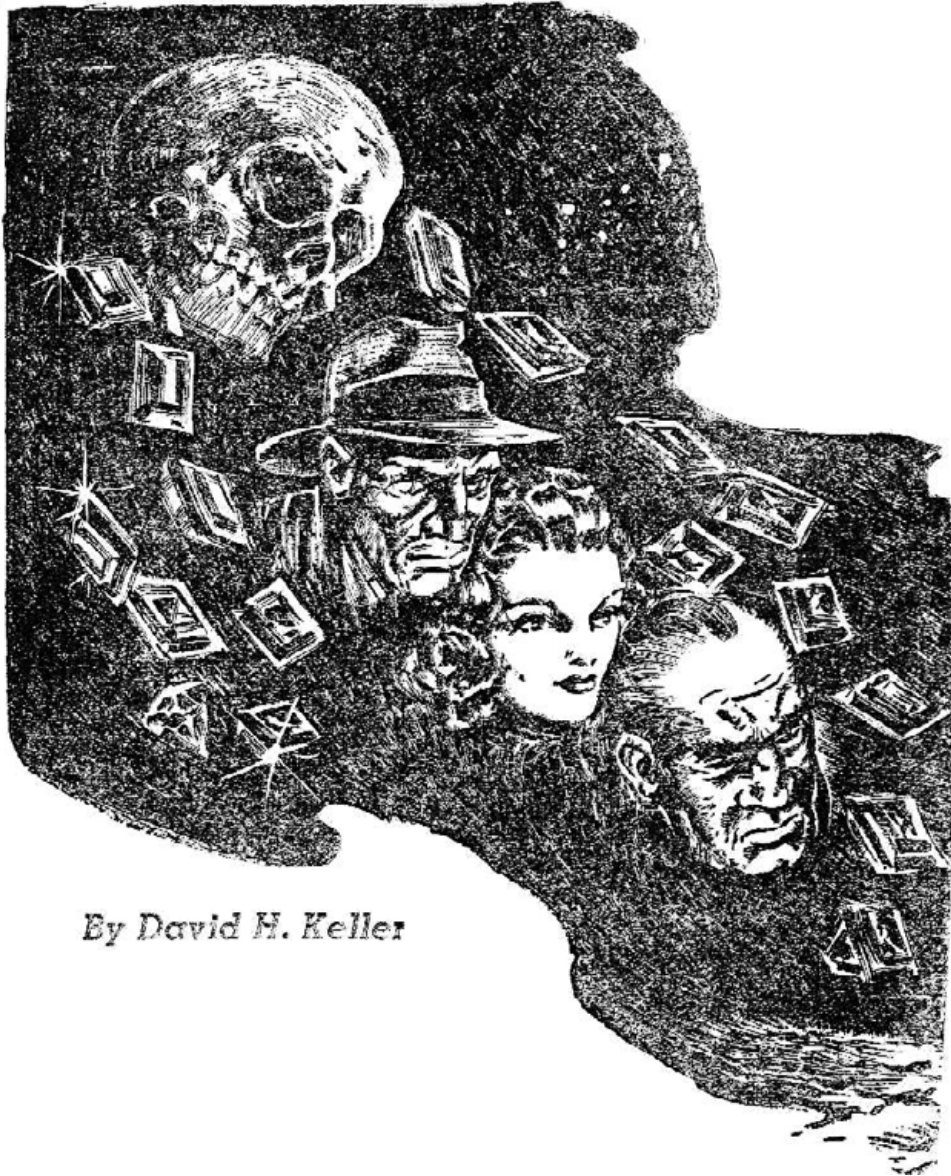


Though two incredible skull-crackings had the best brains of the coast city thwarted, Taine of San Francisco thought he knew a way to put the cuffs on those . . .

Hands of Doom



By David H. Keller

“CAN you take the part of a butler, Taine?” asked the chief of the San Francisco Secret Service. His son-in-law looked at the older man with a hurt, quizzical expression.

“Now you know as well as I do, Chief,

that is not a fair question. A real butler should be at least six feet tall, weigh about two hundred pounds, and be pompous. I could as easily disguise myself as an elephant. I realize my own limitations.”

“I am surprised that you admit to

limitations," the Chief replied with a laugh, for he had, on occasion, been annoyed by the extraordinary conceit of the little man.

"You do not understand me," explained the young man. "The word 'limitations' applies to character portrayals only. When I work on a case I never fail. You know that."

"Let us be serious. I have a job for you. I want you to begin work on the Van Holland murders at once."

"But Houfer just told me he had been assigned to that case."

"Right! And he is going to stay on it, too." Here the Chief's voice sank to almost a whisper. "But he is a front man, will work openly with and be interviewed by the newspapers. But there's only one chance in a million that he will discover anything of value. My suggestion is that you get into the house as a servant of some sort and ferret out the real facts."

"What are the problems involved?"

"Thought you knew. Well, here's the dope. The Van Hollands, mother and son, are among the richest in San Francisco. The boy, out of college a few years, is a likable chap, no business connections, spends his time running around the world. The mother is a nice, but peculiar old lady. Has only the right arm; lost the left one in some sort of accident. Three years ago, while on a trip abroad, young Van Holland married and brought his young wife home. A few days afterward the lovely bride was found dead in the library, skull crushed.

A little more than a year later Van Holland remarried and took his new bride for a year's trip around the world for a honeymoon. Last week they returned. Day before yesterday the second bride was discovered in the library with a crushed skull. Strange coincidence? Even the Van Holland millions can't prevent an investigation this time! These are the

salient facts as we know them. Meanwhile, Houfer is up there talking, taking fingerprints, and openly hunting clues."

"Oh! All you want me to do is find out who killed those two young women!" Taine's voice was loaded with sarcasm.

"Yeah, that's all."

T AINE left the office running meditative fingers along the brim of his gray felt hat. Van Holland! He could not orient the name to the feeling that he should know more about it than he could recall. After five blocks of wondering, a very important fact struggled over the threshold of his consciousness and made its presence known. He not only knew Peter Van Holland but had been in college with him, belonged to the same fraternity. Van Holland graduated and returned to his home while Taine had continued his extra-curricular post-graduate work as a detective. Taine decided the simplest procedure was to call on his fraternity brother.

It required great finesse on the part of Taine, plus a sizable tip, before he was ushered into the den where young Van Holland sat, miserably unhappy, tired, and dejected. He had been both irritated and exhausted by the questioning of Houfer and had ordered that he should not be disturbed by anyone. Houfer, it seemed, had intimated rather too strongly that both he and the public believed the bereaved young widower knew more about the similar deaths of his two brides than he was willing to tell.

He raised puzzled eyes as Taine entered the room with outstretched hand, sympathetic and friendly.

"Taine!" cried the astonished millionaire.

Over clasped hands they told one another that the years had changed them only a little bit. "Can we talk here, I mean

really talk?" asked Taine.

"Certainly!"

"I just heard you were in serious trouble, Peter, so I came up to offer my services. You know in college I was deeply interested in detective work, intrigues, and all that sort of thing."

Van Holland smiled despite his grief and anxiety. "Pardon me, old boy, but the last thing in the world that you resemble is a detective."

"So far I have done fairly well. I think most of my success is attributable to the fact that I do not look like a 'dick.' " Taine was dignity itself in his seeming modesty. "When the Chief asked me to work on this case I couldn't quite connect you with it. When I finally did, I knew I must do better than my best for you." He smiled at his old friend. "Would you mind showing me just where in the house the two ladies were killed?"

Without replying, the two-time widower led the way to the library. The room was large, well-lighted by many French windows between bookcases filled with rare editions and exquisitely tooled and decorated old books. A few expertly chosen pictures and beautiful statuary relieved the room from any sense of austerity.

The elder Van Holland had made his money in copper. Tradition, and his enemies, said he could neither read nor write. This may have been true, but he knew how to select furnishings for his home. To the uninitiate, this assortment of old-world and antique treasures might have indicated the garishness of unaccustomed wealth, but to collectors the individual objects clearly declared the delicate selective instinct of the connoisseur.

"My father always liked this room," explained Peter Van Holland. "He spent most of his time here. That Venetian chair

was his favorite. For hours he would sit there silent, apparently thinking. His head rested, usually, on that piece of velvet tapestry; his left arm stretched along the wide armrest of the chair, clutching the lion's head you see carved on the very end. He was proud of the strength of his left arm; claimed not many men had made a fortune from the earth with only one arm."

"So he had only one arm?"

"No, really he had two arms, but the right was atrophied, useless, since childhood. Mother lost her left arm just before I was born."

"Strange coincidence, each parent with one usable arm."

"As I was saying," resumed Van Holland, "that is where Father used to sit. After he died Mother used to sit there saying it comforted her to rest where he had spent so many hours. She used to try to imitate his position and she had a small cushion made so her head would lie where his had. Often I would find her asleep, clutching the lion's head with her close-gripped fingers.

"She was glad when I married and brought Janette home. Mother must have told her how she and Dad loved the chair and got soul strength from it. Janette must have sat in it, too, at odd times, for that is where we found her—dead.

"Arlene knew all about it. I asked her never to come into this room alone. But I guess it was bravado on her part. Anyway, she, too, was found dead in that chair, each hand clutching a lion's head."

"Terribly sorry," Taine said simply. "But let me take care of this. After I've spent some time here alone I'll just leave without disturbing you again. Who has lived here the past ten years? Who is here now?"

"Only Mother and her sister, a maiden aunt, and myself. Of course the servants—

but all of them have been with us for years.”

ALONE, Taine sat in the Venetian chair, made his head comfortable against the piece of velvet tapestry, and reached for the lions’ heads. Unfortunately he found his arms too short to reach but one at a time. He muttered curses at his unheroic size as he twisted his shoulders forward to slip his hand down over one carved head. He remembered that the old copper magnate had held only the left head, the old mother only the right.

Closing his eyes, he pretended he was the old Van Holland, dreaming of further financial conquests, surrounded by the art objects he loved, here in the library of his choice.

Though Taine’s eyes were closed his mind was most alert. Very peculiar coincidences all through the family. The elder man a cripple from birth. His wife, a victim of an accident which made her a like cripple. Two brides murdered within three years in exactly the same spot and in the same manner.

Continuing to imagine himself the copper magnate, he realized he could not have slept all the time or even kept his eyes closed either, while he sat in that chair. Slowly Taine opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was a black, mottled pedestal holding—what was the thing it held? He rose and read the bronze plate at its base: *Praying Hands*. Now he partly understood.

From a base that resembled a stormswept sea rose two hands uplifted as in prayer. The hands held, as if their hope of eternity depended on their holding tightly, a small globe richly carved. Upon closer examination it showed on one side the face of God, gentle and kind, while from the other side of the globe peered the face of a grinning, sardonic Devil. A

thumb had seemingly slipped from its hold, pointing outward and upward toward the ceiling.

“Praying Hands!” the little detective mused. “Now just what does that mean? There’s a lot to this case I can’t seem to understand. Think I’ll step around to Vital Statistics and see what the old man died from. Also see who the doctor was.”

Taine spent all the next day tracing records and spent two hours, later that night, talking with the doctor who had signed the death certificate. This medico said there was nothing mysterious connected with the death of the elder Van Holland; a cerebral hemorrhage followed a head injury while resting in his favorite chair in the library. He intimated that an autopsy might have shown a skull fracture.

Nothing irregular in his will either. Everything to go to his wife and son and his son’s heirs. If the son predeceased, his mother, leaving no issue from any marriage, the mother should dispose of the residue at her pleasure since Van Holland, Senior, had no blood relatives. No grandchildren—ergo—no family. It was all so simple that Taine felt there must be a joker somewhere.

The third twelve hours Taine walked constantly, obsessed and depressed with his seeming inability to arrive at any conclusion. His Chief had told him to get facts—all he had done up to now was uncover one fact that no one else had connected with the present case: that the aged millionaire had died in the same chair as had the two young wives. Once he had thoroughly digested that fact he rushed to the phone and called Peter Van Holland.

“Peter, this is Taine. Don’t be in that library alone. But whether alone or with anyone, whatever you do, *don’t sit in that chair!* I can’t be too emphatic on that score.”

REASSURED that Peter could not be tempted in any way to sit in the chair, Taine went home and to bed. He was awakened by the telephone on the table by the head of his bed and was amazed to discover he had slept the clock nearly around. The Chief was on the wire and wanted him at the office right away.

Dressing hurriedly, he raced downtown, plunging into the inner office where his father-in-law was talking to a middle-aged woman. To Taine's surprise, the Chief introduced her as Miss Tompkins, sister of Mrs. Van Holland, who had called to give private information which she felt sure would clear up the murders in her sister's home.

"I think they were murders," said the lady "Only looked like accidents. It all began with my brother-in-law's eccentricities. As you know, he built the present home and furnished it with many bizarre pieces which he bought on his several trips to Europe. Once he brought home a bronze piece which he called *The Praying Hands*. For centuries it had been companion to a peculiar chair in one of the old Venetian palaces.

"When he saw the intricate mechanism of the pair he bought them at an exorbitant price and placed them in the same relative positions in his own home. Of course it would not work for either him or his wife—but Peter's wives—I suspected what caused their deaths—but it was so fantastic, so horrible, that I just kept still.

"Of course I never dreamed that Arlene would have courage to go into that room alone, especially when she knew that Janette had died there—poor thing. But she did—so she died in the same way. Of course I am not accusing anyone, but I am sure my sister knew about the chair and should have destroyed the machinery at once, especially after her husband . . ." Here Miss Tompkins seemed overcome

with the memory of the tragic events, so alike, that had stricken her sister's home.

"Just how were those young ladies killed, Miss Tompkins?" asked the Chief.

"They were killed by the Praying Hands. I saw both those poor girls. There were the unmistakable marks of those two thumbs."

"Of course we will have to check on your story, Miss Tompkins, but I believe you are telling the truth. Perhaps it would be best not to mention your visit here. There may have been some negligence on the part of your sister, but I doubt if it could be called criminal negligence. It is a grave question if we could do anything about it. We will check on your story. If you are correct, I thank you for your information and your honesty. We may consider the case closed." The Chief was all courtesy as he bowed Miss Tompkins through the door of the inner office.

The voluble thanks of the lady still ringing in his ears, the Chief looked at his son-in-law.

"Well?" he remarked.

"Certainly was an interesting explanation."

"Don't you believe her?"

"Sure! But if you don't mind, I'll take you up on the proposal to check on parts of her story."

"Take all the time you need, I suppose the Praying Hands are still praying. No chance of her doing anything without the widow knowing. Naturally, Miss Tompkins doesn't want her sister to suspect she has practically accused her of murder, or accidental death."

"I may be gone longer than you anticipate. By the way, did you know old man Van Holland was sitting in front of those Praying Hands when he died? Figure that one out! If his sister-in-law knew that, why didn't she say something about it?"

"Old Peter Van Holland had a stroke,"

protested the Chief.

"Oh, sure," agreed Taine, his voice wise and caustic.

ONE thing Taine neglected. That was to tell the Chief that he had already talked with the morticians who had prepared the bodies of the elder Van Holland and the two brides.

Van Holland, Senior, had the lifelong reputation of being a hardheaded businessman, though in his later years he indulged in seemingly fantastic and expensive furnishings for his home. But that was no reason to believe he had deliberately installed a death-dealing machine in his home, then witlessly fallen victim to it.

There was something else wrong with the story of Miss Tompkins. Taine was furious at his seeming inability to discover the exact point of divergence from the truth. He had always prided himself that nothing escaped his close scrutiny, and he was sure that he had overlooked no smallest detail. He could shut his eyes and see them in detail, that globe with the two faces and the one thumb, yet he was haunted by the idea that something vital eluded him.

Returning to the Van Holland home, he was admitted without protest and went at once to the library, where he seated himself in the Venetian chair, resting his head on the tapestry. There was no thought of testing any machinery. Instinctively he felt that part of Miss Tompkins' story was absolutely true. Anyway it was the hands and not the machinery that had forced his return.

He looked at them carefully from every angle of the room. From the chair, in the open daylight, under the artificial light. Then because he was so short, he stood on a chair to be closer to those hands, held devoutly in prayer. Suddenly he smiled.

"CAN you spare a few hours, Chief?" Taine asked, assuming that well known peculiar air that always presaged victory.

"First may I ask where you have been these many weeks?" the Chief countered.

"Oh, I'll tell you all right when the right time comes, but not now. Can you come with me to the Van Holland house? I have a little investigation to pursue. I phoned Peter to meet us in the library with his mother."

"But I thought that case was closed."

"Don't you remember you told me to go ahead and take all the time I needed to close it properly? I'll close it for you soon, though."

It was the first time either of the detectives had seen Mrs. Van Holland. They were greatly impressed with her shy and gentle manner as contrasted with her sister, the confident and assertive Miss Tompkins.

"Mrs. Van Holland, were you informed concerning all of the purchases your husband made in Europe, especially the art objects used in furnishing this particular room?" Taine asked the widow.

"I was with him on every trip, except one, and we bought things together. On that one trip which he made alone, he purchased only the Venetian chair and the Praying Hands."

"Did he ever tell you or imply that they had an especially interesting history?"

"Nothing definite except that it was certainly a unique combination. He greatly enjoyed sitting in the chair looking at the Hands."

"He never went into detail about them then? That they were in reality connected by machinery?"

"No, he simply said they had come from the same room in a Venetian palace."

"Did he ever caution you about the

chair? That it might be a very dangerous thing for anyone to sit in it?"

"No. After his death I sat in it often. In fact, it was my favorite chair."

"You saw no reason why your daughters-in-law should not sit in it also?"

"Why no, of course not. Except that—well, after Janette died—we cautioned Arlene, you know. But, as you also know now, she made her own decisions."

Taine walked over to the chair, asking the others to join him.

"The relation between this chair and the Hands in this case is a most peculiar one," Taine explained. "There is no doubt that in Venice it was used instead of the poisoned cup or the dagger. I think perhaps it was its history that made Mr. Van Holland desire it. His early life had been adventurous. Sitting in that chair was a bit of daring that might have recalled other times when either death or disaster, or both, had been escaped by a narrow margin."

"The combination works very simply. A person sits in the chair at his ease, usually with head relaxed against the tapestry. It is so fashioned that it is most inviting to do so. The most natural thing for him to do is to rest his arms along the chair arms, especially if he is tired, holding the lions' heads with his hands."

"Equal pressure on the heads sets the machinery in motion. There are wires under each open upper jaw. When the jaws are closed by pressure, they pull on other wires connected with the pedestal, then the pedestal swings forward on a pivot and downward, and the thumb strikes."

"Suppose we imagine that a person is sitting in the chair. I will press on this lion's head and the Chief will press on the other. Ready, Chief? Press!"

AT FIRST slowly, then with increased vigor and deadly force the hammer of

death swung forward and downward toward the headrest of the chair, arrived at its lowest point, then swung back into place. Again and once again the two men worked the mechanism.

"So that is the way the girls were killed!" exclaimed Mrs. Van Holland. "Had I known about it, I certainly would have had the machinery disconnected."

"Accidents—both of them. But what—who could—have known?" Peter was staring, horrified, at the hands that had resumed their pious petitioning.

"Let me show you something that none of you have remarked. Your father, Peter, had only one useful arm. Suppose he had a strap like the one I brought with me. He could have tied the lion's head down on one side, as I am doing, and worked the machinery with the strong hand. I am simply imagining, you understand. Pretending I am your father, I will sit in the chair, make myself comfortable, and press down the head on the left side."

"Don't be a fool, Taine!" cried the Chief, stepping forward to prevent further tragedy.

Pressing his head tightly against the tapestry, Taine bore down with all his might on the lion's head on his left. The Praying Hands swung down again, as before, seemingly determined to crush this daring little man who defied them to do their worst. Four inches from his face the bronze came to a stop, then retreated. Taine smiled.

"That is what I think your father used to do, Peter. He altered their relative position so a person might sit in the chair, work the mechanism, and smile in the face of danger and death. Doubtless the old man got a great thrill out of it for he knew all the time that those bronze holy hands could not harm him."

"But during the demonstration you four people failed to notice one important

thing. The hands came to a stop too far away from the tapestry to harm anyone with an average-sized head. However, the general observation would be, as was yours, that those hands could not help but crush the forehead of anyone sitting in that chair.

"It is also reasonable to believe that Mr. Van Holland knew about the chair but that he never told his wife. He knew that with but one hand she could not operate it and there was no danger of an accident. I suppose that you, Peter Van Holland, did not know?"

"Certainly not! Had I known I would have had the thing destroyed, completely destroyed! It would have never been left about so it could kill."

"But it didn't really kill anyone, Peter. Don't you see that? Even allowing for larger heads, for extra hair on the back of the heads forcing them forward from the headrest, it could not have killed them. No indeed! A certain party told the Chief positively that the two ladies were killed that way. Yet I have proven to you, visually, that that information was incorrect."

"Then how—?" began Peter.

"Ah! Here is Miss Tompkins now," interrupted Taine. "I'm sure she will be delighted to know her suspicions were falsely based."

"Who are these men, Peter?" Miss Tompkins asked, seeming bewildered.

"These are detectives. Mr. Taine. Chief, my aunt."

"Oh yes! I recognize them now. I thought I heard you say something. You thought my suspicions and information were false. Am I right?"

"We were discussing that point, Miss Tompkins," answered the Chief. "We know now that those Praying Hands could not have killed those two young women as you claimed."

"Confident?"

"Absolutely!"

"LET me show you clever men something! My brother-in-law was also very clever. But it was that very cleverness that caused his death, too. He did change the mechanism of the chair, but he did it in such a way that he could replace it in its original position very easily. See, the seat slides forward or backward, exactly five inches. Notice carefully as I push it forward. Makes a difference, does it not? Now suppose I tie a vase where a person's head would normally rest. Mr. Taine, suppose you and your brilliant chief now press the lion's head and see what happens!"

Assurance sharpened her voice to stridency.

The men acceded to her request, and immediately the vase was smashed into bits. Thus justified, Miss Tompkins, jubilant, resumed her monologue:

"That is what happened to my brother-in-law. At least I always believed that was how his skull was crushed instead of his falling, as everyone thought at the time he had his supposed stroke. I think he came in very tired. Without thinking he sat in the chair without first testing its position—and the hands hit him as they did the vase just now. Of course it could not have happened unless someone else knew about it, too, and had changed the position of the chair."

Taine's face was the only one which was not strained with the tension of her revelation of the elder Van Holland's death.

"Who do you think did it, Miss Tompkins?" he asked.

"Just as I told you. The same person who was responsible for the deaths of those two beautiful girls. I am sure it was my sister."

"That's a lie!" shouted Peter Van

Holland, stepping toward his aunt.

"Steady, Mr. Van Holland!" cautioned the Chief. "What was her motive for these murders, Miss Tompkins?"

"Oh, there was motive enough! My sister and her husband were woefully unhappy. He abused her frightfully and it may have turned her mind. Then beside her whole heart was wrapped up in Peter. She was afraid she would lose him completely if he ever married. When he did marry she vented her hatred for her husband on those poor innocent girls. So she really killed all three of them. A psychiatrist might say that she was insane."

Miss Tompkins was flushed, angry, and nervous. Her eyes were downcast as she twisted her handkerchief into tight knots, undoing and retying them more tightly. Peter and his mother were aghast at this vituperative outburst.

"Just a minute," interrupted the Chief. "Mrs. Van Holland, please excuse me, but do you know if there was ever any insanity in your family?"

The fragile, one-armed woman retained her poise as she looked bravely at the Chief. Guilty or not, she had courage.

"Yes, our mother died insane."

"Did you know that the chair could be moved backward or forward?"

"Yes, but I never saw it done. My husband told me all about it."

"Was he brutal to you?"

"No. Never!"

"Thank you. Even if I asked you if you were guilty, you would not be obliged to answer. What is your opinion, Taine?"

"I don't believe those three persons were killed by the Praying Hands."

"Oh, you don't!" sneered Miss Tompkins. "Suppose I show you the photostatic copies of all three death certificates which I have for evidence. I've kept them under lock and key! They all

say the same thing. Each body had identically the same injury, skull fractured by some blunt, pointed instrument. That instrument, my dear Mr. Taine, was the two thumbs of those Praying Hands. No jury would reject that evidence."

"You mean the *two* thumbs of the Praying Hands?" Surprise was in both Taine's voice and face as he repeated, "The *two thumbs*?"

"Certainly! Can't you see them?"

"No. I can only see *one thumb*."

FOUR surprised people stared at the bronze hands, held so reverently in prayer. Miss Tompkins pushed them all aside as they grouped around the pedestal, gazed unbelievably, then, her eyes staring and glazed with incredulity, she raised her own hands and felt of the cold metal, more and more frenziedly.

"There must be two thumbs! There are two hands! Of course there are two thumbs. Two hands—two thumbs! There just have to be two thumbs! There were two holes in their heads!"

Her voice rose to a tremulous, frightened scream as she fiercely reiterated variations of the theme that there just had to be two thumbs. Taine watched her calmly, the other three with growing amazement.

"Suppose we all sit down while I explain it to you," he said. "Yes, you too, Miss Tompkins, though I am well aware of the reasons for your agitation. Mrs. Van Holland, I am sorry to tell you and Peter all this. Your sister, Mrs. Van Holland, was perfectly willing to and did charge you with several brutal crimes. I was sure all the time that you were innocent, but there is a great difference between being morally certain of a fact and being able to prove it to the satisfaction of a jury. Now this is the real story as I have discovered it item by item:

"In some undisclosed manner, Miss Tompkins became aware of the machinery connecting the Venetian chair and the Praying Hands. She also knew that Mrs. Van Holland and her heirs inherited the entire wealth of her husband. Her sister was more pliant than her brother-in-law, so he was removed. When her nephew Peter married, she knew if there were children born to the union she would never inherit from her sister. So she destroyed first one bride and then the other. I am convinced she would have killed Peter eventually. I am so sure that she is the murderess that I have a warrant for her arrest in my pocket.

"I have joined all the links into a perfect chain of evidence. Miss Tompkins took the chance of the investigator believing the hands killed these people. She tried to make us believe it, but she failed in one respect.

"A perfect crime is the exception—and a rare one, too. But the lady was cunning. She went to Paris and found a worker who would make the item she required. She described a pair of hands holding a globe, and used her own hands as a model. Now there are many miles and several weeks between San Francisco and Paris. Because of the weeks of travel, she made the same error most of us would have made. In holding the sphere for the model, we would have held up our hands. There would have been a right hand and a left hand, and naturally, two thumbs.

"You notice this club I am holding? Two hands—two thumbs. A nice little mace, eh, Miss Tompkins? An exact duplicate of the one you had made.

"She returned with this cudgel from France and used it to kill her sister's husband. You may be sure she never came into this room except to kill. However, her error was the preconceived idea that the hands of her club were copies of the

Praying Hands. An illusion, believed in for years, becomes truth to the believer. She built up a seemingly perfect chain of evidence, with which to convict her sister, showing that the fractures had been made by those hands. But in securing her affidavits, she had to have the truth, namely that each head showed the mark of two thumbs.

"Now compare this weapon with the two thumbs, with the bronze Praying Hands. Of course, there is no doubt but this is the weapon used to club those people to death. At once you see on the Praying Hands that there is but one thumb. At least one thumb pointing toward the chair, for the second thumb is on the other side of the globe. Try placing your hands in that position. Obviously it is impossible."

Each person tried to secure the same picture with their hands as that shown on the pedestaled figure, by different ruses, such as tucking one thumb into the palm of the hand, twisting and turning first one hand and then the other but it could not be achieved.

"**T**HEN how is it accomplished in bronze?" Taine resumed after a general acceptance of defeat. "Simple when you understand it. Instead of a pair of hands, right and left, there are two *left hands*. Study them well. You will see that one is a masculine hand, with a man's ring on the third finger; the other hand is feminine, with a wedding ring on the third finger. The two left hands, holding on to God, while the Devil peers sardonically round the corner. We all see it now. Miss Tompkins never saw it, else she would have had this club made differently.

"It took some time to trace the metal worker who did this excellent reproduction of a pair of the hands. After he was found, it was very simple to get a detailed

statement from him, with the aid of the French police, implicating Miss Tompkins. That is all. Do you want to make the arrest, Chief?"

Crying softly, the stricken Mrs. Van Holland was assisted from the room by her son, Peter, and Taine. The Chief gruffly asked Miss Tompkins to follow him. Dully she moved toward the door, then with surprising agility, turned and ran toward the chair.

Before the Chief realized her plan, she was seated, head resting on the tapestry, hands pressing down hard, hard, on the lions' heads. The Praying Hands swung down, forcibly. Even as the Chief grabbed at her dress to pull her from under its

blows, it struck. There was a sound as of dry twigs being broken between layers of wool, a moan, and it was all over.

Taine and Van Holland dashed back into the library. One glance showed them that the woman was beyond medical aid. She died a few minutes later.

Several weeks later, Taine paid a friendly call on the Van Hollands. Peter asked him what his bill was.

Taine said, "Make a check out for whatever you think it is worth to you. In addition, I want the chair and the Praying Hands. I think Mildred would like it in the parlor. Besides, it taught me a valuable lesson. So many people look at things without really seeing them."