

*Detective Dale of Scotland Yard Uses a Little Yankee Bluff and a Lot of Thinking to Turn Suicide Into Murder!*



The

"Suicide, without doubt," Parr shrugged

# LETHAL LIGHT

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“JUST listen to this, Sergeant!” cried Detective-constable Dale with enthusiasm, looking up from his book. “The Mohammedans—”

The Spartan furnishings of the C.I.D. room at Farrow Street station resounded to a double thump as Detective-sergeant Parr’s ample feet dropped from the table to the floor. His ancient swivel chair squeaked in protest as he swung around to glare at his youthful subordinate.

“For God’s sake, Dale!” he growled. “Will you put that confounded ‘Believe It or Not’ thing away? Or at least stop blating to me about it.”

Dale’s round and boyishly ruddy face looked distressed.

“But this might be a good thing to know, Sergeant,” he protested. “It says here that the Mohammedans—”

“Blast the bloody Mohammedans!” roared Parr. “If you’re so keen on

gathering miscellaneous information, m'lad, you'd better to be memorizing the mugs of crooks in the Gazette instead of reading that Yankee trash."

THE door of the private office swung open suddenly. The spare form of the Divisional Detective-inspector entered, a slip of paper in his hand.

"A little less row out here, if you don't mind," he snapped, surveying the stout Parr and the burly young constable disapprovingly. "Here, Parr, get down to forty-five Graythorne Road. Man found dead in bed there—chap named Monro—looks like suicide. The constable on the beat was called in, and he reports he found the door bolted on the inside and room full of gas. But one never knows. Take Dale with you; good experience for him."

"Yes, sir," said Parr, reaching for his hat. "Come along, Dale."

Dale obeyed eagerly. A homicide case, maybe a murder! As the D.D.I. said, you never knew. This was luck, his first week in plain clothes, after almost two years of walking beat, and here he was sent out on a homicide! His blue eyes glowed with enthusiasm as he hurried after Parr.

From a window of the charge-room, the D.D.I. watched them go.

"That young Dale looks a bit odd in plain clothes," he remarked to the superintendent commanding the division. "Typical uniformed constable type—big, ruddy, slow-but-sure sort. Yet there's something inside that big head of his, I think."

"Yankee blood in him, isn't there?" the other asked.

"His mother was an American, I believe," the D.D.I. answered. "And the lad was brought up over there. Makes him rather an unusual chap. British beef and Yankee brass, what?"

"Should go far in the C.I.D.," the

superintendent chuckled.

Graythorne Road proved to be a commonplace thoroughfare lined with dingy brick houses of the solidly respectable type so dear to the solidly respectable British middle class. A middle-aged maid-servant opened the door of Number 45 at Parr's knock.

"From the police, sir?" she sniffled. "Yus, sir. Go right up. 'E—'e's on the second floor, sir. The constable's still 'ere. Ow—the poor old master!"

Parr and Dale climbed two flights of dark and narrow stairs to a musty hallway still strongly odorous of gas. At an open door stood a police-constable in uniform.

"Hullo, Tompkins," said Parr. "What's the lay here?"

Without waiting for the constable to answer, he walked into the guarded room, Dale following.

In a rumpled bed lay the body of the dead man, an open book beside him. He was not a lovely sight. His wrinkled face was congested, his eyes open and protruding; unkempt grey hair straggled from beneath the edges of a soiled flannel night cap. His arms were outflung as though in a final convulsion; his jaw, narrow and out jutting, was clamped tight as though grimly resolved to shut out the poisonous fumes to the last.

"Tough-looking old codger, eh?" muttered Constable Tompkins.

Dale nodded. He was looking at the three men in the room. A fussy, bespectacled little chap whom he knew for the divisional surgeon, Doctor Rhoades—a blond young man in a magnificent wine-colored dressing gown—and a shivering, staring youth in undershirt and trousers. Light streamed into the room from two windows, one opening on the blank brick wall of the adjacent house, some twelve feet away, the other overlooking the street.

"Death from asphyxiation—dead about

three or four hours," the police surgeon said to Parr.

Dale transferred his attention to the room itself, remembering the instructions of that great man, Chief Inspector King, whose class for rookie detectives Dale had attended at the "Yard" the previous afternoon. He must note everything; no detail must be too insignificant to escape careful observation.

The sun was shining through the street window. Its rays fell upon a small rug of gorgeous design—an odd note of splendid luxury in that drab room—placed on the floor just beneath the window. Over the bed at the opposite side of the room was the gas jet from which the fatal fumes had come, within easy reach of the occupant. In the center of the ceiling was an electric fixture with empty bulb sockets. From one of these sockets a wire ran to a small electric fan, which stood on the dressing table near the bed. A chair and a flat desk heaped with papers and books were the only other furnishings.

THE room was chill, heavy with the odor of gas. Dale shivered as his eyes came back to the bed. The stark reality was different from the wonderful "cases" of his imagination. Parr questioned the police-constable.

Mellish, the maid, had called Tompkins in from the street. He had found the hall full of gas, the door of the bedroom locked and bolted from the inside. He had broken down the door, opened a window to free the room of gas, turned off the gas jet which was still flowing steadily, made a cursory examination of the dead man, and called in to the station.

Both windows had been closed and fastened. Neither was accessible from the outside.

"Suicide, without a doubt," Parr shrugged. "I'll just ask a few further particulars. You, sir," he said to the young man in the elegant dressing gown, "are a relative of the deceased, eh?"

"No," was the answer in a pleasant voice. "I'm Alfred Brayson, Mr. Monroe's secretary. This gentleman," he indicated the shivering youth with a slight gesture, "is Mr. Monroe's nephew and nearest relative, Mr. James Monroe."

"Thank you." Parr recorded these facts. "What was the dead man's business? Any known reason for suicide?"

Deferentially Brayson glanced at the nephew. James Monroe dropped his eyes and said nothing.

"None that I know of," Brayson said after a pause. "Mr. Gordon Monroe was a dealer in rare Oriental *objets d'art*—jewelry, porcelains, bronzes. He handled very few items in a year, but those were of the finest. He was an expert in his line, having lived many years in the East. From my knowledge of his business, I would say that he was quite prosperous."

"Was Mr. Monroe married?"

"No."

"Any affairs with women?" asked Parr bluntly.

"None whatever."

"And his health?"

"Excellent for a man of his age."

"Who was the last person to see Mr. Monroe alive?" asked Parr suddenly.

"I suppose I was," answered Brayson. "I was in this room with him last night until about midnight going over various business matters. Nothing out of the ordinary—the papers are still there on the desk."

"Ah! And you noticed nothing odd in his manner?"

"Nothing. When I left him he was already in bed, with his book as usual,

ready to read himself to sleep. He did that almost every night."

"Reading—by gas light?" frowned Parr, glancing at the empty electric sockets.

"Yes. It was his way. He didn't like electric light—claimed it hurt his eyes. Mr. Monro was, in many ways, very eccentric and old-fashioned.

Parr nodded.

"I see. Can you give me any other information that might throw light on Mr. Monro's motive for killing himself? Any unusual happenings of late?"

The secretary looked thoughtful.

"Well, Sergeant," he said, "I fancy the most unusual occurrence has been the recent return of Mr. James Monro, here, who has been abroad for several years—ever since, in fact, he ran away as a boy from the school in which his uncle had placed him.

Parr glanced sharply at young Monro.

"You had come back to live with your uncle, Mr. Monro?" he asked.

"If he'd have me," the young man said sullenly.

"Was he glad to see you?"

"I couldn't tell. He took me in."

Parr snapped his note-book shut.

"That seems to be all. Tompkins, you'd better stay here until the coroner arrives. Come on, Dale, unless there's anything you—eh? What's that?"

The maid servant, puffing and blowing, appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. Brayson, sir!"

"Well, Mellish? What is it?" asked the secretary.

"Mr. Jolley just rang up, sir. 'E's comin' 'round hat once."

"You—told him?"

"Yus, sir."

"Very well. Thank you, Mellish."

The maid, casting a scared glance at the still form on the bed, sidled out.

"Who is Mr. Jolley?" Parr inquired.

"A friend of poor Mr. Monro," replied the secretary.

Dale was thinking. Parr's query to him had been intended as mild irony. Yet there *was* something.

"Mr. Brayson," he asked suddenly, "can you tell me why Mr. Monro was so interested in this book?"

HE picked up from the bed the open book which had been lying there all this while. It was, as Dale had already perceived, an expensively bound and beautifully illuminated copy of Sale's translation of the Koran. There were many marginal notations in English.

Brayson smiled.

"Mr. Monro," he answered, "was a Mohammedan."

"What!" gasped Parr.

"It is quite true," Brayson answered. "He became, as he put it, a convert to Islam, while residing in Baghdad some years ago. He was most devout in his religious observances."

"I *thought* that was a prayer rug, and that window faces toward Mecca," said Dale. "And I'd read somewhere about there being several Englishmen living in London who had embraced the Mohammedan religion."

"Yes, you would collect facts like that," chuckled Parr. "Well, with a queer kink of the sort in his mind, it's easier to understand how he came to kill himself. Religion takes odd turns at times."

"It does, indeed," murmured Brayson, moving easily toward the door, as though to show his visitors out. The police surgeon had already departed. Parr followed Brayson down the stairs, Dale at his heels. As for young Monro, he had sat down in the chair, and was staring dully at his dead uncle.

"There's nothing more I can do for

you, gentlemen?" Brayson inquired when they had reached the lower hallway.

"Nothing, thank you. I suppose you'll be busy enough closing up Mr. Monro's affairs," Parr answered. "By the way, I suppose young Monro inherits the estate?"

"I imagine so," Brayson replied. "He is certainly the only relative, and Mr. Monro has never made a will that I know of. Good day, gentlemen."

"Good day, and thank you," Parr answered. "Please hold yourself in readiness to testify if the coroner requires you."

"Of course." Brayson bowed them out, closed the door behind them.

"That bird," said Dale, on the brownstone steps, "is glad to see the last of us."

"So would I be, if I had a dead man in a house and cops nosing round," answered Parr good-naturedly, as they descended to the sidewalk.

"I'm not satisfied, Sergeant," said Dale determinedly. "There's something wrong in that house. In the first place—"

"Steady on, my son," Parr checked him. He glanced at Dale keenly. "Want to go back?"

"Yes!"

"All right. I'm going down to the Yard; I'll give you an hour. See what you can do, boy. Maybe you'll make a name for yourself." And Parr walked off, grinning.

Dale turned back to Number 45. It was Brayson who opened at his ring.

"Yes?"

"Sergeant Parr sent me back, sir. Wants me to stay for the coroner," said Dale, hat in hand.

"I see," said Brayson, moving aside with some reluctance. "I rather thought you fellows were through."

The door-bell rang again at that instant. The secretary opened it to a white-

haired, benevolent-looking old man with the bright, quick eyes of a bird.

"Good morning, Mr. Jolley," said Brayson as the newcomer came in.

"My poor friend! My poor old friend!" Jolley twittered, his eyes going from Brayson to Dale and back again. "Brayson, this is terrible. Why did he do it?"

"I don't know, sir," Brayson answered. "Er—Mr. Jolley, this is Detective—er—"

"Detective-constable Dale," Dale supplied.

"Nonsense—all nonsense," protested Jolley. "My good man, I have been Mr. Monro's solicitor for twenty years, and I assure you that there is nothing in his affairs which requires the attention of the police."

Dale glanced at Brayson. He was wondering why Brayson had told Sergeant Parr that Mr. Jolley was Mr. Monro's friend instead of his solicitor.

"By the Lord Harry, Monro's death comes at a fortunate moment for you, Brayson!" Jolley exclaimed.

Brayson looked completely astonished. Dale's attention became riveted. What was this?

"You knew that Gordon Monro was about to change his will?" asked Jolley.

"I didn't even know he'd made a will," Brayson answered at once. "He did not confide his personal affairs to me; only business matters."

A business secretary—yet living in the house. The incongruity struck Dale forcibly.

"So?" cried Jolley. "Then permit me to inform you that you are Mr. Monro's sole heir."

"Good God!" cried Brayson, seizing Jolley by one arm. "What's this you say?" He was, Dale thought, rather overdoing the surprise act.

"I was to call on him this morning to

arrange a new will, leaving the bulk of his estate to his nephew, and leaving you an annuity of two hundred pounds. But that is at an end, at an end. You inherit everything. I trust you will do the handsome thing by James."

"Of course," said Brayson. "Why—why, Mr. Jolley—this is all a great surprise to me! And with poor Mr. Monro lying dead upstairs, it scarcely seems the time to think of such things."

"May I see him?" asked Jolley.

"If Scotland Yard has no objections?" Brayson was almost offensively polite.

"None whatever," smiled Dale. "I'll go along."

**B**UT he stopped on the first landing, for all that. He saw the maid, Mellish, coming along the hall, and it occurred to him that no one had bothered to ask Mellish any questions.

"It was you who smelled the gas first, wasn't it?" he inquired as the woman came nearer.

"Yuh, sir."

"When did you last see Mr. Monro alive?" Dale asked.

"About eleven o'clock, or per'aps a bit lyter," was the answer. "I took 'im in a bit o' tea an' toast, 'im an' Mister Brayson. Workin' over a lot o' pypers, they were."

"Gay little tea party, eh?"

"Not gay, no, sir. Orful glum-like an' solemn, seemed to me. Both of 'em."

"Did you hear them say anything to each other while you were in the room?"

"Seems like Mr. Monro said somefin about Mister Jolley bein' 'ere in the mornin' to myke some changes. An' Mr. Brayson said: 'Werry well, sir. Since you wish it.' And I didn't 'ear no more, 'cause I went dahnstairs."

Dale stood quite still. So Jolley's coming had been known to Brayson the night before. And the purpose of it.

**T**HEN Brayson had lied about the will. He had known, all along. Why had he lied? To cover his own guilt? But Parr had called it suicide, and it certainly looked like suicide.

"Mellish," said Dale, "when did you come for the tea things? There are none in the bedroom now."

"Mr. Brayson brought 'em dahn, 'imself, sir," Mellish replied.

"Where is your bedroom?"

"Right 'ere in front, sir. 'Ere on the first floor."

"Funny place for a servant's room."

"Yus, sir. But 'e wanted it so, the marster I mean."

"Why?"

"So if 'e wanted anyfing 'e could call me by 'ammerin' on the floor, sir."

"You heard Brayson come down, eh?"

"Yus, sir. 'Twas just as the hall clock was strikin' twelve. An' then I 'eard Mr. Monro at 'is 'eathen prayers, Gawd 'elp 'im. I went to sleep myself. I woke up once durin' the night an' 'eard the marster snorin'. Then come mornin'—and I smelt the gas."

"You heard him at his prayers, you say? *After* Mr. Brayson left? And snoring later?"

"Yus, sir."

"He must have gone to sleep over his book, as Mr. Brayson tells me he usually did?"

"Right, sir. 'Twas 'is w'y."

Then Monro, having gone to sleep quite naturally, must have awakened later on and determined to kill himself? It seemed extremely unlikely to Dale. Had Monro had a later visitor? If so, how had the door been bolted from the inside?

"To hear all that," Dale remarked, "you must have unusually thin floors and partitions in this house."

"No, sir. Come 'ere, I'll show yer."

The maid took him into her room. In

one wall was a grated opening.

“ ‘Ere, sir. The sound comes dahn through this. There’s one in the marster’s room upstairs, one in the parlor below, and one dahn in the basement ‘allway. All on the same shaft. ‘Twas put in long before we ‘ad the ‘ouse, as a ventilatin’ system, or part o’ one. It’s never worked since *we* ‘ad it.”

“Did Mister Monroe usually snore?”

“Orl night long, sir, always.”

“One more thing, Mellish. Where does Mr. Brayson sleep?”

Mellish permitted herself a sour smile.

“ ‘E sleeps in the basement bedroom, sir. Should be servant’s quarters, but since the marster wanted me ‘ere, ‘e ‘ad to tyke what was left.”

“And Mister James Monroe?”

“ ‘E’s been sleepin’ with Mister Brayson, sir. Wytin’ for the marster to buy a spare mattress for one o’ the other beds. ‘E was a bit close in some w’ys, was the marster.”

“Thank you, Mellish.”

Dale went upstairs. He wanted another look at the death room. Brayson and the solicitor were still there. Nodding at them, he examined the gas jet. It was the ordinary wall fixture operated by a thumb-valve which turned stiffly. The wall itself was solid, papered with a thick grey cartridge-paper heavy with undisturbed dust. No chance of any secret panels through which a murderer might reach stealthily to turn on the gas. Dale chided himself for his fantastic imagination.

This was suicide. It was impossible that it could be anything else. Parr was right. Dale would do better to defer to an experienced superior than to be trying to invent impossible theories for every simple little case he encountered.

And yet, who had ever heard of a man who awoke from a sound sleep to kill himself? It wasn’t natural. And Brayson

had lied about the will. Between the time Brayson had been informed of the change in his prospects, and the time at which the change would have become irrevocable, Monroe had died. Intending to change his will in the morning, Gordon Monroe had killed himself the night before. So considered, the idea was ridiculous. It just didn’t make sense.

As Parr had done, Dale examined the windows. As routes for an escaping murderer, they were clearly impossible. Moreover, both had been latched.

Noting Brayson watching him, a rather sardonic glint in his eyes, Dale asked a question:

“Did Mr. Monroe always sleep with his windows closed?”

“In cold weather, yes. He could bear neither extreme heat nor cold.”

Dale walked to the head of the bed again, looked at the mute, deadly gas jet, at the bed, the dead man, the dressing table, the electric fan. He noted that the younger Monroe was no longer in the room. Jolley sat at the bedside, silently mourning his friend.

Dale went slowly downstairs, recapitulating the facts which he had acquired. Mellish was the only servant in the house. On the upper floor Gordon Monroe had been the only occupant. On the next floor there were four bedrooms, formerly used by various relatives but now empty save for the front one used by Mellish. On the ground floor were the usual living rooms, with Victorian furnishings. The kitchen and scullery were in the rear. There was a large basement bedroom, which Brayson and young Monroe had shared, a bathroom also, and storerooms.

Dale went down to the basement. Moving quietly along the narrow, dark hallway, where a gas jet burned dully in the damp gloom, he came to the door of

the basement bedroom. It was ajar. He pushed it gently open. Seated on the bed, his back to the door, was James Monroe.

"Mr. Monroe!" said Dale.

The boy turned slowly.

"I want to ask you a few questions," Dale announced. "Had you heard your uncle was going to change his will? In your favor?"

"No. I knew nothing of his will."

"You thought, perhaps, that he had no will and that you were the heir at law?" probed Dale.

"I knew nothing of it, I tell you!" The boy's voice rose shrilly. "I never thought about it, and he told me nothing—nothing. He just took me in, as he might a dog. Told me to sleep here, told Mellish to feed me. He never even asked me where I'd been, what I'd done, how I lived, whether I'd suffered or starved."

It sounded as if young Monroe was telling the truth. He did not seem such a practised dissembler as Brayson. The detective changed his tactics.

"**W**ERE you in bed before Brayson last night?" Dale asked.

The other nodded in his sullen way.

"Long before. But I couldn't sleep. I just lay listening to the cursed clock striking the hours."

"When did Brayson come to bed?"

"About midnight."

Here was corroboration of Mellish's story.

"Did he say anything?"

"No. He crawled over me to his place, lay down and went to sleep."

"Crawled *over* you?"

"Yes. He slept next the wall, always."

Dale seemed to have reached an impasse. When Brayson had left the room on the third floor, at midnight, Monroe had been alive. Mellish had heard him snoring, later. And here was Brayson checked into

bed and asleep, by James Monroe's testimony. According to the police surgeon, Gordon Monroe had died between three and four in the morning.

There was one possibility.

"Did Brayson leave the bed again last night?"

"Yes. Twice!"

The answer set Dale's blood pounding through his veins again. One step closer to his man. His certainty was growing.

"You awoke both times?"

"I didn't sleep, I tell you. I don't know why."

"But Brayson thought you were asleep?"

"I don't know. I suppose he did; he got out very quietly, over the foot of the bed."

"What time did he get up?"

"About two o'clock, and again just a little after three."

"Do you know where he went and how long he was gone?"

"Of course I know. He went to the bathroom at the end of the hall. He wasn't gone more than two minutes each time; I could hear his slippers shuffling on the floor, coming and going."

"You could swear to that?"

"Yes."

The monosyllable was uncompromising. Here was an alibi, hard and unbreakable, for Brayson.

"And after this second trip he stayed in bed until—"

"Until we heard Mellish screaming something about gas this morning. We went up to find the constable battering at Uncle Gordon's door." The boy shuddered.

**D**ALE arose, went to the hall door, looked up and down. At that moment Mellish appeared, coming out of the scullery. He could just see her in the dim gas light. A flash of inspiration came to

him.

“Stay where you are a moment, please, Mr. Monro!” he requested, and hurried along the hall toward the maid, who was rummaging in a broom closet.

“Mellish!”

“Lawks! It’s the police agyne!” The woman smiled at him pleasantly enough.

“Mellish,” demanded Dale, “when Mr. Monro fell asleep while reading at night, did he ever leave the gas burning?”

“Many’s the time, sir. Many’s the time I’ve come up in the mornin’ and found it goin’. A wicked wyste, I calls it. Dangerous, too, only that ‘e never ‘ad a window open. Afeared o’ the night, sir, ‘e was.”

“Show me, Mellish,” Dale requested, “where the main valve is that controls the gas supply of the house.”

“Right this w’y, sir.”

Dale had been certain she’d go along the hall toward the bathroom. Instead, she went toward the other end of the hall. Coming to a large iron door, she produced a bunch of keys from her apron pocket, turned one in a ponderous lock with much scraping and squeaking. She pulled open the creaking door and revealed an ill-smelling cellar, lighted by a mere slit of cobwebbed window some distance away. Beneath this window was the gas meter, and beside it was the control valve, which had a pentagonal stem requiring a special spanner to turn it.

“Have you a handle for this valve, Mellish?”

“No, sir. We ‘as to send to the gas company for a man when we wants to turn orf the gas.”

“Do you always keep this door locked? And the key in your apron pocket?”

“Yes, sir. I keep all the keys to the ‘ouse on my ring.”

“Is there another key to this door?”

“No, sir.”

“You had your keys safe last night?”

“I sleeps with ‘em under my pillow, sir.”

Dale went back into the hall. His house of cards had tumbled down again. He had thought that Brayson might have waited till Monro was asleep, then turned off the gas at the main valve, thus extinguishing the light, and turned it on again to let the gas flow out into Monro’s bedroom.

There was, of course, the possibility that Mellish might be lying—shielding Brayson, but Dale didn’t think so. She was an excellent example of the dull, careful, honest, painstaking English maid servant.

“Will you come with me a moment?” he asked her.

HE went down the hall, past the bedroom, to the bathroom. He wanted to see what Brayson could have done in the vicinity of the bathroom. But there seemed nothing. The bath itself had only the usual fixtures, and the ventilator opening high in the wall. A faint murmur came from it—voices, Dale thought. Could this be the explanation of Brayson’s first trip and immediate return?

Had he listened here for the sound of Monro’s snoring, and hearing nothing, returned to bed? It was possible.

Experimenting, Dale found that he could easily look out the window and up between the Monro house and the adjoining house. At night that uncurtained window in Monro’s bedroom would let the gas light shine brightly on the wall of the next house. Here in the basement bathroom Brayson could know, as certainly as if he were in the room above, whether Monro was asleep and whether the light still burned. But he could not, in the time he had been out of bed, have reached that master valve. At least, Dale could not see how.

He stepped out into the hall again

where Mellish was dutifully waiting. The hall itself seemed barren of possibilities. To the left was the door opening into the lower entry, from which a grated gate gave access to the area and the street.

There was nothing else—no sign of a gas pipe.

Then he saw a small door about one foot square in the wall near the entry.

Painted over, buff still distinct, were the letters:

L. & H. C. E. L. Co.

Meaning, Dale knew, London and Home Counties Electric Lighting Company. Curious, he tried the little door. It was locked.

“What’s this? Fuse box?” he asked the maid.

“That’s right, sir.”

“Have you a spare key?”

“No, sir. The key ort to be in it.”

He went out into the area and peered up and down the street. Luck was with him. Tompkins, patrolling the beat, was just turning the corner.

Dale whistled softly and beckoned. “Where’s the nearest branch office of the electric lighting company, Tompkins?”

“On Wellington Bridge Road, ‘ardly more than round the corner,” was the prompt reply.

“Trot round there and get a key for the fuse box at this address, will you? Tell ‘em it’s urgent police business.” Tompkins nodded and went off briskly.

Dale returned to his examination of the bathroom. He noted towels on the rack, a few shaving things in a small cabinet, a toothbrush or two.

Painstakingly he got down on his knees and looked under the tub.

“Hullo!” He reached in and groped for the object he could faintly see. It was a glove of very thin rubber.

“Ever see this before, Mellish?” he asked, rising from his knees.

“Why, yus, sir—it’s mine. I ‘ave a pair of ‘em. They syve yer ‘ands w’en yer usin’ strong soaps for scrubbin’, an’ the like.”

“What’s it doing under the tub?”

“I don’t know, sir. Usually I leave me gloves in the scullery, sir, on the tubs.”

There was a quiet knock on the entry door. The knocker proved to be Constable Tompkins with the key. Dale opened the door of the little fuse box. Within were six round fuse plugs, placed in pairs.

“You know about these, Mellish?”

“Yes, sir. Them first two are for the basement an’ the ground floor; these two are for the first floor, an’ these two for the second.”

“Mr. Monro’s floor, eh? Hm. This one looks pretty black. Burned out, I should say.”

He removed the bad fuse, examined it, dropped it into his pocket and took a good fuse from the first-floor pair.

This he inserted in the empty second-floor fuse socket.

From the bathroom he heard the echo of a startled exclamation down the ventilator shaft.

“Stay here at the door. Let no one out,” he told Tompkins, and went up the stairs two at a time. He was puffing a little when he reached the death room.

As he burst in he became aware of a faint humming sound. In the room was Jolley. He was staring at the electric fan which was running at top speed, a mere blur of brassy metal inside its wire shield.

“It just started up suddenly,” marveled the solicitor.

Dale bent over the fan; saw that the controlling lever was at the high speed position. Wrapping a handkerchief round his hand, Dale shut it off. Then he turned on and lit the gas jet, and started the fan again.

The gas flame flickered and went out—for the fan was aimed right at it.

Dale whistled, his eyes round with sudden comprehension.

“Where’s Brayson?” he asked.

“He just went down to meet the coroner. They’ll be in the parlor, I fancy.”

But Dale didn’t go into the parlor, where he could hear the coroner and Brayson discussing the advisability of getting together a jury to view the body.

He stopped in the hallway, near the open parlor door, and drawing from his pocket a small bottle containing a red liquid, he carefully poured one or two drops on the burnt-out brass fuse which he had removed from the second-floor socket in the fuse box.

He could hear Brayson coming toward him across the parlor floor; he did not look up when the steps stopped at the door, not even when a sharp intake of breath came to him.

“What are you doing now, Inspector?” Brayson was trying to be jocular, but his voice shook a little.

Dale looked at him at last. Brayson was still wearing his maroon robe.

His face was white; his eyes held a venomous glitter. They were fixed on the brass fuse.

“I’m just treating this with formula X-455,” Dale replied. “New thing our chemical department has worked out, down at the Yard. It fixes fingerprints on metal—even when they’ve been made through a rubber glove.”

**B**RAYSON made a choking sound and took a step forward.

“All damn nonsense!” he snarled, deep in his throat.

“It’s true—believe it or not!” smiled Dale, including in his cheerful grin a gentleman in a morning coat who came out of the parlor behind Brayson. “You’re

the coroner, sir? I’m Detective-constable Dale. Would you mind coming up to view the body? I’ve a little experiment with an electric fan and a gas jet—”

He flung himself suddenly upon Brayson, who had leaped for the street door. There was a moment of savage struggle; Brayson fought like a cornered panther. Then Tompkins clattered up the stairs. There was a click, and Brayson was handcuffed.

Dale stood back, still smiling, jingling another fuse plug and a key in his hands.

“You really shouldn’t have kept these in the pockets of your dressing-gown, Mr. Brayson,” he protested. “Though I suppose you never had a good chance to dispose of them.”

Brayson dropped suddenly to the oak hall seat and buried his face in his manacled hands.

Back in the Farrow Street Station, with Brayson and Brayson’s signed confession safely under lock and key, Dale grinned across the C.I.D. room at the slightly crestfallen Parr.

“A neat scheme,” he summed up for Parr’s benefit. “Brayson thought he was absolutely safe. He had only to put a burned-out fuse in the second-floor socket, then when the opportunity offered, turn the fan on full and train it on the gas jet. Who’d notice that in winter? And last night he waited until Monro read himself to sleep as usual. Can’t you see him listening at that ventilator for snores, looking up to see if the light was on? Then just a step to the fuse box to install a good fuse—and the trick was done. On his second trip to the bathroom, Brayson swapped the fuse plugs again.”

“And a plainer case of suicide, on the face of it, I never saw,” admitted Parr. “What the devil made you suspicious, lad?”

“YOU should have listened to me this morning, Sergeant,” said Dale cheerfully. “I was trying to tell you something about the Mohammedans, you remember? It said that Mohammedan countries have the lowest suicide rate in the world, because it is strictly against the laws laid down by the Prophet for any of the faithful to destroy the life which Allah has given them. That’s why I couldn’t believe that Monro, a Mohammedan convert, had killed himself.”

“Well, I’ll be damned!” said Parr. “And what was this nonsense about formula X-455 and bringin’ out fingerprints through a rubber glove?”

“That,” smiled Dale, “was just what you’d call a coarse Yankee bluff.”

Parr reddened.

“All right,” he growled. “But what *was* in that bottle?”

“Toothache drops, believe it or I not, that I found in Brayson’s medicine chest,” answered Dale.