

I walked home after the inquest. Mother had gone in the car, looking rather sick, as she had done since Elinor's death. Not that she had liked Elinor. My cousin Elinor Hammond had gone happily through life, as if she woke each morning wondering what would be the most fun that day; stretching her long lovely body between her silk sheets - how bitter mother was about those sheets! - and calling to poor tired old Fred in his dressing room.

'Let's have some people in for drinks, Fred.'

'Anything you say, my love.'

Anything Elinor said was all right with Fred. I remembered his face at the inquest - shocked and puzzled.

'You know of no reason why your - why Mrs Hammond should take her own life?'

'None at all.'

'Nothing about her health caused her anxiety?'

'Nothing. She always seemed to be in perfect health.'

'She was seeing Doctor Barclay.'

'She was tired,' he said unhappily.

But Elinor had either fallen or jumped from that tenth-floor window of Doctor Barclay's waiting room, and the coroner clearly believed she had jumped.

The doctor had not seen her that day. Only the nurse. 'There was no one else in the waiting room,' she told the coroner. 'The doctor was with a patient. Mrs Hammond sat by the window, took off her hat, lit a cigarette and picked up

a magazine. Then I went back to my office and didn't see her again until-

She was a pretty little thing. She looked pale.

'What happened next?' said the coroner gently.

'I heard the other patient leave. She went out from the doctor's room. When he rang for the next patient, I went to get Mrs Hammond. She wasn't there. I saw her hat, but her bag was gone. Then ...' She stopped and swallowed. 'Then I heard people shouting in the street and I looked out of the window.'

The coroner gave her a little time, then said, 'Would you say she was depressed that morning, Miss Comings?'

'I thought she seemed very cheerful,' she said.

'The window was open beside her?'

'Yes. I couldn't believe it.' She was crying by this time, and it was clear she had told all she knew.

Doctor Barclay, who had just come in, was called next. He was in his late thirties and quite good-looking. Knowing Elinor, I wondered. She had liked handsome men. Fred, who was not at all handsome, was the exception. Beside me, mother had also noticed the doctor's good looks.

So that's it!' she said disapprovingly. 'Elinor had as much need for a psychiatrist as I need a third leg!'

The doctor had not seen Elinor at all that morning. When he rang and nobody came, he went to the waiting room where Miss Comings was looking out of the window. Suddenly, she began to scream. Fortunately a Mrs

Thompson arrived at that time and went to help her.

Asked about Elinor's visits to him, he said, 'I have many patients who are nervous and anxious. Mrs Hammond had been like that for years.'

'That is all? She spoke of no particular trouble?'

He smiled faintly. 'We all have troubles. Some we imagine, some are real. But I would say that Mrs Hammond was an unusually normal person. I had recommended that she go away for a rest. I believe she meant to do so.'

His voice was cool and efficient. Fred, however, was watching him closely.

'You did not think that she intended suicide?'

'No. Not at any time.'

He would not speak about anything Elinor had imagined. His relationships with his patients, he said, were confidential. If he knew anything of value he would tell them, but he did not.

He sat down near us and the next witness was called. It was the Mrs Thompson who had looked after the nurse.

'I clean the doctor's apartment for him once a week,' she said. 'That day I needed a little money in advance, so I went to see him.'

She had not entered the office at once. She had looked in the waiting room and seen Elinor, and had waited in the hall where it was cool. She saw the last patient, a woman, leave the doctor's room and go down the stairs. A minute or so later she heard the nurse scream.

'She was looking out of the window screaming,' she said. 'The doctor ran in and we got her into a chair. Somebody had fallen out, she said, but didn't say who.'

Asked how long she had been in the hall, she thought about quarter of an hour. She was sure no other patient had entered during that time. She would have seen them.

'You found something belonging to Mrs Hammond, didn't you? In the waiting room?'

'Yes, I found her bag.' The bag, it seemed, had been behind the radiator in front of the window. 'I thought it was a strange place for it, if she was going to - do what she did. I gave it to the police when they came.'

So Elinor, having put her hat on the table, had dropped her bag behind the radiator before she jumped. Somehow it didn't make sense to me.

The verdict was suicide. Nobody mentioned murder. After Mrs Thompson's evidence, it seemed impossible. Fred listened with dead eyes. His sister Margaret, sitting beside him, stood up. Doctor Barclay stared ahead of him, then he got up and went out.

I was angry as I walked home. I had always liked Elinor, even though mother said she took Fred away from me. But Fred never saw me after he first met her. He had loved her with a blind passion from the start.

The fools, I thought. Even if Elinor was in trouble, she would never have jumped out of a window. Somebody had killed her and had got away with it. Who hated her enough for that? A jealous wife? It was possible. She would play

around with a woman's husband until she was tired of him. But she had not been doing that lately. She had been rather quiet. Of course, plenty of people had not liked her. She would ignore their feelings or laugh at them. She said what she had to say, and sometimes it wasn't pleasant. Even to Fred. But he had never got angry.

I thought about Fred sitting alone and it made me sad. His house was not far away, and after dinner that evening I went over. It was a large house, surrounded by its own grounds like ours, and a man was standing inside the gates, looking up at the house. He turned suddenly and looked at me. It was Doctor Barclay.

He didn't recognize me. I suppose he had not seen me at the inquest. He touched his hat and went out into the street, and a moment later I heard his car start. But if he had been in the house, Fred made no mention of it. He seemed relieved when he saw me.

'I thought you were the police again,' he said.

We went into the library. It looked as if it hadn't been cleaned for a month. Elinor's house had always looked like that; full of people and cigarette smoke and dirty drinks glasses. But at least it had looked alive. Now it didn't. So it was a surprise to see her bag on the table. Fred saw me looking at it.

'Police returned it today,' he said. 'Drink?'

'Thanks. Can I look inside it?'

He nodded. 'There's nothing in it that doesn't belong there. No note, if that's what you think.'

I opened the bag. It was full as usual: make-up, money, notebook, a handkerchief marked with lipstick, some pieces of dress material with a card saying 'Match shoes to these.' Fred watched me, his eyes red and tired. 'I told you. Nothing,' he said.

I searched the bag again, but could not find the thing that should have been there. I put it back on the table.

Fred was staring at a photograph of Elinor in a silver frame, on the desk. 'She was beautiful.'

'She was indeed,' I said honestly.

'Margaret thought she was a fool who spent too much money.' He glanced at the desk, piled high with unopened bills. 'Maybe she was, but what the hell did I care?'

He seemed to expect me to say something, so I said, 'You didn't have to buy her, Fred. She loved you dearly.'

He gave me a faint smile. 'I wasn't only her husband,' he said, 'I was her father, too. She told me everything. Why she had to go to that doctor . . .'

'Didn't you know she was going, Fred?'

'Not until I found a bill from him.' He talked on as if he was glad of an audience. He had made her happy. She went her own way sometimes, but she always came back to him. He thought the coroner's verdict was terribly wrong. 'She fell. She was always careless about heights.' And he had made no plans, except that Margaret was coming to stay until he closed the house.

And at that minute Margaret walked in.

I had never liked Margaret Hammond. She was a tall woman, older than Fred. She nodded to me.

'I decided to come tonight,' she said to Fred. 'I didn't like you being alone. And tomorrow I want to make a list of everything in the house. I'd like to have father's picture, Fred.'

He looked uncomfortable. There had been a long quarrel about old Joe Hammond's picture. Elinor had not cared about it, but because Margaret had wanted it she had kept it. I looked at Margaret. Perhaps she was the nearest thing to a real enemy Elinor had ever had.

She looked at the pile of bills on the desk. 'We'll have to find out how much money you owe.'

'I know how much money I owe,' he said.

He got up and they stared at each other, Fred with his back to the desk, as if even then he was protecting Elinor from Margaret. But as I left the house, I was fairly confident that Margaret would come downstairs later, when Fred was asleep, and go through those bills.

I was nearly home when I realized I was being followed. Feeling frightened, I stopped and turned. But it was only a girl. She spoke my name.

'Miss Baring? I saw you at the inquest and a newspaper man told me your name. You've been to the Hammonds', haven't you?'

'Yes. What about it?'

She was quite young and seemed nervous.

'Were you a friend of Mrs Hammond's?' she asked.

'She was my cousin. Why?'

She took a cigarette from her bag and lit it. 'Because I think she was pushed out of that window. I work in an office across the street, and I was looking out. I didn't know who she was, of course.'

'Do you mean you saw it happen?' I said, amazed.

'No. But I saw her at the window just before it happened, and she was using a lipstick. When I looked out again she was . . . on the pavement.' Her hand started to shake and she threw away the cigarette. 'I don't think a woman would use a lipstick just before she was going to do a thing like that, do you?'

'No,' I said. 'You're sure it was Mrs Hammond?'

'Yes. She had on a green dress, and I noticed her hair. I went back tonight to see if the lipstick was on the pavement. I couldn't find it. The street was crowded. Someone may have picked it up. It's three days ago. But I'm sure she had it when she fell.'

That was what I had not told Fred, that Elinor's gold lipstick was missing from her bag.

I looked at my watch. It was only eleven o'clock.

'We could go and look again,' I said.

She would not tell me her name. 'Just call me Smith. I don't want to get involved. I have a job to keep.'

I found the lipstick. It was at the side of the road, and twenty cars must have run over it. But after I wiped the mud

off it, the familiar letter 'E' was there to see.

Miss Smith saw it and gasped. 'So I was right.'

Then she jumped on a bus, and I never saw her again.

I slept badly that night, and it was late when I got to Doctor Barclay's office the next morning. I walked in and put Elinor's lipstick on his desk.

'I don't think I understand,' he said, staring at it.

'Mrs Hammond was at the window using that lipstick, only a minute before she fell.'

'Do you mean it fell with her?'

'I mean that she never killed herself. Do you think a woman would put lipstick on just before she was going to do - what we're supposed to think she did?'

He smiled. 'My dear girl, if you saw as much of human nature as I do that wouldn't surprise you.'

'So Elinor Hammond jumped out of your window with a lipstick in her hand, and you watched the Hammond house last night and hurried away when I appeared. If that makes sense ...'

It shocked him. He hadn't recognized me before.

'I see,' he said. 'So it was you.' He leaned forward in his chair. 'I suppose I'd better tell you and trust you to say nothing. I didn't like the way Mr Hammond looked at the inquest. I was afraid he might- well, shoot himself.'

'You couldn't stop it, standing outside,' I said.

'I was wondering how to get in when you arrived. His

sister phoned me. She was worried.'

'I wouldn't rely too much on what Margaret Hammond says. She hated Elinor.' I stood up and picked up the lipstick.

'You're a very young and attractive woman, Miss Baring,' he said. 'Why don't you leave this alone? You can't bring her back, you know that.'

'I know she didn't kill herself,' I said.

I went out - and was less surprised than I might have been to find Margaret in the waiting room. She was standing close to the open window, and for one awful minute I thought she was going to jump herself.

'Margaret!' I said sharply.

She turned, and her face was white. 'Oh, it's you, Louise,' She sat down and wiped her face with her handkerchief. 'She must have slipped on the floor, Lou. It would be easy. Try it yourself.'

But I shook my head. I did not intend to look out of that open window with Margaret behind me. She said she had come to pay Fred's bill for Elinor, but there was something strange about her that day.

I had trouble starting my car, which is how I saw her leave the building. Then she did something that made me stop and watch her. She looked closely at the pavement and the side of the road. So she knew Elinor's lipstick had fallen with her. Or knew it was not in the bag.

She stopped a taxi and got into it. I don't know why I followed her, except she was the only suspect I had. The taxi

went on and on, and I began to feel rather silly. Then it stopped and she got out. She went up some steps to a house and rang the bell.

She was in the house for almost an hour. But when she came out I sat up and stared. The woman at the door with her was Mrs Thompson, from the inquest.

The taxi passed me but Margaret didn't even see my car. Mrs Thompson didn't go into the house at once and was still outside when I went up the steps.

'May I talk to you?' I said.

She was suspicious. 'What about?'

'A murder,' I said. 'I think you know something you didn't tell at the Hammond inquest.'

Some of the color went out of her face. 'It wasn't a murder,' she said. 'The verdict-'

'I think it was murder. What was Mr Hammond's sister doing here if it wasn't?'

'I never saw her before,' she said. 'She came to thank me for what I said at the inquest. Because it showed that the poor woman did it herself.'

'And to pay you for it, I suppose.'

'Nobody paid me anything,' she said angrily. 'If you think anybody can bribe me to lie, you're wrong!'

She went in and banged the door shut. Was she telling the truth? Was there something she had not said at the inquest? I was sure the doctor knew more than he had told. But why hide anything?

All afternoon I wondered what Doctor Barclay and the Thompson woman either knew or suspected. I also went to get my hair done at Elinor's hairdresser's. The girls there were very willing to talk about her, and I learned something new.

'I was waiting for her;' one of them said. 'Of course she never came, and-'

'You mean you expected her here the day it happened?'

'She had an appointment for four o'clock. When I heard what happened, I couldn't believe it, although the last few weeks she hadn't been quite the same.'

'When did you notice a change in her?' I asked.

'About Easter. I remember I liked her new hat, and she gave it to me then and there! She said a strange thing. She said sometimes new hats were dangerous!'

My hair may have looked better when I left the hairdresser's, but my mind was going round in circles.

Mother and I invited Fred over for dinner that evening. During the meal I asked him if anything had happened to upset Elinor in the spring. 'About Easter,' I said.

'I don't remember anything,' he said. 'Except that she started going to that psychiatrist about then.'

'Why did she go to him, Fred?' mother asked.

'You saw him,' he said. 'He was good-looking. Maybe she liked to look at him instead of me.'

He went home soon after that.

I slept badly and was late for breakfast. Mother had finished reading the newspaper, and I took it.

The report was just a few lines on the back page. It said that Mrs Thompson had been shot the night before!

I couldn't believe it.

I read it again. She was not dead, but her condition was serious. She had been sitting alone outside her house when it happened. Nobody had heard the shot. Her husband found her when he came home at eleven o'clock. She had been shot through the chest and was still not able to make a statement.

'So she knew something that made her dangerous,' I thought. I remembered Margaret going up the steps to the house. Margaret searching for Elinor's lipstick in the street. Margaret, who hated Elinor. And I suddenly remembered Fred's gun, which he kept in his desk drawer, I think it was the gun which finally made me go to the police. The police captain of the station wasn't interested, but a detective came to see me later.

'You don't think Mrs Hammond killed herself?' he said.

I told him about the lipstick, about Elinor's appointment at the hairdresser's, and that I thought Mrs Thompson knew something she hadn't told.

'Then who did it?' he said;

'I think it was Mr Hammond's sister. She was in Doctor Barclay's office yesterday-, and insisted that Elinor had fallen out of the window. She said the floor was slippery, and she wanted me to try it myself.' I lit a cigarette and found that my hands were shaking. 'She also knew about the

lipstick because I saw her trying to find it in the street.' But it was my next statement that made him really sit up. 'I think she was in the office the day Elinor was killed,' I said. 'I think the Thompson woman knew it. And I also think she went out there last night and shot her.'

He looked at me closely.

'Why do you think Miss Hammond shot her?' he said.

'Because she went to talk to her yesterday morning. She was there an hour. I know. I followed her.'

He stood up, his face expressionless.

'I have some advice for you, Miss Baring,' he said. 'Leave this to us. If you're right, then it's our job. If you're wrong, then no harm has been done. Not yet anyhow.'

I waited by the telephone that afternoon. When he called, it was to tell me that Mrs Thompson had now made a statement.

She did not know who shot her, or why, but insisted that Margaret had visited her only to thank her for being a witness at the inquest. She had not been given or offered any money.

But there was more. It seemed that Mrs Thompson had been worried since the inquest and had telephoned Margaret to ask her if it was important. Someone had entered the doctor's office while she was in the hall.

'The one person nobody really notices,' said the detective. 'The postman. I've talked to him. He saw Mrs Hammond in the office that morning. He remembers her.'

She had her hat off and was reading a magazine.'

'Did he see Mrs Thompson?'

'He didn't notice her, but she saw him.'

'So he went out last night and shot her!'

He laughed. 'He took his family to the movies last night. Remember, Miss Baring, that shot may have been an accident. Plenty of people are carrying guns now who never did before.'

So Elinor threw herself out of the window and Mrs Thompson was shot by somebody practicing their shooting! I didn't believe it. And I believed it even less after a visit from Doctor Barclay that night.

I had eaten dinner and was listening to the radio when he came. I told him about the police, and that surprised him.

'You've been to the police?' he said.

'Why not? Just because you don't want it known that somebody was pushed out of your office window-'

He was angry. 'You're dealing with something you don't understand. Why can't you stay out of this?'

I suppose I lost control then. 'How do I know you didn't do it?' I shouted. 'You or the postman!'

'The postman?' he said, staring. 'What do you mean?' It must have been his surprised face which made me laugh. I laughed and laughed. Then I was crying, too. I couldn't stop. Suddenly, without warning, he hit me across the face. And that stopped me.

'Get out!' I told him, but he didn't move.

He had stopped looking angry; in fact he seemed rather pleased with himself. 'That's better,' he said, and patted me on the shoulder. 'I didn't come here to attack you. I came to ask you not to go out alone at night.'

'Why shouldn't I go out at night?'

'It may be dangerous,' he said, and I could see he was liking me less and less. 'I particularly want you to keep away from the Hammond house. And I hope you are sensible enough to do that.'

He banged the front door when he went out, and I was still angry when the telephone rang.

It was Margaret!

'I suppose we have you to thank for the police coming here tonight,' she said. 'We're in enough trouble without you making it worse!'

'All right,' I said dangerously. 'Now I'll ask you a question. Why did you visit Mrs Thompson yesterday morning? And who shot her last night?'

She gave a short gasp, then she put down the phone.

Mother had gone to bed and it was half an hour later when I found Fred standing at the kitchen door, smiling a tired smile. 'May I come in?' he said. 'I was out walking and I saw the light.'

He looked better, I thought. He said Margaret was in bed and the house was lonely.

'I don't sleep much anyway,' he said. 'And the house is

hot. I've been getting rid of a lot of stuff. Burning it in the boiler.'

He smoked a cigarette and drank a cup of coffee, then I went out with him to the gates when he left, and watched as he started to walk home. I turned back towards the house and had almost reached it when it happened. I heard something move in the bushes and stopped to see what it was. But I never heard the shot. Something hit me on the head. I fell. Then everything went black.

The next thing I heard was my mother's voice. I was in my own bed with a bandage round my head.

'I think she's crazy,' mother was saying, very upset. 'She went out after you told her not to! Why can't she leave things alone?'

'I did my best, Mrs Baring,' said a male voice.

It was Doctor Barclay. He was standing by the bed. He looked strange. One of his eyes was almost shut, and his shirt collar was in a terrible state.

'You've been in a fight,' I said.

'Yes,' he said. 'And you've got a very pretty bullet graze on the side of your head. I've had to cut off quite a bit of your hair. Don't worry, it was very pretty hair and it will grow again.'

'Who did it? Who shot at me?'

'The postman,' he said, and went out of the room.

I slept after that. I suppose he gave me something. It was the next morning before I heard the rest of the story. He

came in, big and smiling, with his right eye purple and completely closed. Then he told me.

In the spring, Elinor had come to him with a strange story. She was being followed, and was frightened. The man who was watching her, she said, wore a postman's uniform. It sounded fantastic, but she swore it was true.

'Do you mean it was this man that the Thompson woman saw going into your office?' I said.

'She's already identified him. The real postman had been there earlier. He had seen Mrs Hammond sitting in a chair, reading a magazine. But the real postman had gone before the Thompson woman arrived. The postman she saw was the one who, well, the one who killed Elinor.'

I knew before he told me. 'It was Fred, wasn't it?'

'It was Fred Hammond, yes.' He held my hand. 'I'm sorry, my dear. I tried to get Elinor to go away, but she wouldn't do it.'

'It's crazy. Fred was madly in love with her.'

'He loved her, yes. But he was afraid he was losing her. And he was wildly jealous.' He looked slightly embarrassed. 'I think he was jealous of me.'

'But if he really loved her-'

'The line between love and hate is a thin one. And it's possible he felt that she was never really his until - well, until no one else could have her.' He hesitated before going on. 'I was too late last night. I caught him just in time when he shot at you, but he put up a real battle. He got away

somehow... and shot himself.'

He went on quietly. Mrs Thompson had identified Fred's photograph as the postman she had seen going into the office, and coming out again just before she heard the nurse screaming. The bullet she had been shot with had come from Fred's gun. And Margaret - poor Margaret - had been afraid that Fred had not been sane for some time.

'She came to see me yesterday after she heard the Thompson woman had been shot,' he said. 'She wanted Fred put away into a special hospital, but she almost went crazy when I talked about the police. I suppose there wasn't much proof, anyway. Mrs Thompson seemed to be dying and the uniform was gone-'

'Gone?' I said.

'He burned it in the boiler. We found some burned buttons and things last night.'

I tried to think. 'Why did he try to kill Mrs Thompson?' I said. 'What did she know?'

'She was able to describe the postman who went into my office. After Margaret heard this, she went home and searched the house. She found the uniform, and she knew. She tried to think what to do. But she had told Fred she was going to see Mrs Thompson that day and she thinks he knew she had found the uniform. All we know is that he left this house that night, got out his car, and tried to kill the only witness against him. Except you, of course.'

'But why should he try to kill me?' I said.

'Because you wouldn't leave things alone. You were a

danger from the minute you insisted Elinor had been murdered. And because you telephoned Margaret last night and asked her why she had visited Mrs Thompson.'

'You think he was listening?'

'I know he was listening. And that was when Margaret sent me to warn you.' He admitted that he had been watching the Hammond house all evening, and that when Fred came to our kitchen door he had been just outside. But Fred had seemed quiet, drinking his coffee. Then Fred had begun to walk home, and he followed him behind the fence. But just too late he lost him, and he knew he was on the way back. Fred had lifted his gun to shoot me when he grabbed him.

Suddenly I found I was crying. It was all horrible. He got out a handkerchief and dried my eyes.

'It's all over now,' he said. 'You're a very brave woman, Louise Baring. Don't spoil it now.' He got up rather quickly. 'I think you've had enough of murder and sudden death. What you need is quiet. Someone will come soon to put a new bandage on your head.'

'Why can't you do it?'

'Because I'm not that sort of doctor.'

I looked up at him. He was tired and he needed a shave, and that awful eye was getting blacker. But he was big and strong and sane. A woman would be safe with him, I thought. Any woman. Although of course she could never tell him her dreams.

'Why can't you look after me?' I said. 'If I'm to look bald, I'd prefer you to see it. You did it.'

He smiled. Then to my surprise he kissed me lightly on the cheek. 'I've wanted to do that ever since you banged that lipstick down in front of me,' he said, 'And now will you stop being a detective and concentrate on growing some hair on the side of your head? Because I'm going to be around for a considerable time.'

When I looked up, mother was by the door, smiling.