

Eight

MR. EASTWOOD'S ADVENTURE

"Mr. Eastwood's Adventure" was first published as "The Mystery of the Second Cucumber" in *The Novel Magazine*, August 1924. It also appeared later as "The Mystery of the Spanish Shawl."

Mr. Eastwood looked at the ceiling. Then he looked down at the floor. From the floor his gaze travelled slowly up the right-hand wall. Then, with a sudden stern effort, he focused his gaze once more upon the typewriter before him.

The virgin white of the sheet of paper was defaced by a title written in capital letters.

"THE MYSTERY OF THE SECOND CUCUMBER," so it ran. A pleasing title. Anthony Eastwood felt that anyone reading that title

would be at once intrigued and arrested by it. "The Mystery of the Second Cucumber," they would say. "What *can* that be about? A cucumber? The second cucumber? I must certainly read that story." And they would be thrilled and charmed by the consummate ease with which this master of detective fiction had woven an exciting plot round this simple vegetable.

That was all very well. Anthony Eastwood knew as well as anyone what the story ought to be like—the bother was that somehow or other he couldn't get on with it. The two essentials for a story were a title and a plot—the rest was mere spadework, sometimes the title led to a plot all by itself, as it were, and then all was plain sailing—but in this case the title continued to adorn the top of the page, and not the vestige of a plot was forthcoming.

Again Anthony Eastwood's gaze sought inspiration from the ceiling, the floor, and the wallpaper, and still nothing materialized.

Conflict

"I shall call the heroine Sonia," said Anthony, to urge himself on. "Sonia or possibly Dolores—she shall have a skin of ivory pallor—the kind that's not due to ill health, and eyes like fathomless pools. The hero shall be called George, or possibly John—something short and British. Then the gardener—I suppose there will have to be a gardener, we've got to drag that beastly cucumber in somehow or other—the gardener might be Scottish, and amusingly pessimistic about the early frost."

This method sometimes worked, but it didn't seem to be going to this morning. Although Anthony could see Sonia and George and the comic gardener quite clearly, they didn't show any willingness to be active and do things.

"I could make it a banana, of course," thought Anthony des-

perately. "Or a lettuce, or a Brussels sprout—Brussels sprout, now, how about that? Really a cryptogram for *Brussels*—stolen bearer bonds—sinister Belgian Baron."

For a moment a gleam of light seemed to show, but it died down again. The Belgian Baron wouldn't materialize, and Anthony suddenly remembered that early frosts and cucumbers were incompatible, which seemed to put the lid on the amusing remarks of the Scottish gardener.

"Oh! Damn!" said Mr. Eastwood.

He rose and seized the *Daily Mail*. It was just possible that someone or other had been done to death in such a way as to lend inspiration to a perspiring author. But the news this morning was mainly political and foreign. Mr. Eastwood cast down the paper in disgust.

Next, seizing a novel from the table, he closed his eyes and dabbed his finger down on one of the pages. The word thus indicated by Fate was "sheep." Immediately, with startling brilliance, a whole story unrolled itself in Mr. Eastwood's brain. Lovely girl—lover killed in the war, her brain unhinged, tends sheep on the Scottish mountains—mystic meeting with dead lover, final effect of sheep and moonlight like Academy picture with girl lying dead in the snow, and *two trails of footsteps* . . .

It was a beautiful story. Anthony came out of its conception with a sigh and a sad shake of the head. He knew only too well the editor in question did not want that kind of story—beautiful though it might be. The kind of story he wanted, and insisted on having (and incidentally paid handsomely for getting), was all about mysterious dark women, stabbed to the heart, a young hero unjustly suspected, and the sudden unravelling of the mystery and fixing of

the guilt on the least likely person, by the means of wholly inadequate clues—in fact, "THE MYSTERY OF THE SECOND CUCUMBER."

"Although," reflected Anthony, "ten to one, he'll alter the title and call it something rotten, like *'Murder Most Foul'* without so much as asking me! Oh, curse that telephone."

He strode angrily to it, and took down the receiver. Twice already in the last hour he had been summoned to it—once for a wrong number, and once to be roped in for dinner by a skittish society dame whom he hated bitterly, but who had been too pertinacious to defeat.

"Hallo!" he growled into the receiver.

A woman's voice answered him, a soft caressing voice with a trace of foreign accent.

"Is that you, beloved?" it said softly.

② Conflict #2

"Well—er—I don't know," said Mr. Eastwood cautiously. "Who's speaking?"

"It is I. Carmen. Listen, beloved. I am pursued—in danger—you must come at once. It is life or death now."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Eastwood politely. "I'm afraid you've got the wrong—"

She broke in before he could complete the sentence.

"*Madre de Dios!* They are coming. If they find out what I am doing, they will kill me. Do not fail me. Come at once. It is death for me if you don't come. You know, 320 Kirk Street. The word is cucumber . . . Hush . . ."

He heard the faint click as she hung up the receiver at the other end.

"Well, I'm damned," said Mr. Eastwood, very much astonished.

He crossed over to his tobacco jar, and filled his pipe carefully.

"I suppose," he mused, "that that was some curious effect of my subconscious self. She can't have *said* cucumber. The whole thing is very extraordinary. Did she say cucumber, or didn't she?"

He strolled up and down, irresolutely.

"320 Kirk Street. I wonder what it's all about? She'll be expecting the other man to turn up. I wish I could have explained. 320 Kirk Street. The word is cucumber—oh, impossible, absurd—hallucination of a busy brain."

He glanced malevolently at the typewriter.

"What good are you, I should like to know? I've been looking at you all the morning, and a lot of good it's done me. An author should get his plot from life—from life, do you hear? I'm going out to get one now."

He clapped a hat on his head, gazed affectionately at his priceless collection of old enamels, and left the flat.

Kirk Street, as most Londoners know, is a long, straggling thoroughfare, chiefly devoted to antique shops, where all kinds of spurious goods are offered at fancy prices. There are also old brass shops, glass shops, decayed secondhand shops and secondhand clothes dealers.

No. 320 was devoted to the sale of old glass. Glassware of all kinds filled it to overflowing. It was necessary for Anthony to move gingerly as he advanced up a centre aisle flanked by wine glasses and with lustres and chandeliers swaying and twinkling over his head. A very old lady was sitting at the back of the shop. She had a budding moustache that many an undergraduate might have envied, and a truculent manner.

She looked at Anthony and said, "Well?" in a forbidding voice.

Anthony was a young man somewhat easily discomposed. He immediately inquired the price of some hock glasses.

"Forty-five shillings for half a dozen."

"Oh, really," said Anthony. "Rather nice, aren't they? How much are these things?"

"Beautiful, they are, old Waterford. Let you have the pair for eighteen guineas."

Mr. Eastwood felt that he was laying up trouble for himself. In another minute he would be buying something, hypnotized by this fierce old woman's eye. And yet he could not bring himself to leave the shop.

"What about that?" he asked, and pointed to a chandelier.

"Thirty-five guineas."

"Ah!" said Mr. Eastwood regretfully. "That's rather more than I can afford."

"What do you want?" asked the old lady. "Something for a wedding present?"

"That's it," said Anthony, snatching at the explanation. "But they're very difficult to suit."

"Ah, well," said the lady, rising with an air of determination. "A nice piece of old glass comes amiss to nobody. I've got a couple of old decanters here—and there's a nice little liqueur set, just the thing for a bride—"

For the next ten minutes Anthony endured agonies. The lady had him firmly in hand. Every conceivable specimen of the glass-maker's art was paraded before his eyes. He became desperate.

"Beautiful, beautiful," he exclaimed in a perfunctory manner, as he put down a large goblet that was being forced on his attention. Then blurted out hurriedly, "I say, are you on the telephone here?"

"No, we're not. There's a call office at the post office just opposite. Now, what do you say, the goblet—or these fine old rummers?"

Not being a woman, Anthony was quite unversed in the gentle art of getting out of a shop without buying anything.

"I'd better have the liqueur set," he said gloomily.

It seemed the smallest thing. He was terrified of being landed with the chandelier.

With bitterness in his heart he paid for his purchase. And then, as the old lady was wrapping up the parcel, courage suddenly returned to him. After all, she would only think him eccentric, and, anyway, what the devil did it matter what she thought?

"Cucumber," he said, clearly and firmly.

The old crone paused abruptly in her wrapping operations.

"Eh? What did you say?"

"Nothing," lied Anthony defiantly.

"Oh! I thought you said cucumber."

"So I did," said Anthony defiantly.

"Well," said the old lady. "Why ever didn't you say that before? Wasting my time. Through that door there and upstairs. She's waiting for you."

As though in a dream, Anthony passed through the door indicated, and climbed some extremely dirty stairs. At the top of them a door stood ajar displaying a tiny sitting room.

Sitting on a chair, her eyes fixed on the door, and an expression of eager expectancy on her face, was a girl.

Such a girl! She really had the ivory pallor that Anthony had so often written about. And her eyes! Such eyes! She was not English, that could be seen at a glance. She had a foreign exotic

quality which showed itself even in the costly simplicity of her dress.

Anthony paused in the doorway, somewhat abashed. The moment of explanations seemed to have arrived. But with a cry of delight the girl rose and flew into his arms.

"You have come," she cried. "You have come. Oh, the saints and the Holy Madonna be praised."

Anthony, never one to miss opportunities, echoed her fervently. She drew away at last, and looked up in his face with a charming shyness.

"I should never have known you," she declared. "Indeed I should not."

"Wouldn't you?" said Anthony feebly.

"No, even your eyes seem different—and you are ten times handsomer than I ever thought you would be."

"Am I?"

To himself Anthony was saying, "Keep calm, my boy, keep calm. The situation is developing very nicely, but don't lose your head."

"I may kiss you again, yes?"

"Of course you can," said Anthony heartily. "As often as you like."

There was a very pleasant interlude.

"I wonder who the devil I am?" thought Anthony. "I hope to goodness the real fellow won't turn up. What a perfect darling she is."

Suddenly the girl drew away from him, and a momentary terror showed in her face.

"You were not followed here?"

"Lord, no."

"Ah, but they are very cunning. You do not know them as well as I do. Boris, he is a fiend."

"I'll soon settle Boris for you."

"You are a lion—yes, but a lion. As for them, they are *canaille*—all of them. Listen, *I have it!* They would have killed me had they known. I was afraid—I did not know what to do, and then I thought of you . . . Hush, what was that?"

It was a sound in the shop below. Motioning to him to remain where he was, she tiptoed out on to the stairs. She returned with a white face and staring eyes.

"*Madre de Dios!* It is the police. They are coming up here. You have a knife? A revolver? Which?"

"My dear girl, you don't expect me seriously to murder a policeman?"

"Oh, but you are mad—mad! They will take you away and hang you by the neck until you're dead."

"They'll *what?*" said Mr. Eastwood, with a very unpleasant feeling going up and down his spine.

Steps sounded on the stair.

"Here they come," whispered the girl. "Deny everything. It is the only hope."

"That's easy enough," admitted Mr. Eastwood, *sotto voce*.

In another minute two men had entered the room. They were in plain clothes, but they had an official bearing that spoke of long training. The smaller of the two, a little dark man with quiet grey eyes, was the spokesman.

"I arrest you, Conrad Fleckman," he said, "for the murder of

Anna Rosenberg. Anything you say will be used in evidence against you. Here is my warrant and you will do well to come quietly."

A half-strangled scream burst from the girl's lips. Anthony stepped forward with a composed smile.

"You are making a mistake, officer," he said pleasantly. "My name is Anthony Eastwood."

The two detectives seemed completely unimpressed by his statement.

"We'll see about that later," said one of them, the one who had not spoken before. "In the meantime, you come along with us."

"Conrad," wailed the girl. "Conrad, do not let them take you."

Anthony looked at the detectives.

"You will permit me, I am sure, to say good-bye to this young lady?"

With more decency of feeling than he had expected, the two men moved towards the door. Anthony drew the girl into the corner by the window, and spoke to her in a rapid undertone.

"Listen to me. What I said was true. I am not Conrad Fleckman. When you rang up this morning, they must have given you the wrong number. My name is Anthony Eastwood. I came in answer to your appeal because—well, I came."

She stared at him incredulously.

"You are not Conrad Fleckman?"

"No."

"Oh!" she cried, with a deep accent of distress. "And I kissed you!"

"That's all right," Mr. Eastwood assured her. "The early Christians made a practice of that sort of thing. Jolly sensible. Now look here, I'll tool off with these people. I shall soon prove my identity.

In the meantime, they won't worry you, and you can warn this precious Conrad of yours. Afterwards—"

"Yes?"

"Well—just this. My telephone number is North-western 1743—and mind they don't give you the wrong one."

She gave him an enchanting glance, half tears, half a smile.

"I shall not forget—indeed, I shall not forget."

"That's all right then. Good-bye. I say—"

"Yes?"

"Talking of the early Christians—once more wouldn't matter, would it?"

She flung her arms round his neck. Her lips just touched his.

"I do like you—yes, I do like you. You will remember that, whatever happens, won't you?"

Anthony disengaged himself reluctantly and approached his captors.

"I am ready to come with you. You don't want to detain this young lady, I suppose?"

"No, sir, that will be quite all right," said the small man civilly.

"Decent fellows, these Scotland Yard men," thought Anthony to himself, as he followed them down the narrow stairway.

There was no sign of the old woman in the shop, but Anthony caught a heavy breathing from a door at the rear, and guessed that she stood behind it, cautiously observing events.

Once out in the dinginess of Kirk Street, Anthony drew a long breath, and addressed the smaller of the two men.

"Now then, inspector—you are an inspector, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. Detective-Inspector Verrall. This is Detective-Sergeant Carter."

"Well, Inspector Verrall, the time has come to talk sense—and to listen to it too. I'm not Conrad What's-his-name. My name is Anthony Eastwood, as I told you, and I am a writer by profession. If you will accompany me to my flat, I think that I shall be able to satisfy you of my identity."

Something in the matter-of-fact way Anthony spoke seemed to impress the detectives. For the first time an expression of doubt passed over Verrall's face.

Carter, apparently, was harder to convince.

"I daresay," he sneered. "But you'll remember the young lady was calling you 'Conrad' all right."

"Ah! that's another matter. I don't mind admitting to you both that for—er—reasons of my own, I was passing myself off upon that lady as a person called Conrad. A private matter, you understand."

"Likely story, isn't it?" observed Carter. "No, sir, you come along with us. Hail that taxi, Joe."

A passing taxi was stopped, and the three men got inside. Anthony made a last attempt, addressing himself to Verrall as the more easily convinced of the two.

"Look here, my dear inspector, what harm is it going to do you to come along to my flat and see if I'm speaking the truth? You can keep the taxi if you like—there's a generous offer! It won't make five minutes' difference either way."

Verrall looked at him searchingly.

"I'll do it," he said suddenly. "Strange as it appears, I believe you're speaking the truth. We don't want to make fools of ourselves at the station by arresting the wrong man. What's the address?"

"Forty-eight Brandenburg Mansions."

Verrall leant out and shouted the address to the taxi driver. All three sat in silence until they arrived at their destination, when Carter sprang out, and Verrall motioned to Anthony to follow him.

"No need for any unpleasantness," he explained, as he, too, descended. "We'll go in friendly like, as though Mr. Eastwood was bringing a couple of pals home."

Anthony felt extremely grateful for the suggestion, and his opinion of the Criminal Investigation Department rose every minute.

In the hallway they were fortunate enough to meet Rogers, the porter. Anthony stopped.

"Ah! Good evening, Rogers," he remarked casually.

"Good evening, Mr. Eastwood," replied the porter respectfully.

He was attached to Anthony, who set an example of liberality not always followed by his neighbours.

Anthony paused with his foot on the bottom step of the stairs.

"By the way, Rogers," he said casually. "How long have I been living here? I was just having a little discussion about it with these friends of mine."

"Let me see, sir, it must be getting on for close on four years now."

"Just what I thought."

Anthony flung a glance of triumph at the two detectives. Carter grunted, but Verrall was smiling broadly.

"Good, but not good enough, sir," he remarked. "Shall we go up?"

Anthony opened the door of the flat with his latchkey. He was

thankful to remember that Seamark, his man, was out. The fewer witnesses of this catastrophe the better.

The typewriter was as he had left it. Carter strode across to the table and read the headline on the paper.

"THE MYSTERY OF THE SECOND CUCUMBER"

he announced in a gloomy voice.

"A story of mine," explained Anthony nonchalantly.

"That's another good point, sir," said Verrall, nodding his head, his eyes twinkling. "By the way, sir, what was it about? What *was* the mystery of the second cucumber?"

"Ah, there you have me," said Anthony. "It's that second cucumber that's been at the bottom of all this trouble."

Carter was looking at him intently. Suddenly he shook his head and tapped his forehead significantly.

"Balmy, poor young fellow," he murmured in an audible aside.

"Now, gentlemen," said Mr. Eastwood briskly. "To business. Here are letters addressed to me, my bankbook, communications from editors. What more do you want?"

Verrall examined the papers that Anthony thrust upon him.

"Speaking for myself, sir," he said respectfully, "I want nothing more. I'm quite convinced. But I can't take the responsibility of releasing you upon myself. You see, although it seems positive that you have been residing here as Mr. Eastwood for some years, yet it is possible that Conrad Fleckman and Anthony Eastwood are one and the same person. I must make a thorough search of the flat, take your fingerprints, and telephone to headquarters."

"That seems a comprehensive programme," remarked Anthony. "I can assure you that you're welcome to any guilty secrets of mine you may lay your hands on."

The inspector grinned. For a detective, he was a singularly human person.

"Will you go into the little end room, sir, with Carter, whilst I'm getting busy?"

"All right," said Anthony unwillingly. "I suppose it couldn't be the other way about, could it?"

"Meaning?"

"That you and I and a couple of whiskies and sodas should occupy the end room whilst our friend, the Sergeant, does the heavy searching."

"If you prefer it, sir?"

"I do prefer it."

They left Carter investigating the contents of the desk with businesslike dexterity. As they passed out of the room, they heard him take down the telephone and call up Scotland Yard.

"This isn't so bad," said Anthony, settling himself with a whisky and soda by his side, having hospitably attended to the wants of Inspector Verrall. "Shall I drink first, just to show you that the whisky isn't poisoned?"

The inspector smiled.

"Very irregular, all this," he remarked. "But we know a thing or two in our profession. I realized right from the start that we'd made a mistake. But of course one had to observe all the usual forms. You can't get away from red tape, can you, sir?"

"I suppose not," said Anthony regretfully. "The sergeant doesn't seem very matey yet, though, does he?"

"Ah, he's a fine man, Detective-Sergeant Carter. You wouldn't find it easy to put anything over on him."

"I've noticed that," said Anthony.

"By the way, inspector," he added, "is there any objection to my hearing something about myself?"

"In what way, sir?"

"Come now, don't you realize that I'm devoured by curiosity? Who was Anna Rosenberg, and why did I murder her?"

"You'll read all about it in the newspapers tomorrow, sir."

"Tomorrow I may be Myself with Yesterday's ten thousand years," quoted Anthony. "I really think you might satisfy my perfectly legitimate curiosity, inspector. Cast aside your official reticence, and tell me all."

"It's quite irregular, sir."

"My dear inspector, when we are becoming such fast friends?"

"Well, sir, Anna Rosenberg was a German-Jewess who lived at Hampstead. With no visible means of livelihood, she grew yearly richer and richer."

"I'm just the opposite," commented Anthony. "I have a visible means of livelihood and I get yearly poorer and poorer. Perhaps I should do better if I lived in Hampstead. I've always heard Hampstead is very bracing."

"At one time," continued Verrall, "she was a secondhand clothes dealer—"

"That explains it," interrupted Anthony. "I remember selling my uniform after the war—not khaki, the other stuff. The whole flat was full of red trousers and gold lace, spread out to best advantage. A fat man in a check suit arrived in a Rolls-Royce with a factotum complete with bag. He bid one pound ten for the lot. In

the end I threw in a hunting coat and some Zeiss glasses to make up the two pounds, at a given signal the factotum opened the bag and shovelled the goods inside, and the fat man tendered me a ten-pound note and asked me for change."

"About ten years ago," continued the inspector, "there were several Spanish political refugees in London—amongst them a certain Don Fernando Ferrarez with his young wife and child. They were very poor, and the wife was ill. Anna Rosenberg visited the place where they were lodging and asked if they had anything to sell. Don Fernando was out, and his wife decided to part with a very wonderful Spanish shawl, embroidered in a marvellous manner, which had been one of her husband's last presents to her before flying from Spain. When Don Fernando returned, he flew into a terrible rage on hearing the shawl had been sold, and tried vainly to recover it. When he at last succeeded in finding the secondhand clothes woman in question, she declared that she had resold the shawl to a woman whose name she did not know. Don Fernando was in despair. Two months later he was stabbed in the street and died as a result of his wounds. From that time onward, Anna Rosenberg seemed suspiciously flush of money. In the ten years that followed, her house was burgled no less than eight times. Four of the attempts were frustrated and nothing was taken, on the other four occasions, an embroidered shawl of some kind was amongst the booty."

The inspector paused, and then went on in obedience to an urgent gesture from Anthony.

"A week ago, Carmen Ferrarez, the young daughter of Don Fernando, arrived in this country from a convent in France. Her first action was to seek out Anna Rosenberg at Hampstead. There

she is reported to have had a violent scene with the old woman, and her words at leaving were overheard by one of the servants.

"'You have it still,' she cried. 'All these years you have grown rich on it—but I say to you solemnly that in the end it will bring you bad luck. You have no moral right to it, and the day will come when you will wish you had never seen the Shawl of the Thousand Flowers.'"

"Three days after that, Carmen Ferrarez disappeared mysteriously from the hotel where she was staying. In her room was found a name and address—the name of Conrad Fleckman, and also a note from a man purporting to be an antique dealer asking if she were disposed to part with a certain embroidered shawl which he believed she had in her possession. The address given on the note was a false one.

"It is clear that the shawl is the centre of the whole mystery. Yesterday morning Conrad Fleckman called upon Anna Rosenberg. She was shut up with him for an hour or more, and when he left she was obliged to go to bed, so white and shaken was she by the interview. But she gave orders that if he came to see her again he was always to be admitted. Last night she got up and went out about nine o'clock, and did not return. She was found this morning in the house occupied by Conrad Fleckman, stabbed through the heart. On the floor beside her was—what do you think?"

"The shawl?" breathed Anthony. "The Shawl of a Thousand Flowers."

"Something far more gruesome than that. Something which explained the whole mysterious business of the shawl and made its hidden value clear . . . Excuse me, I fancy that's the chief—"

There had indeed been a ring at the bell. Anthony contained

his impatience as best he could and waited for the inspector to return. He was pretty well at ease about his own position now. As soon as they took the fingerprints they would realise their mistake.

And then, perhaps, Carmen would ring up. . . .

The Shawl of a Thousand Flowers! What a strange story—just the kind of story to make an appropriate setting for the girl's exquisite dark beauty.

Carmen Ferrarez. . . .

He jerked himself back from day dreaming. What a time that inspector fellow was. He rose and pulled the door open. The flat was strangely silent. Could they have gone? Surely not without a word to him.

He strode out into the next room. It was empty—so was the sitting room. Strangely empty! It had a bare dishevelled appearance. Good heavens! His enamels—the silver!

He rushed wildly through the flat. It was the same tale everywhere. The place had been denuded. Every single thing of value, and Anthony had a very pretty collector's taste in small things, had been taken.

With a groan Anthony staggered to a chair, his head in his hands. He was aroused by the ringing of the front doorbell. He opened it to confront Rogers.

"You'll excuse me, sir," said Rogers. "But the gentlemen fancied you might be wanting something."

"The gentlemen?"

"Those two friends of yours, sir. I helped them with the packing as best I could. Very fortunately I happened to have them two good cases in the basement." His eyes dropped to the floor. "I've swept up the straw as best I could, sir."

"You packed the things in here?" groaned Anthony.

"Yes, sir. Was that not your wishes, sir? It was the tall gentleman told me to do, sir, and seeing as you were busy talking to the other gentleman in the little end room, I didn't like to disturb you."

"I wasn't talking to him," said Anthony. "He was talking to me—curse him."

Rogers coughed.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry for the necessity, sir," he murmured.

"Necessity?"

"Of parting with your little treasures, sir."

"Eh? Oh, yes. Ha, ha!" He gave a mirthless laugh. "They've driven off by now, I suppose. Those—those friends of mine, I mean?"

"Oh, yes, sir, some time ago. I put the cases on the taxi and the tall gentleman went upstairs again, and then they both came running down and drove off at once . . . Excuse me, sir, but is anything wrong, sir?"

Rogers might well ask. The hollow groan which Anthony emitted would have aroused surmise anywhere.

"Everything is wrong, thank you, Rogers. But I see clearly that you were not to blame. Leave me, I would commune a while with my telephone."

Five minutes later saw Anthony pouring his tale into the ears of Inspector Driver, who sat opposite to him, notebook in hand. An unsympathetic man, Inspector Driver, and not (Anthony reflected) nearly so like a real inspector! Distinctly stagey, in fact. Another striking example of the superiority of Art over Nature.

Anthony reached the end of his tale. The inspector shut up his notebook.

"Well?" said Anthony anxiously.

"Clear as paint," said the inspector. "It's the Patterson gang. They've done a lot of smart work lately. Big fair man, small dark man, and the girl."

"The girl?"

"Yes, dark and mighty good looking. Acts as a decoy usually."

"A—a Spanish girl?"

"She might call herself that. She was born in Hampstead."

"I *said* it was a bracing place," murmured Anthony.

"Yes, it's clear enough," said the inspector, rising to depart. "She got you on the phone and pitched you a tale—she guessed you'd come along all right. Then she goes along to old Mother Gibson's who isn't above accepting a tip for the use of her room for them as finds it awkward to meet in public—lovers, you understand, nothing criminal. You fall for it all right, they get you back here, and while one of them pitches you a tale, the other gets away with the swag. It's the Pattersons all right—just their touch."

"And my things?" said Anthony anxiously.

"We'll do what we can, sir. But the Pattersons are uncommon sharp."

"They seem to be," said Anthony bitterly.

The inspector departed, and scarcely had he gone before there came a ring at the door. Anthony opened it. A small boy stood there, holding a package.

"Parcel for you, sir."

Anthony took it with some surprise. He was not expecting a parcel of any kind. Returning to the sitting room with it, he cut the string.

It was the liqueur set!

"Damn!" said Anthony.

Then he noticed that at the bottom of one of the glasses there was a tiny artificial rose. His mind flew back to the upper room in Kirk Street.

"I do like you—yes, I do like you. You will remember that whatever happens, won't you?"

That was what she had said. *Whatever happens...* Did she mean—

Anthony took hold of himself sternly.

"This won't do," he admonished himself.

His eye fell on the typewriter, and he sat down with a resolute face.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SECOND CUCUMBER

His face grew dreamy again. The Shawl of a Thousand Flowers. What was it that was found on the floor beside the dead body? The gruesome thing that explained the whole mystery?

Nothing, of course, since it was only a trumped-up tale to hold his attention, and the teller had used the old Arabian Nights' trick of breaking off at the most interesting point. But couldn't there be a gruesome thing that explained the whole mystery? couldn't there now? If one gave one's mind to it?

Anthony tore the sheet of paper from his typewriter and substituted another. He typed a headline:

THE MYSTERY OF THE SPANISH SHAWL

He surveyed it for a moment or two in silence.

Then he began to type rapidly. . . .