

# The RED HOUSE MYSTERY

by A.A. MILNE



## BEGIN HERE TODAY

Within two minutes after Robert Ablett, ne'er-do-well brother of Mark Ablett, bachelor proprietor of The Red House, had arrived and been ushered into Mark's office, a shot was heard.

Antony Gillingham, a friend of Bill Beverley, one of Mark's guests, arrived at that moment to find Mark's companion, Matt Cayley, pounding on the locked door of the office and demanding admittance. The two men entered the office by a window and on the floor found the body of Robert with a bullet through the head. Mark was nowhere to be found. Investigation by Inspector Birch showed that Mark had learned with considerable disgust and annoyance of the coming of Robert. Cayley refused to believe that Mark had deliberately murdered Robert.

## GO ON WITH THE STORY

### CHAPTER V.

The housekeeper's room had heard something of the news by this time, and Audrey had had a busy time explaining to other members of the staff exactly what he had said, and what she had said. The details were not quite established yet, but this much at least was certain: that Mr. Mark's brother had shot himself and spirited Mr. Mark away, and that Audrey had seen at once that he was that sort of man when she opened the door to him. Elsie had a contribution of her own to make. She had actually heard Mr. Mark in the office, threatening his brother.

"He said, I heard him say it with my own ears, 'It's my turn now,' he said, triumphant-like."

"Well, if you think that's a threat, dear, you're very particular, I must say."

But Audrey remembered Elsie's words when she was in front of Inspector Birch. She gave her own evidence with the readiness of one who had already repeated it several times.

"Then you didn't see Mr. Mark at all?"

"No, sir; he must have come in before and gone up to his room."

"Well, I think that's all that I want to know. Now what about the other servants?"

"Elsie heard the master and Mr. Robert talking together," said Audrey eagerly. "He was saying—Mr. Mark, I mean—"

"Ah! Who is Elsie, by the way?"

"One of the housemaids. Shall I send her to you, sir?"

"Please."

All that interested Inspector Birch was that Elsie was passing through the hall, and heard voices in the office.

"And stopped to listen?"

"Certainly not," said Elsie with dignity. "I was just passing through the hall, just as you might have been yourself, and not supposing they were talking secrets, didn't think to stop my ears, as no doubt I ought to have done." And she sniffed slightly.

"Come, come," said the inspector soothingly. "Now, then, what was it you heard? Try to remember the exact words."

"Something about working in a passage," thought Elsie.

"H'm. Working a passage over—could that have been it?"

"That's right, sir," said Elsie eagerly. "He'd worked his passage over."

"Well?"

"And then Mr. Mark said loudly—sort of triumphant-like—'It's my turn now. You wait.'"

"Triumphantly?"

"As much as to say his chance had come."

"And that's all you heard?"

"That's all, sir—not standing there listening, but just passing through the hall, as it might be any time."

"Yes. Well, that's really very important, Elsie. Thank you."

Elsie gave him a smile, and returned eagerly to the kitchen.

Meanwhile Antony had been exploring a little on his own. There was a point which was puzzling him. He went through the hall to the front of the house and stood at the open door. He and Cayley had run round the house to the left. Surely it would have been quicker to have run round to the right? Undoubtedly they went the longest way round.

"Why?" he asked himself. "Was it to give Mark more time in which to escape? Only, in that case—why run? Also, how did Cayley know then that it was Mark who was trying to escape? If he had guessed—that one had shot the other, it was much more likely that Robert had shot Mark. Indeed, he had admitted that this was what he thought. The first thing he had said when he turned the body over was, 'Thank God! I was afraid it was Mark.' But why should he want to give Robert time in which to

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get away? And again—why run, if he did want to give him time?"

Antony went out of the house again to the lawns at the back, and sat down on the bench in view of the office windows.

"Now then," he said, "let's go through Cayley's mind carefully, and see what we get."

Cayley had been in the hall when Robert was shown into the office. The servant goes off to look for Mark, and Cayley goes on with his book. Mark comes down the stairs, warns Cayley to stand by in case he is wanted, and goes to meet his brother. What does Cayley expect?

Possibly that he won't be wanted after all; possibly that his advice may be wanted in the matter, say, of paying Robert's debts, or getting him a passage back to Australia; possibly that his physical assistance may be wanted to get an obstreperous Robert out of the house. Well, he sits there for a moment, and then goes into the library. Suddenly he hears a pistol-



"And that's all you heard?"

shot. For the moment he would hardly realize what it was. He listens. Perhaps it wasn't a pistol-shot after all. After a moment or two he goes to the library door again. The profound silence makes him uneasy now. No harm in going into the office just to reassure himself. So he tries the door—and finds it locked!

What are his emotions now? Alarm, uncertainty. Something is happening. Incredible though it seems, it must have been a pistol-shot. He is banging at the door and calling out to Mark, and there is no answer. Alarm—yes. But alarm for whose safety? Mark's obviously. Robert is a stranger; Mark is an intimate friend. Robert had written a letter that morning, the letter of a man in a dangerous temper. Robert is the tough customer; Mark the highly civilized gentleman. If here has been a quarrel, it is Robert who has shot Mark. He bangs at the door again.

Of course, to Antony, coming suddenly upon the scene, Cayley's conduct had seemed rather absurd, but then, just for the moment, Cayley had lost his head. But, as soon as Antony suggested trying the windows, Cayley saw that that was the obvious thing to do. So he leads the way to the windows—the longest way.

Why? To give the murdered time to escape? If he had thought then that Mark was the murdered, perhaps, yes. But he thinks that Robert is the murderer. If he is not hiding anything, he must think so. Indeed he says so, when he sees the body; "I was afraid it was Mark," he says, when he finds that it is Robert who is killed. No reason, then, for wishing to gain time. On the contrary, every instinct would urge him to get into the room as quickly as possible, and seize the wicked Robert. Yet he goes the longest way round. Why? And then, why run?

"That's the question," said Antony to himself, as he filled his pipe, "and bless me if I know the answer!"

He sat there with his unlit pipe in his hand, thinking. There were one or two other things in the back of his brain, waiting to be taken out and looked at. For the moment he left them undisturbed. They would come back to him later when he wanted them.

He laughed suddenly, and lit his pipe.

"I was wanting a new profession," he thought, "and now, I've found it. Antony Gillingham, our own private sleuthhound. I shall begin today."

Whatever Antony Gillingham's other qualifications for his new profession, he had at any rate a brain which worked clearly and quickly. And this clear brain of his had already told him that he was the only person in the house at that moment who was unhandicapped in the search for truth. The inspector had arrived in it to find a man dead and a man missing. It was extremely probable, no doubt, that the missing man had shot the dead man. But it was more than extremely probable, it was almost certain that the inspector would start with the idea that this extremely probable solution was the one true solution and that, in consequence, he would be less disposed to consider without prejudice any other solution.

Inspector Birch was certainly prepared to believe that Mark had shot his brother. Robert had been shown into the office (witness Audrey); Mark had gone in to Robert (witness Cayley); Mark and Robert had been heard talking (witness Elsie); there was a shot (witness everybody); the room had been entered and Robert's body had been found (witness Cayley and Gillingham). And Mark was missing. Obviously, then, Mark had killed his brother; accidentally, as Cayley believed, or deliberately, as Elsie's evidence seemed to suggest.

But there were other possibilities. It would have interested Antony to know that, just at the time when he was feeling rather superior to the prejudiced inspector, the inspector himself was letting his mind dwell lovingly upon the possibilities in connection with Mr. Gillingham. Was it only a coincidence that Mr. Gillingham had turned up just when he did? And Mr. Beverley's curious answers when asked for some account of his friend! An odd man, Mr. Gillingham, evidently. It might be as well to keep an eye on him.

### CHAPTER VI.

The guests had said goodbye to Cayley, according to their different manner.

Bill had seen them into the car, had taken his own farewells (with a special squeeze of the hand for Betty), and had wandered out to join Antony on his garden seat.

"Well, this is a rum show," said Bill as he sat down.

"Very rum, William."

"And you actually walked right into it?"

"Right into it," said Antony, and proceeded to tell all that he had already told the inspector, ill interrupting him here and there with appropriate "Good Lords" and whistles.

"I say, it's a bit of a business, isn't it? Where do I come in, exactly?"

Antony smiled at him.

"Well, there's nothing to worry about, you know. Besides, I need you. Things are going to happen here soon."

(To be continued.)

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