

***NATALIE SUMNER
LINCOLN***

A photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge at night, illuminated with warm yellow lights. The bridge's towers and suspension cables are clearly visible against a dark sky. The bridge deck is lit up, and the surrounding area, including the water and distant city lights, is visible in the background.

***THE RED
SEAL***

Natalie Sumner Lincoln

The Red Seal

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHAPTER I. IN THE POLICE COURT](#)

[CHAPTER II. THE GAME OF CONSEQUENCES](#)

[CHAPTER III. THE ROOM WITH THE SEVEN DOORS](#)

[CHAPTER IV. BARBARA ENGAGES COUNSEL](#)

[CHAPTER V. THE VANISHING MAN](#)

[CHAPTER VI. STRAIGHT QUESTIONS AND CROOKED ANSWERS](#)

[CHAPTER VII. THE RED SEAL](#)

[CHAPTER VIII. THE INQUEST](#)

[CHAPTER IX. "B-B-B"](#)

[CHAPTER X. AT THE CLUB DE VINGT](#)

[CHAPTER XI. HALF A TRUTH](#)

[CHAPTER XII. THE ECHO OF A LAUGH](#)

[CHAPTER XIII. THE FACE AT THE WINDOW](#)

[CHAPTER XIV. PAY CASH](#)

[CHAPTER XV. WHEN THE LIGHT FAILED](#)

[CHAPTER XVI. THE CRIMSON OUTLINE](#)

[CHAPTER XVII. A QUESTION OF HOUSE-BREAKING](#)

[CHAPTER XVIII. THE FATAL PERIOD](#)

[CHAPTER XIX. THE RED SEAL AGAIN](#)

[CHAPTER XX. THE UNKNOWN EQUATION](#)

[CHAPTER XXI. THE RIDDLE ANSWERED](#)

CHAPTER I. IN THE POLICE COURT

[Table of Contents](#)

The Assistant District Attorney glanced down at the papers in his hand and then up at the well-dressed, stockily built man occupying the witness stand. His manner was conciliatory.

"According to your testimony, Mr. Clymer, the prisoner, John Sylvester, was honest and reliable, and faithfully performed his duties as confidential clerk," he stated. "Just when was Sylvester in your employ?"

"Sylvester was never in my employ," corrected Benjamin Augustus Clymer. The president of the Metropolis Trust Company was noted for his precision of speech. "During the winter of 1918 I shared an apartment with Judge James Hildebrand, who employed Sylvester."

"Was Sylvester addicted to drink?"

"No."

"Was he quarrelsome?"

"No."

"Was Sylvester married at that date?"

At the question a faint smile touched the corners of Clymer's clean shaven mouth and his eyes traveled involuntarily toward the over-dressed female whose charge of assault and battery against her husband had brought Clymer to the police court as a "character" witness in Sylvester's behalf.

"Sylvester left Judge Hildebrand to get married," he explained. "He was a model clerk; honest, sober, and industrious."

"That is all, Mr. Clymer." The Assistant District Attorney spoke in some haste. "You may retire, sir," and, as Clymer turned to vacate the witness box, he addressed the presiding judge.

Clymer did not catch his remarks as, on stepping down, he was button-holed by a man whose entrance had occurred a few minutes before through the swing door which gave exit from the space reserved for witnesses and lawyers into the body of the court room.

"Sit over here a second," the newcomer said in an undertone, indicating the long bench under the window. "Has Miss McIntyre been here?"

"Miss McIntyre—here?" Clymer stared in amazement at his questioner. "No, certainly not."

"Don't be so positive," retorted the lawyer heatedly, his color rising at the other's incredulous tone. "Helen McIntyre telephoned me to meet her, and—by Jove, here she comes," as a slight stir at the back of the court room caused him to glance in that direction.

A gray-haired patrolman, cap in hand, was in the lead of the small procession which filed up the aisle, and Clymer gazed in astonishment at Helen McIntyre and her twin sister, Barbara. What had brought them at that hour to the police court?

The court room was filled with men, both white and black, while a dozen or more slatternly negro women were seated here and there. The Assistant District Attorney's plea for a postponement of the Sylvester case on the ground of the absence of an important witness and the granting of his plea was entirely lost on the majority of those in the court

room, their attention being wholly centered on Helen McIntyre and Barbara, whose bearing and clothes spoke of a fashionable and prosperous world to which nearly all present were utterly foreign.

Barbara, sensitive to the concentrated regard which their entrance had attracted, drew closer to Dr. Amos Stone, their family physician, who had accompanied them at her particular request. Except for Mrs. Sylvester, she and her sister were the only white women in the room.

Before they could take the seats to which they had been ushered, the clerk's stentorian tones sent the girls' names echoing down the court room and Barbara, much perturbed, found herself standing with Helen before the clerk's desk. There was a moment's wait and the deputy marshal, who had motioned to one of the prisoners sitting in the "cage" to step outside, emphasized his order with a muttered imprecation to hurry. A slouching figure finally shambled past him and stopped some little distance from the group in front of the Judge's bench.

"House-breaking," announced the clerk. "Charge brought by—" He looked up at the two girls.

"Miss Helen McIntyre," answered one of the twins composedly. "Daughter of Colonel Charles McIntyre of this city."

"Charge brought by Miss Helen McIntyre," continued the clerk, "against—" and his pointed finger indicated the seedy looking man slouching before them.

"Smith," said the latter, and his husky voice was barely audible.

"Smith," repeated the clerk. "First name—?"

"John," was the answer, given after a slight pause.

"John Smith, you are charged by Miss Helen McIntyre with house-breaking. What say you—guilty or not guilty?"

The man shifted his weight from one foot to the other and shot an uneasy look about him.

"Not guilty," he responded.

At that instant Helen caught sight of Benjamin Clymer and his companion, Philip Rochester, and her pale cheeks flushed faintly at the lawyer's approach. He had time but for a hasty handshake before the clerk administered the oath to the prisoner and the witnesses in the case.

Rochester walked back and resumed his seat by Clymer. Propping himself in the corner made by the bench and the cage, inside of which sat the prisoners, he opened his right hand and unfolded a small paper. He read the brief penciled message it contained not once but a dozen times. Folding the paper into minute dimensions he tucked it carefully inside his vest pocket and glanced sideways at Clymer. The banker hardly noticed his uneasy movements as he sat regarding Helen McIntyre standing in the witness box. Although paler than usual, the girl's manner was quiet, but Clymer, a close student of human nature, decided she was keeping her composure by will power alone, and his interest grew.

The Judge, from the Bench, was also regarding the handsome witness and the burglar with close attention. Colonel Charles McIntyre, a wealthy manufacturer, had, upon his retirement from active business, made the National Capital his home, and his name had become a household word for philanthropy, while his twin daughters were both

popular in Washington's gay younger set. Several reporters of local papers, attracted by the mention of the McIntyre name, as well as by the twins' appearance, watched the scene with keen expectancy, eager for early morning "copy."

As the Assistant District Attorney rose to question Helen McIntyre, the Judge addressed him.

"Is the prisoner represented by counsel?" he asked.

For reply the burglar shook his head. Rising slowly to his feet, Philip Rochester advanced to the man's side.

"If it please the court," he began, "I will take the case for the prisoner."

His offer received a quick acceptance from the Bench, but the scowl with which the burglar favored him was not pleasant. Hitching at his frayed flannel collar, the man partly turned his back on the lawyer and listened with a heavy frown to Helen's quick answers to the questions put to her.

"While waiting for my sister to return from a dance early this morning," she stated, "I went downstairs into the library, and as I entered it I saw a man slip across the room and into a coat closet. I retained enough presence of mind to steal across to the closet and turn the key in the door; then I ran to the window and fortunately saw Officer O'Ryan standing under the arc light across the street. I called him and he arrested the prisoner."

Her simple statement evoked a nod of approval from the Assistant District Attorney, and Rochester frowned as he waived his right to cross-examine her. The next witness was Officer O'Ryan, and his testimony confirmed Helen's.

"The prisoner was standing back among the coats in the closet," he said. "My automatic against his ribs brought him out."

"Did you search your prisoner?" asked Rochester, as he took the witness.

"Yes, sir.

"Find any concealed weapons?"

"No, sir."

"A burglar's kit?"

"No, sir."

"Did the prisoner make a statement after his arrest?"

"No, sir; he came along peaceably enough, hardly a word out of him," acknowledged O'Ryan regretfully. He enjoyed a reputation on the force as a "scrapper," and a willing prisoner was a disappointment to his naturally pugnacious disposition.

"Did you search the house?"

"Sure, and haven't I been telling you I did?" answered O'Ryan; his pride in his achievement in arresting a burglar in so fashionable a neighborhood as Sheridan Circle was giving place to resentment at Rochester's manner of addressing him. At a sign from the lawyer, he left the witness stand, and Rochester addressed the Judge.

"I ask the indulgence of the court for more time," he commenced, "that I may consult my client and find if he desires to call witnesses."

"The court finds," responded the Judge, "that a clear case of house-breaking has been proven against the prisoner by reputable witnesses. He will have to stand trial."

For the first time the prisoner raised his eyes from contemplation of the floor.

"I demand trial by jury," he announced.

"It is your right," acknowledged the Judge, and turned to consult his calendar.

Stepping forward, the deputy marshal laid his hand on the burglar's shoulder.

"Go inside," he directed and held open the cage door, which immediately swung back into place, and Rochester, following closely at the prisoner's heels, halted abruptly. A fit of coughing shook the burglar and he paused by the iron railing, gasping for breath.

"Water," he pleaded, and a court attendant handed a cup to Rochester, standing just outside the cage, and he passed it over the iron railing to the burglar. Then turning on his heel the lawyer rejoined Clymer, his discontent plainly discernible.

"A clear case against your client," remarked Clymer, reading his thoughts. "Don't take the affair to heart, man; you did your best under difficulties."

Rochester shook his head gloomily. "I might have—Jove! why didn't I ask for bail?"

"Bail!" The banker suppressed a chuckle as he eyed the threadbare suit and tattered appearance of the burglar, who had resumed his seat in the prisoner's cage. "Who would have stood surety for that scarecrow?"

"I would have." Rochester spoke with some vehemence, but his words were partly drowned by the violent fit of coughing which again shook the burglar, and before he could finish his sentence, Helen McIntyre stood at his elbow.

She bowed gravely to Clymer who rose at her approach, and laid a persuasive hand on Rochester's sleeve.

"Will you come with us?" she asked. "Barbara and Dr. Stone are ready to leave. The doctor wishes to—" As she spoke she looked across at Stone, who stood opposite her in the little group. He failed to catch both her word and her eye, his gaze, passing over her shoulder, was riveted on the burglar.

"Something is wrong," he announced and pushed past Barbara. "Let me inside the cage," he directed as the deputy marshal kept the gate closed at his approach. "Your prisoner appears ill."

One glance at the burglar proved the truth of the physician's statement and the gate was hastily opened. Stone bent over the man, whose spasmodic breathing could be heard distinctly through the court room, then his gaze shifted to the other occupants of the cage.

"The man must have air," he declared. "Your aid here." Looking up his eyes met Clymer's, and the latter came swiftly into the cage, followed by Rochester, and the deputy marshal slammed the door shut behind them.

"Step out this way," he said, as Clymer aided the physician in lifting the burglar, and he led them into the ante-room whence prisoners were taken into the cage.

Stretching his burden on the floor, Stone tore open the man's shirt and felt his heart, while Clymer, spying a water cooler, sped across the room and returned immediately with a brimming glass.

"Here's water," he said, but Stone refused the proffered glass.

"No use," he announced. "The man is dead."

"Dead!" echoed the deputy marshal. "Well, I'll be—say, doctor," but Stone had darted out of the room, and he turned open-mouthed to Clymer. "If it wasn't Doctor Stone I would say he was crazy," he declared.

"Tut! Feel the man's heart and convince yourself," suggested Clymer tartly, and the deputy marshal, dropping on one knee, did so. Detecting no heart-beat, the officer passed his hand over the dead man's unshaven chin and across his forehead, brushing back the unkempt hair. Under his none too gentle touch the wig slipped back, revealing to his astonished gaze a head of short cropped, red hair.

Clymer, who had followed the deputy marshal's movements with interest, gave a shout which was echoed by Rochester and Dr. Stone, who returned at that moment.

"Good God!" gasped Clymer, shaken out of his accustomed calm. "Jimmie Turnbull!"

The deputy marshal eyed the startled men.

"You don't mean—" he stammered, and paused.

For answer Dr. Stone straightened the dead man and removed the wig.

"James Turnbull," he said gravely, and turning, addressed Rochester, who had dropped down on the nearest chair. "Cashier of the Metropolis Trust Company, Rochester, and your roommate, masquerading as a burglar."

CHAPTER II. THE GAME OF CONSEQUENCES

[Table of Contents](#)

Rochester did not appear to hear Dr. Stone's words. With eyes half starting from their sockets he sat staring at the dead man, completely oblivious of the others' presence. After watching him for a moment the physician turned briskly to the dazed deputy marshal.

"Summon the coroner," he directed. "We cannot move the body until he comes."

His curt tone brought the official's wits back with a jump and he made for the exit, only to be stopped at the threshold by a sandy-haired man just entering the room.

At the word coroner, Rochester raised himself from his bent attitude and brushed his hand across his eyes.

"No need for a coroner to diagnose the case," he objected. "Poor Turnbull always said he would go off like that."

Stone moved nearer. "Like that?" he questioned, pointing to the still figure. "Explain yourself, Rochester. Did Turnbull expect to die here in this manner?"

"No—no—certainly not." The lawyer moistened his dry lips. "But when a man has angina pectoris he knows the end may come at any moment and in any place. Turnbull made no secret of suffering from that disease." Rochester turned toward Clymer. "You knew it."

Benjamin Clymer, who had been gazing alternately at the dead man and vaguely about the room, looked startled at the abrupt question.

"I knew Turnbull had bad attacks of the heart; we all knew it at the bank," he stated. "But I understood the disease had responded to treatment."

"There is no cure for angina pectoris," declared Rochester.

"No permanent cure," amended Stone, and would have added more, but Rochester stopped him.

"Now that you know Turnbull died of angina pectoris there is no necessity of sending for the coroner," Rochester spoke in haste, his words tumbling over each other. "I will go at once and communicate with an undertaker." But before he could rise from his chair the sandy-haired man, who had conducted a whispered conversation with the deputy marshal, advanced toward the group.

"Just a moment, gentlemen," he said, and turned back a lapel of his coat and displayed a metal badge. "I am Ferguson of the Central Office. Do you know the deceased?"

"He was my intimate friend," announced Rochester before his companions could reply to the detective's question, which was addressed to all. "Mr. Clymer, here, can tell you that Jimmie Turnbull, cashier of his bank, was well known in financial and social Washington."

"How came he here in this fix?" asked Ferguson with more force than grammatic clarity.

"A sudden heart attack—angina pectoris, you know," replied Rochester glibly, "with fatal results."

"I wasn't alluding to what killed him," Ferguson explained. "But why was the cashier of the Metropolis Trust Company," he looked questioningly at Clymer whom he knew quite well by sight, "and a social high-light, decked

out in these clothes and a wig, too?" leaning down, the better to examine the clothing on the dead man.

"He had just been held for the Grand Jury on a charge of house-breaking," volunteered the deputy marshal. "I reckon that brought on his heart-attack."

"True, true," agreed Rochester. "The excitement was too much for him."

"House-breaking" ejaculated the detective. "Dangerous sport for a man suffering with angina pectoris, aside from anything else. Who preferred charges?"

"The Misses McIntyre," answered the deputy marshal, to whom the question was addressed. "Like to interview them?"

"Yes."

"No, no!" Rochester was on his feet instantly. "There is no necessity to bring the twins out here—it's too tragic!"

"Tragic?" echoed Ferguson. "Why?"

"Why—why—Turnbull was arrested in their house," Rochester was commencing to stutter. "He was their friend —"

"Caught burglarizing, heh?" Ferguson's eyes glowed; the case already whetted his remarkably keen inquisitorial instinct which had gained him place and certain fame in the Washington police force. "Are the Misses McIntyre still in the building?"

"They were in the court room just before we brought Turnbull's body here," responded the deputy marshal. "I guess they are still waiting, eh, doctor?"

Stone, thus appealed to, nodded. "I agree with Mr. Rochester," he said, and the gravity of his manner

impressed Ferguson. "It is better for me to break the news of Mr. Turnbull's death to the young ladies before bringing them here. Therefore, with your permission, Ferguson"—He got no further.

Through the outer entrance of the room came Helen McIntyre and her sister Barbara, conducted by the same bowing patrolman who had ushered them into the court room an hour before.

"My God! Too late!" stammered Rochester under his breath, and he turned in desperation to Benjamin Clymer. The bank president's state of mind at the extraordinary masquerade and sudden death of his popular and trusted cashier bordered on shocked horror, which had made him a passive witness of the rapidly shifting scene. Rochester clutched his arm in his agitation. "Get the twins out of here—do something, man! Don't you know that Turnbull was in love with—"

His fervid whisper penetrated further than he realized and one of the McIntyre twins looked inquiringly in their direction. Clymer, more startled than his demeanor indicated, wondered if she had overheard Rochester's ejaculations, but whatever action the banker contemplated in response to the lawyer's appeal was checked by a scream from the girl on his right. With ashen face and trembling finger she pointed to Turnbull's body which suddenly confronted her as she walked forward.

"Who is it?" she gasped. "Babs, tell me!" And she held out her hand imploringly.

Her sister stepped to her side and bent over Turnbull. When she looked up her lips alone retained their color.

"Hush!" she implored, giving her sister a slight shake. "Hush! It is Jimmie Turnbull. Can you not see for yourself, dear?"

It seemed doubtful if Helen heard her; with attention wholly centered on the dead man she swayed on her feet, and Dr. Stone, thinking she was about to fall, placed a supporting arm about her.

"Do you not know Jimmie?" asked her sister. "Don't stare so, dearest." Her tone was pleading.

"Perhaps the young lady has some difficulty in recognizing Mr. Turnbull in his disguise," suggested Ferguson, who stood somewhat in the background but closely observing the scene.

"Disguise!" Helen raised her eyes and Ferguson, hardened as he had become to tragic scenes, felt a throb of pity as he caught the pent-up agony in her mute appeal.

"Yes, Miss," he said awkwardly. "The burglar you caught in your house was Mr. Turnbull in disguise."

Barbara McIntyre released her grasp of her sister's arm and collapsed on a chair. Stone, still supporting Helen, felt her muscles grow taut and an instant later she stepped back from his side and stood by her sister. As the two girls faced the circle of men, the likeness between them was extraordinary. Each had the same slight graceful figure, equal height; and feature for feature, coloring matching coloring, they were identical; their gowns, even, were cut on similar lines, only their hats varied in shape and color.

"Do I understand, gentlemen," Helen began, and her voice gained steadiness as she proceeded, "that the burglar

whom Officer O'Ryan and I caught lurking in our house was James Turnbull?"

"He was," answered Ferguson, and Stone, as the twins looked dumbly at him, confirmed the detective's statement with a brief, "Yes."

The silence that ensued was broken by Barbara rising to her feet.

"Jimmie won his wager," she announced. Her gaze did not waver before the concentrated regard of the men facing her. "He broke into our house—but, oh, how can I pay my debt to him now that he is dead!"

"Hush!" Helen laid a cautioning hand on her sister's arm as the latter's voice gained in shrillness, the shrillness of approaching hysteria.

"I am all right, Helen." Barbara waved her away impatiently. "What caused Jimmie's death?"

"Angina pectoris," declared Rochester. "Too much excitement brought on a fatal attack." Barbara nodded dazedly. "I knew he had heart trouble, but—" She stepped toward Turnbull and her voice quivered with feeling. "Don't leave Jimmie lying there; take him to his room, doctor," turning entreatingly to Stone.

The physician looked at her compassionately. "I will, just as soon as the coroner views the body," he promised. "But come away now, Babs; this is no place for you and Helen." He signed to the deputy marshal to open the door as he walked across the room, Barbara keeping step with him, and her sister following in their wake. At the door Barbara paused and looked back.

"Will there be an inquest?" she asked.

"That's for the coroner to decide," responded Ferguson. "As long as Mr. Turnbull entered your house on a wager and died from an attack of angina pectoris the inquest is likely to be a mere formality. Ah, here is the coroner now," as a man paused in the doorway.

Helen McIntyre moved back from the door to make room for Coroner Penfield. Having had occasion to attend court that morning, he was passing the door when attracted by the group just inside the room. Courteously acknowledging Helen's act, Penfield stepped briskly across the threshold and stopped abruptly on catching sight of the lonely figure on the floor.

"Won't you hold an autopsy, Ferguson?" asked Clymer, breaking his long silence.

"No, sir, we never do when the cause of death is apparent," the detective bowed to Coroner Penfield. "Isn't that so, Coroner?"

Penfield nodded. "Unless the condition of the body indicates foul play or the relatives specially request it, we do not perform autopsies," he answered. "What has happened here?" and he gazed about with quickened interest.

"Mr. Turnbull, who masqueraded as a burglar on a wager with Miss McIntyre died suddenly from angina pectoris," explained the deputy marshal.

"Just a case of death from natural causes," broke in Rochester. "Please write out a permit for me to remove Turnbull's body, Dr. Penfield."

Helen McIntyre took a step forward. Her eyes, twice their accustomed size, shone brightly, in contrast to her dead

white face. Carefully avoiding her sister's glance she addressed the coroner.

“I must insist,” she began and stopped to control her voice. “As Mr. Turnbull's fiancée, I—” she faltered again. “I demand that an autopsy be held to determine the cause of his death.”

CHAPTER III. THE ROOM WITH THE SEVEN DOORS

[Table of Contents](#)

Mrs. Brewster regarded her surroundings with inward satisfaction. It would have taken a far more captious critic than the pretty widow to find fault with the large, high-ceilinged room in which she sat. The handsome carved Venetian furniture, the rich hangings and valuable paintings on the walls gave evidence of Colonel McIntyre's artistic taste and appreciation of the beautiful. Mrs. Brewster had never failed, during her visit to the McIntyre twins, to examine the rare curios in the carved cabinets and the tapestries on the walls, but that afternoon, with one eye on the clock and the other on her embroidery, she sat waiting in growing impatience for the interruption she anticipated.

The hands of the clock had passed the hour of five before the buzz of a distant bell brought her to her feet. Hurrying to the window she peeped between the curtains in time to see a stylish roadster electric glide down the driveway leading from the McIntyre residence and stop at the curb. As she turned to go back to her chair Dr. Stone was ushered into the library by the footman. Mrs. Brewster welcomed her cousin with frank relief.

"I have waited so impatiently for you," she confessed, making room for him to sit on the sofa by her side.

"I was detained, Margaret." Stone's voice was not over-cordial; three imperative telephone calls from her, coming at a moment when he had been engaged with a serious

case in his office, had provoked him. "Do you wish to see me professionally?"

"Indeed, I don't." She laughed frankly. "I am the picture of health."

Stone, observing her fine coloring and clear eyes, silently agreed with her. The widow made a charming picture in her modish tea-gown, and the physician, watching her with an appraising eye, acknowledged the beauty which had captivated all Washington. Mrs. Brewster had carried her honors tactfully, a fact which had gained her popularity even among the dowagers and match-making mothers who take an active part in Washington's social season.

"Then, Margaret, what do you wish to see me about?" Stone asked, after waiting without result for her to continue speaking.

She laughed softly. "You are the most practical of men," she said. "It would not have been so difficult to find a companion anxious to spend the whole afternoon with me for my sake alone."

"Colonel McIntyre, for instance?" he teased, and laughed amusedly at her heightened color. "Have a care, Margaret; McIntyre's flirtations are all very well, but he is the type of man to be deadly in earnest when once he falls in love."

"Thanks for your warning," Mrs. Brewster smiled, then grew serious. "I sent for you to ask about Jimmie Turnbull's death this morning. Barbara told me you accompanied them to the police court."

"Yes. Why weren't you with the girls?"

"Because I was told nothing of their trip to the police court until they had returned," she replied. "How horribly

tragic the whole affair is!" And a shiver she could not suppress crept down her spine.

"It is," agreed Stone. "What possessed Jimmie Turnbull to play so mad a trick?"

"His wager with Barbara."

Stone leaned a little nearer. "Have you learned the nature of that wager?" he asked, lowering his voice.

"No. Babs was in so hysterical a condition when she returned from the police court that she gave a very incoherent account of the whole affair, and she has kept her room ever since luncheon," explained Mrs. Brewster.

Stone looked puzzled. "I understood that Jimmie was attentive to Helen McIntyre and not to Barbara," he said. "But upon my word, Barbara appeared more overcome by Jimmie's death than Helen."

Mrs. Brewster did not reply at once; instead, she glanced carefully around. The room was generally the rallying place of the McIntyres. It stretched across almost the entire width of the house; the diamond-paned and recessed windows gave it a medieval air in keeping with its antique furniture, and the seven doors opening from it led, respectively, to the large dining room beyond, a morning room, billiard room, the front and back halls, and the Italian loggia which overlooked the stretch of ground between the McIntyre residence and its neighbor on the north. Apparently, she and Dr. Stone had the room to themselves.

"I cannot answer your question with positiveness," she stated. "Frankly, Jimmie appeared impartial in his attentions to the twins. When he wasn't with Barbara he was with Helen, and vice versa."