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**AGATHA CHRISTIE**

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# **THE SIGN IN THE SKY**

**AGATHA CHRISTIE**

The Judge was finishing his charge to the jury.

"Now, gentlemen, I have almost finished what I want to say to you. There is evidence for you to consider as to whether this case is plainly made out against this man so that you may say he is guilty of the murder of Vivien Barnaby. You have had the evidence of the servants as to the time the shot was fired. They have one and all agreed upon it. You have had the evidence of the letter written to the defendant by Vivien Barnaby on the morning of that same day, Friday, September 23rd, a letter which the defence has not attempted to deny. You have had evidence that the prisoner first denied having been at Deering Hill, and later, after evidence had been given by the police, admitted he had. You will draw your own conclusions from that denial. This is not a case of direct evidence. You will have to come to your own conclusions on the subject of motive-of means-of opportunity. The contention of the defence is that some person unknown entered the music room after the defendant had left it, and shot Vivien Barnaby with the gun which by a strange forgetfulness the defendant had left behind him. You have heard the defendant's story of the reason it took him half an hour to get home. If you disbelieve the defendant's story and are satisfied, beyond any reasonable doubt that the defendant did, upon Friday,

September 23rd, discharge his gun at close quarters to Vivien Barnaby's head with intent to kill her, then, gentlemen, your verdict must be guilty. If, on the other hand, you have any reasonable doubt, it is your duty to acquit the prisoner. I will now ask you to retire to your room and consider and let me know when you have arrived at a conclusion."

The jury were absent a little under half an hour. They returned the verdict that to everyone had seemed a foregone conclusion, the verdict of "Guilty."

Mr. Satterthwaite left the court after hearing the verdict, with a thoughtful frown, on his face.

A mere murder trial, as such, did not attract him. He was of too fastidious a temperament to find interest in the sordid details of the average crime. But the Wylde case had been different. Young Martin Wylde was what is termed a gentleman-and the victim, Sir George Barnaby's young wife, had been personally known to the elderly gentleman.

He was thinking of all this as he walked up Holborn, and then plunged into a tangle of mean streets leading in the direction of Soho. In one of these streets there was a small restaurant, known only to the few, of whom Mr. Satterthwaite was one. It was not cheap-it was on the contrary, exceedingly expensive, since it catered exclusively for the palate of the jaded gourmet. It was quiet-no strains of jazz were allowed to disturb the hushed atmosphere-it was rather dark; waiters appeared soft-footed out of the twilight, bearing silver dishes with the air of participating in some holy rite. The name of the restaurant was Arlecchino.

Still thoughtful, Mr. Satterthwaite turned into the Arlecchino and made for his favourite table in a recess in the far corner. Owing to the twilight before mentioned, it was not until he was quite close to it that he saw it was already occupied by a tall, dark man who sat with his face in shadow, and with a play of color from a stained window turning his sober garb to a kind of riotous motley.

Mr. Satterthwaite would have turned back, but just at that moment the stranger moved slightly and the other recognized him.

"God bless my soul," said Mr. Satterthwaite, who was given to old-fashioned expressions. "Why, it's Mr. Quin!"

Three times before he had met Mr. Quin, and each time the meeting had resulted in something a little out of the ordinary. A strange person, this Mr. Quin, with a knack of showing you the things you had known all along in a totally different light.

At once Mr. Satterthwaite felt excited-pleasurably excited. His role was that of the looker on, and he knew it, but sometimes when in the company of Mr. Quin, he had the illusion of being an actor-and the principal actor at that.

"This is very pleasant," he said, beaming all over his dried up little face. "Very pleasant indeed. You've no objection to my joining you, I hope?"

"I shall be delighted," said Mr. Quin. "As you see I have not yet begun my meal."

A deferential head waiter hovered up out of the shadows. Mr. Satterthwaite, as befitted a man with a seasoned palate, gave his whole mind to the task of selection. In a few minutes, the head waiter, a slight smile of approbation on his lips, retired, and a young satellite began his ministrations. Mr. Satterthwaite turned to Mr. Quin.

"I have just come from the Old Bailey," he began. "A sad business, I thought."

"He was found guilty?" said Mr. Quin.

"Yes, the jury were out only half an hour."

Mr. Quin bowed his head.

"An inevitable result on the evidence," he said. "And yet," began Mr. Satterthwaite and stopped. Mr. Quin finished the sentence for him.

"And yet your sympathies were with the accused? Is that what you were going to say?"

"I suppose it was. Martin Wylde is a nice looking young fellow-one can hardly believe it of him. All the same, there have been a good many nice looking young fellows lately who have turned out to be murderers of a particularly cold blooded and repellent type."

"Too many," said Mr. Quin quietly.

"I beg your pardon?" said Mr. Satterthwaite, slightly startled.

"Too many for Martin Wylde. There has been a tendency from the beginning to regard this as just one more of a series of the same type of crime-a man seeking to free himself from one woman in order to marry another."

"Well," said Mr. Satterthwaite, doubtfully. "On the evidence"-

"Ah!" said Mr. Quin quickly, "I am afraid I have not followed all the evidence."

Mr. Satterthwaite's self-confidence came back to him with a rush. He felt a sudden sense of power. He was tempted to be consciously dramatic.

"Let me try and show it to you. I have met the Barnabys, you understand. I know the peculiar circumstances. With me, you will come behind the scenes-you will see the thing from inside."

Mr. Quin leaned forward with his quick encouraging smile.

"If anyone can show me that, it will be Mr. Satterthwaite," he murmured.

Mr. Satterthwaite gripped the table with both hands. He was uplifted, carried out of himself. For the moment, he was an artist pure and simple-an artist whose medium was words.

Swiftly, with a dozen broad strokes, he etched in the picture of life at Deering Hill. Sir George Barnaby, elderly, obese, purse-proud. A man perpetually fussing over the little things of life. A man who wound up his clocks every Friday afternoon, and who paid his own

housekeeping books every Tuesday morning, and who always saw to the locking of his own front door every night. A careful man.

And from Sir George he went on to Lady Barnaby. Here his touch was gentler, but none the less sure. He had seen her but once, but his impression of her was definite and lasting. A vivid, defiant creature-pitifully young. A trapped child, that was how he described her.

"She hated him, you understand? She had married him before she knew what she was doing. And now-"

She was desperate-that was how he put it. Turning this way and that. She had no money of her own; she was entirely dependent on this elderly husband. But all the same she was a creature at bay-still unsure of her own powers, with a beauty that was as yet more promise than actuality. And she was greedy. Mr. Satterthwaite affirmed that definitely. Side by side with defiance there ran a greedy streak-a clasping and a clutching at life.

"I never met Martin Wylde," continued Mr. Satterthwaite. "But I heard of him. He lived less than a mile away. Farming, that was his line. And she took an interest in farming or pretended to. If you ask me, it was pretending. I think that she saw in him her only way of escape and she grabbed at him, greedily, like a child might have done. Well, there could only be one end to that. We know what that end was, because the letters were read out in court. He kept her letters-she didn't keep his, but from the text of hers one can see that he was cooling off. He admits as much. There was the other girl. She also lived in the village of Deering Vale. Her father was the doctor there. You saw her in court, perhaps? No, I remember, you were not there, you said. I shall have to describe her to you. A fair girl-very fair. Gentle. Perhaps yes, perhaps a tiny bit stupid. But very restful, you know. And loyal. Above all, loyal."

He looked at Mr. Quin for encouragement, and Mr. Quin gave it him by a slow appreciative smile. Mr. Satterthwaite went on.

"You heard that last letter read-you must have seen it, in the papers, I mean. The one written on the morning of Friday, September 13th. It was full of desperate reproaches and vague threats, and it ended by begging Martin Wylde to come to Deering Hill that same evening at six o'clock. 'I will leave the side door open for you, so that no one need know you have been here. I shall be in the music room.' It was sent by hand."

Mr. Satterthwaite paused for a minute or two.

"When he was first arrested, you remember, Martin Wylde denied that he had been to the house at all that evening. His statement was that he had taken his gun and gone out shooting in the woods. But when the police brought forward their evidence, that statement broke down. They had found his finger-prints, you remember, both on the wood of the side door and on one of the two cocktail glasses on the table in the music room. He admitted then that he had come to see Lady Barnaby, that they had had a stormy interview, but that it had ended in his having managed to soothe her down. He swore that he left his gun outside leaning against the wall near the door, and that he left Lady Barnaby alive and well, the time being then a minute or two after a quarter past six. He went straight home, he says, but evidence was called to show that he did not reach his farm until a quarter to seven, and, as I have just mentioned, it is barely a mile away. It would not take half an hour to get there. He forgot all about his gun, he declares. Not a very likely statement-and yet-

"And yet?" queried Mr. Quin.

"Well," said Mr. Satterthwaite slowly, "it's a possible one, isn't it? Counsel ridiculed the supposition, of course, but I think he was wrong. You see, I've known a good many young men, and these emotional scenes upset them very much especially the dark nervous type like Martin Wylde. Women, now, can go through a scene like that, and feel positively better for it afterward, with all their wits about them. It acts like a safety valve for them, steadies their nerves down and all that. But I can see Martin Wylde going away with his

head in a whirl, sick and miserable, and without a thought of the gun he had left leaning up against the wall."

He was silent for some minutes before he went on.

"Not that it matters. For the next part is only too clear, unfortunately. It was exactly twenty minutes past six when the shot was heard. All the servants heard it, the cook, the kitchen-maid, the butler, the housemaid and Lady Barnaby's own maid. They came rushing to the music room. She was lying huddled over the arm of her chair. The gun had been discharged close to the back of her head, so that the shot hadn't a chance to scatter. At least two of them penetrated the brain."

He paused again and Mr. Quin asked casually: "The servants gave evidence, I suppose?"

Mr. Satterthwaite nodded.

"Yes. The butler got there a second or two before the others, but their evidence was practically a repetition of each other's."

"So they all gave evidence," said Mr. Quin musingly. "There were no exceptions?"

"Now I remember it," said Mr. Satterthwaite, "the housemaid was only called at the inquest. She's gone to Canada since, I believe."

"I see," said Mr. Quin.

There was a silence, and somehow the air of the little restaurant seemed to be charged with an uneasy feeling. Mr. Satterthwaite felt suddenly as though he were on the defensive.

"Why shouldn't she?" he said abruptly.

"Why should she?" said Mr. Quin with a very slight shrug of the shoulders.

Somehow, the question annoyed Mr. Satterthwaite. He wanted to shy away from it-to get back on familiar ground.

"There couldn't be much doubt who fired the shot. As a matter of fact the servants seemed to have lost their heads a bit. There was no one in the house to take charge. It was some minutes before anyone thought of ringing up the police, and when they did so, they found that the telephone was out of order."

"Oh," said Mr. Quin. "The telephone was out of order."

"It was," said Mr. Satterthwaite and was struck suddenly by the feeling that he had said something tremendously important.

"It might, of course, have been done on purpose," he said slowly. "But there seems no point in that. Death was practically instantaneous."

Mr. Quin said nothing, and Mr. Satterthwaite felt that his explanation was unsatisfactory.

"There was absolutely no one to suspect but young Wylde," he went on. "By his own account, even, he was only out of the house three minutes before the shot was fired. And who else could have fired it? Sir George was at a bridge party a few houses away. He left there at half past six and was met just outside the gate by a servant bringing him the news. The last rubber finished at half past six exactly-no doubt about that. Then there was Sir George's secretary, Henry Thompson. He was in London that day, and actually at a business meeting at the moment the shot was fired. Finally there is Sylvia Dale who, after all, had a perfectly good motive, impossible as it seems that she should have had anything to do with such a crime. She was at the station of Deering Vale seeing a friend off by the 6.28 train. That lets her out. Then the servants. What earthly motive could any one of them have? Besides they all arrived on the spot practically simultaneously. No, it must have been Martin Wylde."

But he said it in a dissatisfied kind of voice.

They went on with their lunch. Mr. Quin was not in a talkative mood, and Mr. Satterthwaite had said all he had to say. But the silence was not a barren one. It was filled with the growing

dissatisfaction of Mr. Satterthwaite, heightened and fostered in some strange way by the mere quiescence of the other man.

Mr. Satterthwaite suddenly put down his knife and fork with a clatter.

"Supposing that that young man is really innocent," he said. "He's going to be hanged."

He looked very startled and upset about it. And still Mr. Quin said nothing.

"It's not as though-" began Mr. Satterthwaite, and stopped. "Why shouldn't the woman go to Canada?" he ended inconsequently.

Mr. Quin shook his head.

"I don't even know what part of Canada she went to," continued Mr. Satterthwaite peevishly.

"Could you find out?" suggested the other.

"I suppose I could. The butler, now. He'd know. Or possibly Thompson, the secretary."

He paused again. When he resumed speech, his voice sounded almost pleading.

"It's not as though it were anything to do with me?"

"That a young man is going to be hanged in a little over three weeks?"

"Well, yes if you put it that way, I suppose. Yes, I see what you mean. Life and death. And that poor girl, too. It's not that I'm hard-hearted-but, after all-what good will it do? Isn't the whole thing rather fantastic? Even if I found out where the woman's gone to in Canada-why, it would probably mean that I should have to go out there myself."

Mr. Satterthwaite looked seriously upset.

"And I was thinking of going to the Riviera next week," he said pathetically.

And his glance toward Mr. Quin said as plainly as it could be said:  
"Do let me off, won't you?"

"You have never been to Canada?"

"Never."

"A very interesting country."

Mr. Satterthwaite looked at him undecidedly.

"You think I ought to go?"

Mr. Quin leaned back in his chair and lighted a cigarette. Between puffs of smoke, he spoke deliberately.

"You are, I believe, a rich man, Mr. Satterthwaite. Not a millionaire, but a man able to indulge a hobby without counting the expense. You have looked on at the dramas of other people. Have you never contemplated stepping in and playing a part? Have you never seen yourself for a minute as the arbiter of other people's destinies-standing in the centre of the stage with life and death in your hands?"

Mr. Satterthwaite leaned forward. The old eagerness surged over him.

"You mean if I go on this wild goose chase to Canada-"

Mr. Quin smiled.

"Oh! it was your suggestion, going to Canada, not mine," he said lightly.

"You can't put me off like that," said Mr. Satterthwaite earnestly.  
"Whenever I have come across you-" He stopped.

"Well?"

"There is something about you I do not understand. Perhaps I never shall. The last time I met you-"

"On Midsummer Eve."

Mr. Satterthwaite was startled, as though the words held a clue that he did not quite understand.

"Was it Midsummer Eve?" he asked confusedly.

"Yes. But let us not dwell on that. It is unimportant, is it not?"

"Since you say so," said Mr. Satterthwaite courteously. He felt that elusive clue slipping through his fingers. "When I come back from Canada-" he paused a little awkwardly-"I-I should much like to see you again."

"I am afraid I have no fixed address for the moment," said Mr. Quin regretfully. "But I often come to this place. If you also frequent it, we shall no doubt meet before very long."

They parted pleasantly.

Mr. Satterthwaite was very excited. He hurried round to Cook's and inquired about boat sailings. Then he rang up Deering Hill. The voice of a butler, suave and deferential, answered him.

"My name is Satterthwaite. I am speaking for a firm of solicitors. I wished to make a few inquiries about a young woman who was recently housemaid in your establishment."

"Would that be Louisa, sir? Louisa Bullard?"

"That is the name," said Mr. Satterthwaite, very pleased to be told it.

"I regret she is not in this country, sir. She went to Canada six months ago."

"Can you give me her present address?"

The butler was afraid he couldn't. It was a place in the mountains she had gone to a Scotch name-ah! Banff, that was it. Some of the other young women in the house had been expecting to hear from her, but she had never written or given them any address.

Mr. Satterthwaite thanked him and rang off. He was still undaunted. The adventurous spirit was strong in his breast. He

would go to Banff. If this Louisa Bullard was there, he would track her down somehow or other.

To his own surprise, he enjoyed the trip greatly. It was many years since he had taken a long sea voyage. The Riviera, Le Touquet and Deauville, and Scotland had been his usual round. The feeling that he was setting off on an impossible mission added a secret zest to his journey. What an utter fool these fellow travellers of his would think him did they but know the object of his quest! But then they were not acquainted with Mr. Quin.

In Banff he found his objective easily attained. Louisa Bullard was employed in the large hotel there. Twelve hours after his arrival he was standing face to face with her.

She was a woman of about thirty-five, anæmic looking, but with a strong frame. She had pale brown hair inclined to curl, and a pair of honest brown eyes. She was, he thought, slightly stupid, but very trustworthy.

She accepted quite readily his statement that he had been asked to collect a few further facts from her about the tragedy at Deering Hill.

"I saw in the paper that Mr. Martin Wylde had been convicted, sir. Very sad, it is, too."

She seemed, however, to have no doubt as to his guilt.

"A nice young gentleman gone wrong. But though I wouldn't speak ill of the dead, it was her ladyship what led him on. Wouldn't leave him alone, she wouldn't. Well, they've both got their punishment. There's a text used to hang on my wall when I was a child, 'God is not mocked,' and it's very true. I knew something was going to happen that very evening and sure enough it did."

"How was that?" said Mr. Satterthwaite.

"I was in my room, sir, changing my dress, and I happened to glance out of the window. There was a train going along, and the white smoke of it rose up in the air, and if you'll believe me it formed

itself into the sign of a gigantic hand. A great white hand against the crimson of the sky. The fingers were crooked like, as though they were reaching out for something. It fair gave me a turn. "Did you ever, now?" I said to myself. "That's a sign of something coming"—and sure enough at that very minute I heard the shot. "It's come," I said to myself, and I rushed downstairs and joined Carrie and the others who were in the hall, and we went into the music room and there she was, shot through the head—and the blood and everything. Horrible! I spoke up, I did, and told Sir George how I'd seen the sign beforehand, but he didn't seem to think much of it. An unlucky day, that was; I'd felt it in my bones from early in the morning. Friday, and the 13th—what could you expect?"

She rambled on. Mr. Satterthwaite was patient. Again and again he took her back to the crime, questioning her closely. In the end he was forced to confess defeat. Louisa Bullard had told all she knew, and her story was perfectly simple and straightforward.

Yet he did discover one fact of importance. The post in question had been suggested to her by Mr. Thompson, Sir George's secretary. The wages attached were so large that she was tempted, and accepted the job, although it involved her leaving England very hurriedly. A Mr. Denman had made all the arrangements to this end and had also warned her not to write to her fellow servants in England, as this might "get her into trouble with the immigration authorities," which statement she had accepted in blind faith.

The amount of the wages, casually mentioned by her, was indeed so large that Mr. Satterthwaite was startled. After some hesitation he made up his mind to approach this Mr. Denman.

He found very little difficulty in inducing Mr. Denman to tell all he knew. The latter had come across Thompson in London, and Thompson had done him a good turn. The secretary had written to him in September saying that for personal reasons Sir George was anxious to get this girl out of England. Could he find her a job? A sum of money had been sent to raise the wages to a high figure.

"Usual trouble, I guess," said Mr. Denman, leaning back nonchalantly in his chair. "Seems a nice quiet girl, too."

Mr. Satterthwaite did not agree that this was the usual trouble. Louisa Bullard, he was sure, was not a cast off fancy of Sir George Barnaby's. For some reason it had been vital to get her out of England. But why? And who was at the bottom of it? Sir George himself, working through Thompson? Or the latter working on his own initiative, and dragging in his employer's name.

Still pondering over these questions, Mr. Satterthwaite made the return journey. He was cast down and despondent. His journey had done no good.

Smarting under a sense of failure, he made his way to the Arlecchino the day after his return. He hardly expected to be successful the first time, but to his satisfaction the familiar figure was sitting at the table in the recess, and the dark face of Mr. Harley Quin smiled a welcome.

"Well," said Mr. Satterthwaite as he helped himself to a pat of butter, "you sent me on a nice wild goose chase."

Mr. Quin raised his eyebrows.

"I sent you?" he objected. "It was your own idea entirely."

"Whose-ever idea it was, it's not succeeded. Louisa Bullard has nothing to tell."

Thereupon Mr. Satterthwaite related the details of his conversation with the housemaid and then went on to his interview with Mr. Denman. Mr. Quin listened in silence.

"In one sense, I was justified," continued Mr. Satterthwaite. "She was deliberately got out of the way. But why? I can't see it."

"No?" said Mr. Quin, and his voice was, as ever, provocative.

Mr. Satterthwaite flushed.

"I daresay you think I might have questioned her more adroitly. I can assure you that I took her over the story again and again. It was

not my fault that I did not get what we want."

"Are you sure," said Mr. Quin, "that you did not get what you want?"

Mr. Satterthwaite looked up at him in astonishment, and met that sad mocking gaze he knew so well.

The little man shook his head, slightly bewildered.

There was a silence, and then Mr. Quin said, with a total change of manner:

"You gave me a wonderful picture the other day of the people in this business. In a few words you made them stand out as clearly as though they were etched. I wish you would do something of that kind for the place-you left that in shadow."

Mr. Satterthwaite was flattered.

"The place? Deering Hill? Well, it's a very ordinary sort of house nowadays. Red brick, you know, and bay windows. Quite hideous outside, but very comfortable inside. Not a very large house. About two acres of ground. They're all much the same, those houses round the links. Built for rich men to live in. The inside of the house is reminiscent of a hotel-the bedrooms are like hotel suites. Baths and hot and cold basins in all the bedrooms and a good many gilded electric light fittings. All wonderfully comfortable, but not very country-like. You can tell that Deering Vale is only nineteen miles from London."

Mr. Quin listened attentively.

"The train service is bad, I have heard," he remarked.

"Oh! I don't know about that," said Mr. Satterthwaite, warming to his subject. "I was down there for a bit last summer. I found it quite convenient for town. Of course the trains only go every hour. Forty-eight minutes past the hour from Waterloo-up to 10.48."

"And how long does it take to Deering Vale?"

"Just about three quarters of an hour. Twenty-eight minutes past the hour at Deering Vale."

"Of course," said Mr. Quin with a gesture of vexation. "I should have remembered. Miss Dale saw someone off by the 6.28 that evening, didn't she?"

Mr. Satterthwaite did not reply for a minute or two. His mind had gone back with a rush to his unsolved problem. Presently he said:

"I wish you would tell me what you meant just now when you asked me if I was sure I had not got what I wanted?"

It sounded rather complicated, put that way, but Mr. Quin made no pretence of not understanding.

"I just wondered if you weren't being a little too exacting. After all, you found out that Louisa Bullard was deliberately got out of the country. That being so, there must be a reason. And the reason must lie in what she said to you."

"Well," said Mr. Satterthwaite argumentatively. "What did she say? If she'd given evidence at the trial, what could she have said?"

"She might have told what she saw," said Mr. Quin. "What did she see?"

"A sign in the sky."

Mr. Satterthwaite stared at him.

"Are you thinking of that nonsense? That superstitious notion of its being the hand of God?"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Quin. "For all you and I know it may have been the hand of God, you know."

The other was clearly puzzled at the gravity of his manner. "Nonsense," he said. "She said herself it was the smoke of the train."

"An up train or a down train, I wonder," murmured Mr. Quin.

"Hardly an up train. They go at ten minutes to the hour. It must have been a down train-the 6.28-no, that won't do. She said the

shot came immediately afterward, and we know the shot was fired at twenty minutes past six. The train couldn't have been ten minutes early."

"Hardly, on that line," agreed Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite was staring ahead of him. "Perhaps a goods train," he murmured. "But surely, if so—"

"There would have been no need to get her out of England. I agree," said Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite gazed at him, fascinated.

"The 6.28," he said slowly. "But if so, if the shot was fired then, why did everyone say it was earlier?"

"Obvious," said Mr. Quin. "The clocks must have been wrong."

"All of them?" said Mr. Satterthwaite doubtfully. "That's a pretty tall coincidence, you know."

"I wasn't thinking of it as a coincidence," said the other. "I was thinking that it was Friday."

"Friday?" said Mr. Satterthwaite.

"You did tell me, you know, that Sir George always wound the clocks on a Friday afternoon," said Mr. Quin apologetically.

"He put them back ten minutes," said Mr. Satterthwaite, almost in a whisper, so awed was he by the discoveries he was making. "Then he went out to bridge. I think he must have opened the note from his wife to Martin Wylde that morning—yes, decidedly he opened it. He left his bridge party at 6.30, found Martin's gun standing by the side door, and went in and shot her from behind. Then he went out again, threw the gun into the bushes where it was found later, and was apparently just coming out of the neighbour's gate when someone came running to fetch him. But the telephone—what about the telephone? Ah! yes, I see. He disconnected it so that a summons could not be sent to the police that way they might have noted the time it was received. And Wylde's story works out now. The real time

he left was five and twenty past six. Walking slowly, he would reach home about a quarter to seven. Yes, I see it all. Louisa was the only danger with her endless talk about her superstitious fancies. Someone might realise the significance of the train and then-good-bye to that excellent alibi."

"Wonderful," commented Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite turned to him, flushed with success. "The only thing is how to proceed now?"

"I should suggest Sylvia Dale," said Mr. Quin.

Mr. Satterthwaite looked doubtful.

"I mentioned to you," he said. "She seemed to me a little-er-stupid."

"She has a father and brothers who will take the necessary steps."

"That is true," said Mr. Satterthwaite, relieved.

A very short time afterward he was sitting with the girl, telling her the story. She listened attentively. She put no questions to him but when he had done she rose.

"I must have a taxi-at once."

"My dear child, what are you going to do?"

"I am going to Sir George Barnaby."

"Impossible. Absolutely the wrong procedure. Allow me to-"

He twittered on by her side. But he produced no impression. Sylvia Dale was intent on her own plans. She allowed him to go with her in the taxi, but to all his remonstrances she addressed a deaf ear. She left him in the taxi while she went into Sir George's city office.

It was half an hour later when she came out. She looked exhausted, her fair beauty drooping like a waterless flower. Mr. Satterthwaite received her with concern.

"I've won," she murmured, as she leaned back with half closed eyes.

"What?" he was startled. "What did you do? What did you say?"

She sat up a little.

"I told him that Louisa Bullard had been to the police with her story. I told him that the police had made inquiries and that he had been seen going into his own grounds and out again, a few minutes after half past six. I told him that the game was up. He-he went to pieces. I told him that there was still time for him to get away, that the police weren't coming for another hour to arrest him. I told him that if he'd sign a confession that he'd killed Vivien I'd do nothing, but that if he didn't I'd scream and tell the whole building the truth. He was so panicky that he didn't know what he was doing. He signed the paper without realising what he was doing."

She thrust it into his hands.

"Take it-take it. You know what to do with it so that they'll set Martin free."

"He actually signed it," cried Mr. Satterthwaite, amazed.

"He is a little stupid, you know," said Sylvia Dale. "So am I," she added as an afterthought. "That is why I know how stupid people behave. We get rattled, you know, and then we do the wrong thing and are sorry afterward."

She shivered and Mr. Satterthwaite patted her hand. "You need something to pull you together," he said. "Come, we are close to a very favourite resort of mine-the Arlecchino. Have you ever been there?"

She shook her head.

Mr. Satterthwaite stopped the taxi and took the girl into the little restaurant. He made his way to the table in the recess, his heart beating hopefully. But the table was empty.

Sylvia Dale saw the disappointment in his face.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Nothing," said Mr. Satterthwaite. "That is, I half expected to see a friend of mine here. It doesn't matter. Some day, I expect, I shall see him again."



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