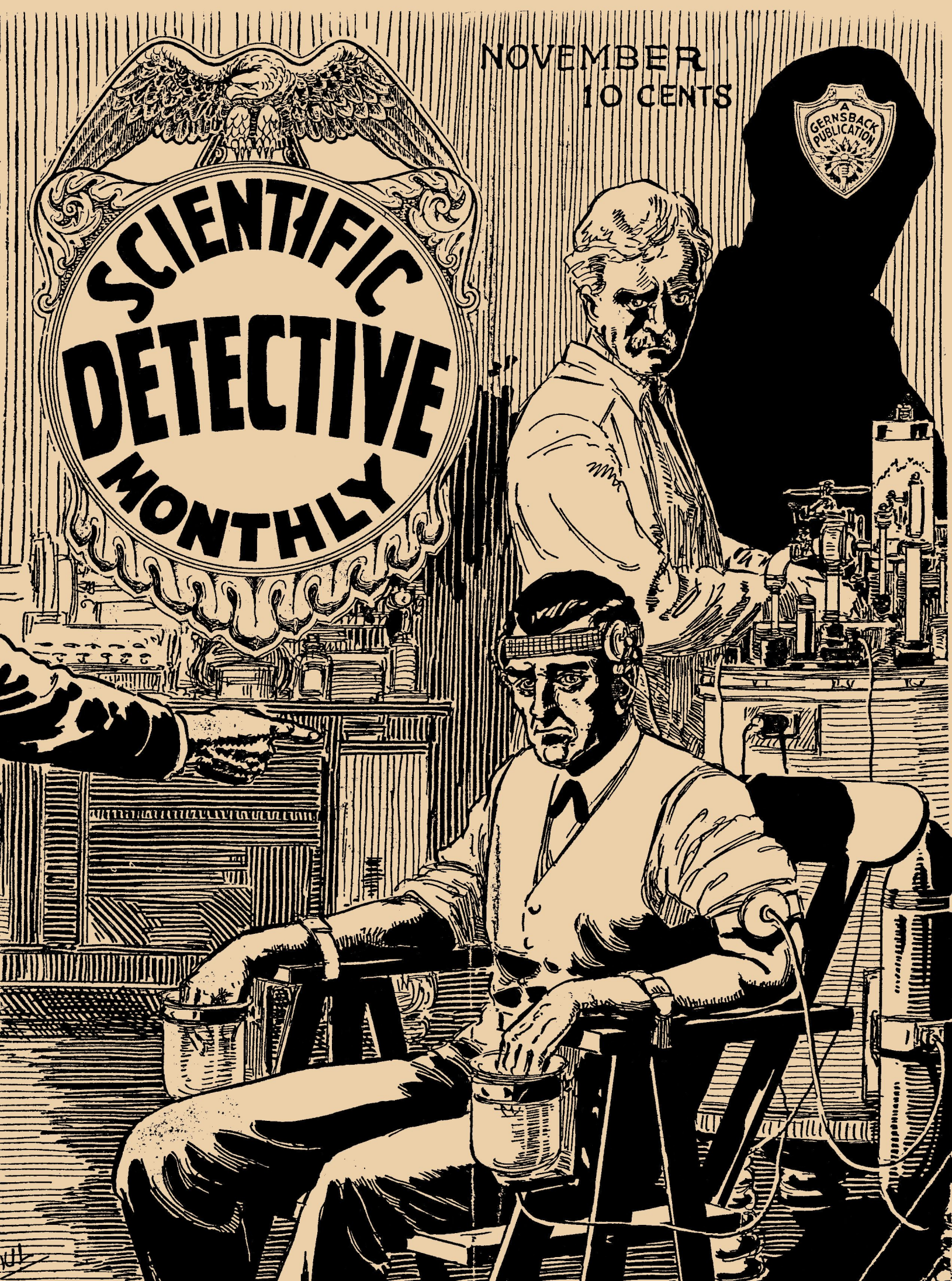
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The Bishop Murder Case

A Philo Vance Story

By S. S. Van Dine

OF all the criminal cases in which Philo Vance participated as an unofficial investigator, the most sinister, the most bizarre, the seemingly most incomprehensible, and certainly the most terrifying, was the one that followed the famous Greene murders. The orgy of horror at the old Greene mansion had been brought to its astounding close in December; and after the Christmas holidays Vance had gone to Switzerland for the winter sports. Returning to New York at the end of February he had thrown himself into some literary work he had long had in mind—and for over a month he had devoted himself sedulously to this thankless task.

However, the fact remains that Vance's translation of Menander was rudely interrupted in early April; and for weeks he became absorbed in a criminal mystery which threw the entire country into a state of gruesome excitement.

This new criminal investigation, in which he acted as a kind of *amicus curioe* for John F. X. Markham, the District Attorney of New York, at once became known as the Bishop murder case. There was nothing ecclesiastical about the ghoulish saturnalia of crime which set an entire community to reading the "Mother Goose Melodies" with fearful apprehension; and no one of the name of Bishop was, as far as I know, even remotely connected with the monstrous events which bore that appellation. But, withal, the word "Bishop" was appropriate, for it was an *alias* used by the murderer for the grimmest of purposes. Incidentally it was this name that eventually led Vance to the almost incredible truth, and ended one of the most ghastly multiple crimes in police history.

The series of uncanny and apparently unrelated events which constituted the Bishop murder case and drove all thought of Menander and Greek monostichs from Vance's mind, began on the morning of April 2, less than five months after the double shooting of Julia and Ada Greene. It was one of those warm luxurious spring days which sometimes bless New York in early April; and Vance was breakfasting in his little roof garden atop his apartment in East 38th Street. It was nearly noon—for Vance worked or read until all hours, and was a late riser—and the sun, beating down from a clear blue sky, cast a mantle of introspective lethargy over the city. Vance sprawled in an easy chair, his breakfast on a low table beside him, gazing with cynical, regretful eyes down at the tree-tops in the rear yard.

For years I had been Vance's friend and legal adviser—a kind of monetary steward and agent-companion. I had quitted my father's law firm of Van Dine, Davis & Van Dine to devote myself wholly to his interests—a post I found far more congenial than that of general attorney in a stuffy office—and though my own bachelor quarters were in a hotel on the West Side, I spent most of my time at Vance's apartment.

I had arrived early that morning, long before Vance was up, and, having gone over the first-of-the-month accounts, now sat smoking my pipe idly as he breakfasted.

"Y' know, Van," he said to me, in his emotionless drawl; "the prospect of spring and summer in New York is neither excitin' nor romantic. It's going to be a beastly bore. But it'll be less annoyin' than travelin' in Europe with the tourists jostlin' one at every turn. . . . It's very distressin'."

Little did he suspect what the next few weeks held in store for him. Had he known I doubt if even the prospect of an old pre-war spring in Paris would have taken him away; for his insatiable mind liked nothing better than a complicated problem; and even as he spoke to me that morning the gods that presided over his destiny were preparing for him a strange and fascinating enigma—one which was to stir the nation deeply and add a new and terrible chapter to the annals of crime.

Vance had scarcely poured his second cup of coffee when Currie, his old English butler and general factotum, appeared at the French doors bearing a portable telephone.

"It's Mr. Markham, sir," the old man said apologetically. "As he seemed rather urgent, I took the liberty of informing him you were in." He plugged the telephone into a baseboard switch, and set the instrument on the breakfast table.

"Quite right, Currie," Vance murmured, taking off the receiver. "Anything to break this deuced monotony." Then he spoke to Markham. "I say, old man, don't you ever sleep? I'm in the midst of an *omelette aux fines herbes.* Will you join me? Or do you merely crave the music of my voice——?"

He broke off abruptly, and the bantering look on his lean features disappeared. Vance was a marked Nordic type, with a long, sharply chiselled face; gray, wide-set eyes; a narrow aquiline nose; and a straight oval chin. His mouth, too, was firm and clean-cut, but it held a look of cynical cruelty which was more Mediterranean than Nordic. His face was strong and attractive, though not exactly handsome. It was the face of a thinker and recluse; and its very severity—at once studious and introspective—acted as a barrier between him and his fellows.

Though he was immobile by nature and sedulously schooled in the repression of his emotions, I noticed that, as he listened to Markham on the phone that morning, he could not entirely disguise his eager interest in what was being told him. A slight frown ruffled his brow; and his eyes reflected his inner amazement. From time to time he gave vent to a murmured

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"Amazin'!" or "My word!" or "Most extr'ordin'ry!"—his favorite expletives—and when at the end of several minutes he spoke to Markham, a curious excitement marked his manner.

"Oh, by all means!' he said. "I shouldn't miss it for all the lost comedies of Menander. . . . It sounds mad. . . . I'll don fitting raiment immediately . . . . *Au revoir.*"

Replacing the receiver, he rang for Currie.

"My gray tweeds," he ordered. "A sombre tie, and my black Homburg hat." Then he returned to his omelet with a preoccupied air.

After a few moments he looked at me quizzically.

"What might you know of archery, Van?" he asked. I knew nothing of archery, save that it consisted of shooting arrows at targets, and I confessed as much.

"You're not exactly revealin', don't y' know." He lighted one of his *Regie* cigarettes indolently. "However, we're in for a little flutter of toxophily, it seems. I'm no leading authority on the subject myself, but I did a bit of potting with the bow at Oxford. It's not a passionately excitin' pastime—much duller than golf and fully as complicated." He smoked a while dreamily. "I say, Van; fetch me Doctor Elmer's tome on archery from the library—there's a good chap."

I brought the book, and for nearly half an hour he dipped into it, tarrying over the chapters on archery associations, tournaments and matches, and scanning the long tabulation of the best American scores. At length he settled back in his chair. It was obvious he had found something that caused him troubled concern and set his sensitive mind to work.

"It's quite mad, Van," he remarked, his eyes in space. "A mediaeval tragedy in modern New York! We don't wear buskins and leathern doublets, and yet—By Jove!" He suddenly sat upright. "No—no! It's absurd. I'm letting the insanity of Markham's news affect me. . . ." He drank some more coffee, but his expression told me that he could not rid himself of the idea that had taken possession of him.

"One more favor, Van," he said at length. "Fetch me my German diction'ry and Burton E. Stevenson's 'Home Book of Verse.'"

When I had brought the volumes, he glanced at one word in the dictionary, and pushed the book from him.

"That's that, unfortunately—though I knew it all the time."

Then he turned to the section in Stevenson's gigantic anthology which included the rhymes of the nursery and of childhood. After several minutes he closed that book, too, and, stretching himself out in his chair, blew a long ribbon of smoke toward the awning overhead.

"It can't be true," he protested, as if to himself. "It's too fantastic, too fiendish, too utterly distorted. A fairy tale in terms of blood—a world in anamorphosis—a perversion of all rationality. . . . It's unthinkable, senseless, like black magic and so[illegible]nd thaumaturgy. It's downright demented."

He glanced at his watch and, rising, went [illegible]s, leaving me to speculate vaguely on the c[illegible]is unwonted perturbation. A treatise on archer[illegible]r-man dictionary, a collection of children's verses, and Vance's incomprehensible utterances regarding insanity and fantasy—what possible connection could these things have? I attempted to find a least common denominator, but without the slightest success. And it was no wonder I failed. Even the truth, when it came out weeks later bolstered up by an array of incontestable evidence, seemed too incredible and too wicked for acceptance by the normal mind of man.

Vance shortly broke in on my futile speculations. He was dressed for the street, and seemed impatient at Markham's delay in arriving.

"Y' know, I wanted something to interest me—a nice fascinatin' crime, for instance," he remarked; "but—my word!—I wasn't exactly longin' for a nightmare. If I didn't know Markham so well I'd suspect him of spoofing."

When Markham stepped into the roof garden a few minutes later it was only too plain that he had been in deadly earnest. His expression was sombre and troubled, and his usual cordial greeting he reduced to the merest curt formality. Markham and Vance had been intimate friends for fifteen years. Though of antipodal natures—the one sternly aggressive, brusque, forthright, and almost ponderously serious; the other whimsical, cynical, debonair, and aloof from the transient concerns of life—they found in each other that attraction of complementaries which so often forms the basis of an inseparable and enduring companionship.

It was not surprising, therefore, that Markham should have turned to Vance at the very beginning of the Bishop murder case. More and more, I had noticed, he had come to rely on the other's help in his criminal investigations; and in the present instance it was particularly fortunate that he appealed to Vance, for only through an intimate knowledge of the abnormal psychological manifestations of the human mind, such as Vance possessed, could that black, insensate plot have been contravened and the perpetrator unearthed.

"This whole thing may be a mare's-nest," said Markham, without conviction. "But I thought you might want to come along. . ."

"Oh, quite!" Vance gave Markham a sardonic smile. "Sit down a moment and tell me the tale coherently. The corpse won't run away. And it's best to get our facts in some kind of order before we view the remains. Who are the parties of the first part, for instance? And why the projection of the District Attorney's office into a murder case within an hour of the deceased's passing? All that you've told me so far resolves itself into the utterest nonsense."

Markham sat down gloomily on the edge of a chair and inspected the end of his cigar.

"Damn it, Vance! Don't start in with a mysteries-of-Udolpho attitude. The crime—if it is a crime—seems clear-cut enough. It's an unusual method of murder, I'll admit; but it's certainly not senseless. Archery has become quite a fad of late. Bows and arrows are in use to-day in practically every city and college in America."

"Granted. But its been a long time since they were used to kill persons named Robin."

Markham's eyes narrowed, and he looked at Vance searchingly.

"That idea occurred to you, too, did it?"

"Occurred to me? It leapt to my brain the moment you mentioned the victim's name." Vance puffed a moment on his cigarette. "'Who Killed Cock Robin?' And with a bow and arrow! . . . Queer how the doggerel learned in childhood clings to the memory. By the by, what was the unfortunate Mr. Robin's first name?"

"Joseph, I believe."

"Neither edifyin' nor suggestive . . . Any middle name?"

"See here, Vance!" Markham rose irritably. "What has the murdered man's middle name to do with the case?"

"I haven't the groggiest. Only as long as we're going insane we may as well go the whole way. A mere shred of sanity is of no value."

He rang for Currie and sent him for the telephone directory. Markham protsted, but Vance pretended not to hear; and when the directory arrived he thumbed its pages for several moments.

"Did the departed live on Riverside Drive?" he asked finally, holding his finger on a name he had found.

"I think he did."

"Well, well," Vance closed the book, and fixed a quizzically triumphant gaze on the District Attorney. "Markham," he said slowly, "there's only one Joseph Robin listed in the telephone direct'ry. He lives on Riverside Drive, and his middle name is—Cochrane!"

"What rot is this?" Markham's tone was almost ferocious. "Suppose his name *was* Cochrane; are you seriously suggesting that the fact had anything to do with his being murdered?"

"'Pon my word, old man, I'm suggesting nothing." Vance shrugged his shoulders slightly. "I'm merely jotting down, so to speak, a few facts in connection with the case. As the matter stands now; a Mr. Joseph Cochrane Robin—to wit: Cock Robin—has been killed by a bow and arrow. Doesn't that strike even your legal mind as deuced queer?"

"No!" Markham fairly spat the negative. "The name of the dead man is certainly common enough; and it's a wonder more people haven't been killed or injured with all this revival of archery throughout the country. Moreover, it's wholly possible that Robin's death was the result of an accident."

"Oh, my aunt!" Vance wagged his head reprovingly. "That fact, even were it true, wouldn't help the situation any. It would only make it queerer. Of the thousands of archery enthusiasts in these fair states, the one with the name of Cock Robin should be accidentally killed with an arrow! Such a supposition would lead us into spiritism and demonology and whatnot. Do you, by any chance believe in Eblises and Azazels and jinn who go about playing Satanic jokes on mankind?"

"Must I be a Mohammedan mythologist to admit coincidences?" returned Markham tartly.

"My dear fellow! The proverbial long arm of coincidence doesn't extend to infinity. There are, after all, laws of probability, based on quite definite mathematical formulas. It would make me sad to think that such men as Laplace and Czuber and von Kries had lived in vain. The present situation, however, is even more complicated than you suspect. For instance, you mentioned over the phone that the last person known to have been with Robin before his death is named Sperling."

"And what esoteric significance lies in that fact?"

"Perhaps you know what *Sperling* means in German," suggested Vance dulcetly.

"I've been to High School," retorted Markham. Then his eyes opened slightly, and his body became tense.

Vance pushed the German dictionary toward him.

"Well, anyway, look up the word. We might as well be thorough. I looked it up myself. I was afraid my imagination was playing tricks on me, and I had a yearnin' to see the word in black and white."

Markham opened the book in silence, and let his eye run down the page. After staring at the word for several moments he drew himself up resolutely, as if fighting off a spell. When he spoke his voice was defiantly belligerent.

"*Sperling* means 'sparrow.' Any school boy knows that. What of it?"

"Oh, to be sure." Vance lit another cigarette languidly. "And any school boy knows the old nursery rhyme entitled 'The Death and Burial of Cock Robin,' what?" He glanced tantalizingly at Markham, who stood immobile, staring out into the spring sunshine. "Since you pretend to be unfamiliar with that childhood classic, permit me to recite the first stanza."

A chill, as of some unseen spectral presence, passed over me as Vance repeated those old familiar lines:

"Who killed Cock Robin?
'I,' said the sparrow,
'With my bow and arrow.
I killed Cock Robin'."

Slowly Markham brought his eyes back to Vance.

"It's mad," he remarked, like a man confronted with something at once inexplicable and terrifying.

"Tut, tut!" Vance waved his hand airily. "That's plagiarism. I said it first." (He was striving to overcome his own sense of perplexity by a lightness of attitude.) "And now there really should be an inamorta to bewail Mr. Robin's passing. You recall, perhaps, the stanza:

"Who'll be chief mourner?
'I,' said the dove,
'I mourn my lost love;
I'll be chief mourner.'"

Markham's head jerked slightly, and his fingers beat a nervous tattoo on the table.

"Good God, Vance! There *is* a girl in the case. And there's a possibility that jealousy lies at the bottom of this thing."

"Fancy that, now! I'm afraid the affair is going to develop into a kind of tableau-vivant for grownup

kindergartners, what? But that'll make our task easier. All we'll have to do is to find the fly."

"The fly?"

"The *Musca domestica,* to speak pedantically . . . . My dear Markham, have you forgotten?—

"Who saw him die?
'I,' said the fly,
'With my little eye;
I saw him die'."

"Come down to earth!" Markham spoke with acerbity. "This isn't a child's game. It's damned serious business."

Vance nodded abstractedly.

"A child's game is sometimes the most serious business in life." His words held a curious, far-away tone. "I don't like this thing—I don't at all like it. There's too much of the child in it—the child born old and with a diseased mind. It's like some hideous perversion." He took a deep inhalation on his cigarette, and made a slight gesture of repugnance. "Give me the details. Let's find out where we stand in this topsy-turvy land."

Markham again seated himself.

"I haven't many details. I told you practically everything I know of the case over the phone. Old Professor Dillard called me shortly before I communicated with you———"

"Dillard? By any chance, Professor Bertrand Dillard?"

"Yes. The tragedy took place at his house. You know him?"

"Not personally. I know him only as the world of science knows him—as one of the greatest living mathematical physicists. I have most of his books. How did he happen to call you?"

"I've known him for nearly twenty years. I had mathematics under him at Columbia, and later did some legal work for hm. When Robin's body was found he phoned me at once—about half past eleven. I called up Sergeant Heath at the Homicide Bureau and turned the case over to him—although I told him I'd come along personally later on. Then I phoned you. The Sergeant and his men are waiting for me now at the Dillard home."

"What's the domestic situation there?"

"The professor, as you probably know, resigned his chair some ten years ago. Since then he's been living in West 75th Street, near the Drive. He took his brother's child—a girl of fifteen—to live with him. She's around twenty-five now. Then there's his protégé, Sigurrd Arnesson, who was a classmate of mine at college. The professor adopted him during his junior year. Arnesson is now about forty, an instructor in mathematics at Columbia. He came to this country from Norway when he was three, and was left an orphan five years later. He's something of a mathematical genius, and Dillard evidently saw the makings of a great physicist in him and adopted him."

"I've heard of Arnesson," nodded Vance. "He recently published some modifications of Mie's theory on the electrodynamics of moving bodies. . . . And do these three — Dillard, Arnesson and the girl — live alone?"

"With two servants. Dillard appears to have a very comfortable income. They're not very much alone, however. The house is a kind of shrine for mathematicians, and quite a *cénacle* has developed. Moreover, the girl, who has always gone in for outdoor sports, has her own little social set. I've been at the house several times, and there have always been visitors about—either a serious student or two of the abstract sciences up-stairs in the library, or some noisy young people in the drawing-room below."

"And Robin?"

"He belonged to Belle Dillard's set—an oldish young society man who held several archery records. . . ."

"Yes, I know. I just looked up the name in this book on archery. A Mr. J. C. Robin seems to have made the high scores in several recent championship meets. And I noted, too, that a Mr. Sperling has been the runner-up in several large archery tournaments. Is Miss Dillard an archer as well?"

"Yes, quite an enthusiast. In fact, she organized the Riverside Archery Club. Its permanent ranges are at Sperling's home in Scarsdale but Miss Dillard has rigged up a practice range in the side yard of the professor's 75th-Street house. It was on this range that Robin was killed."

"Ah! And, as you say, the last person known to have been with him was Sperling. Where is our sparrow now?"

"I don't know. He was with Robin shortly before the tragedy; but when the body was found he had disappeared. I imagine Heath will have news on that point."

"And wherein lies the possible motive of jealousy you referred to?" Vance's eyelids had drooped lazily, and he smoked with leisurely but precise deliberation —a sign of his intense interest in what was being told him.

"Professor Dillard mentioned an attachment between his niece and Robin; and when I asked him who Sperling was and what his status was at the Dillard house, he intimated that Sperling was also a suitor for the girl's hand. I didn't go into the situation over the phone, but the impression I got was that Robin and Sperling were rivals, and that Robin had the better of it."

"And so the sparrow killed Cock Robin." Vance shook his head dubiously. "It won't do. It's too dashed simple; and it doesn't account for the fiendishly perfect reconstruction of the Cock-Robin rhyme. There's something deeper—something darker and more horrible—in this grotesque business. Who, by the by, found Robin?"

"Dillard himself. He had stepped out on the little balcony at the rear of the house, and saw Robin lying below on the practice range, with an arrow through his heart. He went down-stairs immediately—with considerable difficulty, for the old man suffers abominably from gout—and, seeing that the man was dead, phoned me. That's all the advance information I have."

"Not what you'd call a blindin' illumination, but still a bit suggestive." Vance got up. "Markham old dear, prepare for something rather bizarre—and damnable. We can rule out accidents and coincidence. While it's true that ordin'ry target arrows—which are made of soft wood and fitted with little bevelled piles—could easily penetrate a person's clothing and chest wall, even when driven with a medium weight bow, the fact that a man named 'Sparrow' should kill a man named Cochrane Robin, *with a bow and arrow,* precludes any haphazard concatenation of circumstances. Indeed, this incredible set of events proves conclusively that there has been a subtle, diabolical intent beneath the whole affair." He moved toward the door. "Come, let us find out something more about it at what the Austrian police officials eruditely call the *situs criminis.*"

We left the house at once and drove up-town in Markham's car. Entering Central Park at Fifth Avenue we emerged through the 72nd Street gate, and a few minutes later were turning off of West End Avenue into 75th Street. The Dillard house—number 391—was on our right, far down the block toward the river. Between it and the Drive, occupying the entire corner, was a large fifteen-story apartment house. The professor's home seemed to nestle, as if for protection, in the shadow of this huge structure.

The Dillard house was of gray, weather-darkened limestone, and belonged to the days when homes were built for permanency and comfort. The lot on which it stood had a thirty-five-foot frontage, and the house itself was fully twenty-five feet across. The other ten feet of the lot, which formed an areaway separating the house from the apartment structure, was shut off from the street by a ten-foot stone wall with a large iron door in the centre.

The house was of modified Colonial architecture. A short flight of shallow steps led from the street to a narrow brick-lined porch adorned with four white Corinthian pillars. On the second floor a series of casement windows, paned with rectangular leaded glass, extended across the entire width of the house. (These, I learned later, were the windows of the library). There was something restful and distinctly old-fashioned about the place: it appeared like anything but the scene of a gruesome murder.

Two police cars were parked near the entrance when we drove up, and a dozen or so curious onlookers had gathered in the street. A patrolman lounged against one of the fluted columns of the porch, gazing at the crowd before him with bored disdain.

An old butler admitted us and let us into the drawing-room on the left of the entrance hall, where we found Sergeant Heath and two other men from the Homicide Bureau, the Sergeant, who was standing beside the centre-table smoking, his thumbs hooked in the armholes of his waistcoat, came forward and extended his hand in a friendly greeting to Markham.

"I'm glad you get here, sir," he said; and the worried look in his cold blue eyes seemed to relax a bit. "I've been waiting for you. There's something damn fishy about this case."

Markham sensed the Sergeant's mental insecurity, and asked somewhat abruptly: "Just what seems to be the difficulty in the present case?"

"I didn't say there was any difficulty, sir," Heath replied, "It looks as though we had the bird who did it dead to rights. But I ain't satisfied, and—oh, hell! Mr. Markham . . . it ain't natural; it don't make sense."

"I think I understand what you mean," Markham regarded the Sergeant appraisingly. "You're inclined to think that Sperling's guilty?"

"Sure, he's guilty," declared Heath with over-emphasis. "But that's not what's worrying me. To tell you the truth, I don't like the name of this guy who was croaked—especially as he was croaked with a bow and arrow. . . ." He hesitated, a bit shamefaced. "Don't it strike you as peculiar, sir?"

Markham nodded perplexedly.

"I see that you, too, remember your nursery rhymes," he said, and turned away.

Vance fixed a waggish look on Heath.

"You referred to Mr. Sperling just now as a 'bird,' Sergeant. The designation was most apt. *Sperling,* d' ye see, means 'sparrow' in German. And it was a sparrow, you recall, who killed Cock Robin with an arrow. . . . A fascinatin' situation—eh, what?"

The Sergeant's eyes bulged slightly, and his lips fell apart. He stared at Vance with almost ludicrous bewilderment.

"I said this here business was fishy!"

"I'd say, rather, it was avian, don't y' know."

"You *would* call it something nobody'd understand," Heath retorted truculently. It was his wont to become bellicose when confronted with the inexplicable.

Markham intervened diplomatically.

"Let's have the details of the case, Sergeant. I take it you've questioned the occupants of the house."

"Only in a general way, sir." Heath flung one leg over the corner of the center-table and relit his dead cigar. "I've been waiting for you to show up. I knew you were acquainted with the old gentleman up-stairs; so I just did the routine things. I put a man out in the alley to see that nobody touches the body till Doc Doremus arrives,—he'll be here when he finishes lunch. —I phoned the finger-print men before I left the office, and they oughta be on the job any minute now; though I don't see what good they can do. . . ."

"What about the bow that fired the arrow?" put in Vance.

"That was our one best bet; but old Mr. Dillard said he picked it up from the alley and brought it in the house. He probably gummed up any prints it mighta had."

"What have you done about Sperling?" asked Markham.

"I got his address—he lives in a country house up Westchester way—and sent a coupla men to bring him here as soon as they could lay hands on him. Then I talked to the two servants—the old fellow that let you in, and his daughter, a middle-aged woman who does the cooking. But neither of 'em seemed to know anything, or else they're acting dumb. After that I tried

to question the young lady of the house." The Sergeant raised his hands in a gesture of irritated despair. "But she was all broke up and crying; so I thought I'd let *you* have the pleasure of interviewing her,—Snitkin and Burke"—he jerked his thumb toward the two detectives by the front window—"went over the basement and the alley and back yard trying to pick up something; but drew a blank. And that's all I know so far. As soon as Doremus and the finger-print men get here, and after I've had a heart-to-heart talk with Sperling, then I'll get the ball to rolling and clean up the works."

Vance heaved an audible sigh.

"You're so sanguine, Sergeant! Don't be disappointed if your ball turns out to be a parallelopiped that won't roll. There's something deuced oddish about this nursery extravaganza; and, unless all the omens deceive me, you'll be playing blind-man's bluff for a long time to come."

"Yeh?" Heath gave Vance a look of despondent shrewdness. It was evident he was more or less of the same opinion.

"Don't let Mr. Vance dishearten you, Sergeant," Markham rallied him. "He's permitting his imagination to run away with him." Then with an impatient gesture he turned toward the door. "Let's look over the ground before the others arrive. Later I'll have a talk with Professor Dillard and the other members of the household. And, by the way, Sergeant, you didn't mention Mr. Arnesson. Isn't he at home?"

"He's at the university; but he's expected to return soon."

Markham nodded and followed the Sergeant into the main hall. As we passed the heavily-carpeted passage to the rear, there was a sound on the staircase, and a clear but somewhat tremulous woman's voice spoke from the semi-darkness above.

"Is that you, Mr. Markham? Uncle thought he recognized your voice. He's waiting for you in the library."

"I'll join your uncle in a very few minutes, Miss Dillard." Markham's tone was paternal and sympathetic. "And please wait with him, for I want to see you, too."

With a murmured acquiescence, the girl disappeared round the head of the stairs.

We moved on to the rear door of the lower hall. Beyond was a narrow passageway terminating in a flight of wooden steps which led to the basement. At the foot of these steps we came into a large, low-ceilinged room with a door giving directly upon the areaway at the west side of the house. This door was slightly ajar, and in the opening stood the man from the Homicide Bureau whom Heath had set to guard the body.

The room had obviously once been a basement storage; but it had been altered and redecorated, and now served as a sort of clubroom. The cement floor was covered with fibre rugs, and one entire wall was painted with a panorama of archers throughout the ages. There were a piano and a phonograph in the room; numerous comfortable wicker chairs; a varicolored divan; an enormous wicker centre-table littered with all manner of sports magazines; and a small bookcase filled with works on archery. Several targets rested in one corner, their gold discs and concentric chromatic rings making brilliant splashes of color in the sunlight which flooded in from the two rear windows. One wall space near the door was hung with long bows of varying sizes and weights; and near them was a large old-fashioned tool-chest. Above it was suspended a small cupboard, or ascham, strewn with various odds and ends of tackle, such as bracers, shooting-gloves, piles, points of aim, and bow strings. A large oak panel between the door and the west window contained a display of one of the most interesting and varied collections of arrows I had ever seen.

This panel attracted Vance particularly, and adjusting his monocle carefully, he strolled over to it.

"Hunting and war arrows,' he remarked. "Most inveiglin! . . . *Ah!* One of the trophies seems to have disappeared. Taken down with considerable haste, too. The little brass brad that held it in place is shockingly bent."

On the floor stood several quivers filled with target arrows. He leaned over and, withdrawing one, extended it to Markham.

"This frail shaft may not look as if it would penetrate the human breast; but target arrows will drive entirely through a deer at eighty yards. . . . Why, then, the missing hunting arrow from the panel? An interestin' point."

Markham frowned and compressed his lips; and I realized that he had been clinging to the forlorn hope that the tragedy might have been an accident. He tossed the arrow hopelessly on a chair, and walked toward the outer door.

"Let's take a look at the body and the lie of the land,' he said gruffly.

As we emerged into the warm spring sunlight a sense of isolation came over me. The narrow paved areaway in which we stood seemed like a canyon between steep stone walls. It was four or five feet below the street level, which was reached by a short flight of steps leading to the gate in the wall. The blank, windowless rear wall of the apartment house opposite extended upwards for 150 feet; and the Dillard house itself, though only four stories high, was the equivalent of six stories gauged by the architectural measurements of to-day. Though we were standing out of doors in the heart of New York, no one could see us except from the few side windows of the Dillard house and from a single bay window of the house on 76th Street, whose rear yard adjoined that of the Dillard grounds.

This other house, we were soon to learn, was owned by a Mrs. Drukker; and it was destined to play a vital and tragic part in the solution of Robin's murder. Several tall willow trees acted as a mask to its rear windows; and only the bay window at the side of the house had an unobstructed view of that part of the areaway in which we stood.

I noticed that Vance had his eye on this bay window, and as he studied it I saw a flicker of interest cross his face. It was not until much later that afternoon that I

was able to guess what had caught and held his attention.

The archery range extended from the wall of the Dillard lot on 75th Street all the way to a similar street wall of the Drukker lot on 76th Street, where a butt of hay bales had been erected on a shallow bed of sand. The distance between the two walls was 200 feet, which as I learned later, made possible a sixty-yard range, thus permitting target practice for all the standard archery events, with the one exception of the York Round for men.

The Dillard lot was 135 feet deep, the depth of the Drukker lot therefore being sixty-five feet. A secton of the tall iron-work fence that separated the two rear yards had been removed where it had once transected the space now used for the archery range. At the further end of the range, backing against the western line of the Drukker property, was another tall apartment house occupying the corner of 76th Street and Riverside Drive. Between these two gigantic buildings ran a narrow alleyway, the range end of which was closed with a high board fence in which had been set a small door with a lock.

The body of Robin lay almost directly outside of the archery-room door. It was on its back, the arms extended, the legs slightly drawn up, the head pointing toward the 76th-Street end of the range. Robin had been a man of perhaps thirty-five, of medium height, and with an incipient corpulency. There was a retund puffiness to his face, which was smooth-shaven except for a narrow blond moustache. He was clothed in a two-piece sport suit of light gray flannel, a pale-blue silk shirt, and tan Oxfords with thick rubber soles. His hat—a pearl-colored felt fedora—was lying near his feet.

Beside the body was a large pool of coagulated blood which had formed in the shape of a huge pointing hand. But the thing which held us all in a spell of fascinated horror was the slender shaft that extended vertically from the left side of the dead man's breast. The arrow protruded perhaps twenty inches, and where it had entered the body there was the large dark stain of the hemorrhage. What made this strange murder seem even more incongruous were the beautifully fletched feathers on the arrow. They had been dyed a bright red; and about the shaftment were two stripes of turquoise blue—giving the arrow a gala appearance. I had a feeling of unreality about the tragedy, as though I were witnessing a scene in a sylvan play for children.

Vance stood looking down at the body with half-closed eyes, his hands in his coat pockets. Despite the apparent indolence of his attitude I could tell that he was keenly alert, and that his mind was busy co-ordinating the factors of the scene before him.

"Dashed queer, that arrow," he commented. "Designed for big game; . . . undoubtedly belongs to that ethnological exhibit we just saw. And a clean hit—directly into the vital spot, between the ribs and without the slightest deflection. Extr'ordin'ry! . . . I say, Markham; such marksmanship isn't human. A chance shot might have done it; but the slayer of this johnny wasn't leaving anything to chance. That powerful hunting arrow, which was obviously wrenched from the panel inside, shows premeditation and design——" Suddenly he bent over the body. "Ah! Very interestin'. The nock of the arrow is broken down,—I doubt if it would even hold a taut string." He turned to Heath. "Tell me, Sergeant, where did Professor Dillard find the bow?—not far from that club-room window, what?"

Heath gave a start.

"Right outside the window, in fact, Mr. Vance. It's in on the piano now, waiting for the finger-print men."

"The professor's sign-manual is all they'll find, I'm afraid." Vance opened his case and selected another cigarette. "And I'm rather inclined to believe that the arrow itself is innocent of prints."

Heath was scrutinizing Vance inquisitively.

"What made you think the bow was found near the window, Mr. Vance?" he asked.

"It seemed the logical place for it, in view of the position of Mr. Robin's body, don't y' know."

"Shot from close range, you mean?"

Vance shook his head.

"No, Sergeant. I was referring to the fact that the deceased's feet are pointing toward the basement door, and that, though his arms are extended, his legs are drawn up. Is that the way you'd say a man would fall who'd been shot through the heart?"

Heath considered the point.

"No-o," he admitted. "He'd likely be more crumpled up; or, if he did fall over back, his legs would be straight out and his arms drawn in."

"Quite. And regard his hat. If he had fallen backwards it would be behind him, not at his feet."

"See here, Vance," Markham demanded sharply; "what's in your mind?"

"Oh, numberless things. But they all boil down to the wholly irrational notion that this defunct gentleman wasn't shot with a bow and arrow at all."

"Then why, in God's name——"

"Exactly! Why the utter insanity of the elaborate stage-setting?—My word, Markham! This business is ghastly."

As Vance spoke the basement door opened, and Doctor Doremus, shepherded by Detective Burke, stepped jauntily into the areaway. He greeted us breezily and shook hands all round. Then he fixed a fretful eye on Heath.

"By Gad, Sergeant!" he complained, pulling his hat down to an even more rakish angle. "I only spend three hours out of the twenty-four eating my meals; and you invariably choose those three hours to worry me with your confounded bodies. You're ruining my digestion." He looked about him petulantly and, on seeing Robin, whistled softly. "For Gad's sake! A nice fancy murder you picked out for me this time!"

He knelt down and began running his practised fingers over the body.

Markham stood for a moment looking on, but presently he turned to Heath.

"While the doctor's busy with his examination, Sergeant, I'll go up-stairs and have a chat with Professor Dillard." Then he addressed himself to Doremus. "Let me see you before you go, doctor."

"Oh, sure." Doremus did not so much as look up. He had turned the body on one side, and was feeling the base of the skull.

When we reached the main hall Captain Dubois and Detective Bellamy, the finger-print experts from Headquarters, were just arriving. Detective Snitkin, who had evidently been watching for them, led them at once toward the basement stairs, and Markham, Vance and I went up to the second floor.

The library was a large, luxurious room at least twenty feet deep, occupying the entire width of the building.

Professor Dillard sat before the desk, one foot resting on a small tufted ottoman; and in a corner near the windows, huddled in a sprawling armchair, was his niece, a vigorous, severely tailored girl with strong, chiselled features of classic cast. The old professor did not rise to greet us, and made no apology for the omission. He appeared to take it for granted that we were aware of his disability. The introductions were perfunctory, though Markham gave a brief explanation of Vance's and my presence there.

"I regret, Markham," the professor said, when we had settled ourselves, "that a tragedy should be the reason for this meeting; but it's always good to see you—I suppose you will want to cross-examine Belle and me. Well, ask anything you care to."

Professor Bertrand Dillard was a man in his sixties, slightly stooped from a sedentary studious life; clean-shaven, and with a marked brachycephalic head surmounted with thick white hair combed pompadour. His eyes, though small, were remarkably intense and penetrating; and the wrinkles about his mouth held that grim pursed expression which often comes with years of concentration on difficult problems. His features were those of the dreamer and scientist; and, as the world knows, this man's wild dreams of space and time and motion had been actualized into a new foundation of scientific fact. Even now his face reflected an introspective abstraction, as if the death of Robin were but an intrusion upon the inner drama of his thoughts.

Markham hesitated a moment before answering. Then he said with marked deference:

"Suppose, sir, you tell me just what you know of the tragedy. Then I'll put whatever questions, I deem essential."

Professor Dillard reached for an old meerschaum pipe on the stand beside him. When he had filled and lighted it he shifted himself more comfortable in his chair.

"I told you practically everything I know over the telephone. Robin and Sperling called this morning about ten o'clock to see Belle. But she had gone to the courts to play tennis, so they waited in the drawing-room down-stairs. I heard them talking there together for half an hour or so before they went to the basement club-room. I remained here reading for perhaps an hour, and then, as the sunshine looked so pleasant, I decided to step out on the balcony at the rear of the house. I had been there about five minutes, I should say, when I chanced to look down on the archery range; and to my horrified amazement I saw Robin lying on his back with an arrow-shaft protruding from his breast. I hastened down as quickly as my gout would permit, but I could see at once that the poor fellow was dead; so I immediately telephoned to you. There was no one in the house at the time but old Pyne—the butler—and myself. The cook had gone marketing; Arnesson had left for the university at nine o'clock; and Belle was still out playing tennis. I sent Pyne to look for Sperling, but he was nowhere about; and I came back to the library here to wait for you. Belle returned shortly before your men arrived, and the cook came in a little later. Arnesson won't be back until after two."

"There was no one else here this morning—no strangers or visitors?"

The professor shook his head.

"Only Drukker,—I believe you met him here once. He lives in the house at our rear. He often drops in—mostly, however, to see Arnesson; they have much in common. He's written a book on 'World Lines in Multidimensional Continua.' The man's quite a genius in his way; has the true scientific mind. . . . But when he found that Arnesson was out he sat for a while with me discussing the Brazillian expedition of the Royal Astronomical Society. Then he went home."

"What time was this?"

"About half past nine. Drukker had already gone when Robin and Sperling called."

'Was it unusual, Professor Dillard," asked Vance, "for Mr. Arnesson to be away on Saturday mornings?"

The old professor looked up sharply, and there was a brief hesitation before he answered.

"Not unusual exactly; although he's generally here on Saturdays. But this morning he had some important research work to do for me in the faculty library. . . . Arnesson," he added, "is working with me on my next book."

There was a short silence; then Markham spoke.

"You said this morning that both Robin and Sperling were suitors for Miss Dillard's hand. . . ."

"Uncle!" The girl sat upright in her chair and turned angry, reproachul eyes upon the old professor. "That wasn't fair."

"But it was true, my dear." His voice was noticeably tender.

"It was true—in a way," she admitted. "But there was no need of mentioning it. You know, as well as they did, how I regarded them. We were good friends—that was all. Only last night, when they were here together, I told them—quite plainly—that I wouldn't listen to any more silly talk of marriage from either of them. They were only boys . . . and now one of them's gone. . . . Poor Cock Robin!" She strove bravely to stifle her emotion.

Vance raised his eyebrows and leaned forward.

"'Cock Robin'?"

"Oh, we all called him that. We did it to tease him, because he didn't like the nickname."

"The sobriquet was inevitable," Vance observed sympathetically. "And it was rather a nice nickname,

don't y' know. The original Cock Robin was loved by 'all the birds of the air,' and they all mourned his passing." He watched the girl closely as he spoke.

"I know," she nodded. "I told him that once. And every one liked Joseph, too. You couldn't help liking him. He was so—so goodhearted and kind."

Vance again settled back in his chair; and Markham continued his questioning.

"You mentioned, professor, that you heard Robin and Sperling talking in the drawing-room. Could you hear any of their conversation?"

The old man shot a sidelong glance at his niece.

"Does that question really matter, Markham?" he asked, after a moment's hesitation.

"It may have some very vital bearing on the situation."

"Perhaps." The professor drew on his pipe thoughtfully. "On the other hand, if I answer it I may give an erroneous impression, and do a grave injustice to the living."

"Can you not trust me to judge that point?" Markham's voice had become at once grave and urgent.

There was another short silence, broken by the girl.

"Why don't you tell Mr. Markham what you heard, uncle? What harm can it do?"

"I was thinking of you, Belle," the professor answered softly. "But perhaps you are right." He looked up reluctantly. "The fact is, Markham, Robin and Sperling were having some angry words over Belle. I heard only a little, but I gathered that each regarded the other as being guilty of playing unfair—of standing in each other's way. . . ."

"Oh! They didn't mean it," Miss Dillard interpolated vehemently. "They were always ragging each other. There *was* a little jealousy between them; but I wasn't the real cause of it. It was their archery records. You see, Raymond—Mr. Sperling—used to be the better shot; but this last year Joseph beat him at several meets, and at our last annual tournament he became the club's Champion Archer."

"And Sperling thought, perhaps," added Markham, "that he had correspondingly fallen in your estimation."

"That's absurd!" the girl retorted hotly.

"I think, my dear, we can leave the matter safely in Mr. Markham's hands," Professor Dillard said mollifyingly. Then to Markham: "Were there any other questions you cared to ask?"

"I'd like to know anything you can tell me about Robin and Sperling—who they are; their associations; and how long you have known them."

"I think that Belle can enlighten you better than I. Both boys belonged to her set. I saw them only occasionally."

Markham turned inquiringly to the girl.

"I've known both of them for years," she said promptly, "Joseph was eight or ten years older than Raymond, and lived in England up to five years ago, when his father and mother both died. He came to America, and took bachelor quarters on the Drive. He had considerable money, and lived idly, devoting himself to fishing and hunting and other outdoor sports. He went about in society a little, and was a nice, comfortable friend who'd always fill in at a dinner or make a fourth hand at bridge. There was nothing really much to him—in an intellectual way, you understand. . . ."

She paused, as if here remarks were in some way disloyal to the dead, and Markham, sensing her feelings, asked simply:

"And Sperling?"

"He's the son of a wealthy manufacturer of something or other—retired now. They lived in Scarsdale in a beautiful country home,—our archery club has its regular ranges there,—and Raymond is a consulting engineer for some firm down-town; though I imagine he works merely to placate his father, for he only goes to the office two or three days a week. He's a graduate of Boston Tech, and I met him when he was a sophomore, home on vacation. Raymond will never set the world afire, Mr. Markham; but he's really an awfully fine type of American young man—sincere, jolly, a little bashful, and perfectly straight."

It was easy to picture both Robin and Sperling from the girl's brief descriptions; and it was correspondingly difficult to connect either of them with the sinister tragedy that had brought us to the house.

Markham sat frowning for a while. Finally he lifted his head and looked straight at the girl.

"Tell me, Miss Dillard: have you any theory or explanation that might, in any way, account for the death of Mr. Robin?"

"No!" The word fairly burst from her. "Who could want to kill Cock Robin? He hadn't an enemy in the world. The whole thing is incredible. I couldn't believe it had happened until I went and—and saw for myself. Even then it didn't seem real."

"Still, my dear child," put in Professor Dillard, "the man was killed; so there must have been something in his life that you didn't know or suspect. We're constantly finding new stars that the old-time astronomers didn't believe existed."

"I can't believe Joseph had an enemy," she retorted. "I won't believe it. It's too utterly absurd."

"You think then," asked Markham, "that it's unlikely Sperling was in any way responsible for Robin's death?"

"Unlikely?" The girl's eyes flashed. "It's impossible!"

"And yet, y' know, Miss Dillard,"—it was Vance who now spoke in his lazy casual tone—"*Sperling* means 'sparrow'."

The girl sat immobile. Her face had gone deathly pale, and her hands tightened over the arms of the chair. Then slowly, and as if with difficulty, she nodded, and her breast began to rise and fall with her labored breathing. Suddenly she shuddered and pressed her handkerchief to her face.

"I'm afraid!" she whispered.

Vance rose and, going to her, touched her comfortingly on the shoulder.

"Why are you afraid?"

She looked up and met his eyes. They seemed to reassure her, for she forced a pitiful smile.

"Only the other day," she said, in a strained voice, "we were all on the archery range down-stairs; and

Raymond was just preparing to shoot a single American Round, when Joseph opened the basement door and stepped out on the range. There really wasn't any danger, but Sigurd—Mr. Arnesson, you know—was sitting on the little rear balcony watching us; and when I cried 'He! He!' jokingly to Joseph, Sigurd leaned over and said: 'You don't know what a chance you're running, young man. You're a Cock Robin, and that archer's a sparrow; and you remember what happened to your namesake when a Mr. Sparrow wielded the bow and arrow!—or something like that. No one paid much attention to it at the time. But now! . . " Her voice trailed off into an awed murmur.

"Come, Belle; don't be morbid." Professor Dillard spoke consolingly, but not without impatience. "It was merely one of Sigurd's ill-timed witticisms. You know he's continually sneering and jesting at realities: it's about the only outlet he has from his constant application to abstractions."

"I suppose so," the girl answered. "Of course, it was only a joke. But now it seems like some terrible prophecy. Only," she hastened to add, *"Raymond* couldn't have done it."

As she spoke the library door opened suddenly, and a tall gaunt figure appeared on the threshold.

"Sigurd!" Belle Dillard's startled exclamation held an undeniable note of relief.

Sigurd Arnesson, Professor Dillard's protege and adopted son, was a man of striking appearance—over six feet tall, wiry and erect, with a head which, at first view, appeared too large for his body. His almost yellow hair was unkempt, like a schoolboy's; his nose was aquiline; and his jowls were lean and muscular. Though he could not have been over forty, there was a net-work of lines in his face. His expression was sardonically puckish; but the intense intellectual passion that lighted his blue-gray eyes belied any superficiality of nature. My initial reaction to his personality was one of liking and respect. There were depths in the man-powerful potentialities and high capabilities.

As he entered the room that afternoon, his searching eyes took us all in with a swift, inquisitive glance. He nodded jerkily to Miss Dillard, and then fixed the old professor with a look of dry amusement.

"What, pray, has happened in this three-dimensional house? Wagons and populace without: a guardian at the portals . . . and when I finally overcome the Cerberus and was admitted by Pyne, two plainclothes men hustled me up here without ceremony or explanation. Very amusing, but disconcerting. . . . Ah! I seem to recognize the District Attorney. Good morning—or rather, afternoon—, Mr. Markham."

Before Markham could return this belated greeting Belle Dillard spoke.

"Sigurd, please, be serious. Mr. Robin has been killed."

"'Cock Robin,' you mean. Well, well! With such a name what could the beggar expect?" He appeared wholly unmoved by the news. "Who, or what, returned him to the elements?"

"As to who it was, we don't know." It was Markham who answered, in a tone of reproach for the other's levity. "But Mr. Robin was killed with an arrow through the heart."

"Most fitting." Arnesson sat down on the arm of a chair and extended his long legs. "What could be more appropriate than that Cock Robin should die from an arrow shot from the bow of——"

'Sigurd!" Belle Dillard cut him short. "Haven't you joked enough about that? You *know* that Raymond didn't do it."

"Of course, sis." The man looked at her somewhat wistfully. "I was thinking of Mr. Robin's ornithological progenitor." He turned slowly to Markham. "So it's a real murder mystery, is it—with a corpse, and clews, and all the trappings? May I be entrusted with the tale?"

Markham gave him a brief outline of the situation, to which he listened with rapt interest. When the account was ended he asked:

"Was there no bow found on the range?"

"Ah!" Vance, for the first time since the man's arrival, roused himself from seeming lethargy, and answered for Markham. "A most pertinent question, Mr. Arnesson,—Yes, a bow was found just outside of the basement window, barely ten feet from the body."

"That of course simplifies matters," said Arnesson, with a note of disappointment. "It's only a question now of taking the finger-prints."

"Unfortunately the bow has been handled," explained Markham. "Professor Dillard picked it up and brought it into the house."

Arnesson turned to the older man curiously.

"What impulse, sir, directed you to do that?"

"Impulse? My dear Sigurd, I didn't analyze my emotions. But it struck me that the bow was a vital piece of evidence, and I placed it in the basement as a precautionary measure until the police arrived."

Arnesson made a wry face and cooked one eye humorously.

"That sounds like what our psychoanalytic friends would call a suppression-censor explanation. I wonder what submerged idea was actually in your mind. . ."

There was a knock at the door, and Burke put his head inside.

"Doc Doremus is waiting for you down-stairs, Chief. He's finished his examination."

Markham rose and excused himself.

"I shan't bother you people any more just at present. There's considerable preliminary routine work to be done. But I must ask you to remain upstairs for the time being. I'll see you again before I go."

Doremus was teetering impatiently on his toes when we joined him in the drawing-room.

"Nothing complicated about it," he began, before Markham had a chance to speak. "Our sporty friend was killed by an arrow with a mighty sharp point entering his heart through the fourth intercostal space. Lot of force behind it. Plenty of hemorrhage inside and out. He's been dead about two hours, I should say, making the time of his death around half past eleven. That's only guesswork, however. No signs of a struggle—no marks on his clothes or abrasions on his hands. Death supervened most likely without his

knowing what it was all about. He got a nasty bump, though, where his head hit the rough cement when he fell. . . ."

"Now, that's very interestin'." Vance's drawing voice cut in on the Medical Examiner's staccato report. "How serious a 'bump' was it, Doctor?"

Doremus blinked and eyed Vance with some astonishment.

"Bad enough to fracture the skull. I couldn't feel it, of course; but there was a large haematoma over the occipital region, dried blood in the nostrils and the ears, and unequal pupils, indicating a fracture of the vault. I'll know more about it after the autopsy." He turned back to the District Attorney. "Anything else?"

"I think not, Doctor. Only let us have your *post-mortem* report as soon as possible."

"You'll have it to-night. The Sergeant's already phoned for the wagon." And shaking hands with all of us, he hurried away.

Heath had stood glowering in the background.

"Well, that don't get us anywheres, sir," he complained, chewing viciously on his cigar.

"Don't be downhearted, Sergeant," Vance chided him. "That blow on the back of the head is worthy of your profoundest consideration. I'm of the opinion it wasn't entirely due to the fall, don't y' know."

The Sergeant was unimpressed by this observation.

"What's more, Mr. Markham," he went on, "there wasn't any finger-prints on either the bow or the arrow. Dubois says they looked as though they'd both been wiped clean. There were a few smears on the end of the bow where the old gentleman picked it up; but not another sign of a print."

Markham smoked a while in gloomy silence.

"What about the handle on the gate leading to the street? And the knob on the door to the alley between the apartment houses?"

'Nothing!" Heath snorted his disgust. "Both of rough, rusty iron that wouldn't take a print."

"I say, Markham," observed Vance: "you're going at this thing the wrong way. Naturally there'd be no finger-prints. Really, y' know, one doesn't carefully produce a playlet and then leave all the stage props in full view of the audience. What we've got to learn is why this particular impresario decided to indulge in silly theatricals."

"It ain't as easy as all that, Mr. Vance," submitted Heath bitterly.

"Did I intimate it was easy? No, Sergeant; it's deucedly difficult. And it's worse than difficult: it's subtle and obscure and . . . fiendish."

Markham sat down resolutely before the centre-table.

"Suppose, Sergeant, we overhaul the two servants now."

Heath stepped into the hall and gave an order to one of his men. A few moments later a tall, sombre, disjointed man entered and stood at respectful attention.

"This is the butler, sir," explained the Sergeant. "Named Pyne."

Markham studied the man appraisingly. He was perhaps sixty years old. His features were markedly acromegalic; and this distortion extended to his entire figure. His hands were large, and his feet broad and misshapen. His clothes, though neatly pressed, fitted him badly; and his high clerical collar was several sizes too large for him. His eyes, beneath gray, bushy eyebrows, were pale and watery, and his mouth was a mere slit in an unhealthily puffy face. Despite his utter lack of physical prepossession, however, he gave one the impression of shrewd competency.

"So you are the Dillard butler," mused Markham. "How long have you been with the family, Pyne?"

"Going on ten years, sir."

"You came, then, just after Professor Dillard resigned his chair at the university?"

"I believe so, sir." The man's voice was deep and rumbling.

"What do you know of the tragedy that occurred here this morning?" Though Markham put the question suddenly, in the hope, I imagine, of surprising some admission, Pyne received it with the utmost stoicism.

"Nothing whatever, sir. I was unaware that anything had happened until Professor Dillard called to me from the library and asked me to look for Mr. Sperling."

"He told you of the tragedy then?"

"He said: 'Mr. Robin has been murdered, and I wish you'd find Mr. Sperling for me.' That was all, sir."

"You're sure he said 'murdered,' Pyne?" interjected Vance.

For the first time the butler hesitated, and an added astuteness crept into his look.

"Yes, sir—I'm sure he did. 'Murdered' is what he said."

"And did you see the body of Mr. Robin when you pushed your search?" pursued Vance, his eyes idly tracing a design on the wall.

Again there was a brief hesitation.

"Yes, sir. I opened the basement door to look on the archery range, and there I saw the poor young gentleman. . . ."

"A great shock it must have given you, Pyne," Vance observed drily. "Did you, by any hap, touch the poor young gentleman's body?—or the arrow, perhaps?—or the bow?"

Pyne's watery eyes glistened for a moment.

"No—of course not, sir. . . . Why should I, sir?"

"Why, indeed?" Vance sighed wearily. "But you saw the bow?"

The man squinted, as if for purposes of mental visualization.

"I couldn't say, sir. Perhaps, yes; perhaps, no. I don't recall."

Vance seemed to lose all interest in him; and Markham resumed the interrogation.

"I understand, Pyne, that Mr. Drukker called here this morning about half past nine. Did you see him?"

"Yes, sir. He always uses the basement door; and he said good-morning to me as he passed the butler's pantry at the head of the steps."

"He returned the same way he came?"

"I suppose so, sir—though I was up-stairs when he went. He lives in the house at the rear——"

"I know." Markham leaned forward. "I presume it was you who admitted Mr. Robin and Mr. Sperling this morning."

"Yes, sir. At about ten o'clock."

"Did you see them again, or overhear any of their remarks while they waited here in the drawing-room?"

"No, sir. I was busy in Mr. Arnesson's quarters most of the morning."

"Ah!" Vance turned his eyes on the man. "That would be on the second floor rear, wouldn't it?—the room with the balcony?"

"Yes, sir."

"Most interestin'. . . . And it was from that balcony that Professor Dillard first saw Mr. Robin's body. How could he have entered the room without your knowing it? You said, I believe, that your first intimation of the tragedy was when the professor called you from the library and told you to seek Mr. Sperling."

The butler's face turned a pasty white, and I noticed that his fingers twitched nervously.

"I might have stepped out of Mr. Arnesson's room for a moment," he explained, with effort. "Yes—it's quite likely. In fact, sir, I recall going to the linen-closet. . . ."

"Oh, to be sure." Vance lapsed into lethargy.

Markham smoked a while, his gaze concentrated on the table-top.

"Did any one else call at the house this morning, Pyne?" he asked presently.

"No one, sir."

"And you can suggest no explanation for what happened here?"

The man shook his head heavily, his watery eyes in space.

"No, sir. Mr. Robin seemed a pleasant, well-liked young man. He wasn't the kind to inspire murder—if you understand what I mean."

Vance looked up.

"I can't say that I, personally, understand exactly what you mean, Pyne. How do you know it wasn't an accident?"

"I don't sir," was the unperturbed answer. "But I know a bit about archery—if you'll pardon my saying so—and I saw right away that Mr. Robin had been killed by a hunting arrow."

"You're very observin', Pyne," nodded Vance. "And quite correct."

It was plain that no direct information was to be got from the butler, and Markham dismissed him abruptly, at the same time ordering Heath to send in the cook.

When she entered I noticed at once a resemblance between father and daughter. She was a slatternly woman of about forty, also tall and angular, with a thin, elongated face and large hands and feet. Hyperpituitarism evidently ran in the Pyne family.

A few preliminary questions brought out the information that she was a widow, named Beedle, and had, at the death of her husband five years before, come to Professor Dillard as the result of Pyne's recommendation.

"What time did you leave the house this morning, Beedle " Markham asked her.

"Right after half past ten." She seemed uneasy and on the alert, and her voice was defensively belligerent.

"And what time did you return?"

"About half past twelve. That man let me in"—she looked viciously at Heath—"and treated me like I'd been a criminal."

Heath grinned. "The time's O. K., Mr. Markham. She got sore because I wouldn't let her go down-stairs."

Markham nodded non-committally.

"Do you know anything of what took place here this morning?" he went on, studying the woman closely.

"How should I know? I was at Jefferson market."

"Did you see either Mr. Robin or Mr. Sperling?"

"They went down-stairs to the archery-room past the kitchen a little while before I went out."

"Did you overhear anything they said?"

"I don't listen at keyholes."

Markham set his jaw angrily and was about to speak when Vance addressed the woman suavely.

"The District Attorney thought that perhaps the door was open, and that you might have overheard some of their conversation despite your commendable effort not to listen."

"The door might've been open, but I didn't hear anything," she answered sullenly.

"Then you couldn't tell us if there was any one else in the archery-room."

Beedle narrowed his eyes and gave Vance a calculating look.

"Maybe there was some one else," she said slowly. "In fact, I thought I heard Mr. Drukker." A note of venom came into her voice, and the shadow of a hard smile passed over her thin lips. "He was here to call on Mr. Arnesson early this morning."

"Oh, was he, now?" Vance appeared surprised at this news. "You saw him perhaps?"

"I saw him come in, but I didn't see him go out—anyway, I didn't notice. He sneaks in and out at all hours."

"Sneaks, eh? Fancy that! . . . By the by, which door did you use when you went a-marketing?"

"The front door. Since Miss Belle made a club-room out of the basement, I always use the front door."

"Then you didn't enter the archery-room this morning?"

"No."

Vance raised himself in his chair.

"Thanks for your help, Beedle. We won't need you any more now."

When the woman had left us Vance rose and walked to the window.

"We're expending too much zeal in irrelevant channels, Markham," he said. "We'll never get anywhere by ballyragging servants and questioning members of

the household. There's a psychological wall to be battered down before we can begin storming the enemy's trenches. Everybody in this menage has some pet privacy that he's afraid will leak out. Each person so far has told us either less or more than he knows. Disheartenin', but true. Nothing that we've learned dovetails with anything else; and when chronological events don't fit together, you may rest assured that the serrated points of contact have been deliberately distorted. I haven't found one clean joinder in all the tales that have been poured into our ears."

"It's more likely the connections are missing," Markham argued; "and we'll never find them if we don't pursue our questionings."

"You're much too trustin'," Vance walked back to the centre-table. "The more questions we ask the farther afield we'll be taken. Even Professor Dillard didn't give us a wholly honest account. There's something he's keeping back—some suspicion he won't voice. Why did he bring that bow indoors? Arnesson put his finger on a vital spot when he asked the same question. Shrewd fella, Arnesson. Then there's our athletic young lady with the muscular calves. She's entangled in various amat'ry meshes, and is endeavoring to extricate herself and her whole coterie without leaving a blemish on any one. A praiseworthy aim, but not one conducive to the unadulterated truth. Pyne has ideas, too. That flabby facial mask of his curtains many an entrancin' thought. But we'll never probe his cortex by chivyin' him with questions. Somethin' rum, too, about his matutinal labors. He says he was in Arnesson's room all morning; but he obviously didn't know that the professor took a sunnin' on Arnesson's verandah. And that linen-closet alibi—much too specious. Also, Markham, let your mind flutter about the widowed Beedle's tale. She doesn't like the over-sociable Mr. Drukker; and when she saw a chance to involve him, she did so. She 'thought' she heard his voice in the archery-room. But did she? Who knows? True, he might have tarried among the slings and javelins on his way home and been joined later by Robin and Sperling. . . . Yes, it's a point we must investigate. In fact, a bit of polite converse with Mr. Drukker is strongly indicated. . . ."

Footsteps were heard descending the front stairs, and Arnesson appeared in the archway of the living-room.

"Well, who killed Cock Robin?" he asked, with a satyr-like grin.

Markham rose, annoyed, and was about to protest at the intrusion; but Arnesson held up his hand.

"One moment, please. I'm here to offer my exalted services in the noble cause of justice—mundane justice, I would have you understand. Philosophically, of course, there's no such thing as justice. If there really were justice we'd all be in for a shingling in the cosmic wood-shed." He sat down facing Markham and chuckled cynically. "The fact is, the sad and precipitate departure of Mr. Robin appeals to my scientific nature. It makes a nice, orderly problem. It has a decidedly mathematical flavor — no undistributed terms, you understand; clear-cut integers with certain unknown quantities to be determined. Well, I'm the genius to solve it."

"What would be your solution, Arnesson?" Markham knew and respected the man's intelligence, and seemed at once to sense a serious purpose beneath his attitude of sneering flippancy.

"Ah! As yet I haven't tackled the equation," Arnesson drew out an old briar pipe and fingered it affectionately. "But I've always wanted to do a little detective work on a purely earthly plane—the insatiable curiosity and natural inquisitiveness of the physicist, you understand. And I've long had a theory that the science of mathematics can be advantageously applied to the trivialities of our life on this unimportant planet. There's nothing but law in the universe—unless Eddington is right and there's no law at all—and I see no sufficient reason why the identity and position of a criminal can't be determined just as Leverrier calculated the mass and ephemeris of Neptune from the observed deviations in the orbit of Uranus. You remember how, after his computations, he told Galle, the Berlin astronomer, to look for the planet in a specified longitude of the ecliptic."

Arnesson paused and filled his pipe.

"Now, Markham," he went on; and I tried to decide whether or not the man was in earnest, "I'd like the opportunity of applying to this absurd muddle the purely rational means used by Leverrier in discovering Neptune. But I've got to have the data on the perturbations of Uranus's orbit, so to speak—that is, I must know all the varying factors in the equation. The favor I've come here to ask is that you take me into your confidence and tell me all the facts. A sort of intellectual partnership. I'll figure out this problem for you along scientific lines. It'll be bully sport; and incidentally I'd like to prove my theory that mathematics is the basis of all truth however far removed from scholastic abstractions." He at last got his pipe going, and sank back in his chair. "Is it a bargain?"

"I'll be glad to tell you whatever we know, Arnesson," Markham replied after a brief pause. "But I can't promise to reveal everything that may arise from now on. It might work against the ends of justice and embarrass our investigation."

Vance had sat with half-closed eyes, apparently bored by Arnesson's astonishing request; but now he turned to Markham with a considerable show of animation.

"I say, y' know; there's really no reason why we shouldn't give Mr. Arnesson a chance to translate this crime into the realm of applied mathematics. I'm sure he'd be discreet and use our information only for scientific purposes. And—one never knows does one?—we may need his highly trained assistance before we're through with this fascinatin' affair."

Markham knew Vance well enough to realize that his suggestion had not been made thoughtlessly; and I was in no wise astonished when he faced Arnesson and said:

"Very well, then. We'll give you whatever data you need to work out your mathematical formula. Anything special you want to know now?"

(To be continued)

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