

THE MIDDLE TEMPLE MURDER

A Detective Story by J. S. Fletcher

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Frank Spargo, a young city editor to a newspaper, on returning home from his work late one night, is attracted by a couple of men peering into a dark corner in an alleyway. Investigation shows that a man was reclining against a wall and that he was dead, murdered, it seemed. In his pocket there is found the name and address of Ronald Breton, Barrister, King's Bench Walk, Temple, London.

Detective Sergeant Rathbury, who has been given charge of the investigation, together with Spargo, visit Ronald Breton in his chambers and the three men journey to the mortuary where the murdered man is lying, but after looking steadily and earnestly at him, he drew back, shaking his head.

(AND HERE IT CONTINUES) "NO!" he said with decision. "Don't know him—don't know him from Adam. Never set eyes on him in my life, that I know of."

Rathbury replaced the cloth. "I didn't suppose you would," he remarked. "Well, I expect we must go on the usual lines. Somebody'll identify him."

"You say he was murdered?" said Breton. "Is that certain?" Rathbury jerked his thumb at the corpse.

"The back of his skull is smashed in," he said laconically. "The doctor says he must have been struck down from behind—and a fearful blow, too. I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Breton. 'Oh, all right!' said Breton. 'Well, you know where to find me if you want me. I shall be curious about this. Good-by—good-by, Mr. Spargo.' The young barrister hurried away, and Rathbury turned to the journalist.

"I didn't expect anything from that," he remarked. "However, it was a thing to be done. You are going to write about this for your paper?"

Spargo nodded. "Well," continued Rathbury. "I've sent a man to Fiekle's, the latter's where that cap came from, you know. We may get a bit of information from that quarter—if you like to meet me here at 12 o'clock I'll tell you anything I've heard. Just now I'm going to get some breakfast. 'I'll meet you here,' said Spargo, 'at 12 o'clock.'"

He watched Rathbury go away round a corner; he himself suddenly set off round another. He went to the Watchman office, wrote a few lines, which he inclosed in an envelope for the day editor, and went out again. Somehow or other, he hit him up Fleet street, and before he quite realized what he was doing he found himself turning into the Law Courts.

CHAPTER III The Clue of the Cap

HAVING no clear conception of what had led him to these scenes of litigation, Spargo went wandering aimlessly about in the corridors until an official, who took him to be lost, asked him if there was any particular part of the building he wanted. For a moment Spargo stared at the man as if he did not comprehend his question. Then his mental powers reasserted themselves.

"Isn't Mr. Justice Barrow sitting in one of the courts this morning?" he suddenly asked.

"Number seven," replied the official. "What's your case when it's down?" "I haven't got a case," said Spargo. "I'm a pressman—reporter, you know."

"The official stuck out a finger. "Round the corner—first to your right—second on the left," he said automatically. "You'll find plenty of room—nothing much doing there this morning."

He turned away, and Spargo remonstrated his apparently aimless perambulation of the dreary, depressing corridors.

"Upon my honor!" he muttered. "Upon my honor, I really don't know what I've come up here for. I've no business here."

Just then he turned a corner and came face to face with Ronald Breton. The young barrister was now in his wig and gown and carried a bundle of papers tied up with pink tape; he was scowling two young ladies, who were laughing and chattering as they tripped along at his side. And Spargo, glancing at them meditatively, instinctively told himself which was the one that he and Rathbury had overheard as she made her burlesque speech; it was not the elder one, who walked by Ronald Breton with something of an air of proprietorship, but the younger, the girl with the laughing eyes and vivacious smile, and it suddenly dawned upon him that somewhere, deep within him, there had been a notion, a hope of seeing this girl again—why, he could not then think.

Breton stopped, half inquisitive. His eyes seemed to ask a question.

"Yes," said Spargo. "The fact is, I remembered that you said you were coming up here, and I came after you. I want—when you've time—to have a talk, to ask you a few questions. About this affair of the dead man, you know."

Breton nodded. He tapped Spargo on the arm.

"Look here," he said. "When this case of mine over, I can give you as much time as you like. Can you wait a bit? Yes? Well, I say, do me a favor. I was taking these ladies round to the gallery—about there, and up the stairs—and I'm a bit pressed for time. I've a solicitor waiting for me. You take them—there's a good fellow; then, when the case is over, bring them down here, and you and I will talk. Here—I'll introduce you all—no ceremony. Miss Aylmore—Miss Jessie Aylmore. Mr. Spargo—of the Watchman. Now, I'm off!" Breton turned on the instant; his gown whisked round a corner, and Spargo found himself staring at two smiling girls. He saw then that both were pretty and attractive, and that one seemed to be the elder by some three or four years.

"That is very cool of Ronald," observed the elder young lady. "Perhaps his scheme doesn't fit in with yours, Mr. Spargo? Pray don't—"

"Oh, it's all right!" said Spargo, feeling himself uncommonly stupid. "I've nothing to do. But—where did Mr. Breton say you wished to be taken?"

"Into the gallery of No. 7 court," said the younger girl, promptly. "Round this corner—I think I know the way."

Spargo, still marveling at the rapidity with which affairs were moving that morning, bestirred himself to act as cicerone and presently led the two young ladies to the very front of one of those public galleries from which lawyers and specially interested spectators may see and hear the proceedings which obtain in the badly ventilated, ill-lighted tanks wherein justice is dispensed at the law courts. There was no one else in the gallery; the attendant in the corridor outside seemed to be vastly amazed that any one should wish to enter it, and he presently opened the door, beckoned to Spargo, and came half-way down the stairs to meet him.

"Nothing much going on here this morning," he whispered behind a raised hand. "But there's a nice breach case in No. 5—get you three good seats there if you like."

Spargo declined this tempting offer, and went back to his charges. He had decided by that time that Miss Aylmore was about twenty-three, and her sister, about eighteen; he also thought that young Breton was a lucky dog to be in possession of such a charming future wife and an equally charming sister-in-law. And he dropped into a seat at Miss Jessie Aylmore's side, and looked around him as if he were much awed by his surroundings.

"I suppose one can talk until the judge enters?" he whispered. "Is this really Mr. Breton's first case?" "His very first—all on his own responsibility, any way," replied Spargo's companion, smiling. "And he's very nervous—and so's my sister. Aren't you, now, Evelyn?"

Evelyn Aylmore looked at Spargo, and smiled quietly.

"I suppose one's always nervous about one's appearance," she said. "However, I think Ronald's got plenty of confidence, and, as he says, it's not much of a case; it isn't even a jury case. I'm afraid you'll find it dull. Mr. Spargo—it's only something about a promissory note."

"Oh, I'm all right, thank you," replied Spargo, unconsciously falling back on a favorite formula. "I always like to hear lawyers—they manage to write for the papers, don't they?"

"About nothing," said Jessie Aylmore. "But there—so do gentlemen who write for the papers, don't they?"

Spargo was about to admit that there was a good deal to be said on that point when Miss Aylmore suddenly drew her sister's attention to a man who had just entered the well of the court.

"Look!" she observed. "There's Mr. Elphick!"

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THE GUMPS—Help!

WELL- I FEEL FINE THIS MORNING - HAD A GOOD NIGHTS SLEEP LAST NIGHT - AND I TOOK A LITTLE PEEP IN THAT GRIP OF UNCLE BIMS AND I SAW THAT BIG ROLL THAT'S CROWDING THE LITTLE ONES SO BADLY AND I TURNED IT OVER AND ON THE BOTTOM OF THAT ROLL WAS A LITTLE CARD ON WHICH WAS WRITTEN - FROM UNCLE-BIM TO ANDY - SOMEBODY TRY TO MAKE ME BLUE TODAY

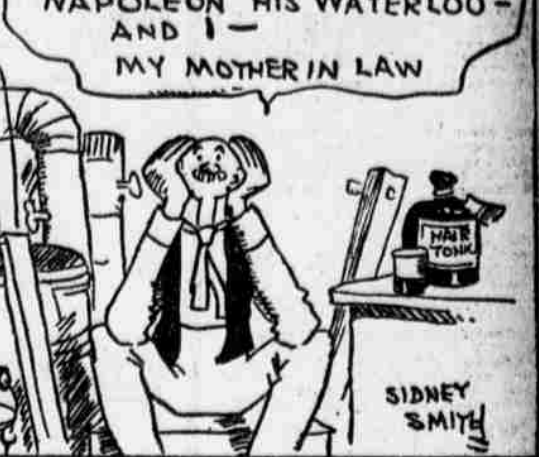
OH ANDY! A LETTER FROM MOTHER



DEAR CHILDREN - AS SOON AS I HEARD THAT UNCLE BIM WAS VISITING YOU - I MADE UP MY MIND THAT I MUST COME AND SEE YOU AT ONCE - I WOULD NEVER FORGIVE MYSELF IF I MISSED UNCLE BIM - I HAD A LITTLE SHOOTING TO DO SO I THOUGHT I WOULD KILL TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE - ETC



WELL - IT'S COMING TO ME - ANY GUY THAT STARTS TO BRAG ABOUT FEELING SO GOOD IS FLIRTING WITH FATE. CAESAR HAD HIS BRUTUS NAPOLEON HIS WATERLOO - AND I - MY MOTHER IN LAW



PETEY—Was, Not "Is"



The Young Lady Across the Way



THE TERRIBLE-TEMPERED MR. BANG



SCHOOL DAYS



DREAMLAND ADVENTURES MR. MOON LOSES HIS HEAD

By DADDY

(Peggy is called to the Moon to help the Man in the Moon find his head. She learns he has thirteen heads, and is astonished when the one he is wearing is accidentally knocked off.)

CHAPTER III The Head Rolls Away

PEGGY was shocked when the head of the Man in the Moon went flying off his shoulders. It was the strangest thing she had seen in many and many a day. She thought it was surely the end of the Man in the Moon. She knew it would have been the end of her had a cannon ball come along and carried away her own head in a like manner.

But it was far from being the end of the Man in the Moon. His headless body danced and pranced about in a way that showed he was very much alive. He couldn't talk because his mouth was gone with his head, but his wildly waving hands said just as plainly as words: "Bring back my head; bring it back this instant."

"I'll get it for you," cried Peggy, and she dashed into the passageway down which the head had rolled. But though she ran fast she couldn't catch up with the head. It had vanished, as if it were, into this gloomy hole that went down and down like a mine shaft.

Distressed at the thought that the head of the Man in the Moon was gone for good, Peggy climbed slowly back. And as she climbed she heard a pulsing sound from the depths below—a sound like animal laughter—a happy barking, a joyous bleating.

"I wonder if that can be Johnny Bull and Billy Goat," Peggy thought to herself. "I wonder if they are lost in the depths of the Moon." But if Johnny Bull and Billy Goat were lost, they were not worrying Peggy. For the sounds were plainly sounds of mirth and merriment.

When Peggy got back to the big chamber, she found the Moon folks scattering in all directions. They were trying to get out of the way of the pound-hungry man in the Moon. He lay in finding his head and was taking his vengeance out on whomever he could reach. It was like a game of Blind Man's Buff, with stinging thumps for every person who was caught.

For a fool without a head, the Man in the Moon was exceedingly vigorous and dangerous. He had every one in the chamber dodging—every one except Billy Belgium and Bally Sam. These two were busy counting the big round

disks they had earned with Bally Sam's kicking game. They were busy until the Man in the Moon in going around happened to stumble into Bally Sam's legs. The Man in the Moon felt the legs as a blind man would feel a dog, and he happened to kick Bally Sam. Now, if there is anything a mule doesn't like, it is for some one to tickle his hind legs. Bally Sam, both of Bally Sam's heels kicked out, catching the Man in the Moon in the stomach. Zip! the Man in the Moon flew across the chamber right into the arms of Peggy. That's the way down with the Man in the Moon on her lap. He seemed furiously angry and struggled like a squalling baby. Peggy clung tightly to him for fear he would slip and harm her.

"Help me hold him," she cried to the scurrying Moon folks. "We must keep him quiet until we find his head."

The answer of the Moon folks was a loud shout: "A head! A fresh head for the Man in the Moon!"

In response to the shout, a door in the glittering wall of the chamber swung quickly back and in trotted thirteen attendants, each carrying what seemed to be a large hat box. They lined up in front of the Man in the Moon, and sang out as if calling a roll:

"Here we are prompt and soon Skating Moon, Stormy Moon, Sugar Moon, Waking Moon, Grower Moon, Honey Moon, Harvest Moon, Pumpkin Moon, Nutting Moon, Hunting Moon, Christmas Moon, all in tune. Pick up quick, Man in the Moon."

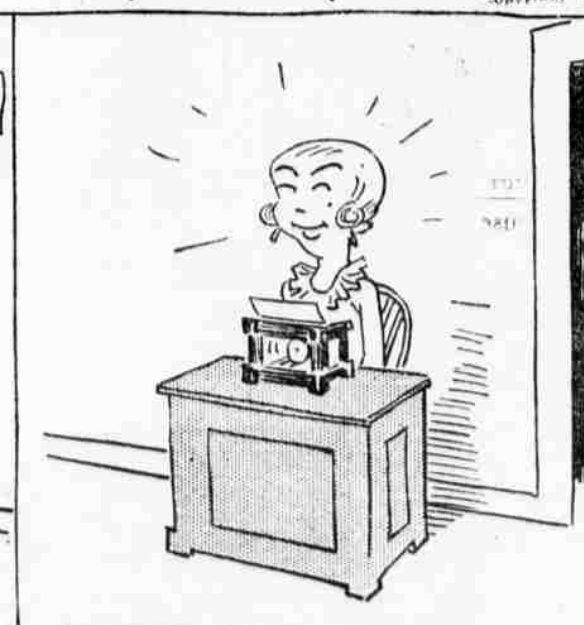
The Man in the Moon wriggled out of Peggy's lap and groped toward the boxes, each of which had a different name upon it. It chanced that he first touched the one marked "Stormy Moon," and the crowd of Moon folks groaned in dread. Eagerly he tore the cover off, only to find the box empty. At once the headless Man in the Moon flew into a rage that caused the attendants to dodge in trembling fear.

Again the Man in the Moon groped among the boxes and this time the Moon folks shouted in joy as he lifted the cover of the one marked "Honey Moon." Inside was a shining, round moon head. The Man in the Moon placed the head on his shoulders, and there he was, as sound as ever, and beaming around on every one with a happy smile.

"My, it's lucky for all of us he picked out mild moon," whispered an attendant in Peggy's ear.

(In tomorrow's chapter Peggy sees more of the Moon's head covers. These covers their mysterious powers.)

SOMEBODY'S STENOG—This Chap's Stuck Up



DOROTHY DARNIT—Walter Was Carried Away by His Art

