on the top of the pack. Stott upset them all clumsily, and gathered them again with a meek apology. All the same, a minute later the American letter was in his pocket, and he was helping himself to brandy with a liberal hand. A man escaping from the gallows with safety in his grasp could have looked no more ghastly.

"It's—it's the pain again," he stammered. "A little nausea as well. I'll lie down in my own room, and smoke a cigarette. I shall return presently if I am up to it. You will work late, Sir George?"

"I am interested," Massey replied. "The inspiration—the divine afflatus is upon me. Possibly I may be here till 2 o'clock—perhaps later. You may go, Stott."

It was a dismissal—bland, dignified, but firm. Stott went off with a grin on his face. But his lips were still ghastly blue,

and he shuffled upstairs like one in the first stage of paralysis. He could not smoke just yet; he felt too sick for that. He took the letter from his pocket, opened it, and read it hastily. Then he burnt it, and ground the ashes into powder.

"A near thing, a very near thing," he murmured. "That man would strangle me if he only knew. And I cannot keep the knowledge from him much longer. A cable message, an inquiry through a lawyer, and I am ruined. Well, I must take the goods the gods provide—the little legacy and all the rest of it. Nobody will know how Sir George—What a fool I was not to bring that brandy decanter up here! I shall want most of it before morning."

II. — WAS IT SUICIDE?

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From the point of the guide-book and the tourist, the drawing-room at Broadwater is not a show place. It has no great historic pictures, no priceless statues, or cases of china, or coins or cameos. But it has the most artistic furniture, the pictures are Greuzes and the like, and the tapestry is a dream. So also is the ceiling—a marvellous piece of coloring and design. There are deep stone windows, filled for the most part with stained glass, and at either end is a conservatory which opens into the room, so that it seems to be framed in flowers. A score of rare lamps, with all kinds of heavy shades, make the apartment wonderfully pleasing and restful to the eye. And here Lyn Verity made her court, and lived out most of her pleasing life.

She looked very like a dainty picture in black velvet as Lance came into the room. She turned from a pile of engravings to greet him, and when he took the dainty figure into his arms and kissed her she seemed to regard it as quite the natural thing to do.

"So you've been catching it, sir," Lyn said, with a charming smile. "Sir George's voice is a singularly penetrating one. Still, he might recollect that the servants have ears. When Long brought in my coffee I thought he was going to commiserate with me."

"I am afraid we shall have to take the law into our own hands, Lyn," said Lance.

Lyn smiled demurely. At the same time she looked a little anxious. She was very much in love with this man; all

Broadwater was as nothing to her without him. And yet she hesitated for his sake to lose it all. They stood for some little time gazing into the wood fire, both troubled and anxious.

"He says I am to give you up, dearest," Lance said.

"I heard him," the girl replied, with the same dazzling smile. "I should imagine that most of the household must have heard him for that matter. But I don't quite see how you are going to give me up without the most unpleasant consequences, Lance. I believe that the law is particularly severe upon a—"

Lance laid his hand over the speaker's mouth. She was about to say something indiscreet—and walls have ears. His face was grave as hers was smiling.

"Darling," he said, "it is hateful to me to refer to that topic. But you know perfectly well what the dear old boy's objection is. It is ten years since that business happened, and we all took the story for granted. It was more or less investigated for Sir George at the time by Malcolm Stott, who then had a theatre of his own in New York. Isn't it just possible that the whole thing—"

"Should have been no more than a dreadful accident, Lance. You know what those awful American papers are like. Anything for a sensation. And I mistrust Stott. If Sir George were in his—I mean if he were as clear-headed as he used to be, he wouldn't tolerate that drinking, slimy little wretch in the house at all. Stott plays upon his vanity, of course. He pretends to believe in that impossible play."

"I wish that we could get rid of him; I shall never feel safe so long as he is in the house. And if he discovers our secret —"

"Ah!" Lance exclaimed, "I had never thought of that."

"It would be a dreadful weapon for him. And he has great influence over Sir George. And Sir George can leave his property where he chooses. Lance, there is a tragedy hanging over this house, and the tragedy is going to fall. How it will come I don't know, but I can feel it in the air. If you could clear my father's name—"

Lyn paused for a moment. Lance was regarding her with loving eye. He drew her to his side, and kissed the red lips that trembled ever so slightly.

"You have an idea," he whispered. "Tell me what it is."

"You are going to America before long," Lyn said, thoughtfully. "And you will have to be in New York some time, after your play is produced there. I want you to make inquiries; to sift the matter to the bottom. It never has been properly done; we have always taken too much for granted. We have only Malcolm Stott's word and the copy of an old newspaper. And Stott is your enemy and mine. It is to his interest to foster trouble between Sir George and yourself over me. Lance, I hate that man. I am afraid of him. And he is afraid in his turn; he is afraid of the American mails."

"What can he possibly have to be afraid of, Lyn?"

"I don't know. Being always here, I have the chance of watching him. Of late I have noticed that he is always hanging about when the morning and evening letters come. One day, a fortnight ago, I was down before him. There was an American letter for Sir George. A moment later, and Stott passed through the hall, and I missed that letter. And Sir George said the next day that he had had no American correspondence for a long time. He commented on the fact

at breakfast, and Stott looked like a guilty wretch, caught red-handed. We must get to the bottom of it, Lance."

Lance was listening with grave attention. Personally he disliked Stott quite as much as Lyn appeared to do. He knew that the fellow had had large sums of money from Sir George; he felt him to be utterly unscrupulous. And he was playing on the baronet's weakness now. Nor was it the slightest use arguing with Sir George. His mind was going; he had all the obstinacy of the man of feeble intellect. Under these circumstances Stott might do a deal of mischief. But why should he steal those American letters? What had the fellow to fear from that quarter?

"Our policy is to be quiet," Lance said. "We must pretend to notice nothing, and keep our eyes open at the same time. Madison may produce my play at any time, and, if so, I shall be compelled to visit the States. Then I will do my best. And if I could only find that we have been mistaken, Lyn—"

He did not care to say more. Lyn was regarding him with slightly troubled eyes. His arm was about her waist still; she was absently playing with the silken collar of his dinner jacket. The door opened softly, and Malcolm Stott slid in. If he had noticed anything he did not show it in his face. He spoke with the easy air of one who feels pretty certain of his welcome.

"No, I won't stay," he said. "I came for a book for Sir George. If there is going to be any music I might perhaps be tempted—"

"There will be no music," Lyn said shortly. "I am going to bed."

She gave a little wave of her hand, and disappeared. Stott held the door for her politely. He did not look in the least crushed. But just for a moment there was a snarl on his lips, his teeth gleamed like those of a cur that would bite if it dared. It was gone in an instant as he turned to Lance with a smile.

"Sir George does not seem very well," he said. "I have been trying to persuade him to go to bed. But he does not appear disposed to follow my suggestion."

Lance went up to his own room presently. The whole house was in darkness now, save for the light in the hall and the gleaming slit of flame from the half-closed library. Stott and Sir George were discussing something in low tones. There was a rustle of papers, and the sound of a key turned crisply in a lock.

Lance lay for a long time thinking over what Lyn had told him. But he could hardly believe that Stott was really a dangerous character—a criminal character, that was. He had not nerve enough for that sort of thing. Even now he was creeping up to bed timidly, as if afraid of disturbing some of the sleeping household. Lance could catch the faint suggestion of cigarette smoke as Stott passed his door.

When he woke again it was broad daylight. He came uneasily out of a dream wherein some monster was holding him down by the shoulders, and presently this monster resolved itself into Long, the sedate family butler, who was shaking him violently. That Long should be guilty of such an outrage was almost amusing. Long excited was a unique circumstance.

"Has the house caught fire?" Lance asked. "Or are those intaglios—"

Then he paused. It was something worse than that. Long's face was white and quivering; he could not speak for the horror and agitation that lay upon him. Lance jumped out of bed with a sudden sickening sense of tragedy.

"What is it, Long?" he asked. "What has happened? Pull yourself together, man."

"Sir George!" Long gasped. "Lying dead in the library. Murdered!"

A fit of trembling shook the old retainer from head to foot. He pressed his hands to his eyes as if to shut out the horror that stood stark before them. It was some little time before he had the power to speak again.

"I came down first, sir," he said. "I mostly do, because Sir George scatters his papers about so, and he always likes me to tidy up before he is dressed. And—and there he was."

Long broke down like a child. Lance was huddling on his clothes with hands that trembled as if they were cold.

In the hall the sun was shining, making a broad band of light from the library door. Just for a moment Lancelot hesitated. His artistic nature recoiled from anything ghastly or horrible.



Sir George lay as if asleep, resting his head on his arm, on the table."

But the horrible had to be faced. Like most dreadful things, it was not quite so bad as a vivid imagination had painted it. Sir George lay as if asleep, resting his head on his arm, on the table. There was no spot or stain on the mass of papers there, but the left side was one horrible sticky mess, and there was a great dark circle on the Persian carpet. The white refined face, pallid as a statue now, looked wonderfully peaceful.

"Give me a hand here," said Lance, hoarsely. "He must be moved."

They laid the body back in the chair, and as they did so a razor dropped with a soft thud on the carpet. The dull noise startled Lance as if a pistol had been fired in his ear. He recognised the razor as one of an ivory-handled pair constantly used by Sir George. There was a wide red gash in the neck, whence the crimson stream had run down in the form of a grotesque, ill-drawn map.

"We can do no more now," Lance whispered. "Come away and lock the door. Get up one of the grooms, and send him into Swanley for Dr. Burlinson and Inspector Lawrence."

But the household was already aroused. By a kind of instinct everybody seemed to know what had happened without being told. A white-faced group stood whispering in the hall; a kitchen maid began to weep hysterically. Lyn, looking fresh and bright as the morning itself, stood with an air of wonder on her face. A horse's hoof could be heard spurning the gravel as he flew down the drive. Lance drew Lyn into the dining-room.

"What is it?" she asked. "Where is Sir George? Something dreadful has happened."

In a few words Lance told her; indeed, there was little to tell. Sir George Massey had been murdered in his library by some unknown person. Somebody must have got into the house. None of the servants could possibly have had anything to do with it. Lance had seen them all; had read the horror of their faces. And there was not one of them who had not been born and bred on the estate. They would have to look further afield for the criminal.

They stood in there, waiting and trembling. Stott crept into the room half-fearfully, as if half-expecting that the

assassin was lurking there with a knife ready for him. His baby face was all quivering, his blue watery eyes were rounded with horror. As he came in, the room seemed to fill with a faint suggestion of brandy.

"I can't grasp it," he said. "I can't believe it. My old friend and patron murdered like this. And only last night he was so cheerful. And now he's dead."

Stott sat down and burst into maudlin tears. A dirty handkerchief trembled in his fingers. Nothing but the oppressive solemnity of the moment kept Lance from kicking him. He eyed the quivering little figure with disgust.

"Did you hear or see anything?" he asked.

"No," Stott said, from behind the quivering handkerchief, "I didn't. I left Sir George in the library at midnight, busy on his play. I had one of my neuralgic attacks. I hate the remedy, but I have no other resource—brandy. After that I slept soundly till just now."

Stott wept again, smiled feebly, and wiped his eyes. In that delicate way he conveyed the fact that he had gone to bed and passed the night in the heavy sleep of intoxication. Evidently the man knew nothing, and Lance dismissed certain suspicions with a feeling of shame. After all, the death of Sir George would be a serious loss to the fellow.

It seemed strange to see the work of the house-hold progressing as usual, to see Long bring in the Queen Anne breakfast service, and to catch the fragrance of coffee and ham. Breakfast lay on the table, but nobody thought of touching it save Dr. Burlinson, who came presently. And doctors must breakfast, whatever horrors may be.

"We won't go into the room till Lawrence comes," he said. "We might disturb some clue."

Presently the chief of the Swanley police arrived. He listened gravely to all Lance had to say, and then he asked for the key of the library. For some time he examined the room in silence.

"I should like to ask Long a few questions," he said.

Long came fearsome, as honest men often do when required by the officers of the law. He had been down first, certainly, and he had opened the house. He was quite certain that no door had been left open, that no window was unlatched. The house contained many things of almost priceless value, and every window on the ground floor had steel shutters. It was his duty to see that these were fastened, and he had not failed to go over the house twice each night for many years. Nobody could have got into the house.

"Nothing missing?" Lawrence asked.

"Nothing, sir—as far as I can judge," Long replied. "And Sir George kept no money in the house."

"Absolutely everything was paid by cheque," Lance explained.

The inspector looked puzzled. He would like to see the servants whilst Dr. Burlinson was making an examination of the body. But, as Lawrence expected, he could make nothing out of the servants who slept in the house. Truth and honesty were writ large on every face there. The mystery looked like becoming a national sensation.

"The carotid artery has been most neatly severed," Burlinson said. "Sir George must have been attacked from

behind as he sat at the table."

"Any sign of a struggle?" Lawrence asked.

"Not the slightest. But Sir George was very feeble, and a comparatively firm grip of his shoulders for about half a minute or even less would have rendered him too weak to move. A daring woman might have done a thing like that."

With some hesitation Lance hazarded the suggestion that the wound might have been self-inflicted. Burlinson made no reply for a moment. Lawrence was softly walking round the room, examining everything even to the mass of papers on the table. They appeared to be of no great importance. The police inspector paused with a sheet of notepaper in his hand to catch the doctor's reply.

"I should be strongly inclined to scout the idea," the latter said; "especially as Sir George was one of the last men in the world to do such a thing. But, at the same time, the thing is possible. Suicides have frequently taken their lives in that manner. If your suggestion can be proved, I shall have nothing more to say."

"I have the proof here," Lawrence said quietly. "A letter written by Sir George on his own paper, apparently addressed to Mr.—, his nephew. Let me read it:—

"My dear Nephew,

"I am going away where none can follow. The secret that lies between us is gradually sapping my reason. But the time will come when you will discover that you cannot defy me when I am in my grave. I have no more to say; all I have to do is to act. One touch and the thread is cut, the problem solved. This is the last word that I shall ever write.

"Yours sorrowfully,

>

"George M—."

Lance took up the paper. Beyond doubt it was in his uncle's handwriting, on his own paper, and it was addressed to him. Here was a full confession of the suicide. The body of the letter was absolutely meaningless to him; but here it was in black and white that he had deliberately destroyed his own life.

"This seems to settle the whole matter," he said.

Lawrence evidently thought so. He looked just a little disappointed. Perhaps he felt that he had been done out of a sensational case. Burlinson looked still more disappointed. The suicide theory had been proved correct, and yet at the same time it seemed to him to be utterly beyond the bounds of reason.

"I have no more to say," he murmured. "The thing is settled. Everything is for the best. But I am not satisfied at all."

Lance said nothing. He felt in some strange way that he had been all through this before at some time. The letter was real, and yet it suggested a previous tragedy. Everybody knows the feeling. It was the first stage of a dream, with the consciousness that there was more to come.

III. — BURLINSON HAS HIS DOUBTS

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The more the Massey tragedy came to be examined, the more mysterious it seemed. Yet there was the letter written in Sir George's own handwriting upon his own notepaper. The feeble brain in the feeble body had given way at last, and he had died by his own hand.

But though the Masseys were not regarded as an intellectual race, they had never been violent people. Nor had they ever displayed any morbid tendencies. Sir George's nearest approach to a passion meant no more than a slight raising of the high-pitched voice, and the mere suggestion of carmine on his cheeks.

What then did it mean? The deceased baronet's financial position had been a splendid one. He was justly proud of his house and his art treasures. He had been working on a play which some day was going to take the world by storm. Then, without the slightest warning, he had destroyed his own life, and had left a letter to say so.

Inspector Lawrence was inclined to think no more of the matter. He had all the evidence he required; there would be a more or less formal inquest, and the verdict of the jury would be temporary insanity. Sir George would rest with his fathers, and Sir Lancelot would reign in his stead. Burlinson shook his head. With Lancelot the doctor was discussing the matter in Lawrence's private room at Swanley.

"No chance of that letter being a forgery?" he suggested.

The letter lay open on the table. Lawrence smiled.

"You don't seem to be satisfied, doctor," he said.

"In strictest confidence, I don't mind saying that I am anything but satisfied," Burlinson replied. "As you know, I am practically out of business; in fact, I only attend a few of my very old patients, like Sir George. But I read a great deal, and I have lectured a great deal on brain diseases. I'll go bail for it that Sir George Massey was mentally sound—at any rate, I never knew a man less susceptible to the homicidal mania."

"And yet there is the letter before you."

Burlinson shook his head doubtfully. There was no getting over that letter. Lance was examining it through a strong magnifying glass.

"This is absolutely genuine," he said. "Forgery is out of the question. Would you mind telling me what you are driving at, Burlinson?"

But the doctor refused to be drawn.

"I'd like to spend an hour or so in Sir George's study," he said. "Can you manage that for me without rousing suspicion?"

"Why not come over with me this afternoon?" Lance said. "I have a long interview with Wallace and Wallace, my uncle's solicitors, after which I drive back to Broadwater. I shall be very pleased to have your company."

Burlinson assented eagerly—indeed Lance had never seen him quite so excited over anything before. He was not given to unnecessary speech as a rule, yet he evidently scented some mystery here, where all things appeared quite plain to others.

Wallace and Wallace were exceedingly pleased to see Sir Lancelot, indeed they had expected him before. The sole

surviving partner of the old-established firm bowed him into the inner office. Gerald Wallace looked more like a sporting landed proprietor than anything else. But then he had been upon the friendliest terms with the county people all his life, and no better shot was to be found anywhere. His keen, shrewd face was very grave.

"I suppose you know something of the position of affairs, Sir Lancelot?" he asked.

"Oh, drop that, Wallace," Lance exclaimed, hastily. "At least till the dear old chap is in his grave. I would not have had this happen for anything. You did all Sir George's business. Did you ever detect anything of—of that kind about him?"

"Never!" Wallace said, emphatically. "Once get him interested in business, and he was as clear as crystal. His will shows that."

"I suppose you people made it, Wallace?"

"No, we didn't. But I've got it in my safe. An eminent barrister drew that will up under Sir George's instructions, through Mabey and Leesom, our London agents. It was signed in London by Sir George in the presence of two doctors, and subsequently handed over to us for safe custody. On certain conditions everything comes to you."

It was only human nature that Lance should breathe a little more freely on hearing this. He was no stranger to his late uncle's views on the matter of Lyn Verity, and his own feelings towards her, and he had half-feared some complications.

"What conditions are there?" he asked.

Wallace scraped his chin thoughtfully.

"Well, I am afraid that you will find them a bit irksome," he said. "Without being in the least offensive, I may venture to suggest that you are contemplating matrimony."

"People are so good as to say so," Lance smiled. "Miss Verity and myself."

"Exactly. Poor Verity was a client of mine, and the whole sad story is no secret from me. Well, Sir George left you everything on condition that you contracted no alliance with any family where the slightest trace of insanity had manifested itself. The will mentions no names, it merely contains that one stringent clause, and the executors are bound by it. It therefore follows that if you marry Miss Verity you lose every penny of this money."

It was some little time before Lance spoke again. The blow had fallen, and it had been more severe than he had anticipated. Only he knew how severe it was. He was filled by the burning injustice of the thing.

"You don't mean to say that a document like that would stand?" he cried.

"Indeed, I do, Massey. It has been drawn with the greatest care. Two of the greatest physicians in England witnessed the signature, and will be prepared to swear that the testator was in his right mind at the moment of execution. And the executors are both of them aware of the tragedy in Miss Verity's family."

"Who are the executors, Wallace?" Lance asked.

"Well, I'm one. My co-executor is not precisely the gentleman I should have picked out as a colleague, and had it been almost anybody else I should have declined to act. I'm sorry to say that the other man is Malcolm Stott."