

Child's Play

By Alice Campbell

A snippet of brown paper wiggled under Andrea's door. "Coyt" ran the faint penciled scrawl, "is again arrested. Alibi destroyed. Letters have just reached the police. Give Gammon entire truth, first burning this."

"O, yes," the Devon detective almost visibly licked his chops. "Turner can't swear it wasn't this new Yankee he bumped into up on that cliff. Evers was there at the right time, lost a fountain pen which, I may tell you, Coyt actually saw him pick up yesterday morning."

"Run coincidence, that" Mottroy commented dryly. "I imagine it's occurred to you the pen may have been planted several evenings later on?"

"Can Coyt prove it was? Well, Mr. Mottroy, you may just as well know the worst. The superintendent's just rung me to say that since I was called up here the post-man has brought along a couple of letters addressed to Capt. Coyt in Burma. No clue to the sender, merely a printed line declaring they were discovered in Andrea Braebourne's room. These documents, it seems, floodlight the whole situation."

"Suddenly the speaker impaled Mottroy with a glance. "Did you know about these two eye-openers?" he accused. Phlegmatically calm, Mottroy nodded. "Since yesterday, quite, Mrs. Braebourne has been merely holding the information till you paid your next call. The evening she arrived back at this place she ran into Capt. Coyt in the grounds. That was how she came by these old letters."

"I have a further communication to make to you, inspector. It concerns Lady Braebourne's niece, Miss Lulling. We assumed, didn't we, that last Friday evening when she telephoned the hotel she collapsed at the mere mention of a bad accident? It now appears she was felled by a deliberate unseen blow."

"The inspector's jaw dropped. "And Miss Lulling's been keeping a thing like this under her hat, Jumping Jupiter, why?"

"Offer her police protection," advised the barrister crisply, "and you may learn." He added that the inspector might also sound the victim on the subject of a certain spoiled brook. "Humph," came the slow grunt. "And you conclude, do you, these acts were the doings of the drug-taking aunt? Very possible, I'd say; but how does any of this couple on to Braebourne's assassination?"

"I don't say it does." They moved out of the dust sheeted room and along to Kuoensis's door. About to tap the inspector turned on Mottroy with slow dawning comprehension. "That's so! He rubbed his chin. "You're the counsel who secured young Braebourne's acquittal. I'm very much afraid this new evidence won't be pleasant hearing for you, sir."

"Never mind my feelings. You might tell me this: Does Capt. Coyt continue to stick to his assertion about the second man in the hotel alley?"

"Does he? Like glue, when I've been proved up to the hilt Leonard Cree couldn't possibly have been there."

"Curious, Mottroy mused. "Even more odd in its way than this man Evers' purely voluntary stepping into the picture. You see, inspector, I know who Byers is. He's no other than the factory expert Leonard Cree is in process of consulting up at Port Ryde. One is tempted to ask whether the general manager of the Cree interests may not have dropped a gentle hint indicating that a certain service just performed might guarantee a contract yet unsecured. Would you, for that matter, utterly deny the possibility of Turner's palm being well greased . . . and the night watchman's?"

"The inspector's enraged lantern jaws swelled to ruby balloons. Rude-ly declining to reply to this outrageous suggestion he knocked heavy knuckles on Queenie's door. Mottroy gravitated back into the room just quitted. Something bright blue had caught his eye, something straggling from the bed he had

stripped and inadequately recovered in the dark last night when, as that he was, he had sat watching the wrong mousehole. It was a duster . . . blue and white checks, twin to the one the woman now dead had fastened in his face. Someone had stuck it between the concealed pillows. He shook the cloth out and heard a tinkle. At his feet lay a bronze key. . . . Swiftly Mottroy wheeled, stuffing his finds into a pocket. "Well, Moon?" he grated. "What brings you in here?"

"Adams nurse had ducked back from the threshold of the empty bedroom, but now he stepped forward. "It was you I was wanting, sir," Moon jerked a meaning head toward the officer posted in the corridor, and interpreting it Mottroy led the way to his own quarters. "Wot's this flatty been up to, mucking my traps about like ruddy hell?" the Cockney voice whined. "Nosing for cold poison?"

"As the barrister merely looked at him Moon blurted out his eyes from the unsightly bulge in Mottroy's coat pocket and answered his own question. "I'm wise," he jeered. "This here Gammon and Spinach wants to fasten his hooks on to my lurid past. And I can tell you who's put him on to a matter that's nothing to do with no one, see, barring the governor and myself. Strewth! Something seemed to uncoil and leap from Moon. "If ever I catch that slimy weasel by himself on a dark night, you watch me twist his three foot neck for him! Pardon, sir." The ferocity went quickly to cover.

Talk. Smoked camouflaged to veil the fact of slipping like an eel into that unoccupied room? Crafty now, Mottroy moved to open directly under Mottroy's uncompromising chin. "You bin and spilled anything," Moon challenged, "about the dog?"

"No," Mottroy said flintily. "And you?"

"Me? No fear. A sigh trickled. Falsely perky again, Moon admitted he had got the dind up, uncertain if Mr. Mottroy had deemed it his citizen's duty to place hidden cards at the inspectors' disposal. "I wouldn't do, tho, would it?" Obviously Moon leered. "Little lady's got enough on her hands without you and me lugging in strychnine. Maybe whoever cremated that dog done her a good turn! Right! Now I can push on with my work."

"Crimly Mottroy now examined the dust sheet of the alley. It occurred to him both might have been planted on purpose for the police to discover. The soft, thick cotton fabric would have deadened the impact of a blood-gout."

Dropping the blue duster back into the housemaid's cupboard, Mottroy shook his head over the shameful ease with which he was thru out his career had spurred trickery, was now suppressing criminal evidence. All that caused him a quail was the sudden appearance of Col. Pratt, who, by luck, was too absorbed in main issues to notice his friend's surreptitious dodge from a passage door.

"Hardly done the autopsy," Pratt confided. "All pretty much as we said. You've heard, I suppose, we've got bracelets on the American again? And written stuff that'll sound practically fatal, in court, for that girl."

[Continued tomorrow.]

Miracle on 34th Street advertisement featuring Maureen O'Hara and John Payne.

The EGG and I advertisement featuring Claudette Colbert and Fred MacMurray.

Shirley Temple advertisement for the movie 'The Guy Who Loved Me'.

World Playhouse advertisement for the movie 'Carmen'.

South Side advertisement for the movie 'The Yearling'.

Advertisement for 'Miracle on 34th Street' featuring a photo of Maureen O'Hara.

Advertisement for 'The Yearling' featuring a photo of a young boy.

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Advertisement for 'The Yearling' featuring a photo of a young boy.

Your Stars Today advertisement featuring photos of various celebrities and the text 'Feels Much Better Now'.

Advertisement for 'The Yearling' featuring a photo of a young boy.

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