THE MIDDLE TEMPLE MURDER

A Detective Story by J. S. Fletcher

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"IT'S plenty," observed Breton laconically.

He sat staring at his notes for a moment; then he looked up at Spargo. "What do you really think?" he asked.

"About—what?" said Spargo.

"This flight of Elphick's and Cardlestone's."

"I think, as I said, that they knew something which they think may be forced upon them. I never saw a man in a greater fright than that I saw Elphick in last night. And it's evident that Cardlestone shares in that fright, or they wouldn't have gone off in this way together."

"Do you think they know anything of the actual murder?"

Spargo shook his head.

"I don't know. Probably. They know something. And—look here!"

Spargo put his hand in his breast pocket and drew something out which he handed to Breton, who gazed at it curiously.

"What's this?" he demanded.

"Stamps?"

"That, from the description of Criedir, the stampdealer, is a sheet of those rare Australian stamps which Maitland had on him—carried on him. I picked it up just now in Cardlestone's room, when you were looking into his bedroom."

"But that, after all, proves nothing. Those mayn't be the identical stamps. And whether they are or not——"

"What are the probabilities?" interrupted Spargo sharply. "I believe that those are the stamps which Maitland—your father!—had on him, and I want to know how they came to be in Cardlestone's rooms. And I will know."

Breton handed the stamps back.

"But the general thing, Spargo?" he said. "If they didn't murder—I can't realize the thing yet!—my father——"

"If they didn't murder your father, they know who did!" exclaimed Spargo. "Now, then, it's time for more action."

"Let Elphick and Cardlestone alone for the moment—they'll be tracked easily enough. I want to tackle something else for the moment. How do you get an authority from the government to open a grave?"

"Order from the home secretary, which will have to be obtained by showing the very strongest reasons why it should be made."

"Good! We'll give the reasons. I want to have a grave opened."

"A grave opened! Whose grave?"

"The grave of the man Chamberlayne at Market Milcaster," replied Spargo.

Breton started.

"His? In heaven's name, why?" he demanded.

Spargo laughed as he got up.

"Because I believe it's empty," he answered. "Because I believe that Chamberlayne is alive and that his other name is—Cardlestone!"

CHAPTER XXXI

The Penitent Window Cleaner

THAT afternoon Spargo had another of his momentous interviews with his proprietor and his editor. The first result was that all three drove to the offices of the legal gentleman who catered for the Watchman when it wanted any law, and that things were put in shape for an immediate application to the home office for permission to open the Chamberlayne grave at Market Milcaster; the second was that on the following morning there appeared in the Watchman a notice which set half the mouths of London awatering. That notice, penned by Spargo, ran as follows:

"ONE THOUSAND POUNDS REWARD

"Whereas, on some date within the last twelve months, there was stolen, abstracted, or taken from the chambers in Fountain Court, Temple, occupied by Stephen Aylmore, M. P., under the name of Mr. Anderson, a walking stick or stout staff of foreign make, and of curious workmanship, which stick was probably used in the murder of John Marbury, or Maitland, in Middle Temple Lane, on the night of June 21-22 last, and is now in the hands of the police:

"This is to give notice that the proprietor of the Watchman newspaper will pay the above-named reward (one thousand pounds sterling) at once and in cash to whosoever will prove that he or she stole, abstracted, or took away the said stick from the said chambers, and will further give full information as to his or her disposal of the same, and the proprietor of the Watchman moreover engages to treat any revelation affecting the said stick in the most strictly private and confidential manner, and to abstain from using it in any way detrimental to the informant, who should call at the Watchman office, and ask for Frank Spargo at any time between 11 and 1 o'clock midday, and 7 and 11 o'clock in the evening."

"And you really expect to get some information through that?" asked Breton, who came into Spargo's room about noon on the day on which the promising announcement came out. "You really do?"

"Before today is out," said Spargo confidently. "There is more magic in a thousand-pound reward than you fancy, Breton. I'll have the history of that stick before midnight."

"How are you to tell that you won't be imposed upon?" suggested Breton. "Anybody can say that he or she stole the stick."

"Whoever comes here with any tale of a stick will have to prove to me how he or she got the stick and what was done with the stick," said Spargo. "I haven't the least doubt that that stick was stolen or taken away from Aylmore's rooms in Fountain Court, and that it got into the hands of——"

"Yes, of whom?"

"That's what I want to know in some fashion. I've an idea, already, but I can afford to wait for definite information. I know one thing—when I get that information—as I shall—we shall be a long way on the road toward establishing Aylmore's innocence."

Breton made no remark upon this. He was looking at Spargo with a meditative expression.

"Spargo," he said, suddenly, "do you think you'll get that order for the opening of the grave at Market Milcaster?"

"I was talking to the solicitors over the phone just now," answered Spargo. "They've every confidence about it. In fact, it's possible it may be made this afternoon. In that case, the opening will be made early tomorrow morning."

"Shall you go?" asked Breton.

"Certainly. And you can go with me, if you like. Better keep in touch with us all day in case we hear. You ought to be there—you're concerned."

"I should like to go—I will go," said Breton. "And if that grave proves to be—empty—I'll—I'll tell you something."

Spargo looked up with sharp instinct.

"Never mind—wait until we see if that coffin contains a dead body or lead and sawdust. If there's no body there——"

At that moment one of the senior messenger boys came in and approached Spargo. His countenance, usually subdued to an official stolidity, showed signs of something very like excitement.

"There's a man downstairs asking for you, Mr. Spargo," he said.

"He's been hanging about a bit, sir—seems very shy about coming up. He won't say what he wants, and he won't fill up a form, sir. Says all he wants is a word or two with you."

"Bring him up at once!" commanded Spargo. He turned to Breton when the boy had gone. "There!" he said, laughing. "This is the man about the stick—you see if it isn't."

"You're such a cocksure chap, Spargo," said Breton. "You're always going on a straight line."

"Trying to, you mean," retorted Spargo. "Well, stop here, and hear what this chap has to say: it'll no doubt be amusing."

The messenger boy, deeply conscious that he was ushering into Spargo's room an individual who might shortly carry away a thousand pounds of good Watchman money in his pocket, opened the door and introduced a shy and self-conscious young man, whose nervousness was painfully apparent to everybody and deeply felt by himself. He halted on the threshold, looking round the comfortably furnished room, and at the two well-dressed young men which it framed as if he feared to enter on a scene of such grandeur.

"Come in, come in!" said Spargo, rising and pointing to an easy-chair at the side of his desk. "Take a seat. You've called about that reward, of course."

The man in the chair eyed the two of them cautiously, and not without suspicion. He cleared his throat with a palpable effort.

"Of course," he said. "It's all on the strict private. Name of Edward Mollison, sir."

"And where do you live, and what do you?" asked Spargo.

"You might put it down Rowton House, Whitechapel," answered Edward Mollison. "Leastways, that's where I generally hang out when I can afford it. And—window-cleaner. Leastways, I was window cleaning when—when——"

"When you came in contact with the stick we've been advertising about," suggested Spargo. "Just so. Well, Mollison—what about the stick?"

Mollison looked round at the door, and then at the windows, and then at Breton.

(CONTINUED MONDAY)

DREAMLAND ADVENTURES

THE LONG-AGO CHARM

By DADDY

(The Wild Geese bring Peggy and Billy a charm which takes them back to the long ago when only Indians lived in America. They meet two Indian boys and go with them to help rescue their father from other Indians who are about to burn him at the stake.)

Billy's Spirits

BILLY'S plan for saving Chief Eagle Feather from being burned at the stake came to him as he glanced into the tepee behind which he and Peggy and the Indian boys and Balky Sam were hiding as they watched Red Dog's savages dancing around their captives. The tepee was that of the village medicine man, and in it were many strange robes, Indian headdresses and charms which the medicine man used in making his medicine.

Billy whispered his scheme to Peggy. It was to make a monster Indian out of these robes and headdresses and to use it in scaring the Indians away, making them think it was a ghost.

Without wasting any time, Peggy and Billy pitched into their work. They used a long pole on which to build the ghost. For the head they took a tom-tom drum they found in the tepee, marking a face on it with the medicine man's war paints. For a headdress they used strings of eagle feathers tied together. For clothes they fastened together the robes of the medicine man. For an eye they put Billy's flashlight in the center of the ghost's forehead, covering the lamp with a piece of cloth, so it would not shine till the right time.

Billy tied his lasso to the top of the pole and threw the other end of the lasso over the limb of a tree, so he could pull the ghost up.

Everything was nearly ready, when Peggy and Billy heard a low gabbling beside them, and there were the Wild Geese. The sight of them gave Peggy an idea, and quickly she dressed up the King of the Wild Geese and his flock until they looked like flying Indian-head ghosts. One headdress was still left and she put that on Balky Sam.

By this time the dancing around the captives had grown wild and furious.

"Light the fires around the stakes," shouted Red Dog. "Burn up Eagle Feather and his braves."

"Eagle Feather fears you not," answered the captive chief.

A dozen savages snatched brands from the big fire and hurled them into the piles of wood heaped about the captives. The flames sprang up; Eagle Feather and his braves seemed doomed.

But at this moment there came a startling interruption. "Hee-haw! Hee-haw!" roared a rasping voice out of the darkness. It was the bray of Balky Sam and its strangeness scared the savages as it had scared the Indian boys. They whirled around, only to get another scare, for there, swaying high above the ground, was the biggest Indian they had ever seen. "Hee-haw!" roared the voice again, and a bright light suddenly glared fiercely from the face of the huge, swaying Indian. It was Billy's flashlight, but the Indians thought it was the angry, fire-darting eye of a ghost.

"Hee-haw!" roared the voice a third time and, with a fluttering flurry, Indian heads began to fly around in the shadow outside the glow of the fire. It was the Wild Geese wearing the Indian headdresses.

At the same instant, Flashing Eye and Little Bear, the Indian boys, began to fire their arrows into the savages as fast as they could. Peggy and Billy helped out by throwing stones. "Hee-haw!" roared Balky Sam, and, wearing his Indian headdress, he rushed toward the frightened Indians.

That finished the savages. With shouts of frantic fear they turned and fled—fled far, far, until their weary legs would carry them no farther.

And the Indians tied to the stakes, they were scared, too—more scared of the ghosts than they were of the flames leaping up to devour them. They feared that these ghosts were coming to carry them off. They, too, would have fled when Balky Sam kicked the burning wood away, and the children cut their bonds if Flashing Eye and Little Bear had not stopped them.

"You are safe!" shrieked the Indian boys. "The White Spirits have saved you. They are our friends. Be not afraid!"

Then Chief Eagle Feather stopped the flight of his braves, and thanked Billy and Peggy.

"Come with us to our village," he said. "There you shall be our honored guests."

So Peggy and Billy went with them in the canoes, and what happened on the visit to the Indians will be told in next week's story.

THE GUMPS—Andy in the Neb Class

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By Sidney Smith

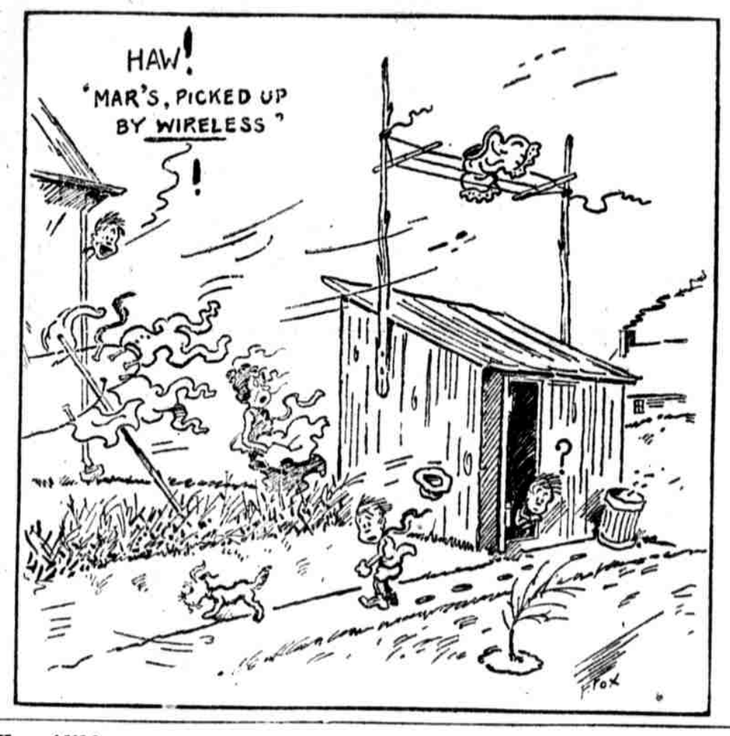
PETEY—If She Had Been a Man She'd Have Taken It for After Dinner

By C. A. Voight

The Young Lady Across the Way

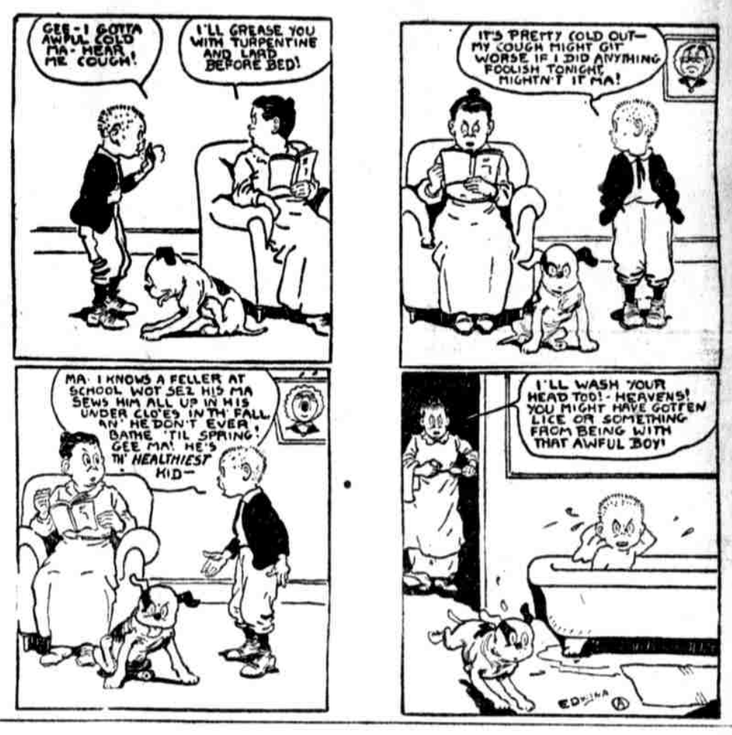
We asked the young lady across the way if she didn't think there was getting to be altogether too much class consciousness in this country and she said she didn't see very well how the poor freshmen could help it, the way they were treated.

You Might Know Vernon McNutt Would Say Something Like That -:- By Fontaine Fox



"CAP" STUBBS—No, It Didn't Work!

By EDWINA



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—Her Alibi

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By Hayward

DOROTHY DARNIT—As a Hat It's a Fine Orchard

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By Chas. McManus