

THE MIDDLE TEMPLE MURDER

A Detective Story by J. S. Fletcher

Do you recognize that photograph as that of anybody you know? "Look at it well and closely." Mr. Quarterpage put on a special pair of spectacles and studied the photograph from several points of view. "No, sir," he said at last with a shake of the head. "I don't recognize it at all." "Can't see in it any resemblance to any man you've ever known?" asked Spargo. "No, sir, none," replied Mr. Quarterpage. "None whatever," said Spargo, laying the photograph on the table between them. "Now, then, I want you to tell me what John Maitland was like when you knew him. Also, I want you to describe Chamberlayne as he was when he died. Chamberlayne was supposed to die. You remember, of course, quite well?" "Mr. Quarterpage got up and moved to the door. "I can do better than that," he said. "I can show you photographs of both men as they were just before Maitland's death. I have a photograph of a small group of Market Mitecastor notabilities which was taken at a municipal garden party; Maitland and Chamberlayne are both in it. It's been put away in a cabinet in my drawing room for many a long year, and I've no doubt it's as fresh as when it was taken." He left the room and presently returned with a large mounted photograph which he laid on the table before his visitor. "There you are, sir," he said. "Quite fresh, you see—it must be getting on to twenty years since that was taken out of the drawer that it's been kept in. Now, that's Maitland. And that's Chamberlayne. Spargo found himself looking at a group of men who stood against an ivy-covered wall in the stiff attitudes in which photographers arrange masses of men. He fixed his attention on the two figures indicated by Mr. Quarterpage, and saw two medium-height, rather sturdy but thin men with some rather startlingly but not unusual features. "Um," he said, musingly. "Both bearded." "Yes, they both wore beards—full beards," assented Mr. Quarterpage. "And you see, they weren't so much alike. But Maitland was a much darker man than Chamberlayne, and he had brown eyes, while Chamberlayne's were rather a bright blue." "The removal of a beard makes a great difference," remarked Spargo. He looked at the photograph of Maitland in the group, comparing it with that of Marbury which he had taken from his pocket. "And twenty years makes a difference, too, he changed much, they did during the last twenty years. But I've known men change—age, almost beyond recognition—in five years. It depends, sir, on what they go through." Spargo suddenly laid aside the photographs, put his hands in his pockets and looked steadfastly at Mr. Quarterpage. "Look here!" he said. "I'm going to tell you what I'm after, Mr. Quarterpage. I'm sure you've heard all about what's known as the Middle Temple murder—the Marbury case?" "Yes, I've read of it," replied Mr. Quarterpage. "Have you read the accounts of it in your paper, the Watchman?" asked Spargo. Mr. Quarterpage shook his head. "I've only read one newspaper, sir, since I was a young man," he replied. "I take the Times, sir—we always took it, eye, even in the days when newspapers were taxed." "Very good," said Spargo. "But perhaps I can tell you a little more than you've read, for I've been working up that case ever since the body of the man known as John Marbury was found. Now, if you'll just give me your attention, I'll tell you the whole story from that moment until—now." And Spargo, briefly, succinctly, related the story of the Marbury case from the first instant of his own connection with it until the discovery of the silver ticket, and Mr. Quarterpage listened in rapt attention, nodding his head from time to time as the younger man made his points. "And now, Mr. Quarterpage," concluded Spargo, "this is the point I've come to. I believe that the man who came to the Anglo-Orient Hotel as John Marbury and who was undoubtedly murdered in Middle Temple Lane that night was John Maitland—I haven't a doubt about it after learning what you tell me about the silver ticket. I've found out a great deal that's valuable here, and I think I'm getting nearer to a solution of the mystery. That is, of course, to end out who murdered John Maitland, or Marbury. What you have told me about the Chamberlayne affair has led me to think this—here may have been people, or a person in London, who was anxious to get Marbury, as we'll call him, out of the way, and who somehow encountered him that night—evidently to silence him. I mean, because of the Chamberlayne affair. And I wondered, as there is so much mystery about him, and as he won't give any account of himself, if this man Ayilmore was really Chamberlayne. Yes, I wondered that! But Ayilmore's a tall, finely built man, quite six feet in height, and his hair, though it's now getting grizzled, has been very dark, and Chamberlayne, you say, was a medium-sized, fair man with blue eyes." "That's so, sir," assented Mr. Quarterpage. "Yes, a middling-sized man, and fair—very fair. Deary me, Mr. Spargo—this is a revelation. And you really think, sir, that John Maitland and John Marbury are one and the same person?" "I'm sure of it, now," said Spargo. "I see it in this way. Maitland, on his release, went out to Australia, and there he stopped. At last he came back, evidently well-to-do. He's murdered the very day of his arrival. Ayilmore is the only man who knows anything of him—Ayilmore won't tell all he knows, that's flat. But Ayilmore admits that he knew him at some vague date, say from twenty to twenty-two or three years ago. Now, where did Ayilmore know him? He says in London. That's a vague term. He won't say where he won't say anything definite—he won't even say what he, Ayilmore, himself was in those days. Do you recollect anything of anybody like Ayilmore coming here to see Maitland, Mr. Quarterpage?" "I don't," answered Mr. Quarterpage. "Maitland was a very quiet, retiring fellow, sir; he was about the quietest man in town. I never met a member of such a friend of his as this Ayilmore, from your description of him, would be at that time." "Did Maitland go to London much in those days?" asked Spargo. Mr. Quarterpage laughed. "Well, now, to show you what a good memory I have," he said. "I'll tell you of something that occurred across there at the Dragon only a few months before the Maitland affair came out. There were some of us in there one evening, and, for a rare thing, Maitland came in with Chamberlayne. Chamberlayne happened to remark that he was going up to town next day—he was always to and fro—and we got talking about London. And Maitland said the course of conversation that he believed he was about the only man of his age in England—and, of course, he meant if by class and means—who's never even seen London. And I don't think he ever went there between that time and his trial; in fact, I'm sure he didn't, for if he had, I should have heard of it." "Well, that's queer," remarked Spargo. "It's very queer. For I'm certain Maitland and Marbury are one and the same person. My theory about that all hinges on the fact that Maitland had that carefully planted before his arrest; that he dug it up when he came out of Dartmoor; that he took it off to Australia with him; that he brought it back with him; and that, of course, the silver ticket and the photograph had been in it all these years. Now—there's the loots from the Dragon at the front door, sir," said a parlor-maid, entering. "He's brought two telegrams for Mr. Spargo, thinking he might want them at once."

CHAPTER XXI
Arrested
SPARGO hurried out to the hall, took the two telegrams from the boots of the Dragon, and tearing open the envelopes, read the messages hastily. He went back to Mr. Quarterpage. "Here's important news," he said as he closed the library door and resumed his seat. "I'll read these telegrams to you, sir, and then we can discuss them in the light of what we've been talking about this morning. The first is from Australia. I told you we sent over Marbury at the place he said he had fled from—Columbidze. That report's just reached the Watchman, and they've wired it on to me. It's from the chief of police at Columbidze to the editor of the Watchman, London: "John Marbury came to Columbidze in the winter of 1918-19. He was unaccompanied. He appeared to be in possession of fairly considerable means and bought a share in a small sheep farm from its proprietor, Andrew Robertson, who is still here. Andrew says that Marbury never told him anything about himself except that he had emigrated for health reasons and was a widower."

THE GUMPS—Oh, Minerva!



PETEY—The Message Almost Came Too Soon



The Young Lady Across the Way



QUEER MENTAL REACTION



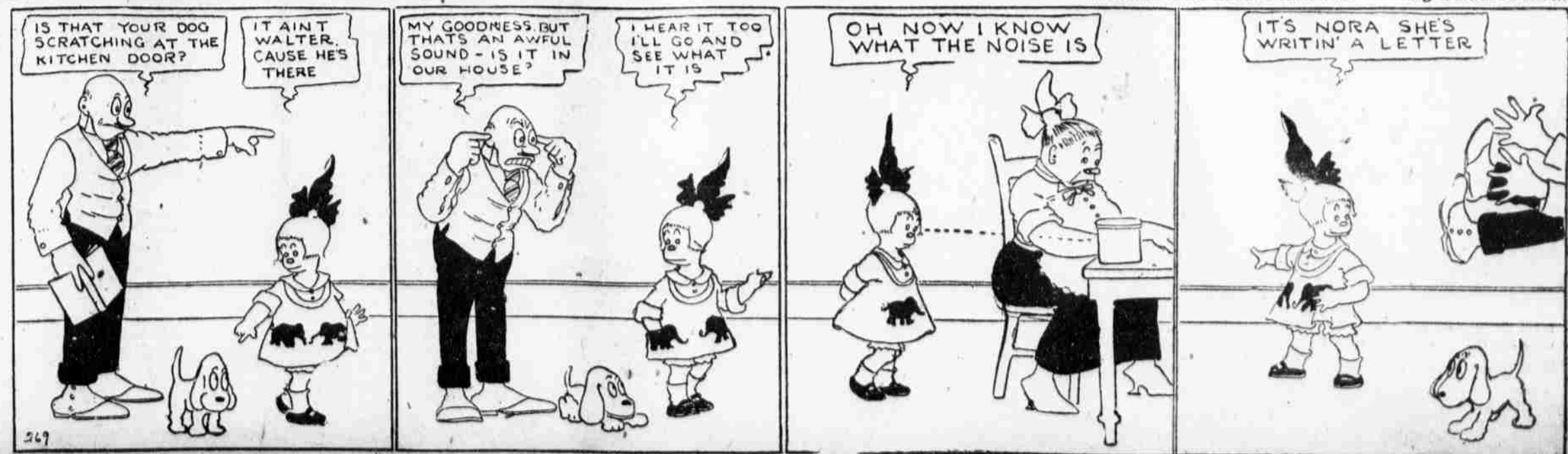
SCHOOL DAYS



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—She Gets a Clue to "Venus" Love Affair



DOROTHY DARNIT—Nora Was Scratching a Few Lines



DREAMLAND ADVENTURES

"JUDITH, THE FAIR DAMSEL"

(Peggy and Billy are in Movie-land, where Farmer Strongarm puts Crooked Nose and Giant Fierce Fangs to four tests to see if they are his daughter, Judith, the fair damsel. Crooked Nose meets two tests but is puzzled by the third.)
CHAPTER V
The Alarm-Clock Owl
FARMER STRONGARM, settling himself for a nap in the porch swing, had a grin on his face. He was well with the trade he had made with sure Crooked Nose could meet the third test by selling him something he didn't want. But the grin of Farmer Strongarm soon turned into a frown, for the birds which had gone with Peggy and Billy to see Crooked Nose for the hand of the farmer's daughter, Judith, the fair damsel, were chattering loudly among themselves over the plight of Crooked Nose, and their racket woke the farmer awake. The farmer turned and he tossed and he twisted, but the chatter, chatter, chatter grew louder and louder as the birds watched Peggy, Billy and Crooked Nose puzzle over how to meet the third test. Finally Farmer Strongarm sat up with an angry shout. "Get those noisy birds out of here," he shouted. "How can I sleep amid all this din?" He shouted so loudly the birds flew away in a hurry and Farmer Strongarm again settled down for his nap. Peggy gave a quick chuckle and clapped her hands. Farmer Strongarm's anger at the noise of the birds had put her head a plan for selling him something he didn't want. Quickly she whispered her scheme to Billy. The first part of Peggy's plan was to have Crooked Nose disguise himself as a gypsy woman, wearing a gypsy dress Judith had once worn to a party. She stained his face with coffee grounds and covered up his twisted nose with a swab. The second part of Peggy's plan was to call Judge Owl from the woods and have him perch on a post beside Crooked Nose, who sat cross-legged on the lawn. When all was ready, Peggy, Billy and Judith hid themselves and Judge Owl began to hoot as loudly and as diabolically as though he were lost in the woods. "Hoo! Hoo! Too! Too!" he hooted like a train whistle. (In tomorrow's chapter Crooked Nose faces the fourth and last test.)