

CAROLYN
WELLS

THE MARK
OF CAIN

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The Mark of Cain

THROUGH THE GREEN CORD

Judge Hoyt's strong, keen face took on a kindlier aspect and his curt "Hello!" was followed by gentler tones, as he heard the voice of the girl he loved, over the telephone.

"What is it, Avice?" he said, for her speech showed anxiety.

"Uncle Rowly,—he hasn't come home yet."

"He hasn't? Well, I hope he'll turn up soon. I want to see him. I was coming up this evening."

"Come now," said Avice; "come now, and dine here. I am so anxious about uncle."

"Why, Avice, don't worry. He is all right, of course."

"No he isn't. I feel a presentiment something has happened to him. He never was so late as this before, unless we knew where he was. Do come right up, won't you, Judge?"

"Certainly I will; I'm very glad to. But I'm sure your fears are groundless. What about Mrs. Black? Is she alarmed?"

"No, Eleanor laughs at me."

"Then I think you needn't disturb yourself. Surely she——"

“Yes, I know what you’re going to say, but she isn’t a bit fonder of Uncle Rowly than I am. Good-by.”

Avice hung up the receiver with a little snap. She was willing that Mrs. Black should marry her uncle, but she did hate to be relegated to second place in the household. Already the handsome widow was asserting her supremacy, and while Avice acknowledged the justice of it, it hurt her pride a little.

“I’ve asked Judge Hoyt to dinner,” she said, as she returned to her post at the window.

Mrs. Black glanced up from the evening paper she was reading and murmured an indistinct acquiescence.

It was late June, yet the city home of the Trowbridges was still occupied by the family. As Avice often said, the big town house was cooler than most summer resorts, with their small rooms and lack of shade. Here, the linen-swathed furniture, the white-draped chandeliers and pictures, the rugless floors, all contributed to an effect of coolness and comfort.

Avice, herself, in her pretty white gown, fluttered from one window to another, looking out for her uncle.

“Mrs. Black, why do you suppose Uncle Rowly doesn’t come? He said he would be home early, and it’s after six o’clock now!”

“I don’t know Avice, I’m sure. Do be quiet! You fluster around so, you make me nervous.”

“I’m nervous myself, Eleanor. I’m afraid something has happened to uncle. Do you suppose he has had a stroke, or anything?”

“Nonsense, child, of course, not. He has been detained at the office for something.”

“No he hasn’t; I telephoned there and the office is closed.”

“Then he has gone somewhere else.”

“But he said he would be home by five.”

“Well, he isn’t. Now, don’t worry; that can do no good.”

But Avice did worry. She continued to flit about, dividing her attention between the clock and the window.

The girl had been an orphan from childhood, and Rowland Trowbridge had been almost as a father to her. Avice loved him and watched over him as a daughter; at least, that had been the case until lately. A few weeks since, Mr. Trowbridge had succumbed to the rather florid charms of Mrs. Black, his housekeeper, and told Avice he would marry her in a month.

Though greatly surprised and not greatly pleased, Avice had accepted the situation and treated the housekeeper with the same pleasant courtesy she had always shown her. The two “got along” as the phrase is, though their natures were not in many ways congenial.

Avice remained at the window till she saw at last Leslie Hoyt’s tall form approaching. She ran to open the door herself.

“Oh, Judge Hoyt,” she cried, “Uncle hasn’t come yet! There must be something wrong! What can we do?”

“I don’t know, Avice, dear. Tell me all about it.”

“There’s nothing to tell, only that uncle said he would be home at five, and it’s almost seven and he isn’t here! Such a thing never happened before.”

“Good evening, Judge Hoyt,” said Mrs. Black’s cool, measured voice as they entered the drawing-room. “I think our Avice is unnecessarily alarmed. I’m sure Mr. Trowbridge can take care of himself.”

“That is doubtless true,” and for the first time a note of anxiety crept into Hoyt’s tone; “but as Avice says, it is most unusual.”

Mrs. Black smiled indifferently and returned to her paper.

Leslie Hoyt was so frequent a visitor at the house, that he was never treated formally. He seated himself in an easy chair, and took a cigarette case from his pocket, while Avice continued her nervous journeys between the clock and the window.

“We won’t wait dinner after seven,” said Mrs. Black, in a voice that might mean either command or suggestion, as her hearers preferred.

“You may have it served now, if you like,” returned Avice, “but I shan’t go to the table until uncle comes.”

Now, it had been nearly two hours before this that a telephone call had been received at police headquarters.

“Is dees polizia stazione?” Inspector Collins had heard, as he held the receiver to his ear.

Through the green cord the broken voice spoke in a halting way, as if uncertain how to word the message.

“Yes; who is speaking?” Collins replied.

“Meester Rowlan’ Trowbridga,—he is dead-a.”

“I can’t hear you! What’s all that racket where you are?”

“My bambini—my childaren. They have-a da whoopa-cough.”

“It’s more than children making all that noise! Who are you?”

“Not matter. I say, Meester Trowbridga—he dead-a.”

“Rowland Trowbridge dead! Where—who are you?”

“You find-a heem. Bringa da bod’ home.”

“Where is he?”

“Van Cortaland’ Park. By da gollif play. You go finda da man—Bringa da bod’ home.”

“See here, you tell me who you are!”

But a sudden click told that the message was finished, and after a few impatient hellos, Collins hung up the receiver.

“Rubbish!” he said to himself; “some Dago woman trying to be funny. But a queer thing,—Rowland Trowbridge! Phew, if it should be! I’ll just call up his house.”

Collins called up the Trowbridge house on Fifth Avenue. Not to alarm any one he merely inquired if Mr. Trowbridge was at home. The answer was no, and, glancing at the clock, Collins called up Mr. Trowbridge’s office in the Equitable Building. There was no response, and as it was five o’clock, he assumed the office was already closed.

“I’ve got a hunch there’s something in it,” he mused, and acting on his conviction, he called up the Van Cortlandt Park Precinct Station, and told the story.

Captain Pearson, who took the message, shrugged his shoulders at its dubious authority, but he assembled several detectives and policemen, and set off with them in a patrol car for the golf links.

Up to Van Cortlandt Park they went, past the gay-coated, gay-voiced golf players, on along the broad road to the woods beyond.

“By golly! There he is!” cried one of the detectives, whose expectant eyes noted a dark heap on the ground, well back among the trees.

Jumping from the car and running across the uneven, root-roughened ground, they found the dead body of Rowland Trowbridge.

Dressed in his business clothes, his hat on the ground nearby, the body was contorted, the hands clenched, and the face showed an expression of rage, that betokened a violent death.

“He put up a fight,” observed Pearson. “Poor man, he had no chance. Somebody stabbed him.”

A gash in the blood-stained waistcoat proved that the aim at the victim’s heart had been all too sure, and his frantic, convulsive struggles of no avail.

Eagerly the men looked for clues. But they found nothing save the dead man and his own belongings. The scene of the tragedy was not very far from the road, but it was well screened by the thick summer foliage, and the rocks and high tree roots hid the body on the ground from the sight of passers-by.

“Footprints?” said Lieutenant Pearson, musingly.

“Nothing doing,” returned Detective Groot. “Some few depressions here and there—of course, made by human feet—but none clear enough to be called a footprint.”

“And the ground is too stony and grassy to show them. Look well, though, boys. No broken cuff-links, or dropped gloves? It’s a canny murderer who doesn’t leave a shred of incriminating evidence.”

“It’s a fool murderer who does,” returned Groot. “And this affair is not the work of a fool. Probably they’ve been spotting Mr. Trowbridge for months. These millionaires are fair game for the Dago slayers.”

“Why Dago?”

“Didn’t an Italian woman turn in the call? How could she know of it unless some of her own people did it?”

“But there seems to be no robbery. Here’s his watch and scarfpin all right.”

“And his roll?”

“Yes,” said Pearson, after an investigation of the dead man’s pockets. “Bills and change. Nothing taken, apparently.”

“Valuable papers, maybe.”

“Not a Dago, then. Your theories don’t hang together. Well, this will create some stir in the Street! Biggest sensation in years. Rowland Trowbridge! Phew! Won’t the papers go crazy!”

“What family has he? Wife?”

“No, nor child. Only a niece, but she’s the apple of his eye. We’ll get Collins to telephone to the house. It’s an awful business.”

The business was awful, and its awful details took so much time that it was seven o’clock before Inspector Collins called up the Trowbridge home.

“Maybe that’s uncle now!” cried Avice, and springing from her chair she went to the ringing telephone.

“Hello—yes—no,—oh, tell me!—I am Miss Trowbridge,—no, his niece,—please come here, Judge Hoyt!”

Leslie Hoyt took the receiver from the hand of the agitated girl, and received this message from the police station.

“Yes, sir; I couldn’t tell the young lady, sir. Do you belong to the family? Well, then, there’s no use beatin’ round the bush. Mr. Trowbridge is dead. We found his body in Van Cortlandt Park woods. Will you come here to identify it?”

“Wait a minute! Let me think!” and Hoyt strove to control himself. “Avice, you were right. Something has happened.”

“Oh, Uncle Rowly!”

“Yes,—” and Hoyt’s voice faltered, “he has been—has been hurt. They—they have found him——”

“I know,” said Avice, standing perfectly still, while her face went white. “You needn’t tell me. I know. He is dead.”

Hoyt looked at her dumbly, not contradicting. He had loved the girl for years, but though she liked him, she would give him no promise, and he

still hoped and waited. He turned back to answer the insistent telephone. "Yes; of course, there is nothing else to do. Tell the coroner. I will go there at once. Are you sure of what you tell me?"

"There can be no doubt," he said gently, as he finally left the telephone. "There are letters in his pockets, and some of the policemen know him. Avice, dear!"

But Avice had flung herself on a couch, her face buried in the pillows, and was sobbing her heart out.

"Let her cry," said Mrs. Black, softly, as she laid her long white hand gently upon the bowed head; "it will do her good. Tell me all, Judge Hoyt. I am the one in charge now."

The woman's handsome face showed dignity and authority rather than grief, but Leslie Hoyt was merely the dead man's lawyer, and had no right to intrude personal comment or sympathy. He had long been a close friend of Rowland Trowbridge and his niece, but with the housekeeper his acquaintance was but formal.

"I know very little, Mrs. Black," he said, his eyes wandering to the convulsed figure on the couch. "The inspector merely told me that Mr. Trowbridge has been killed and that someone must go to the police station to represent the family. As his lawyer, it is appropriate that I should go, and, indeed, it seems to me there is no one else who could—" his voice broke as he looked again at Avice, now sitting up and staring, wide-eyed at him.

"Yes, do go, Judge Hoyt," she cried; "you are the one—who else could? Not I, surely,—you don't want me to go, do you?"

“No, Avice, no, dear,” said Mrs. Black, soothingly. “Nobody thought of your going. Judge Hoyt has kindly consented——”

“I will stop for Doctor Fulton, I think, and ask him to go with me,” and Leslie Hoyt took up his hat. “You had better go to your room, Avice. It may be a long time before my return.”

“I will look after her,” and Mrs. Black nodded her head. “I will attend to everything.”

She accompanied Hoyt to the door, saying in low tones, “When you come back, will you bring the the—will you bring Mr. Trowbridge with you?”

“I can’t be sure. There are so many formalities to be looked after. Try to keep Avice as quiet as possible. It will be a trying scene at best, when we return.”

“I will do all I can for her. How fortunate that you are here, Judge Hoyt.”

“Indeed, yes. Had I not been, the girl might have insisted on going on this awful errand.”

The judge walked the few blocks to Doctor Fulton’s office, and luckily finding him in, they both went at once in the doctor’s car to the scene of the tragedy.

“Let me give you some quieting draught, Avice dear,” said Mrs. Black, as she returned to the girl, “and then I’m going to send you to bed.”

“Indeed, you’ll do nothing of the kind. I have quite as much right here as you have.”

“Of course you have,” and the lady’s voice was as straightforward as her words. “I only want to spare you the shock.”

“I don’t want to be spared, I want to know all about everything that goes on. I won’t be treated as a child or an imbecile! I want to help.”

“But, my dear, there is nothing to do.”

“There will be. If Uncle Rowly has been killed, someone has done the deed, and I shall never rest until I find out who did it, and bring him to justice! How can you sit there so calmly? Don’t you care? You, who pretended to love him!”

“There, there, Avice, don’t get so excited. I know how you must feel, but ———”

“Don’t talk to me, Eleanor! You drive me crazy!”

Offended, and a little frightened at the girl’s vehemence, the older woman ceased all attempts at conversation, and busied herself about the rooms, with those futile, nervous little motions that most women indulge in under stress of great excitement.

“I think, Avice, dear, you ought to try to eat some dinner,” she suggested. “Shall we go out together?”

But Avice only looked at her in dumb reproach, and closed her eyes as if to dismiss the subject.

Mrs. Black went into the dining-room alone.

“There has been an accident, Stryker,” she said to the butler, thinking it unwise to say more at the present. “They will bring Mr. Trowbridge home

after a time. Meantime, say nothing to the other servants, and give me my dinner, for I feel I must try to eat something.”

Mrs. Black’s face was inscrutable as she sat at the well-appointed table. She ate a little of the dishes Stryker brought, but her thoughts were evidently far away. She frowned now and then, and once she smiled, but mostly she seemed in a brown study, and as if she had weighty affairs on her mind. Not a tear did she shed, nor did she look bowed with sorrow; indeed, her fine, well-poised head held itself a little higher than usual as she gave low-voiced orders to the butler now and then.

She returned to the drawing-room and the weary hours dragged by. Occasionally the two women spoke to each other, but only of trivialities, or necessary details of arrangement. No word of sympathy or common grief passed between them.

At last they heard steps outside, and they knew Rowland Trowbridge was being brought into his house for the last time.

Judge Hoyt came in first and kept the two women in the drawing-room while the bearers took their tragic burden up to Mr. Trowbridge’s own room. Shortly afterward Doctor Fulton came down.

“Mr. Trowbridge was murdered,” he said briefly. “Stabbed with a dagger. He has been dead five or six hours now. Perhaps more.”

“Who did it?” cried Avice, looking more like an avenging angel than a grief-stricken girl.

“They have no idea. The coroner must try to determine that.”

“The coroner!” exclaimed Mrs. Black in horror.

Avice turned on her. "Yes, coroner," she said; "how else can we find out who killed Uncle Rowly, and punish him,—and kill him!"

Every one stared at Avice. The policeman in the hall looked in at the doorway, as her ringing tones reached him. The girl was greatly excited and her eyes blazed like stars. But she stood quietly, and spoke with repressed force.

"What is the first thing to do?" she said, turning to Doctor Fulton, and then glancing past him to the policeman in the doorway.

"Wait, Avice, wait," put in Leslie Hoyt; "let us consider a moment."

"There is nothing to be considered, Leslie. Uncle is dead. We must discover who killed him. We must get the best detectives, and we must never rest until we have brought the villain to justice."

"Of course, of course, Avice," said Mrs. Black, soothingly, "but we can't hurry so, child."

"We must hurry! It is only by beginning at once that we can find clues and things. Delay means opportunity for the criminal to escape!"

Hoyt and Doctor Fulton looked at the girl in amazement. Where had she learned these terms that fell so readily from her tongue?

"She is right," said Judge Hoyt, sadly. "There must be no unnecessary delay in these matters. But the law moves slowly, at best. Everything possible will be done, Avice; you may rest assured of that. The coroner is upstairs now, and when he comes down he will want to talk with you. You won't object?"

"Indeed, no. I want to see him. Why, only think, I know nothing,—nothing, as yet, as to how Uncle Rowly met his death!"

WHO COULD HAVE DONE IT?

Coroner Berg came down stairs and joined the group in the drawing-room. He was a bristling, fussy little man, with a decided sense of his own importance and evidently inclined to make much of his office. His sparse, sandy hair stood out straight from his head, and his light blue eyes darted from one to another of the impatient people awaiting his report.

“Sad case,” he said, wringing his hands; “very sad case. Fine man like that, struck down in the prime of life. Awful!”

“We know that,” and Avice looked annoyed at what she thought intrusive sympathy. “But who did it? What have you found out?”

“Very little, Miss,” answered Berg. “Your uncle was killed by a dagger thrust, while up in Van Cortlandt Park woods. His body was found in a lonely spot up there, and there is no trace of the murderer. The police were informed of the murder by telephone, which is a mighty queer performance if you ask me! They say a Dago woman called up headquarters and told the story.”

“Extraordinary!” said Hoyt; “an Italian?”

“Yes, sir; they say she sounded like one, anyhow.”

“And a dagger or stiletto was used,” said Doctor Fulton, thoughtfully; “that looks like Italian work. Had your uncle any Italian enemies, Miss Trowbridge?”

“Not that I know of,” and Avice spoke a little impatiently; “but uncle had no enemies that I know of. At least, none who would kill him.”

“He had enemies, then?” spoke up the coroner, alertly.

“Uncle Rowly was not an easy-going man. He had many acquaintances with whom he was not on terms of friendship. But I’m sure none of his quarrels were grave enough to lead to this.”

“But somebody committed the crime, Miss Trowbridge, and who so likely as a known enemy? Tell me any of your uncle’s unfriendly acquaintances.”

“Positively no one, Mr. Berg, who could be in the least suspected. I’m thinking of such men as Judge Greer, who holds political views opposed to those of my uncle. And Professor Meredith, who is an enthusiastic naturalist, but who disagrees with my uncle in some of their classifications. As you see, these are not sufficient grounds for killing a man.”

“Of course, not,” said Hoyt. “I know those men, and their relations with Mr. Trowbridge were really friendly, though differing opinions frequently led to quarrels. Mr. Trowbridge was quick-tempered and often said sharp things, which he forgot as quickly as he uttered them.”

“Yes, he did,” corroborated Avice. “Why, he sometimes scolded me, and soon after was sunny and sweet again. No, I’m sure Uncle Rowland had no real enemies, surely none that would seek his death. And the fact that an Italian woman gave the message proves to my mind that he was struck down by some horrid Italian society,—Black Hand, or whatever they call it.”

“That remains to be seen,” said Berg, with an air of importance. “I shall conduct an inquest tomorrow morning. It is too late to get at it tonight, and too, I want to collect a little more evidence.”

“Where do you get evidence, Mr. Berg?” asked Avice, eager interest and curiosity shining in her brown eyes.

“Wherever I may pick it up. I must question the police further and I must endeavor to trace that telephone call, though that is a hard matter usually. Then, also, I must question all members of this household. As to his habits, I mean, and his whereabouts today. He left home this morning, as usual?”

“Quite as usual,” broke in Mrs. Black, before Avice could reply. “I was probably the one who saw him last as he departed. I went to the door with him, and he,—he kissed me good-by.” Mrs. Black’s handkerchief was pressed into service, but she went on, clearly; “we were to have been married next month. Our engagement had been announced.”

“And you heard nothing from Mr. Trowbridge during the day?”

“No,” said Avice, taking up the tale again; “uncle told me before he left he would be home by five, as I was to help him with his work. He is a naturalist, out of office hours, and I assist with his cataloguing. Then, when he didn’t come at five, I was worried, and I kept on being worried until—until—” and here the girl broke down and buried her face again in the sofa pillows.

“And you weren’t worried?” asked Coroner Berg, turning his pale blue eyes on the housekeeper.

“No,” and Mrs. Black’s voice was cool and composed; “I supposed he was merely detained by some business matter. I had no reason to fear any

harm had come to him.”

“When did you last see him?” went on the coroner, turning to Judge Hoyt.

“Let me see; it was—yes, it was last Friday. I was at his office consulting with him about some business, and promised to report today. But as I was called to Philadelphia today on an important matter, I wrote him that I would come here to this house to see him this evening, and give him the report he wanted.”

“And you went to Philadelphia today?”

“Yes, I left there at three and reached New York at five. I intended coming here this evening, but when Miss Trowbridge telephoned me soon after six, I came right up at once.”

“Well, I think I’ll go now, for I may dig up something of importance at the police station, and I’ll be here tomorrow for the inquest at ten or thereabouts.”

As Coroner Berg left, the men from the undertaker’s arrived, and the trying session with them had to be gone through.

“But I can’t make arrangements about the funeral now,” said poor Avice, breaking down again. “Why, I can’t even realize Uncle Rowly is dead, and _____”

“Never mind, my dear,” said Mrs. Black, “don’t try to. Go to your room now, and leave the funeral matters to me. I will arrange everything, and Judge Hoyt will assist me with his advice.”

“Indeed you won’t,” said Avice, spiritedly: “I suppose I am still my uncle’s niece. And I prefer to be consulted about the last rites for him.”

“Then stay by all means,” and Mrs. Black’s voice was honey-sweet. “I only meant to save you a harrowing experience.” She turned to the suave young man who had with him a book of pictured caskets, and was soon deeply interested in the choice of shape, style and number of handles that seemed to her most desirable.

Avice looked at her with aversion. It seemed to the girl almost ghoulish to show such absorption in a question of the quality of black cloth, or the lettering on the name-plate.

“But it must be decided,” said Mrs. Black. “Of course, we want the best of everything, and it is the last honor we can pay to dear Mr. Trowbridge. You should be very thankful, Avice, that you have me here to assist and advise you. You are too young and inexperienced to attend to these matters. Isn’t that so, Judge Hoyt?”

“It seems so to me, Mrs. Black. These selections must be made, and surely you are showing good taste and judgment.”

“Very well,” returned Avice. “Go on, and get whatever you like. As for me, I’m far more concerned in hunting down my uncle’s murderer. And I doubt if that coroner man will do it. He’s a perfect lump! He’ll never find out anything!”

“Why, Avice,” remonstrated Hoyt, “what could he find out tonight? It is a mysterious affair, and as we here know nothing of the crime, how could Mr. Berg discover anything from us?”

“But he has no brains, no intelligence, no ingenuity!”

“Coroners rarely have. It is their province only to question and learn the circumstances. ‘Sleuthing’ is what you have in mind, and that must be

done by detectives.”

“I know it,” cried Avice, eagerly; “that’s what I said at first. Oh, Leslie, won’t you get the very best detectives there are and put them on the case at once?”

“Wait a moment, Avice,” said Mrs. Black, coldly. “I am not sure you are in absolute authority here. I have something to say in the decisions.”

“But surely, Mrs. Black, you want to spare no pains and no expense to learn who killed Uncle Rowly!”

“You talk very glibly of expense, my dear Avice. Until your uncle’s will is read, how do you know who will be in a position to bear these expenses you are so ready to incur?”

Avice looked at the older woman with scorn. “I don’t quite follow you,” she said, slowly; “but surely, whoever inherits my uncle’s fortune, owes first the duty of bringing his murderer to justice!”

Leslie Hoyt looked very grave. “As Mr. Trowbridge’s lawyer,” he said, “I know the contents of the will. It will be read after the funeral. Until then, I am not at liberty to disclose it. I must go now, as I have some investigations to make myself. By the way, Avice, I brought home a Philadelphia afternoon paper, and it contains a glowing account of the *début* of your friend, Rosalie Banks. But, perhaps, you don’t care to see it, now?”

“Yes, leave it,” said Avice, apathetically; “I am fond of Rosalie and I’d like to look it over.”

Hoyt found the paper where he had left it on the hall table, and gave it to her, and then with a sympathetic, but unobtrusive pressure of her hand,

the lawyer went away and the doctor also.

“May I look at that Philadelphia paper a moment?” asked Mrs. Black, “I want to see an advertisement.”

“Certainly, here it is,” and Avice passed it over. “Just think of Rosalie having her coming-out party just now while I’m in such sadness. We were at school together, and though younger than I, she was always one of my favorites.”

“You didn’t care to go to the party?”

“No it was yesterday, and I had that luncheon engagement here, you know. And oh, Eleanor, isn’t it fortunate I am here and not in Philadelphia!”

“Why? You can’t do anything.”

“I know it. But it would have been awful to be away making merry when uncle was—was breathing his last! Who do you suppose did it?”

“Some highway robber, of course. I always told your uncle he ought not to go off, in those lonely woods all by himself. He ran a risk every time. And now the tragedy has occurred.”

“It doesn’t seem like a highway robber to use a dagger. They always have a club or a—what do they call it? a blackjack.”

“You seem to know a lot about such things, Avice. Well, I’m going to my room, and you’d better do the same. We’ve a hard day before us tomorrow. I think it’s dreadful to have an inquest here. I thought they always held them in the court-room or some such place.”

“They do, sometimes. Inquests are informal affairs. The coroner just asks anybody, hit or miss, anything he can think of. That’s why I wish we had a cleverer coroner than that Berg person. I can’t bear him.”

“I don’t care what he’s like, if he’ll only get the scene over. Shall we have to be present?”

“Gracious! You couldn’t keep me away. I want to hear every word and see if there’s any clue to the truth.”

The two went up to their rooms, but neither could sleep. Avice sat in an easy chair by her open window, wondering and pondering as to who could have been the criminal. Mrs. Black, on the other hand, thought only of herself and her own future.

She was a very beautiful woman, with finely cut features and raven black hair, which she wore in glossy smooth waves partly over her small ears. Her eyes were large and black and her mouth was scarlet and finely curved. She was of Italian parentage, though born in America. Her husband had been a New York lawyer, but dying, left her in greatly straitened circumstances and she had gladly accepted the position of housekeeper in the Trowbridge home. At first, she had rejected the advances of Rowland Trowbridge, thinking she preferred a younger and gayer man. But the kindness and generosity of her employer finally won her heart, or her judgment, and she had promised to marry him. It is quite certain, however, that Eleanor Black would never have come to this decision, had it not been for Rowland Trowbridge’s wealth.

Late into the night, Avice sat thinking. It seemed to her that she must by some means ferret out the facts of the case,—must find the dastardly villain who killed her uncle and let justice mete out his punishment. But where to turn for knowledge, she had no idea.

Her mind turned to what Mr. Berg had said about enemies. It couldn't be possible that either of the men she had mentioned could be implicated, but mightn't there be someone else? Perhaps someone she had never heard of. Then the impulse seized her to go down to her uncle's library, and look over his recent letters. She might learn something of importance. Not for a moment did she hesitate to do this, for she knew she was the principal heir to his fortune, and the right to the house and its contents was practically hers.

And her motives were of the best and purest. All she desired was to get some hint, some clue, as to which way to look for a possible suspect.

Walking lightly, though taking no especial precautions of silence, she went slowly down stairs, and reached the door of the library. From the hall, as she stood at the portière, she heard someone talking inside the room. Listening intently she recognized the voice of Eleanor Black at the telephone.

"Yes," Mrs. Black was saying: "keep still about it for the present,—yes,—yes, I'll do whatever you say,—but don't come here tonight. You see it was an Italian—yes, I'll meet you tomorrow at the same time and same place. No, don't call me up,—when I can, I'll call you."

Hearing the click that told of the hanging up of the receiver Avice quickly stepped aside into an alcove of the hall, where she could not be seen.

But apparently, Mrs. Black had no thought of any one near her, for she turned off the library table light she had been using, and softly went upstairs. A low hall light was sufficient illumination for this, and Avice saw her go.

After waiting a few moments, the girl went into the library, and first closing the door, she switched on the light.

Taking up the telephone, she said to the operator, "Please tell me that number I just had. I can't remember it, and I want to preserve it."

Sleepily the girl responded, telling the number and exchange.

"Thank you," said Avice, and hanging up the receiver she went to the desk and jotted down the number.

"Not that I have the least suspicion of Eleanor," she said to herself, "but if I'm going to investigate, I mustn't leave a stone unturned, especially anything so unusual as a midnight telephoning."

And then Avice set herself to the task she had come for. But she found nothing definite or incriminating. There were some old and carefully preserved notes from men who were very evidently angry with her uncle, but they were not sufficiently strong to point to anything criminal. There was the usual collection of bills, business letters and memoranda, but nothing to interest or alarm her, and finally, growing wearied, she went back upstairs.

As she passed Mrs. Black's door it softly opened, and the lady herself, wrapped in a kimono, looked out. Her long black hair hung in two braids, and her eyes were very bright.

"Avice, where have you been? At this time of night!"

"Just down in the library, looking after some matters."

"Well, it's time you were in bed," and the door closed again.

“H’m,” thought Avice, “she is afraid I heard her telephoning! That’s why she’s on the watch!”

And now, her momentary weariness gone, Avice was again widely awake.

“I’ve got to think it out,” she told herself. “I don’t for a minute imagine Eleanor is implicated in Uncle Rowly’s death, but what was she telephoning for? And she said ‘it was an Italian,’ and she’s Italian herself, and there’s something queer. I’m glad I got that telephone number, but I doubt if I’ll ever use it. It doesn’t seem quite right now, though it did when I asked Central for it. I believe I’ll tear it up.”

But she didn’t.

PINCKNEY, THE REPORTER

“There’s no use mincing matters,” said Mrs. Black, as she and Avice sat at breakfast next morning: “I was your uncle’s promised wife and I feel that it is, therefore, my right to assume the head of the household and give orders.”

Avice looked at her sadly. “I have no objection to your giving orders so long as they in no way interfere with my plans or wishes. But I think it would be pleasanter for us both if you were to drop that defiant air, and let us be on a more friendly footing. I quite appreciate your position here, but you must remember that though you were engaged to my uncle you were not married to him and that——”

“That makes no difference in reality! As his future wife, I have every right of a wife already, so far as this house is concerned. Indeed, it is already mine, by will as you are soon to find out.”

“Very well, Mrs. Black,” said Avice, wearily, “let’s not quarrel over it. I’m sure I don’t want this house, and I am not at all afraid that my uncle’s will leaves me unprovided for. I wish the coroner would come! I long to get to work on the solution of the mystery.”

“How you talk!” and Mrs. Black shuddered delicately; “I don’t see how you can bear to have to do with those awful investigations!”

“Would you sit calmly down, and let the murderer go scot-free?”