

decaying. You are aware, I suppose, that pearls, if they are not worn for a long time, sometimes decay, and that the Valdoreme pearls had not been worn for years previous to the forced sale?"

Again Clare nodded. She was absorbing the facts and drawing them to a conclusion.

"At any rate," he resumed, "though they were decaying they were still immensely valuable. When they disappeared from Wheaton's stateroom a thorough search was made. Some suspected a passenger; others an employee of the ship. Wireless messages were sent ahead and city detectives met the boat at the pier. The customs inspectors made a more than usually thorough search, also, but without success and without finding any sort of clue to the thief.

"After she landed and was settled in her regular suite at the Prince Henry with her friend, Miss Le Compte, who had accompanied her abroad, the talk about the pearls gradually died away. Wheaton, apparently, never seemed to suspect her. At least he kept up his intimacy, for I've seen him at the hotel with her, in the parlors and in the tea-room any number of times. As I said, I don't think the pearls have anything to do with this latest case. But they serve to show that she was on very good terms with Wheaton."

From the hotel Clare hurried directly to the laboratory of her friend, Dr. Lawson.

"Delighted at the interruption," he greeted, tossing aside the report of an analysis one of his assistants had just made. "Now, my dear, what's on your mind?"

Scarcely stopping for breath she poured forth the main facts of her recent grewsome experience.

"What do you suppose this was, Billy?" she asked, laying down on the laboratory table some pieces of glass which she had picked up in her handkerchief in the little room at the Prince Henry.

"You say that everything seemed to point to asphyxiation?" asked Lawson taking the pieces of glass and casually endeavoring to fit them together. "Did she look strong and robust—I mean would she impress you as a girl who had a good heart?"

"Oh, yes!" asserted Clare watching him closely.

He had fitted several of the little pieces of thin glass together. Apparently they formed a tube which narrowed down to a point in which there had been a capillary opening, evidently covered by a metal cap that screwed on. The other end of the tube had been a sort of bulb.

CLARE looked on with dawning comprehension. She seemed almost, without being told, to sense what he was about to say. "Those things have been used before," she cried excitedly.

"No doubt," replied Lawson thoroughly absorbed in his work. "Of course, you are more familiar with the criminal side than I am. It is the medical and the scientific that interest me."

"What was the stuff that was in it?" she asked.

Lawson sniffed at the glass. "An anesthetic," he answered. "You know an anesthetic is dangerous in proportion to the chlorine it contains, according to some experts. This one acts violently on people. Now, there is no evidence that there was cardiac failure in this case. Rather, you say it seems to you to have been asphyxiation. Her tongue probably fell back into her throat and choked her. If some one could have been there to catch it and hold it in place she would have come out as quickly as she went under."

"This," he continued, "is a substance that boils and vaporizes at a lower temperature than that of the body. Why, if you took off the cap of this tube and held the bulb in the palm of your hand the warmth from your hand alone would be sufficient to start a spray of vapor from the tiny opening of the bulb."

"What is the name of it?" asked Clare. Her mind was working quickly on the practical aspects of the

case. She was quite ready to trust the scientific end to her friend, while she pieced the thing together and caught the criminal.

"Kélène," he replied briefly. "Ethyl chloride, or as the French call it, *chlorure d'éthyle*."

"THE French," repeated Clare thoughtfully. "Yes, to be sure, that is where I have heard of it—among the Paris Apaches."

"It is a colorless liquid," pursued Lawson, "with a slight ethereal and, to some people, agreeable odor. Owing to its extreme volatility it comes in these airtight sealed glass tubes. It acts on the sympathetic nerves first, then on the spinal cord and brain in quick sequence. Complete anesthesia is a matter of



It was evident that his reluctance was creating a very unfavorable impression.

minutes, almost seconds. It is one of the quickest anesthetics known. Doctors often use it for minor operations because no special apparatus is needed and it is easily portable. Spray a little bit at a person, clap something over his face so that he can breathe it all and, presto!—that person is out. It's hardly what you would expect a suicide to use. Besides, a woman like Louise De Voe is n't at all likely to have known much about such things."

Clare had rung for a messenger. For a moment she pondered, then wrote a message, carefully condensing the words. It was a cablegram to the Paris police.

A second search of the apartment of Louise and Violet yielded nothing of a directly incriminating nature. There was, however, in the writing desk a large packet of letters from Wheaton, covering a long period.

Clare read them all carefully. The young man had been infatuated with her. That was evident. But even in the tone of his love letters it was apparent between the lines that he was more secretly flattered at having excited in her a feeling of love than capable of really appreciating it himself.

He was cautious, often to the point of coldness and brutality. His fear of scandal, which appeared directly or indirectly in every letter, was excessive in one who seemed to care so little for facts and acts, but solely for the publicity of them.

Wheaton had been treading a course that must inevitably lead to open scandal in time. Had he foreseen it? Had he tried to avoid it? Were his instructions to Clare to spare no effort to get at the truth so long as his name was not involved, born of his certainty that he could not now be involved in the girl's death, though he was still afraid that the old scandal might crop up embarrassingly?

One very significant thing, it seemed to Clare as she went over the case, was the bitterness which Violet Le Compte showed toward Wheaton from time to time. It was not that she ever said anything directly. Indeed, that was quite unnecessary. Her actions, and the implications from them, plainly showed that he was in her mind in some way.

Once only, even to continued questioning by Clare,

had she betrayed even a hint of what seemed to be lurking in her thoughts. They were talking of the Valdoreme pearls.

"Louise was a fool ever to have let him put those pearls on her," she exclaimed.

Then she bit her lip. Either she could not or would not voice her suspicions. But the remark was sufficient to cause Clare, without further reasoning, to discard Callahan's theory that the Valdoreme pearls had nothing to do with the tragedy. The more she thought about it, the more she felt that, somehow, in some strange way, Wheaton and the pearls were at the bottom of the mystery.

Finding no answer to her question in any of the evidence she had so far been able to unearth, Clare

became decidedly interested in pearls in general and the robbery in particular. She spent the rest of the morning and a good part of the afternoon interviewing jewelers, customs officers, and detectives who had worked on the first case, but without discovering any new facts. The first day saw her little advanced toward solving the puzzle.

Still, the fact that she was investigating was enough and Clare was not surprised the next day to receive a very agitated gentleman from the customs service.

"Miss Kendall," began the customs man nervously, "I understand that you have been inquiring about the Valdoreme pearls. A pearl necklace, one of our special detectives tells me, has very quietly been offered for sale by Gaston Margot, a Fifth Avenue dealer who has the reputation of being not over-scrupulous. Before I take you to see it, I want you to look at this description

of the necklace that was given us by Mr. Wheaton himself."

Clare read:

The necklace consists of four strings of one hundred and twenty pearls, perfectly matched and graduated, ranging in size from some small ones up to two, hanging as pendants, of very large size. Were it in perfect condition it would be almost priceless. For years, however, it had been growing dull and tarnished from neglect and old and uncongenial wearers.

A photograph accompanied the brief description.

MARGOT'S shop impressed Clare as being almost what might be called a sort of high-class pawn-broking establishment. He had engineered several questionable sales of gems, she knew.

They entered, looked about at various things and finally asked to see the pearls. Sure enough, they corresponded almost precisely in number and arrangement with those of the Valdoreme necklace. The customs man was struggling with suppressed excitement as they turned to leave the establishment.

"I shall sue out a warrant immediately," he whispered to Clare. "Why, I never saw or heard of such a barefaced game. Here it is not half a year after the smuggling of the pearls, described in every paper in the country, and some one has the nerve to offer them for sale."

"Just a moment, please," interrupted a voice behind them. "I thought you did not look like buyers, nor like crooks. Did I hear you refer to the Valdoreme pearls? Well, this is an exact replica of the necklace that was lost. As for being the necklace itself—pouf!—you can ask any one in New York who knows anything about pearls and he will tell you that the old Valdoreme necklace was made of decaying pearls. Look for yourselves. Did you ever see pearls more fresh and lovely than these? Bah—do you really want to know the truth? Yes? Well, I assembled these pearls myself and made them up after the famous design."

It was Margot himself. There was nothing to say. The customs man bit his lip and turned to Miss Kendall in mute appeal to meet. (Continued on Page 11)