

Truly a Floral Tribute

by Vivian Farmer
Chap 14

Samuel Monday was not normally a cheerful man, and this morning was not exception. Not that he would have wanted to change his misanthropic outlook and suspicion of all mankind. No, he enjoyed his jaundiced view, taking a perverse pleasure in the reactions of others to his pessimism and open scorn of their cheer. It was his right to try to get back at the world. What had the world done for him? Had anyone taken him in when as an infant he had been left on the steps of the very church where he now served as sexton? No instead he had been taken to an orphanage, where, since no identification had been made of the child, and because it had been the first day of the week, he was given the surname Monday. The orphanage was also at the letter S in the alphabet, in the naming of boys. The boy who had arrived just before him being given the name Samson, he was given the next name in the S-s, Samuel. Farmers gave more thought in naming their cattle, Samuel had always thought.

He had gone from the impersonality of the orphanage, to the regimentation of the infantry in the last years of World War II, surviving that to go into the woolen mill at the end of that conflict, where he had remained until the plant was finally closed and all hope of it being bought and re-opened by its new owner was abandoned. His life had then gone full circle, and he was back on the church steps, this time as the Sexton.

But now he wasn't a powerless infant. Not that this thought ever crossed his mind, for Samuel wasn't given to introspection. Nor did he recognize that his boot-legging out of the curate's cottage, his use of the mausoleum of one of the oldest families in the community for the storage of his wares, were acts of vengeance for the his being ignored by the world, being denied even his rightful identity.

And his sense of anger and frustration this morning was the direct result of someone's having deprived him first of one of his favourite targets of ridicule, Agnes Turley and then one of his best customers, her husband, Charlie. Even Samuel's less than well honed perceptions, were beginning to pick up animosity in the reactions of others when he walked down the street, in place of their usual indifference. For the first time he was being noticed... and a part of him enjoyed it. But this notoriety was having an effect on business. One of the advantages of dealing with Sam Monday, was his going largely unnoticed. In fear that the police might be watching Sam's activities, his regular customers were staying away from him. It wasn't just the reduction of income that was angering Sam, it was being party to the petty sins of some of the guiding lights of the community that was being thwarted.

With that peculiar tendency a topic of general interest and concern seems to have to become a litany, thus had

the deaths become in Weavers' Mills. Conversations that morning began with, "lovely day," ...response, "need rain though." "Terrible about Agnes and Charlie,"response, "terrible... can't help but wonder who's next." "They have no idea who did it,"response, "no suspect." "Bi-Centennial Celebration is getting near,"response, "yes, and won't Agnes be missed." The only change in this litany since Agnes's death, had been the addition of Charlie's name.

The police took note of these conversations and the complete lack of the mention of possible suspects. No one seemed to have any idea of who in the community would want these two people dead. Corporal Fairchild said as much on Tuesday morning when Jeremy Fegan stopped by to inquire how the investigation was going.

"The biggest mystery is the complete lack of suspects," the officer complained. "If Agnes was murdered.... and we still have no proof that she was... why? Then why kill Charlie? Or was Charlie's death accidental?"

Jeremy took a sip of the coffee he had been given by the officer, and grimaced. "Is this the stuff you serve to prisoners when you interrogate them?" He didn't wait for an answer. "If it is the threat of having to drink a second cup must make them tell anything they know...." He put the cup on the edge of the desk where a small gap existed between the stacks of reports and files. "If it's any help, Charlie was definitely murdered. Someone very carefully doctored the second bottle of whiskey, knowing that Charlie wouldn't notice the change. The bottle I took a sample from was as close to pure grain alcohol as one could hope to get. Two good slugs of that would kill an ox and Charlie wasn't an ox."

"Yah! I thought you'd say that," the detective took an absent-minded drink of his coffee. "I have a call in to the lab in Toronto for the results of the tests on the stuff we took from the crimes scene at the church. They should have something by now."

"So far though," Jeremy mused, "the only person with a common connection with deaths is Samuel Monday. He would have unquestioned access to the cleaning materials at the church being the sexton and being the local entrepreneur, to the bottle that Charlie had. His dislike of Agnes could be seen as a motive, and Charlie might have said something to this effect to Monday and Monday decided to eliminate him as well..... but that is too obvious. Anyway, Sam is a miserable excuse for a human, but he's not smart enough to plan and execute either crime."

"He's the only suspect we have though." Fairchild put his feet up on the desk and leaned back in his chair.

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