

THE BIG FOUR

A Mystery-Romance by Agatha Christie

CHAPTER XVII

Mr. Martin went out. "The letter was evidently about the property Mr. Ryland was thinking of buying. But really, I do feel that a man who can get into a rage over such a trifle is well, dangerous. What do you think I ought to do, Major Neville? You've more experience of the world than I have."

I looked at the girl down, pointed out to her that Mr. Ryland had probably been suffering from the effects of his race-antipathy. In the end I sent her away quite comforted. But I was not so easily satisfied myself. When the girl had gone, and I was alone, I took out my notebook and ran over the letter which I had just read down. What did it mean? This apparently innocent-sounding missive? Did it concern some business deal which Ryland was undertaking, and was he anxious that no details about it should leak out until it was carried through? That was a possible explanation. But I remembered the small figure I with which the envelope was marked, and I felt that, in fact, I was on the track of the thing we were seeking.

I puzzled over the letter all that evening, and most of the next day—and then suddenly the solution came to me. It was so simple, too. The figure was the clue. Read every fourth word in the letter, and an entirely different message appeared. "Essential should see you quarry seventeen eleven four." The solution of the figures was easy. Seventeen stood for the seventeenth of October—which was tomorrow, eleven was the time, and four was the signature—either referring to the mysterious Number Four himself—or else it was the "trade-mark" so to speak, of the Big Four. The quarry was so intelligible. There was a big diamond quarry on the estate about half a mile from the house—a lonely spot, ideal for a secret meeting.

For a moment or two I was tempted to run the show myself. It would be such a feather in my cap, for once, to have the pleasure of crowing over Poirot.

But in the end I overcame the temptation. This was a big business—I had no right to play a part in it, and perhaps jeopardize our chances of success. For the first time, we had stolen a march upon our enemies. We must make good this time—and, disguise the fact as I might, Poirot had the better brain of the two.

I wrote off post haste to him, laying the facts before him, and explaining how urgent it was that we should overtake what went on at the interview. If he liked to leave it to me, well and good, but I gave him detailed instructions how to reach the quarry from the station in case he should deem it wise to present himself.

I took the letter down to the village and posted it myself. I had been able to communicate with Poirot throughout my stay, by the simple expedient of posting my letters myself, but we had agreed that he should not attempt to communicate with me in case my letters should be tampered with.

I was in a glow of excitement the following evening. No guests were staying in the house, and I was busy with Mr. Ryland in his study all the evening. I had foreseen that this would be the case, which was why I had no hope of being able to meet Poirot at the station. I was, however, confident that I would be dismissed well before eleven o'clock.

Sure enough, just after ten-thirty, Mr. Ryland glanced at the clock, and announced that he was "through." I took the hint and re-

tired discreetly. I went upstairs as though going to bed, and slipped quietly down a side staircase and let myself out into the garden, having taken the precaution to don a dark overcoat to hide my white shirt-front.

I had gone some way down the garden when I chanced to look over my shoulder. Mr. Ryland was just stepping out from his study window into the garden. He was starting to keep the appointment. I redoubled my pace, so as to get a clear start. I arrived at the quarry somewhat out of breath. There seemed to me one about, and I crawled into a thick tangle of bushes and awaited developments.

Ten minutes later, just on the stroke of eleven, Ryland stalked up, his hat over his eyes and the inevitable cigar in his mouth. He gave a quick look around, and then plunged into the hollows of the quarry below. Presently I heard a low murmur of voices come up to me. Evidently the other man—or men—whichever they were, had arrived first at the rendezvous. I crawled cautiously out of the bushes and, inch by inch, using the utmost precaution against noise, I wormed myself down the steep path. Only a boulder now separated me from the talking men. Secure in the darkness, I peeped round the edge of it and found myself facing the muzzle of a black, murderous-looking automatic!

"Hands up!" said Mr. Ryland succinctly. "I've been waiting for you."

He was seated in the shadow of the rock, so that I could not see his face, but the menace in his voice was unpleasant. Then I felt a ring of cold steel on the back of my neck, and Ryland lowered his own automatic.

"That's right, George," he drawled. "March him around here."

Raging inwardly, I was conducted to a spot in the shadows, where the unseen George (whom I suspected of being the impeccable Devenis), gagged and bound me securely.

Ryland spoke again in a tone which I had difficulty in recognizing, so cold and menacing was it. "This is going to be the end of you two. You've got in the way of the Big Four once too often. Ever heard of hard labor? There was one about here two years ago. There's going to be another tonight. I've fixed that good and square. Say, that friend of yours doesn't keep his dates very punctually."

A wave of horror swept over me. Poirot! In another minute he would walk straight into the trap. And I was powerless to warn him. I could only pray that he had elected to leave the matter in my hands, and had remained in London. Surely, if he had been coming, he would have been here by now.

With every minute that passed, my hopes rose.

Suddenly they were dashed to pieces. I heard footsteps—can-

ous footsteps, but footsteps nevertheless. I writhed in impotent agony. They came down the path, paused, and then Poirot himself appeared, his head a little on one side, peering into the shadows.

I heard the growl of satisfaction Ryland gave as he raised the big automatic and shouted "Hands up." Devenis sprang forward as he did so, and took Poirot in the rear. The ambush was complete.

"Please to meet you, Mr. Hercule Poirot," said the American grimly.

Poirot's self-possession was marvellous. He did not turn a hair. But I saw his eyes searching in the shadows.

"My friend? He is here?" "Yes, you are both in the trap—the trap of the Big Four," he laughed.

"A trap?" queried Poirot. "Say, haven't you tumbled to it yet?"

"I comprehend that there is a trap—yes," said Poirot gently. "But you are in error, monsieur. It is you who are in it—not I and my friend."

"What?" Ryland raised the big automatic, but I saw his gaze falter.

"If you fire, you commit murder watched by ten pairs of eyes, and you will be hanged for it. This place is surrounded—has been for the last hour—by Scotland Yard men. It is chockablock, Mr. Abe Ryland."

He uttered a curious whistle, and as though by magic, the place was alive with men. They seized Ryland and the valet and disarmed them. After speaking a few words to the officer in charge, Poirot took me by the arm, and led me away.

Once clear of the quarry he embraced me with vigor.

"You are alive—you are unhurt. It is magnificent. Often have I blamed myself for letting you go."

"I'm perfectly all right," I said, disengaging myself. "But I'm just a big forced. You tumbled to their little scheme, did you?"

"But I was waiting for it! For what else did I permit you to go there? Your false name, your disguise, not for a moment was it intended to deceive?"

"What?" I cried. "You never told me."

"As I have frequently told you, Hastings, you have a nature so beautiful and so honest that unless you are yourself deceived, it is impossible for you to deceive others. Good then, you are spotted from the first, and they do what I had counted on their doing—a mathematical certainty to any one who uses his gray cells properly—use you as a decoy. They set the girl on—by the way, mon ami, as an interesting fact psychologically, has she got red hair?"

"If you mean Miss Martin," I said coldly. "Her hair is a delicate shade of auburn, but—"

"They are shrewd—these people! They have even studied your psychology. Oh! yes, my friend, Miss Martin was in the plot—very much so. She repeats the letter to you, together with her tale of Mr. Ryland's wrath, you write it down, you puzzle your brains—but either is nicely arranged, difficult, but not too difficult—you solve it, and

you send for me." "But what they do not know is that I am waiting for just this very thing to happen. I go post haste to Japp and arrange things. And so, as you see, all is triumph!"

I was not particularly pleased with Poirot, and I told him so. We went back to London on a milk train in the early hours of the morning, and a most uncomfortable journey it was.

I was just out of my bath and indulging in pleasant thoughts of breakfast when I heard Japp's voice in the sitting room. I threw on a bath-robe and hurried in.

"A pretty nurse's nest, you've got us into this time," Japp was saying. "It's too bad of you, Mr. Poirot. First time I've ever known you take a toss."

Poirot's face was a study. Japp went on.

"There were we, taking all this black hand stuff seriously—and all the time it was the footman!"

"The footman?" I gasped.

"Yes, James, or whatever his name is. Seems he had 'em a wager in the servants' hall that he could get taken for the old man by his nibs—that's you, Captain Hastings—and would hand him out a lot of spy stuff about a Big Four gang."

"Impossible!" I cried.

"Don't you believe it! I marched our gentleman straight to Hatton Chase, and there was the real Ryland in bed and asleep, and the butler and the cook and lord knows how many of them to swear to the wager. Just a silly hoax—that's all it was—and the valet is with him."

"So that was why he kept in the shadow," murmured Poirot.

After Japp had gone we looked at each other.

"We know, Hastings," said Poirot at last. "Number Two of the Big Four is Abe Ryland. The masquerading on the part of the footman was to ensure a way of retreat in case of emergencies. And the footman—"

"Yes," I breathed.

"Number Four," said Poirot gravely.

(To be continued)

Miss Helen Nelson, factory representative of the Easy Washing Machine company will demonstrate Easy Ironer daily at the California Oregon Fair.

Rooms from 2 to 5 p. m., October 26 to 31, inclusive. Let Miss Nelson solve your ironing problems the EASY WAY. There will be given a useful gift to each lady attending the demonstration.—Adv.

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It's not the first year or even the fifth year of using it that makes you really appreciate Hills Bros. Coffee...but as you use it through the years you come to know how consistently good it is and realize that it's never disappointing.

For fifty-eight years, ever since Hills Bros. Coffee was first roasted and packed, an exacting, unvarying standard of quality has been maintained. Times may change...but today, tomorrow, years from now, you can be certain always of the constant delight and enjoyment offered by Hills Bros. Coffee.

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The Correct Grind of Hills Bros. Coffee is a standard set by a knowledge of coffee acquired through more than half a century of roasting and packing coffee. The Correct Grind is as fine as coffee should be ground. Finer grinding sacrifices flavor and aroma, as well as keeping qualities after the can is opened. Hills Bros. Coffee should not be reground. The Correct Grind is guaranteed to produce the finest-tasting beverage in any type of coffee-maker. Directions for making coffee by the method you use will be sent on request.

ORIENTAL GARDENS HALLOWE'EN DANCE
Saturday, Oct. 31
Music by Burr Diviller and his Organions
Gents 40c Ladies 10c

HOME LOANS
To Buy, Build, Remodel, Refinance
No Commissions
No Finance Fee
Low Interest
Attractive Terms
Umpqua Savings & Loan Association

LANDON SCORED ON SECURITY ATTITUDE
Demolition of Law Aim of Opponents, Charge of Senator Wagner.

NEW YORK, Oct. 29.—(AP)—Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York, one of the authors of the new deal social security act, said in a statement today that Governor Alf M. Landon and the republican national committee "propose to wreck and demolish the whole structure of social security throughout the nation."

"This danger," the democratic senator said, "looms up clearly and honestly through the dust and smoke raised by the desperate republican leadership as the campaign draws to a close."

Wagner said the "very heart of our social security law is its old age insurance system. This system guarantees for the worker a decent monthly retirement allowance in his old age. It is an absolutely safe system because it is supported by regular contributions to a fund in the United States treasury. But only half the insurance cost is paid by the workers. The other half is paid by their employers, and thus every worker will receive twice as much old age protection as he could afford to buy for himself."

"Undermining" Charged
"Mr. Landon and his backers do not dare to attack this wonderful

law openly and directly. They try, instead, to undermine it in a covert way. They pretend that they are very sorry about what old age protection costs the workers, but what really worries them is not what the worker pays but what the worker gets. What really worries them is that for the first time on a national scale the wear and tear that the worker suffers is compensated in part by the industry he has served.

"Under the false pretense of helping the worker, Mr. Landon proposes to relieve industry of its fair obligation and to saddle the whole cost upon the back of the worker by a shameful sales tax. That is the sinister purpose of the deceiving little pay envelope sent around by the republican national committee to frighten the uninformed."

Senator Wagner said he felt sure "the pay envelope" campaign will be "resented by the overwhelming majority of republican."

as well as democratic, members of congress who voted for the social security law. These included Senators Vandenberg, Borah, Capper, of Mr. Landon's own state of Kansas, and McNary, the republican leader of the senate.

WESTERN Field pump gun, 12 gauge, \$22.25. Parlow Hardware Co.—Adv.

WATKINS GOODS, 120 W. Lane.—Adv.

VOTERS—Read Carefully!
THIS MEASURE APPEARS ON YOUR BALLOT:—
TAX LIMITATION CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS HAVING 100,000 POPULATION—Purpose: To amend the constitution . . . to levy taxes not to exceed 80% of TOTAL 1932 levy . . .

MASQUERADING UNDER FALSE COLORS—this amendment is not a TAX LIMITATION—it's a TAX BOOST of \$1,300,000—although purposely worded to DECEIVE YOU that Portland School District would operate for 80% of the 1932 levy, or 20% less.

This measure is not honestly and fairly presented to you with all facts clearly stated—the main purpose of the bill is CONCEALED.

Portland school census shows rapid decline, over 100 Vacant rooms with 9,000 less enrolled. INCREASED TAXES ARE NOT JUSTIFIED.

DON'T PERMIT Portland School Board to tamper with present 6% Tax Limitation Law observed by all other School districts in Oregon; or to enact SPECIAL LAWS by Statewide vote for PORTLAND BENEFIT ONLY.

DON'T PERMIT Portland School District to become exempt from FULL LEGISLATIVE CONTROL as to general school laws.

Maintain HOME RULE THROUGHOUT THE STATE and require Portland School District to submit special problems of school operation to the Voters of its own district.

EAST SIDE TAXPAYERS LEAGUE, RAILWAY EXCHANGE BLDG., PORTLAND, OREGON. Executive Committee: Sumner Newell, E. L. Wilson, Robert Mitchell, Tyson Kinsey, P. L. Cover

also—
READ
VOTERS
PAMPHLET
PAGE 17

VOTE 305x No!

HALLOWEEN PARTY NEEDS
Goblins, spooks and witches will soon be prowling through the night! Plan a Halloween party—then come to Headquarters* for your cider and doughnuts, marshmallows and pumpkin and the 101 other party suggestions we have on display—priced low!

*Your nearest Red & White Store.

Specials for Saturday, Monday, Oct. 31, Nov. 2

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BINGS
Sunshine Butter Crackers

1-Lb. Pkg. 19c

Flakewhite **SHORTENING**
4-Lb. Pkg. 55c

Red & White **CORN OR GLOSS STARCH**
1-Lb. Pkg., 3 for 29c

Harvest Pride **FLOUR**
49-Lb. Sack \$1.49

Red & White Extra Fancy **BREAKFAST FIGS IN SYRUP**
No. 1's Tall 15c
2 for 28c

Red & White Fancy **SLICED PEACHES**
No. 1's Tall 10c

Red & White Fancy **CORN**
Golden Bantam or Whole Kernel No. 2's, 2 for 29c

Red & White Wet Pack **SHRIMP**
2 Cans For 33c

Red & White **CHILI CON CARNE**
No. 1's 13c
2 for 25c

Our Favorite **CATSUP**
14-Oz. Bottle 10c

Blue & White **BROOMS** 73c

Lady Godiva **TOILET SOAP**
4 Bars For 19c
With Wash Cloth

GRECIAN CURRANTS—
Wadhams Fancy, 11 Ounces for 15c

PANCAKE FLOUR—
Red & White, 10-lb. Sack 53c

COFFEE—Red & White,
1-lb. Wide Mouth Jars 31c

COFFEE—Early Riser,
1-lb. Bag 19c

COFFEE—Mart Brand,
1-lb. Bag 23c

MILK—Red & White,
Tall Cans, 4 for 33c

MAYONNAISE—
Red & White, Pint Jars 27c

SALAD DRESSING—
Sun Spun, Pint Jars 24c

HUSKIES—
10-Ounce Pkg. 23c

MARSHMALLOWS
1-Pound Package 18c

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L. E. Henninger Canyonville
Morgan's Grocery Roseburg
Reynolds & Adams Myrtle Creek

B. R. Richter & Co. Camas Valley
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