

An Odd Story of Justice
From London Society

CHAPTER I.

No doubt there were some in the time of the Queen of Sheba who carped at the wisdom of Solomon; and so there were people in the city in the days that immediately followed the American War who had something to say against the firm of Parkman, Bubb & Parkman, of No. 17 Change Alley. They could not deny that it was an old-established concern, for Parkmans' had been trading between London and Calcutta in almost the early days of John Company Bahadur. And they could not say that it was not prosperous, for its name stood high in its own branch of business; and it had never been known to go in for rash speculations or risky profits. But what people did say, and there were old fogies on 'Change never tired of repeating it, was that there was too much young blood in Parkmans'. "Go into Parkmans'," these would say, "and you'll have a young man to deal with, unless you have the luck to do with old Parkman!" treatment which they seemed to think most offensive. And of course when old Parkman died rather suddenly, these carpers were still more triumphant. There was no saving clause now when they stated the treatment you might expect at Parkmans'. For the second partner was only a sleeping partner—sleeping, it was currently reported on a fine estate in Ross-shire—and young Parkman—well, he was young Parkman. Then Critchlow, the cashier, was young for a cashier, being under forty; and Crisp, the head clerk, was very young, being something over thirty. And altogether Parkmans' might expect, for some time, to come to hear a good deal about its young blood.

It was 2 o'clock on a Saturday some three weeks after old Mr. Parkman's death. In the large office the clerks were putting away their books and getting down their hats. There was a murmur of talk about the river, or Wimbledon, whatever amusement they severally had in view for the afternoon, when a tall man, dressed in dark mourning and wearing his hat, entered from an inner room. The noise sank to a respectful hum. He was a handsome man, with a short, fair moustache and light blue eyes. He nodded pleasantly to one or two of the clerks, and walked through to where a glass case in the corner indicated the sanctum of the head clerk. Crisp, a small, slender, dark-complexioned man, looked up peevishly as the chief entered, but seeing who it was would have got down from his stool.

"Sit still," the merchant said, laying his hand lightly on the other's shoulder to stay him. "I am only waiting for the carriage. It is more pleasant here than in the outer office. You are not going about your usual business to-day, I think, Crisp, eh?"

The clerk's face flushed.

"No, Mr. James," he said, "I am not."

"What, haven't you made it up with her yet?"

The younger man shook his head, and then broke out suddenly with:

“And what is more, sir, my temper has been so bad ever since Critchlow found out this deficiency that I should be afraid of making matters worse. I don’t wonder she could not stand it; it is no good my trying to make it up with her till I have cleared that up. Then I shall be myself again, and can look her in the face. As I told you, sir, I shall come back at 4 and go through the books quietly by myself. I shall never forget your kindness, sir, never! But Critchlow is so trying! There’s not a clerk in the office does not know that there is something the matter with my accounts.”

Crisp spoke with deep feeling, and it was evident that the other believed him.

“Don’t think too much of it!” he said kindly. “If it cannot be explained, I shall still trust you. It is but a small amount. Try to hit upon the blot.”

“Try!” cried the head clerk; “I’ve tried again and again.”

He passed his hands through his hair until it stood on end, and with his bright, black eyes, gave him a very wild look.

“Well, do your best,” the merchant answered, drawing on his gloves. “You know my poor father had every confidence in you—as he had in your father—and I have the same, Crisp.”

And then he went, the young man looking after him with grateful, almost worshiping, eyes. There were few men in his position and at his age so invariably kind and considerate to their inferiors as was James Parkman. Old Parkman had been the same; and father and son enjoyed a rare popularity in the office. It was whispered, but probably there was no truth in the malicious rumor, that they never quarreled save with one another.

Crisp sat for some minutes pondering, and, if his face was any index of his thoughts, upon some unpleasant subject. Then he arose, and taking his hat, went into the outer office. There were still two or three clerks there, detained by some small matters, and talking to them in a sharp, rasping voice, was a stout, black-whiskered, short faced man.

“Not found it out yet?” he said to Crisp in a sneering tone. He was Critchlow, the cashier.

“No,” retorted the head clerk, “nor likely to while there is so much noise in the office!”

“Well, if I were you, I’d stay and find it out, if I staid until to-morrow. But it is fine to be you. I’ve got to stay until 4 or thereabouts, error or no error.”

“I think,” said Crisp, wrathfully, seeing the clerks upon the broad grin, “that I should make it hot for you if I staid long with you anywhere!”

And without waiting to hear the cashier's retort or the burst of laughter which his own excited answer evoked from the youngsters, he passed out and ran down the stairs and through the quiet alley into the street.

CHAPTER II.

It was 4:30 when Crisp, after threading diverse of the city ways, in which the crowds were now rapidly lessening, turned again into Change alley. A look of depression—a haggard, careworn look—was upon the young man's face as he crossed it, his head bent down. Suddenly a sweet, glad cry—oh! So out of place there—struck upon his ear, and he stopped and looked round with a start, to meet the next instant two little gloved hands thrust into his, two brown eyes swimming with tears looking into black ones. "Oh, Ernest!" the girl cried—she was young and pretty, but dressed very plainly in black, and until this moment had worn her veil down—"aren't you glad to see me?"

"Glad, my darling?" he cried, all the care gone out of his face; "yes, very glad. You know I am glad."

"And you do love me as much as ever?" she pleaded, with her eyes fixed so very anxiously on his.

"Yes," he said simply. Nor did she doubt his now, though during the last fortnight of estrangement following that wretched petty quarrel she had fancied all sorts of dreadful things. "More and more every day, dearest. It was all my fault Ethel. I had been worried and vexed by business, and visited it upon you."

The girl looked up at him with clinging eyes as if it had been a privilege he had granted her. Then she said, but not reproachfully, "I have been here half an hour. I expected you before."

"Did you?" he answered. "It was so good of you to be here, generous of you, like yourself! But you must come in for a minute with me, Ethel. The house is quite empty. The care-taker I know has leave to be away this afternoon; and Critchlow, our cashier, will have left by now."

"I don't think I ought," she said, smiling.

"Nonsense," he replied, gayly. "I must put my books away now, and come back after tea. And see, if you are thinking of the proprieties, there is a policeman watching us with the most unflattering interest."

He opened the door with his key, and she came shyly in. Once inside, however, and the door shut upon the inquisitive policeman—well, it is no matter to us how Crisp welcomed her. But this satisfactorily performed, they went up stairs, his arm round her waist—a strange sight in that dusty place—their steps echoing in the empty house. At the top of the stairs the door into the large clerk's room was ajar. Crisp pushed it open and led her in. "And this is where you do your work?" she asked, devouring with wide open

eyes the long bare room, with its four windows, its row of desks and stools along one side and the glass box in the far corner.

“No,” he answered, laughing, “I am supposed to be a cut above this darling. Only I am obliged to be very careful not to throw stones.” He led her up the room, and unlocking the door of his glass house, took her in. How delightful it was to help her up on his high stool, and hold her there—for, of course, being unaccustomed to it she might have become giddy! And see her fit her little boots to the rail of the desk, and unlock the latter and come at once face to face with her own photograph! And then to see her blush, all pleasure at this proof of his fidelity! It was all so delightful that he wondered why, though they had met in Change alley on Saturday afternoon before, he had never brought her to see his office.

“And where do those doors lead to? Don’t Ernest; leave my hair alone. How do you know, sir, that there is no one there?”

He stopped at once—whatever he was doing—and a dark shadow fell across his face. “That’s Critchlow’s room,” he said. “And, by Jove, he’s left the key in it! There’s a nice piece of carelessness!” But there was no elation in his voice. It seemed as if a shadow had fallen on them both, from the moment her eyes were drawn to that door. It was not just in front of them—the door leading to the partners’ rooms stood there—but in the corner on the left.

“I’ll take the key and convict him at any rate of this,” the young man said moodily, and went out of his glass case, and crossed the floor to the door. The girl followed him, a strange sudden feeling of the emptiness of the house upon her. How hollow Ernest’s footsteps rang. The sun too had gone behind a cloud, and the room seemed dreary, dusty, and cold too, for she shivered.

Crisp, after trying the cashier’s door and finding it locked, slipped the key out and put it into his pocket. Then he locked his own door and pocketed that key also. It was strange perhaps that he took no farewell kiss in the hall, but opened the outer door hastily and seemed to breathe more freely when they were out of the alley and in the peopled street.

They took so long a walk, Ethel telling her lover of her latest troubles at Maintree House, a young ladies’ seminary where she was tolerated as teacher of English, and Ernest confided the dreadful matter of the error in his accounts, that when they parted he gave up all thought of returning to his books.

“But you must not be late another day, sir,” were her last words. He thought nothing of them then, but afterward, when he was alone, they puzzled him. There had been no appointment made for that afternoon, no promise given, no time fixed. So how could he have been late? It was odd. What did she mean by saying he was late?

CHAPTER III.

Crisp's omission to return to the books may have blunted his moral sense: or it may have been mere chance that led him to be nearly a quarter of an hour late on Monday morning. As he hurried up the alley he was surprised by the sight of a group collected about Parkman's door. Among them was one or two of Parkman's clerks looking unlike themselves, and one or two policemen unable to look anything but themselves.

"What is up!" he asked lightly; but though they all seemed to be looking at him, no one answered. Instead a clerk, one of the juniors, said, audibly "That is Mr. Crisp!" and a strange voice answered emphatically, "That is the man!" This seemed to cause a sensation, amid which a short, stout person with a blunt, hearty voice and a humorous eye pushed through the group, and said, "This way, sir, please," in a voice of authority.

"What in the world is the matter?" asked Crisp.

"Tell you in a moment, sir. Please to step with me up to Mr. Parkman's room." And he took Crisp by the arm, in what the latter thought an odd fashion, and led him up, and swiftly through the clerk's office, which was half full of staring gapers, and into the junior partner's room.

Crisp looked round him in utter bewilderment. On the hearthrug stood Mr. Parkman, pale and agitated. By the window two gentlemen were talking. At the table, apparently making some notes, sat a police officer.

"Watson," said his conductor, shutting the door firmly behind them, "do you take him!" and fell back into a corner of the room where he seemed to busy himself with an old Joe Miller, so very facetious that it rendered him oblivious to all going on around him.

While Crisp stood looking from one to the other the Superintendent rose abruptly and stepped close to him. "Mine is a painful business, sir. You are Mr. Ernest Crisp, I think!"

It darted into Crisp's mind that the chief had put the police in motion in the matter of the little discrepancy in his accounts; but a single glance at Mr. Parkman's pale, sympathizing face suffered to dispose of that. "Yes," he said, "I am. That is my name."

"You may or may not know, then, that a great crime was committed here on Saturday afternoon. The cashier, Mr. Critchlow, has been found dead in his office, stabbed to the heart from behind."

"Mr. Critchlow," the head clerk whispered with white shaking lips.

"And you have been identified as the person last seen to leave the house. I'm sorry to say that I must take you into custody on suspicion: I must warn you, too, Mr. Crisp, that anything you say will be given in evidence against you."

"On Saturday afternoon!" Crisp muttered in awed accents, looking around him with eyes that did not see. "But what—why am I suspected?"

“All that you will hear at the Mansion House. I am anxious to take you there at once, and with as little unpleasantness to yourself as possible.”

“It is a mere formality, Crisp,” Mr. Parkman volunteered, speaking for the first time with earnest kindness. “I will attend myself and say how perfectly ridiculous your conduct for many years makes this charge appear.”

The color came back to the clerk’s face. “Thank you, sir,” he said.

“Perhaps you will let yourself be searched here?” asked the policeman. Crisp nodded acquiescence, and did not flinch when the operation began. But the first articles to appear were two keys. The policeman looked carelessly at the first; but his face lit up wonderfully as he held up the second.

“This is the missing key!” he exclaimed, and a thrill of intelligence seemed to pass round the room.

“That key,” said Crisp, still bewildered and grappling with the memory of things which seemed to have happened so long ago, “that is the key of Mr. Critch—“ he stopped with trembling lips. He had gone so far unthinking; and then his position in all its bearings flashed across his mind. He remembered all that the presence of that key upon him, all that the words he had uttered, might mean for him. The room began to go round, visions of Ethel and Mr. Critchlow swam before his eyes. Amid an appalling silence, which had greeted his words, he fell to the floor in a dead faint.

Five minutes later the room was cleared of all save its owner and the short, stout man. “I can not believe it now,” Mr. Parkman was saying, “and yet the key!—the key! How can he explain that? How can he explain that?”

“You remember, sir. I told you it was a pretty clear case?” answered the detective—for such he was, and a well known one.

“You did, and I did not believe you,” the merchant answered with a groan. He was very greatly distressed, and no wonder.

“Well, sir, I am inclined to think that you were right and I was wrong,” the other answered dryly.

“Eh! Less clear now, inspector? But the key?”

“It is the key, and another matter or two, that puzzle me,” the man answered thoughtfully. “You’ve read, I dare say, of murderers doing stupid things, sir? There was that nurse who strangled her patient and then could not refrain from laying her out? Yes, quite so. But I never heard of a murderer carrying a proof against himself in his pocket, and that proof a thing he had no motive for keeping and every chance to get rid of!”

It almost seemed as if the merchant in his interest in the puzzle thus presented to him forgot his anxiety on behalf of his poor clerk. "But," he suggested, "it was very likely sheer carelessness. Its discovery, you could see was a terrible shock to him."

"Quite true, sir," the detective said.

"And the female who, if the policeman is to be believed, was with him—if you could get a clew to her, she might clear it all up."

"I hope she may," the man answered coolly, "for I have not only got the clew to her; I shall see her to-day. I don't think there can be any imprudence in showing you this." He took from a large pocket-book which he produced a tiny newspaper cutting. Mr. Parkman looked at it with a face of great amazement. It read thus:

"Gl vgsvo nzrmgivv slfhv srtstzgv nvvg nv wvziyhg zg 17 xszmvv zoovb zg ulfi glnlhld yb gszg grnv rdoo szev irw nbhvou lu lf1 dligh vmvnb blfi olermt vimvhg."

"But this is gibberish!" The merchant said, after turning it over.

"No, not gibberish," the detective answered, wondering that such a man should know so little of such a subject; "only cipher, and the easiest that exists. It's merely a transposition of the alphabet, Z is A, Y is B, and so on. But here is my translation. I may add that the advertisement appeared in the *Standard* of last Friday, sir."

The translation ran as follows:

To Ethel, Maintres House, Highgate:

"Meet me, dearest, at No. 17 Change Alley at 4 to-morrow.

"By that time I will have rid myself of our worst enemy. Your loving, Ernest."

"Good heavens!" cried the merchant, pale with excitement. "He is lost! This is almost conclusive evidence. I don't know—good heavens!—I don't know what can be said to this."

"Umph!" the detective said. "This advertisement is another thing which I had not when I gave you my opinion this morning." He said it meaningly, and paused as if expecting to be questioned. But Mr. Parkman had not marked the drift of his last words, and let them pass unchallenged.

Shortly afterward the merchant, pale but collected, had to be present at the Lord Mayor's inquiry at the justice-room of the Mansion House. We need not attend him thither, for only such evidence was taken as would justify a remand, and the reader can guess what that was. The policeman was examined who had seen Crisp go into the house on

Saturday afternoon, and had likewise seen him leave it a little later, each time in company with a lady. Then the Superintendent of Police produced the key found upon the prisoner, and proved that it was the key of Mr. Critchlow's office, the door of which was found locked upon the outside. And two of Parkmans' clerks reluctantly described the bad terms upon which the prisoner and the deceased were, and the *quasi* threat with which the former had left Critchlow upon the last occasion, when the cashier was, so far as could be proved, seen alive by any one except the murderer. This amply sufficed; and Ernest Crisp, clerk, was formally remanded—bail being of course, refused—until the following Thursday upon the charge of willful murder. The inquest, opened the same day, was adjourned to await the result of the magisterial inquiry.

CHAPTER IV.

“A clergyman to see Miss Maunder? I will see him first myself,” said Miss Maintree, in her stiffest tone. She was the principal of the Maintree House Seminary, the propriety of which was so rigid that no letters were permitted to be received by the pupils or governesses, save such as could first be read by that dragon of virtue, the Principal.

She was absent from the school-room ten minutes. The girls looked curiously at Ethel, and the latter wondered who it could be. She knew of no clergyman likely to visit her, and was surprised by the gracious permission to go to the drawing-room which Miss Maintree presently vouchsafed her; an indulgence due not so much to the reverend visitor's subtle politeness as to the fact, casually made known by him, that he had three daughters of an age to be in school.

“You wished to see me?” Ethel said, surprised at confronting a short, portly clergyman, who was a complete stranger to her.

“I do. You look a sensible young lady, and I will tell you right out who I am and what I want. Please don't faint or scream, or all my trouble expended in making things comfortable for you will be thrown away. My name is Peters—I am a detective officer. You know a gentleman called Crisp—I see you do. Are [you] engaged to marry him? Just so. Well, he has been charged—but, there, read that, please, and pray, be as calm as you can.” And he put into her hand an early *Globe*, pointing out the report of the proceedings at the Mansion House. “Pray, be as calm as you can!”

She went white to the lips as she read, but save one faint cry when its meaning broke upon her, gave no sign of the demonstrations so much dreaded by the detective.

“Now, I am quite aware, miss, that you were the lady who was with the accused. If you are implicated”—he did not think, after a glance at her face that she was—“you had best say nothing. But if the young man is innocent you take it very coolly, miss!”

“And why not?” she cried indignantly. “Why should I be troubled because a false charge is brought against him? Why——” But then her voice broke, and she cried piteously. “Oh, tell me, sir, how can I help him?”

“First, miss, by telling me all you did on Saturday.” The girl did so and he took note of it. “Quite so,” he said when he had heard all, “but may I ask if you met by appointment?”

She colored. “I had a message from him on the Friday morning.”

“Verbal or written?”

“Neither. I can not receive letters here, so when Earnest could take me out on Saturday—his and my half holiday—he would put an advertisement in Friday’s *Standard*. It was foolish, perhaps, but Ernest had a fancy to put it in cipher, and I, well—” with a bright blush—“I liked it because it took me longer to read the message.”

“Just so! You’ll forgive me saying that now I know you are telling me the truth. So will you please explain what that ugly little bit means?” He handed her the slip he had shown Mr. Parkman, and pointed out the words, “I will have rid myself of our worst enemy.”

“Yes. We had a silly quarrel. I told him, oh, how could I?—that his temper was his worst enemy and mine. He meant that as a—I mean he wished to apologize and make it up.”

“One more question, young lady. What should you say if I told you that Mr. Crisp denied on his way to the Mansion House, this morning, being the author of that?”

“Say!” she cried fiercely. “I should say I believed him. But still it surprises me. This message begins and ends as his always did. Yet I remember that I always thought it odd that he made no reference to this passage on Saturday. And it was strange that though he was half an hour after the appointed time, he did not seem aware of it—or say he was sorry.”

Peters sat thinking deeply. “It’s a cipher a child could read,” he murmured to himself; “and anyone reading previous advertisements could have identified the Ernest, very likely. Is it possible that some one, having learned, no matter how, his habit of corresponding with this girl, has done this to divert suspicion from himself? Unlikely; but still possible. Do you know, Miss,” he continued aloud, “of any one being acquainted with these cipher messages?”

“Not through me,” she answered quickly. “But I remember Ernest saying that young Mr. Parkman knew all about me, and had been very kind. But he can not have anything to do with it.”

“No,” the detective answered briskly, “but he may have told some one else. I must go to Richmond to-morrow, or as soon as I can, and ask him. We will lose no time,” he added cheerily. “Your young gentleman shall be free in a day or two. And I hope that then he will teach you a better cipher, Miss—or get rid of any necessity for using one.”

On the tram-car Peters said to himself, “Wanted, some one with two things. Firstly, a motive for murdering Critchlow, and secondly, a knowledge, however gained, of the

relations between Crisp and this very nice girl. By gad! This is a new idea! Could it be that Critchlow fancied the girl and tried to decoy her there with this bogus message, and was found out and killed by the jealous lover before the girl came? I must consider that. That is a new idea!”

CHAPTER V.

“Are you engaged to marry the accused?”

This was not the first question put to the witness, but it was the first that promised to afford the spectators, who occupied every inch of floor in the justice-room, the slightest return for the trouble they had taken. The city were talking of nothing but the Critchlow tragedy; and even in Cheapside the excitement was plainly visible. Every one who could win an entrance, and was not be engaged elsewhere, was there. It was rumored that the matter was now as clear as the murder was diabolical, and that the young man would certainly be committed for trial to-day. Among the persons pointed at, and scanned and sketched by the crowd in that close, green-painted court, with the one window and the skylight, was Mr. Parkman; and close observers noted that his eyes would now and again turn from wandering over the court to cast a look of anxiety, of expectation, almost of dread, toward the door.

But listen. The witness has answered the question bravely. “I am.”

“And he was in the habit of communicating with you by cipher advertisements similar to the one I produce?”

“He was.”

“Did he communicate with you by an advertisement appearing in the *Standard* on the Friday before the murder?”

“He did not.”

“Were you,” said the counsel smiling, “under the impression last Saturday that the advertisement emanated from him?”

“I was. But you must let me explain.”

And with great steadiness she stated her reasons for so thinking, and what she had understood the message to mean, and why she did not now think Ernest the author of it. This caused a great sensation. The strange cipher advertisement was a fact quite new to the general public.

“Do I understand you to think, then, Miss Maunder, that the person, whoever he was, who inserted this advertisement was also the murderer?”

“I don’t know,” she faltered. Then with courage, “Yes, I do think so.”

He smiled calmly as he looked round. It was evident he thought nothing of the girl's theory, but believed Crisp to be both author and murderer. Others in court also smiled and shook their heads. Her idea was too complex and far-fetched for them. They could not swallow it, in vulgar phrase.

She was taken then through the events of the Saturday afternoon, and examined particularly as to the prisoner's statements about the deceased. Afterward the solicitor for the defense, well known to be employed by Mr. Parkman, drew from her all that might tell in the prisoner's favor; and then, casting one long, loving look of comfort at her lover, Ethel sat down. She had told the truth; she had perfect trust now in the wisdom of the law.

Two or three unimportant witnesses followed, the medical evidence succeeded these, and then Mr. Parkman was called. As he took off his glove many sympathizing glances were cast at his handsome figure and grave face. What a trouble and annoyance it must have been to him! What a loss to be deprived of his two chief employees at once! And then how rich he was said to be, and almost fashionable, too, for was he not going to be married to the Hon. Sylvestra Hautban? Even the Lord Mayor could hardly refrain from leaning forward in his great oak chair to look his sympathy.

"The prisoner has been a clerk in the employment of your firm for nearly fourteen years, Mr. Parkman?" That was the first question of any interest.

"He has. He has been a most faithful, steady, and upright man in all his dealings with us."

This was a gallant testimony, but what could it avail against facts? It only evoked a look of warm gratitude from the prisoner. Mr. Parkman then went on to tell what he knew of the differences between Critchlow and the prisoner, and the unfriendly mention of the cashier, which Crisp had made in their last conversation. But he told this so reluctantly that the examining barrister was struck by his bias in the prisoner's favor, and asked him with a smile: "And do you think that the same person inserted the advertisement and committed the murder?"

The witness paused; it was clear that he had no doubt that his protégé was guilty of one and the other, for he faltered and passed his hand over his brow. Then he said, "I do."

"And so do I," said the counsel dryly, and was about to sit down with that quip in his mouth when there was a bustle at the door. Some glanced that way impatiently, and some expectantly; what was the expression on Mr. Parkman's face it was hard to say. It was almost a baffled, hunted look that came into his light blue eyes, and the hand which he raised to stroke his moustache scarcely hid an odd contraction of the mouth. The noise ceased as a burly man pushed his way through the crowd to the table. He seemed to be some one of importance, for the counsel paused in the act of sitting down, and lent a willing ear to his whisper. Then a hurried and seemingly excited conference went on

between these two and the solicitor for the defense and one or two others—so exciting that expectation was raised to a very high pitch, and at length the Lord Mayor, unable to bear it longer, said: “Have you any more questions for this witness, Mr. Banckworth?”

Thus recalled to himself, Mr. Banckworth rose from his stooping position and seemed to hesitate. Finally he said, with an air of reluctance, “Yes, my Lord, I fear I have. Mr. Parkman, did I understand you to give it as your opinion that whoever inserted that advertisement committed this murder?”

A strange pause, then, in an equally strange, hoarse tone, “Yes.”

“Is that,” holding up a Russia-leather blotting case filled with green blotting paper, “the blotting case you use in your library at Richmond?”

It sounded, apart from the sudden production of the case, a harmless question enough. And yet how was it that through all that crowded Court every one felt the terrible nature of the silence which followed? Was that ordinary looking case a gorgon’s head, that at sight of it the perspiration should spring in great beads to the witness’ forehead, and his mouth should writhe in a vain attempt to speak? He couldn’t. He couldn’t. In the end he only nodded.

“Then can you explain,” the lawyer asked, solemnly, “how it happens that upon a page of this blotting paper there appears in printed characters a reverse impression of the latter part of this advertisement?”

The crisis had come, the worst had happened; and yet even now some cool, plausible reason might avail him. Now was the time for ready brain and steady pulse. Now; but now all these were wanting! He glared round him for a moment on the sea of faces, grasped wildly at his throat, and fell to the floor of the box in a fit.

Amid a thrill of such sensation as few in that court had ever experienced they bore him out to an adjoining room. But he was dead before they could bring a doctor to him. That moment—and heaven knows what of bitter anticipation—had been his punishment in this world.

Peters, it appeared, had gone down to see him at Richmond, and while waiting in the library had in the instinctive pursuit of his profession turned over the leaves of the blotting book. The cipher caught his eye; but the merchant entering at the moment, it was not until he left for town that Peters could get into the house again, confirm his impression, and with his strange piece of evidence follow to London by a later train.

For a few hours after the merchant’s death it seemed one of those motiveless murders that upset all calculation. But among his papers was found the key. He had lost great sums by deep play at a West End club. His father was then ill, his needs were most pressing. He had already far exceeded his right to draw upon the firm; to get more he deposited forged acceptances. At his father’s death the cashier discovered this, and though the junior

partner was now able to refund the money, Critchlow held the forgeries in *terrorem* over him. Parkman, secretive yet fierce, took his life.

Of him enough. For Ernest Crisp, he married Ethel three weeks later.

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