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'Fresh from the gardens'

The Bishop Murder Case

A PHILO VANCE STORY

BY S. S. VAN DINE

SYNOPSIS.

Two men have been murdered. One known as Cock Robin, has been shot through the heart with an arrow, on the archery range of Prof. Dillard's home. The other, John E. Sprigg, was shot through the head with a bullet. The crimes seem to be a crazy dramatization of the nursery rhymes, "Who killed Cock Robin?" and "There was a little man and he had a little gun." District Attorney Markham is puzzled and calls in Philo Vance, wealthy amateur criminologist. Those questioned by Vance are: Sperling, last seen with Robin and also in love with Belle Dillard, niece of the professor's; Sigurd Arnesson, a protege of the professor's; Mrs. Drukker and her son Adolph, neighbors. Mrs. Drukker has an unbalanced mind and believes Adolph is still a baby. Adolph is grown up, is a cripple, but has an abnormal mind. Vance has just finished questioning the servants of Prof. Dillard's household. Markham has received a note from the murderer signed The Bishop.

CHAPTER XVII.—(Cont'd.)

Vance leaned suddenly toward the window.

"Ah! Here comes Arnesson. Looks a bit excited."

A few moments later there was the sound of a key in the front door, and Arnesson strode down the hall. When he saw us he came quickly into the drawing room and, without a word of greeting, burst forth:

"What's this I hear about Sprigg being shot?" His eager eyes darted from one to the other of us. "I suppose you're here to ask me about him. Well, fire away." He threw a bulky brief-case on the centre table and sat down abruptly on the edge of a straight chair. "There was a detective up at college this morning asking fool questions and acting like a burlesque sleuth in a comic opera. Very mysterious. . . . Murder—horrible murder! What did we know about a certain John E. Sprigg? And so on. . . . Scared a couple of juniors out of an entire semester's mental growth, and sent a harmless young English instructor into incipient nervous collapse. I didn't see the Dogberry myself—was in a class at the time. But he had the cheek to ask what women Sprigg went around with. Sprigg and women! That boy didn't have a thought in his head but his work. Brightest man in senior math. Never missed a class. When he didn't answer roll call this morning I knew something serious was the matter. At the lunch hour every one was buzzing about murder. . . . What's the answer?"

"We haven't the answer, Mr. Arnesson." Vance had been watching him closely. "However, we have another determinant for your formula. Johnny Sprigg was shot this morning with a little gun through the middle of his wig."

Arnesson stared at Vance for some time without moving. Then he threw his head back and gave a sardonic laugh.

"Some more mumbo-jumbo, eh?—like the death of Cock Robin. . . . Read me the rune."

Vance gave him briefly the details of the crime.

"That's all we know at present," he concluded. "Could you, Mr. Arnesson, add any suggestive details?"

"Good Lord, no!" The man appeared genuinely amazed. "Not a thing. Sprigg . . . one of the keenest students I ever had. Something of a genius, by gad! Too bad his parents named him John—plenty of other names. It sealed his doom apparently; got him shot through the head by a maniac. Obviously the same merry-Andrew who did Robin in with an arrow." He rubbed his hands together,—the abstract philosopher in him had become uppermost. "A nice problem. You've told me everything? I'll need every known integer. Maybe I'll hit upon a new mathematical method in the process—like Kepler." He chuckled over the conceit. "Remember Kepler's 'Doliometrie'? It became the foundation of Infinitesimal Caluculus. He arrived at it trying to construct a cask for his wine—a cask with a minimum amount of wood and a maximum cubical content. Maybe the formulas I work out to solve these crimes will open up new fields of scientific research. Ha! Robin and Sprigg will then become martyrs."

The man's humor, even taking into consideration his life's passion for abstractions, struck me as particularly distasteful. But Vance seemed not to mind his cold-blooded cynicism.

"There's one item," he said, "that I omitted to mention." Turning to Markham he asked for the piece of paper containing the formula, and handed it to Arnesson. "This was found beneath Sprigg's body."

The other scrutinized it superciliously.

"The Bishop, I see, is again involved. Same paper and typing as the notes. . . . But where did he get that Riemann-Christoffel tensor? Now, if it had been some other tensor—like the G-sigma-tau, for instance—any one interested in practical physics might have hit on it. But this one isn't common; and the statement of it here is arbitrary and unusual. Certain terms omitted. . By George! I was talking to Sprigg about this only the other night. He wrote it down, too."

"Pyne mentioned the fact that Sprigg had called here Thursday night," put in Vance.

"Oh, he did, did he? . . Thursday—that's right. Pardee was here, too. And Drukker. We had a discussion on Gaussian co-ordinates. This tensor came up—Drukker mentioned it first, I think. And Pardee had some mad notion of applying the higher mathematics to chess. . . . ."

"Do you play chess, by the by?" asked Vance.

"Used to. But no more. A beautiful game, though—if it wasn't for the players. Queer crabs, chess players."

"Did you ever make any study of the Pardee gambit?" (At the time I could not understand the seeming irrelevance of Vance's questions; and I noticed that Markham too was beginning to show signs of impatience.)

"Poor old Pardee!" Arnesson smiled unfeelingly. "Not a bad elementary mathematician. Should have been a high school teacher. Too much money, though. Took to chess. I told him his gambit was unscientific. Even showed him how it could be beaten. But he couldn't see it. Then Capablanca, Vidmar and Tartakower came along and knocked it into a cocked hat. Just as I told him they would. Wrecked his life. He's been fussing around with another gambit for years, but can't make it cohere. Reads Weyl, Silberstein, Eddington and Mach in the hope of getting inspiration."

"That's most interestin'." Vance extended his match-case to Arnesson, who had been filling his pipe as he talked. "Was Pardee well acquainted with Sprigg?"

"Oh, no. Met him here twice—that's all. Pardee knows Drukker well, though. Always asking him about potentials and scalars and vectors. Hopes to hit on something that'll revolutionize chess."

"Was he interested in the Riemann-Christoffel tensor when you discussed it the other night?"

"Can't say that he was. A bit out of his realm. You can't hitch the curvature of space-time to a chess-board."

"What do you make of this formula being found on Sprigg?"

"Don't make anything of it. If it had been in Sprigg's handwriting I'd say it dropped out of his pocket. But who'd go to the trouble of trying to type a mathematical formula?"

"The Bishop apparently."

Arnesson took his pipe from his mouth and grinned.

"Bishop X. We'll have to find him. He's full of whimsies. Perverted sense of values."

"Obviously." Vance spoke languidly. "And, by the by, I almost forgot to ask you: does the Dillard house harbor any revolvers?"

"Oho!" Arnesson chuckled with unrestrained delight. "Sits the wind there? . . . Sorry to disappoint you. No revolvers. No sliding doors. No secret stairways. All open and aboveboard."

Vance sighed theatrically.

"Sad . . . sad! And I had such a comfortin' theory."

Belle Dillard had come silently down the hall, and now stood in the archway. She had evidently heard Vance's question and Arnesson's answer.

"But there are two revolvers in the house, Sigurd," she declared. "Don't you remember the old revolvers I used for target practice in the country?"

"Thought you'd thrown 'em away long ago." Arnesson rose and drew up a chair for her. "I told you when we returned from Hopatcong that summer that only burglars and bandits are allowed to own guns in this benevolent State. . . . ."

"But I didn't believe you," the girl protested. "I never know when you're jesting and when you're serious."

"And you kept them, Miss Dillard?" came Vance's quiet voice.

"Why—yes." She shot an apprehensive glance at Heath. "Shouldn't I have done so?"

"I believe it was technically illegal. However"—Vance smiled reassuringly—"I don't think the Sergeant will invoke the Sullivan law against you. Where are they now?"

"Downstairs in the archery room. They're in one of the drawers of the tool chest."

Vance rose.

"Would you be so good, Miss Dillard, as to show us where you put them. I have a gnawin' curiosity to see 'em, don't y' know."

The girl hesitated and looked to Arnesson for guidance. When he nodded she turned without a word and led the way to the archery room.

"They're in that chest by the window," she said.

Going to it she drew out a small deep drawer in one end. At the rear, beneath a mass of odds and ends, was a .38 Colt automatic.

"Why!" she exclaimed. "There's only one here. The other is gone."

"It was a smaller pistol, wasn't it?" asked Vance.

"Yes. . . ."

"A .32?"

The girl nodded and turned bewildered eyes on Arnesson.

"Well, it's gone, Belle," he told her, with a shrug. "Can't be helped. Probably one of your young archers took it to blow out his brains with after he'd foozled at shooting arrows up the alley."

"Do be serious, Sigurd," she pleaded, a little frightened. "Where could it have gone?"

"Ha! Another dark mystery," scoffed Arnesson. "Strange disappearance of a dicarded .32."

Vance changed the subject.

"Perhaps, Miss Dillard, you'd be good enough to take us to Mrs. Drukker."

"Oh, you musn't bother her today." Her tone was tragically appealing. "Lady Mae is very ill. After she'd seen you and Mr. Markham she became very weak—something terrible seemed to be preying on her mind. She kept repeating in an awful whisper: 'Johnny Sprigg, Johnny Sprigg.' I phoned her doctor and he came right over. She has to be kept very quiet."

"Who is her doctor, Miss Dillard?"

"Whitney Barstead."

"A good man," nodded Vance. "We'll do nothing without his permission."

(To be continued.)

FEEL MEAN?

Don't be helpless when you suddenly get a headache. Reach in your pocket for immediate relief. If you haven't any Aspirin with you, get some at the first drugstore you come to. Take a tablet or two and be rid of the pain. Take promptly. Nothing is gained by waiting to see if the pain will leave of its own accord. It may grow worse! Why postpone relief?

There are many times when Aspirin tablets will "save the day." They will always ease a throbbing head. Quiet a grumbling tooth. Relieve nagging pains of neuralgia or neuritis. Or check a sudden cold. Even rheumatism has lost its terrors for those who have learned to depend on these tablets.

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Moon on the Thorn

I hear the grey geese winging
Between the stars and me,
And little people singing
Along the misty lea.
A valley fox is crying,
A mountain cat replying,
A far off river sighing
Upon her way to sea.

The fairies flock and mingle,
Till blows an elfin horn,
And gallop from their dingle
Two ring-straked unicorn.
I hear the creatures neighing,
"Come, monkeys, cease your playing;
Be off! Be off a maying:
The moon is on the thorn!"

Then kobold, deev and pixie,
Red troll and sprite and fay,
Pidwidgeon, brownie, nixie
Make haste to seek the may:
And where they took their pleasure,
At midnight hour of leisure,
A white hare danced a measure
Before he hopped away.

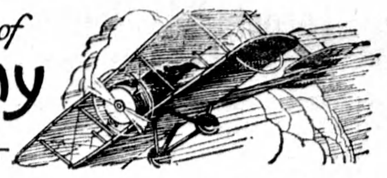
—Eden Phillpotts, in Country Life, London.

Holding Doesn't Pay

Holding eggs for a "rise in the market doesn't pay, as a recent report from federal inspectors at Winnipeg clearly shows. It reads: "The majority of receipts are of good quality, although some held eggs are in evidence. These invariably grade seconds, showing the fallacy of holding perishable products for any length of time in anticipation of a higher market." At the time this report was received the spread of extras over seconds was five cents per dozen. The Egg Marketing Service of the Dominion Department of Agriculture urges farmers to market their eggs in the very best of condition, which naturally is as soon after laying as possible so that they will get the benefit of official grading.

ISSUE No. 12—'31

The ADVENTURES of CAPTAIN JIMMY and his Dog SCOTTIE



We had slipped down the burning slope, expecting every minute to be our last, then found ourselves falling into space. We shut our eyes, rather than see the fiercely burning furnace that we believed lay below—the suddenly I found myself choking for breath, deep down in the cool swirling depths of a mountain pool.

I fought my way to the top, and found Scottie swimming in circles up there on the surface, looking for me, with a most doleful expression on his whiskered face.

Above us the woods burned brightly, and down stream the river disappeared in a smoke-filled tunnel of flaming trees. It was through that tunnel we must go if we were ever to get out. The air was alive with hot cinders—and the light was so uncertain that we had no idea whether the sun was shining or not.

When the water grew shallow I waded around slippery boulders, and crawled over ledges where the swift, white current pulled and tugged at my clothes and often swept me off my feet. It was painfully slow work for both of us. Scottie was clutched under my coat and I staggered along as fast as I could.

The stream narrowed, and the rock ledges on either side rose to a height of twenty feet or more. It was a regular gorge. Up over us the woods were burning fiercely, but above the crackle and roar of the flames rose another sound—a sort of deep bass rumble like thunder that broke through a long drawn out note. Falling water, and not very far ahead!

The current grew deeper and swifter, and the gorge continued to grow steeper and narrower. I clung to a ledge for support while I rested.

Sure enough. Not a hundred feet along, the stream dropped over a ledge. I crept as closely as I dared. Apparently the water fell twenty-five or thirty-five feet into a round basin and the gorge was considerably wider at that point. It looked for all the world as if some giant with an auger had bored this big hole in the rock, into which the water tumbled and hissed.

Slowly, step by step, we retraced our way back through the gorge. On a flat rock in the stream we sat down to think—the bank was too cool for comfort and the rock was none too cool. Taking off my leather jacket, I carefully cut the heavy leather into strips, using the sleeves and all. When fastened together these strips made a strong rope about ten or twelve yards long.

Now for a place to tie it at the head of the falls. I needed a log that could be wedged securely between the walls of the gorge—that would do it. Finally I found one the right size. Half floating it, I made my way towards the edge of the falls. One false move—and over I'd have gone! Carefully I worked one end into a crevise in the ledge. With on end anchored I pushed the other into place against the opposite wall of the gorge. Then I went back for Scottie.

From my shirt I made a sling. With one end of the rope anchored around my waist, I braced myself against the tree and lowered Scottie down. The rope just reached, and he climbed out on the side of the basin. My turn came now. I straddled the log, took a tight hold of the leather rope, and slipped over. The force of the falls was tremendous. The rope slipped through my fingers, and I spun dizzily around, and with a thump I landed in the shallow water at the edge of the basin. I climbed wearily out and there was Scottie watching me on the bank.

The woods seemed to be getting lighter ahead. I pushed on faster—and soon we were on the edge of the nicest little mountain lake you ever saw. Far up to the right the fire was rapidly working down to the lake. To our left, the woods were burning almost to the water's edge. We were hemmed in again.

Suddenly there was a scrambling in the underbrush—some heavy animal scratching through. Scottie remembered the bears and stood still with every hair standing straight out like a porcupine. The crashing grew nearer . . .

(To be continued)

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