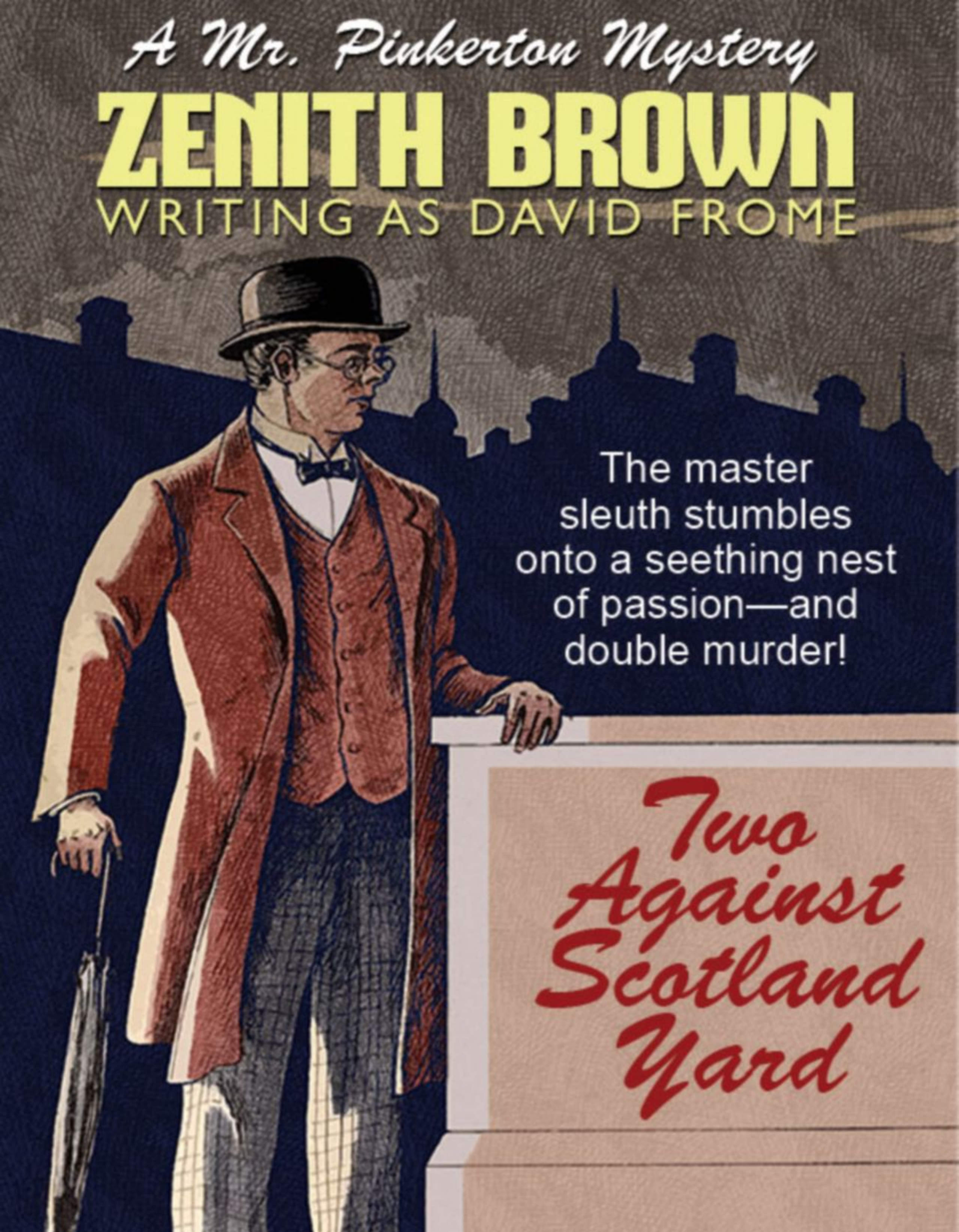
A Mr. Pinkerton Mystery

ZENITH BROWN

WRITING AS DAVID FROME



The master sleuth stumbles onto a seething nest of passion—and double murder!

Two Against Scotland Yard

TWO AGAINST SCOTLAND YARD

A Mr. Pinkerton Mystery

ZENITH BROWN

(writing as David Frome)

Table of Contents

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

Published by Wildside Press LLC.
wildsidepress.com | bcmystery.com

CHAPTER ONE

On the evening of Wednesday, February 25th, 1931, a man stood in the shadow of the entrance to the grounds of a large house on the Colnbrook Road, about a quarter of a mile from the London end of the by-pass. Beside him, turned towards town, was a motorcycle. Its engine was running quietly, but the rider made no move towards leaving. Several times he glanced over his shoulder at the white "For Sale" placards on the gate posts, or looked nervously at the watch on his wrist. Now and then his hand stole to the packet of cigarettes in his coat pocket, but he changed his mind each time.

The illuminated hands of his watch showed exactly nine-twenty-two o'clock when he heard the purr of a motor car coming from his right. He stepped into the middle of the road. As the big Daimler came into view he held up his hand. The car stopped a few feet from him. The chauffeur lowered the window, leaned out to see what was wanted, and found himself staring into the cold steel circle of a revolver muzzle. Another was pointed steadily at the two people in the back of the car.

"Get out," said the man. "Keep your hands up."

The chauffeur got out, holding his hands over his head.

"Stand over there."

The chauffeur stepped promptly over to the side of the road.

"Now you get out and put that satchel on the ground."

The heavily built man, grey-haired, in evening clothes, moved clumsily towards the door of the car. The woman with him started to follow.

"You stay where you are."

The man took one step back from the car, his revolvers pointing steadily at the two men. The elderly man still held the small black satchel in his hands.

"Put that down, or I'll shoot you," the man said calmly.

"Give it to him, for God's sake, George!" the woman cried.

As the man stooped to put the satchel down her hand moved stealthily to the side pocket of the car. Without moving her shoulders she whipped a small automatic out of it and

brought it to a level with her knees. As the bandit with a sharp movement of his foot brought the satchel near him she fired through the open door and sank back into the cushions.

Instantly two shots rang out, so close to hers that the reports could almost have been one drawn-out sound rather than three. The heavy man in evening clothes pitched forward without a word. There was the rush of feet, the roar of an engine, and the cyclist disappeared in the darkness towards London.

The chauffeur ducked forward, his face grey in the glare of the headlights. He bent over his employer. The woman, white and shaking, stumbled out of the car.

"What made you shoot, madam?" the chauffeur asked in a hushed voice. "You nearly caught me."

The woman stared at him in terror.

"The diamonds!" she gasped.

"Lord! did he have diamonds with him?" The chauffeur whistled, and glanced about.

"I'd better go for a constable," he said after a moment's thought

"No. I can't stay here alone with him. I'll go."

"Here comes somebody now, madam."

A man came running awkwardly towards them along the road.

"Hi there," the chauffeur said. "There's a man dead. Run and get the police, will you?"

The man gave a long stare at the scene. "Right you are," he said. "I'll get my push-bike." He turned and ran back into the darkness.

The woman sank to the running board and stared blindly at the prostrate figure on the ground. She scarcely noticed the small crowd of sleepy villagers that had gathered. They stood whispering at a respectful distance, staring at the great car, the woman in the ermine cloak, and the figure lying motionless on the ground. The chauffeur moved back and forth trying to light a cigarette. His hands shook and he dropped the match.

The woman suddenly got up and started pacing the road. "Oh, why don't they hurry?" she cried in an agony of despair.

"'Obbs is off on 'is push-bike, miss," one of the bystanders volunteered. "'E cahn't make it short of five minutes."

"More like ten, as I'd say," said another. There was a muttered altercation.

It was a good ten minutes before a murmur broke from the little knot of watchers.

"Ay, there 'e is, and Jock Gibney with him."

The young constable got off his bicycle and propped it against the hedge on the other side of the road. The woman came quickly forward to meet him.

"My husband's been robbed and killed," she said quickly. "Heaven knows how far the man has got already."

The constable was more used to arresting cyclists without lights than comforting London ladies in ermine wraps. He cleared his throat and looked about in some embarrassment. Then he set about his work with dogged determination.

"Just tell me what happened, madam," he said, "and I'll get at it as quick as I can."

"We were held up right here by a man on a motorcycle. He made my husband give him a satchel we had. I thought I could frighten him, I shot at him and he shot my husband. Oh, it's all my fault!"

She began to sob convulsively.

"It won't help none to let yourself get in a state, ma'am," the constable said stolidly. He knelt down over the dead man and flashed his lamp into his face.

"He was your husband?"

"Yes."

"Could you describe the man? He was on a motorcycle?"

She nodded.

"You didn't see the number?"

She shook her head. The constable turned to the chauffeur. "I didn't see it," he said. "He must haye had the plates covered. I looked."

The constable scratched his head, then brightened as there was another murmur from the group of bystanders.

"That'll be the sergeant," he said cheerfully.

The circle opened; a small car drove up and the division sergeant stepped out.

"What's up?" he said. When the constable had given the meagre details he knelt over the silent figure.

He straightened up after a short examination.

"Shot twice," he said laconically. "Once through the heart. Instantaneous death. What was the man like?"

Neither the woman nor the chauffeur could give anything but a vague description. The murderer had worn a cyclist's leather cap and large goggles, with a black mask over the lower part of his face. He was taller than the dead man but slenderer, the chauffeur thought; the woman thought he was the same height.

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders. "Just like everybody else riding a motorcycle, and he's been gone fifteen minutes. Gibney, you go back with the lady and the driver to the station. Drive back in their car. Put in a call to Scotland Yard and tell them exactly what's happened. Tell them the motorcycle left here at 9.24 or 9.25, headed towards town."

He turned to the woman.

"I'll have to ask you to go back to Colnbrook for a bit, madam. If there's anybody you'd like to have come, the constable will give them a ring."

She shook her head, and taking a last agonised look at the figure on the ground got into the car. The chauffeur took his place. The young constable got in beside him, and they drove off slowly into the little village.

At the tiny police station the constable reported the night's event to Scotland Yard. The woman again declined to have anyone sent for. In a few minutes the sergeant returned and proceeded to take formal depositions from the two witnesses of the murder.

"My name is Colton," the woman said. "My husband's name was George Colton; he is a jeweller off Bond-street."

The sergeant looked quickly at her. He recognised the name as that of one of the oldest and most reputable firms in London.

"We live at 82 Cadogan-square, Kensington. Tonight we dined with Mrs. Martha Royce in Windsor. She is an old friend of my husband's and wanted him to take some jewels of hers to town for appraisal and I believe for sale. I begged him not to take them, to have a guard sent for them, but he

laughed at me. He had often carried large amounts in jewels. Now they're gone, and he's gone."

She shivered and drew her ermine wrap closer about her slender shoulders. The sergeant's pen scratched slowly along the paper. He turned to the chauffeur.

"Your name."

"Oliver Peskett. Driver for Mr. George Colton, 82 Cadogan-square, Kensington."

"Age?"

"Thirty-one."

"How long in present employ?"

"Two years Michaelmas."

The sergeant grunted as he noted these facts down.

"Now tell me again exactly what happened," he went on. After Mrs. Colton and the chauffeur had slowly repeated the story of the robbery and murder, and the sergeant had carefully blotted his record, he said, "There's one thing more I'd like to ask you. Your husband carried jewels belonging to Mrs. Royce of Windsor, and they were stolen. Can you tell me the value, or the approximate value, of the jewels? And what were they like?"

"I can't describe them."

"You hadn't seen them?"

"No."

"But you're sure he had them? They were talked about at dinner?"

"Yes. They talked about them then and I know he had them in the black satchel. I think they were all diamonds, and I think they said the value was something like twenty or thirty thousand pounds."

The sergeant looked at the chauffeur. "You knew about them?" he said in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Not I," the chauffeur said promptly. "Hadn't the foggiest. I knew he had the bag. I didn't know what he had in it."

"All right,"

The sergeant hesitated a moment. Then he said, "I won't keep you any longer. We'll take care of your husband's remains, Mrs. Colton. Will you be in your home in the morning, please. We'll want to see you again. You're sure you don't want me to send for some relative, or friend?"

She shook her head.

"No, thanks. I have no one."

The chauffeur held the door open for her. As he closed it his eyes met the steady gaze of the sergeant for an instant and quickly shifted away.

CHAPTER TWO

Inspector Bull entered the front door of his modern semi-detached villa in Hampstead. The odour of burned mutton met him full in the face, and he wished for the hundredth time that Mrs. Bull would come back home. In the two years of his married life he had failed to learn why it was that when his wife was at home the maid was what is commonly called a treasure, and when his wife was away she became an increasing liability with every meal. He took off his heavy brown overcoat, which made him somewhat resemble a large cinnamon bear on its hind legs. Not that Inspector Bull was ungainly; he was simply of large bulk. And he always wore cinnamon brown overcoats. His wife's tactful efforts to make him go in for contrasting instead of harmonising shades met a placid but adamant resistance. The tawny hazel of his moustache and his hair set the pitch for the colour harmony that Inspector Bull followed with some determination. There was no affectation or foppishness about it. Inspector Bull simply dressed in brown.

He deposited his coat and hat in the hall cupboard and went upstairs to the back room he liked to call his den. As a matter of fact that is pretty much what it was. It was pleasantly dim there. The green-shaded lamp on the large flat top desk (from Maple's) made very little headway against the dark tan paper and heavy leather upholstered furniture and the red and green turkey rug (also from Maple's). Here Bull brought and—in a sense—buried the bones of his calling as a valued member of the C.I.D. Here also came the few odds and ends of antique china that he could not resist buying from time to time. His passion for broken china had always made him the butt of the perpetual bromide about bulls in china shops. No one had ever failed to mention it. At one time Bull had smiled painfully, but that was when he was a younger man. He was now thirty-six.

He knocked out his pipe into the patented non-tipoverable ash receiver that somebody had given him and sat down in the big chair in front of his desk. He was very low. His wife was away and Scotland Yard was as dead as a door nail. Three communists and two cat burglars had constituted his

entire share for two weeks. He was tired of routine, and he was especially tired of hearing about a first-rate poisoning case that Inspector Millikan had been given.

After some thought Inspector Bull reached for the telephone and called his friend, former landlord and ardent admirer Mr. Evan Pinkerton, to invite him to stay a week.

Mr. Pinkerton lived in a large dingy house in Golders Green. He was a grey mouse-like little Welshman who on one memorable occasion had emerged from his chrysalis and for a few moments had become the gaily colored butterfly, so to speak, of avenging justice. Inspector Bull had never forgot that except for the little man in Golders Green the girl who later became his wife would have been lying dead in a ravine in the mountains of Wales. In the past few years Bull had come to rely on Mr. Pinkerton's curious, almost feminine—or so Bull thought—intuition, in hard cases. He was constantly taking all the policeman's elaborately collected evidence, looking at it and saying, "Well, well, maybe it's as you say. But I should have thought the fellow with the brown toupee did it." This Inspector Bull would never admit. But he would set to work again, and with indomitable thoroughness build up another chain of evidence that led inevitably to the conviction of the man with the brown toupee. On such occasions Mr. Pinkerton would nod his head without complacency and say, "That's what I would have thought."

When Inspector Bull called up on this occasion Mr. Pinkerton allowed himself to hope that he was being invited to take part in another case. The cinema and Inspector Bull's cases were the two scarlet mountain peaks on the dull grey monotonous prairie of Mr. Pinkerton's existence. Nevertheless he carefully finished his tea of bloater and apple and plum jam before he took off his felt slippers and put on his boots. Then he washed up his dishes and left the place spotless for the woman who came in to clean for him in the mornings.

He got out the bright new suitcase the Bulls had given him for Christmas and packed his things for his visit. Next he locked all the windows, put on his brown bowler hat and his grey overcoat and took his way to Hampstead, where he found Inspector Bull sprinkling weed-killer on the lawn. Peo-

ple who were accustomed to read Dr. Freud would have seen an unconscious connection between the weed-killer and Inspector Millikan's poisoning case, but Inspector Bull had never read Dr. Freud, nor had Mr. Pinkerton. They greeted each other solemnly and Inspector Bull said that dinner was ready.

The downstairs clock had just struck ten, and Inspector Bull had just yawned and thought of another day of routine on the Embankment, when the telephone on his desk jangled urgently. He looked at it expectantly. It was a private connection with New Scotland Yard.

"Bull speaking!" ("Bellowing, he means," Commissioner Debenham had once remarked.) "Colnbrook? Bucks. Robbery? Murder? Right you are."

He put the receiver down and turned to his guest, whose eyes were protruding with pleasurable anticipation.

"There's been robbery and murder out on the Colnbrook Road. Chief wants me to have a look at it. He says in the morning, but I think I'll have a look at it now. You want to come along?"

No need to ask. The little man had his brown bowler and grey overcoat on before Bull had heaved his vast bulk out of his desk chair.

"I'll bring the car around," said the Inspector. "You lock the door."

In Commissioner Debenham's room at New Scotland Yard Chief Inspector Dryden and the Commissioner himself were having what in two less moderate men might be called a decided difference of opinion.

"Our method is wrong, sir," the Chief Inspector said flatly. "We've got to use modern methods for modern crime. The old tradition of the Yard is all right, but when you've got motor bandits you've got to use their own methods to get them."

The Commissioner pursed his lips and nodded his qualified agreement.

"That's undoubtedly true, to a certain extent," he replied deliberately, pushing a box of cigars across the desk. "But what can we do? Look at this business tonight. I dropped in here half an hour ago. There was a call from Colnbrook. A man with a motorcycle held up George Colton's car—the

jeweller. Relieved him of a satchel of jewels, shot him dead and disappeared. Twenty minutes later we get word of it. All the motor cars in England, each one full of police, won't help us to catch that man on that motorcycle in London tonight. As soon as we hear about it we have everyone on the look-out. This is early closing day; one-third of the shopkeepers' assistants in Middlesex are out motorcyling.—Of course, if we'd known in five minutes, we could have done something. Now, new methods won't help us. It's a case of the right man on the job."

The Chief Inspector stared at the smoke rising from the end of his cigar.

"Then why, sir," he said with a polite impatience, "put Humphrey Bull on the case? Nobody likes Bull better than I do, or thinks more of his ability in certain lines; but it doesn't run to gang crime."

"Is this gang crime, Dryden?"

"Typically American, sir. The exact way it's done. The cold brutality of the gangster. Sheer, deliberate murder."

Commissioner Debenham shook his head.

"You have American crime and American methods on the brain. We'll give Bull a chance at it. If it appears to be a gang of Americans, or an Americanised gang of Englishmen, you can take it yourself. I'm a little prejudiced in Bull's favour, I must admit, since he discovered that Tito Mellema murdered that woman—what's her name? La Mar. If I'm not mistaken, Inspector, you thought her death was a gang racket because she was connected with an American musical comedy."

Inspector Dryden grinned in spite of himself.

"Perhaps you're right, sir. Well, I'll be getting home. I'm sorry old Colton's dead."

"So am I," said the Commissioner. "There wasn't much he didn't know about precious stones, and who owns 'em, and how much they paid."

"Or when they sold them and for how much, sir."

"I'm afraid that's right too, Dryden. I hope you're not thinking, by the way, of the recent loss of Lady Blanche's emerald collar, which rightfully belongs—or belonged—to her mother-in-law the Duchess?"

Inspector Dryden allowed himself only half a smile.

"Oh, no, sir," he said soberly.

"Of course not, Dryden. Well, we certainly got 'down the banks,' as young Boyd says, for that collar. And worse luck, I have to look in on the Home Secretary tonight, and he'll have enough to say about this business of Colton. Good-night, Inspector."

CHAPTER THREE

It was a little after eleven that night when Inspector Bull and Mr. Pinkerton drove up to the Colnbrook police station in Inspector Bull's open Morris Oxford. It had begun to rain in torrents, but Bull had refused to take the time to put up the curtains. Cold and wet, he and Mr. Pinkerton listened with impassive silence to the sergeant's account of the holdup and murder. At least Inspector Bull did, in the best manner of the Metropolitan police. Mr. Pinkerton's attempt to appear impassive was a little-comical; he was quivering like a badly bred hound at the kill. The sergeant in the meantime had learned for the first time from Inspector Bull the importance of the victim that Fate had left on his doorstep, and was little short of interested himself.

"Well, we'd better run down and have a look," Bull said when the man had finished. "This rain'll leave everything a blank. What time did you phone in to have the London Road watched?"

"About 9.35, sir."

The sergeant tended to be a little aggressive, without particularly being able to think of anything he had left undone. But he had told his story ten times in the last hour, and Inspector Bull was the only person not impressed.

"Any report come in?"

"No, sir."

"Did you notify the station at Slough?"

The sergeant looked bewildered.

"He was headed for London!" he replied with some vexation.

Bull grunted. "If I was him," he said calmly, "I'd have turned left into the by-pass and gone right through Slough, or anywheres else, and left the people at Cranford still waiting. But I guess he could have got to Dover by the time we heard about it. Let's get along."

A lone constable in a rubber cape was on guard in the road.

"That's the place," the sergeant said.

Bull turned his overcoat collar up around his neck and got heavily out of the small car. It was pitch dark except for the

small sea of light from their headlights. The sergeant explained

"The man stopped by the gate there and waited until they came along. When the car came, he stepped out and held up his hand. The driver stopped and asked what he wanted. He found himself looking in a gun. He gets out and holds up his hands. The man orders Colton to get out. The lady is to stay where she was—she'd started to get out too, you see?"

Bull grunted.

"The car was right here?"

"That's right. The man stood here, and the driver stood just here. Then the woman takes a revolver out of the pocket in the car and fires at him. The fellow shoots twice straight into Colton. He drops right forward here. Then he's off on the cycle."

Bull grunted at this second recital and made a rapid examination, with the help of his pocket lamp, of the entrance in which the man had stood while waiting. The rain washing down the brick walk made a small sea at the side of the road. So far as Bull could make out, there was no evidence that either a man or a machine had ever stood there.

"There's one point, Inspector," the sergeant went on judicially. "That's how did he know the car with those diamonds was coming this way? It's the first thing on wheels that's not a touring lay-out that we've seen here for a month of Sundays. You know the by-pass takes 'em all around the other way."

Inspector Bull's grunt was even less interested than usual.

"Has anybody been by here while you've been on duty?" he asked the constable.

"No, sir. Only the 102 bus from Windsor. No private cars."

"And nobody on a motor-bike, I suppose."

"No, sir."

Bull chewed his lower lip.

"Colton was standing right here when he was shot?"

"That's the spot, sir," said the sergeant. He pointed to what Mr. Pinkerton could imagine was still the tinge of crimson that nature, in her inexorable cleanliness, had washed away with swift torrents of rain.