

The Mystery of the Boule Cabinet

By BURTON E. STEVENSON

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ars and one for five, and there were two or three dollars in silver and four five-centime pieces in a small coin purse which he carried in his trousers' pocket. The large purse had four or five calling cards in one of its compartments, each bearing a different name, none of them his. On the back of one of them Vantine's address was written in pencil.

There were no letters, no papers, no written documents of any kind in the pockets, the remainder of whose contents consisted of such odds and ends as any man might carry about with him—a cheap watch, a penknife, a half empty packet of French tobacco, a sheaf of cigarette paper, four or five keys on a ring, a silk handkerchief, and perhaps some other articles which I have forgotten, but not a thing to assist in establishing his identity.

"This proves that he's French," said Godfrey.

"His best girl?"

For answer, Godfrey held up the watch, which he had been examining. He had opened the case and inside it was a photograph—the photograph of a woman with bold, dark eyes and full lips and oval face, a face so typically French that it was not to be mistaken.

"A lady's maid, I should say," added Godfrey, looking at it again. "There is one fact which we have apparently overlooked, but it proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that this fellow didn't drift in here by accident. He came here of intention, and the intention wasn't to kill himself, either."

"How do you know that?" demanded Godberger incredulously.

Godfrey picked up the purse, opened it and took out one of the cards.

"By this," he said, and held it up. "You have already seen what is written on the back of it—Mr. Vantine's name and the number of this house. That proves, doesn't it, that this fellow came to New York expressly to see Mr. Vantine?"

"Perhaps you think Mr. Vantine killed him," suggested Godberger sarcastically.

"No," said Godfrey. "He didn't have time."

"Thanks," said Vantine drily.

"I suppose, then, you think it was Parks," said Godberger.

"It may quite possibly have been Parks," agreed Godfrey gravely.

"Nonsense!" broke in Vantine impatiently.

"Of course it's nonsense," assented Godberger. "It's nonsense to say that he was killed by anybody. He killed himself."

"I'll cable to Paris," said Simmonds. "If he belongs there we'll soon find out who he is."

"You'd better call an ambulance and have him taken to the morgue," went on Godberger. "Somebody may identify him there. There'll be a crowd tomorrow, for, of course, the papers will be full of this affair."

"The Record at least will have a very full account," Godfrey assured him.

"And I'll call the inquest for the day after," Godberger continued. "I'll send my physician down to make a post mortem right away. If there's any poison in this fellow's stomach we'll find it."

Godfrey did not speak, but I knew what was in his mind. He was thinking that if such poison existed the vessel which had contained it had not yet been found. The same thought no doubt occurred to Simmonds, for after ordering the policeman in the hall to call the ambulance he returned and began a careful search of the room, using his electric torch to illumine every shadowed corner. Godfrey devoted himself to a similar search, but both were without result. Then Godfrey made a minute inspection of the bureau, while Godberger looked on with ill concealed impatience, and finally Godfrey moved toward the door.

"I think I'll be going," he said. "But I'm interested in what your physician will find. Mr. Cooper. Will you be at home tonight, Lester?"

"Yes, I expect to be," I answered.

"You're still at the Marathon?"

"Yes," I said, "still."

"Perhaps," he went around to see the door, and a moment later I heard the door close behind him as he went out.

"That's a good man," said Goldberger. "He's been searching. Take a look at this. There's a man like himself, a man who believes that a man should be a man, on the one hand, and that a man should be a man, on the other."

would kill a man as quick as that, for he must have dropped dead before he could get out of the room to summon help. If it was prussic acid he swallowed it."

"How do you explain the address on the card, Mr. Goldberger?" I asked.

"My theory is that this fellow really had some business with Mr. Vantine. Probably he wanted to borrow some money or ask for help, and then while he was waiting he suddenly gave the thing up and killed himself. The address has no bearing whatever, that I can see, on the question of suicide. And I'll say this, Mr. Lester, if this isn't suicide—here's the ambulance."

The tenses entered with the stretch-

er, placed the body on it and carried it away. Goldberger paused to gather up the articles he had taken from the dead man's pockets.

"You gentlemen will have to give your testimony at the inquest," he said, "so will Parks and Rogers. It will be day after tomorrow, probably at 10 o'clock, but I'll notify you of the hour."

"Very well," I said, "we'll be there," and Goldberger bade us goodbye and left the house. "And now," I added to Vantine, "I must be getting back to the office. They'll be asking the police to look for me next. Man alive"—and I glanced at my watch—"it's after 4 o'clock!"

"Too late for the office," said Vantine. "Better come upstairs and have a drink. Besides, I want to talk with you."

"At least I'll let them know I'm still alive," I said, and I called up the fire and alayed any anxiety that may have been felt there concerning me. I must admit that it did not seem acute.

"Tell me, Lester," said Vantine, and he looked at me earnestly. "Do you think that poor devil came in here just to get a chance to kill himself quietly?"

"No, I don't," I said.

"Then what did he come in for?"

"I think Goldberger's theory a pretty good one—that he had heard of you as a generous fellow and came in here to ask help, and while he was waiting suddenly gave it up—"

"And killed himself?" Vantine completed.

I hesitated. I was astonished to find at the back of my mind a growing doubt.

"See here, Lester," Vantine demanded. "If he didn't kill himself, what happened to him?"

"Heaven only knows," I answered in despair. "I've been asking myself the same question without finding a reasonable answer to it. But if any body can see through it Jim Godfrey can."

Vantine seemed deeply perturbed.

"Tell me, Lester," he said, "do you believe that theory of Godfrey's—that that insignificant wound on the hand caused death?"

I asked myself the same question before I answered.

"Yes, I do," I said finally.

"Lester, I have a queer feeling that the business which brought this man here in some way concerned the Boule cabinet I was telling you about. Perhaps it belonged to him."

"Hardly," I protested, recalling his shabby appearance.

"At any rate, I remember as I was looking at his card that some such thought occurred to me. It was for that reason I told Parks to ask him to wait."

"It's possible, of course," I admitted. "But that wouldn't explain his excitement. And that reminds me," I added, "I haven't sent off that cable."

"Any time tonight will do. It will be delivered in the morning. But you haven't seen the cabinet yet. Come down and look at it."

He led the way down the stair. Parks met us in the lower hall.

"There's a delegation of reporters outside, Mr.," he said. "They say they've got to see you."

Vantine made a movement of impatience.

"Tell them," he said, "that I positively refuse to see them or to allow my servants to see them. Let them get their information from the police."

"Very well, Mr.," said Parks and turned away, grinning.

Vantine passed on through the ante-room in which we had found the body of the unfortunate Frenchman and into the room beyond. Five or six pieces of furniture, evidently just unpacked, stood there; but, ignorant as I am of such things, he did not have to point out to me the Boule cabinet.

I looked at it for some moments, for it was certainly a beautiful piece of work, with a wealth of inlay and incrustation little short of marvelous. But I may as well say here that I never really appreciated it. The florid style of the fourteenth and fifteenth Louis is not at all to my taste. I am afraid that Vantine found me a little cold.

"You don't seem to care for it," he said, looking at me.

"That's my fault and not the fault of the cabinet," I pointed out. "I'm not accustomed to it. I'm not used to an artist's work."

He was looking at a man who had been arrested, and he led the way from the room at once.

"Remember, Lester," he said a little sternly, pausing with his hand on the front door. "There is to be no foolishness about securing that cabinet for me. Don't you let it get away. I'm in deadly earnest. Let me know as soon as you have any news."

Was Vantine quite normal? I wondered on my way home. Could any man be normal who was willing to pay \$100,000 for a piece of furniture, especially a man who could not afford such extravagance? I knew the size of Vantine's fortune. It was large, but \$100,000 represented more than a year's income. And then I smiled to myself. Of course Vantine was merely jesting when he named that limit. The cabinet could be bought for a tenth of it at the most.

It was about 8 o'clock that evening that Godfrey tapped at my door and when I let him in I could tell by the way his eyes were shining that he had some news.

"I can't stay long," he said. "I've got to get down to the office and put the finishing touches on that story." But nevertheless he took the cigar I proffered him and sank into the chair opposite my own.

"I want to say this, Lester," he said, "that of all the cases I ever had not one has promised better than this one does. The coroner's physician finished his postmortem half an hour or so ago."

"Well?" I said.

"The stomach was absolutely normal. It showed no trace of poison of any kind. Rather a fencer for our friend Goldberger."

"What's the matter with Goldberger?" He seemed rather peeved with you this afternoon."

"No wonder. He's a Grady man, and we're after Grady. Grady isn't fit to head the detective bureau. He got the job through his pull, he's stupid and I suspect he's crooked. The Record says he has got to go. Once he's out everything will be serene again."

"Look here, Godfrey," I said, "if it wasn't poison what was it?"

"But it was poison."

"Inserted at the hand?"

He nodded.

"Goldberger says there's no poison known which could be used that way, and which would act so quickly."

"Goldberger is right in that," agreed Godfrey. "But there's a poison unknown that will, because it did."

"It wasn't a snake bite?"

"Oh, no. Snake poison wouldn't kill a man that quickly, not even a fer-de-lance. That fellow practically dropped where he was struck."

"Then what was it?"

Godfrey was sitting erect again. He was not smiling now. His face was very stern.

"That fellow was killed by some agency outside himself," he said. "In some way a drop or two of poison was introduced into his blood by an instrument something like a hypodermic needle, and that poison was so powerful that almost instantly it caused paralysis of the heart."

"But you've already said there's no poison so powerful as all that."

"I said we didn't know of any. I wouldn't be so sure that Catherine de Medici didn't. This case isn't as extraordinary as some of the old poisoning stories."

"No," I agreed, and fell silent, shivering a little, for there is something horrible and revolting about the poisoner.

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been arrested. And, of course, we can't get at motives until we find out something about him."

"But, Godfrey," I said, "how was it done? That is what stumps me. How was it done?"

"Ah," agreed Godfrey. "That's it! How was it done? I told you it was a pretty case, Lester. But wait till we hear from Paris."

"That reminds me," I said, sitting up suddenly. "I've got to cable to Paris myself, on some business for Mr. Vantine."

"Not connected with this affair?"

"Oh, no; his shippers over there sent him a piece of furniture that doesn't belong to him. He asked me to straighten the matter out."

I rang for the hallboy, asked for a cable blank and sent off a message to Armand & Son, telling them of the mistake and asking them to cable the name of the owner of the cabinet now in Mr. Vantine's possession. Godfrey got to his feet.

"I must be moving along," he said. "There's no use sitting here theorizing until we have some sort of foundation to build on."

The ringing of my telephone stopped him.

"Hello," I said, taking down the receiver.

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