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## A Mystery

Being a Story of How a Murder Case Was Not Solved.

By DONALD CHAMBERLIN

My telephone bell rang and, going to the instrument, I took up the receiver. "Is that you, Thompson?"

"Yes."

"I'm Parker. I wish you to come down and stay in the house with me tonight. I'm alone and nervous."

"Certainly, old man. What's the matter with you?"

"I can't ask you to dinner, for I haven't a servant in the house."

"Well, I'll be over about 9 o'clock. Will that do?"

"Yes; much obliged."

Parker was the junior partner in a large jewelry firm and a man who never shrank from any duty involving danger. Therefore I was surprised at his shrinking from sleeping in a house alone. He was a widower without children, and though he lived in the house he had occupied with his wife, he took his meals at his club, hiring no servant except for day work. I fancied he must be ill, or he would not have asked any one to sleep in the house with him.

At 9 o'clock I rang his doorbell, and he admitted me himself. He appeared neither ill nor troubled. He led me into an apartment he used for a smoking room, where he produced cigars,

and we sat down for a smoke. I waited some time for him to tell me why he wished for some one to sleep in his house with him, but he did not, chatting on ordinary topics until I rose to go to bed. Then I asked him what had made him nervous.

"There is a story connected with it, and I don't feel like telling it tonight," he said. "We are all connected with some disagreeable episode and are apt to make too much of it. Doubtless in a few days or a few weeks I shall think nothing of the one in which I am concerned. Why take up a lot of time going over it with you, especially since it would be unpleasant for me to do so?"

I excused him and went to my room, having told him that I must be up early in the morning and off, for my time for going to business was 7 o'clock, while he did not need to do so till 9 o'clock. I bade him good night, telling him that if he should be wakeful to come into my room for a chat. He said he expected to sleep soundly, and with that we parted.

In the morning I went out, treading softly that I might not awaken my friend, and emerged from the front door before most persons were stirring. A milkman drove up at the time and carried a bottle of milk to a rear door. He looked at me, and I spoke to him, expressing surprise that he should leave milk at a house where no meals were served, whereupon he told me that Mr. Parker drank a quart of milk every day at home.

I called up Parker the same evening by telephone to ask him if he required my services again, but there was no response to the call. I thought nothing of this, for there was no one besides himself to answer, and I presumed he was not at home. Several days passed, and I heard nothing from him. Then on taking up my morning paper I saw

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under large headlines a statement that he had been found murdered in his bed. The man who left the milk at his back door, seeing that the bottles remained unemptied where he had left them, notified a neighbor, who broke into the house and found Parker stabbed to the heart. A loaded revolver was under his pillow that had not been used.

Horrified, I started immediately to go to the house where the murder had been committed. On the way I met the milkman in company with a policeman. On seeing me the former said something to the policeman, which I did not hear, and the two stopped before me.

"You're wanted at Inspector O'Connor's office," said the policeman.

"I'm going to the house of a friend of mine who has been murdered. I'll call later at the inspector's office."

"You'll have to go with me now," was the reply.

Then for the first time it dawned upon me that I was under arrest for Parker's murder; that he had been killed the night I had slept at his house; that the milkman had seen me coming out the morning after the murder had been committed. The situation flashed upon me and the danger in which it placed me. I am sure I turned pale, and I felt my legs tremble beneath me.

Not a human being knew of my having been called upon by Parker to stay at his house the night he was murdered. I had been seen leaving it early in the morning of the murder. There had not been another person in the house during the night than myself except the murderer. What a pity I had not insisted on Parker's telling me the story connected with his objecting to sleep in the house alone! The circumstance attending my being there, together with the revolver found under his pillow, made it plain as the sun in heaven that he had feared some enemy. But all this was a blank to the rest of the world. An explanation made in a courtroom unsupported by a single clew pointing in the same direction would be set down as a fabrication. However, since I had been a friend of Parker, since my reputation was good, since I could not see how any motive on my part for the crime could be aduced, I hoped that common sense on the part of those by whom I would be judged would save me. But

the case went to trial nevertheless.

It is astonishing how in such cases so much may be made of so little. Parker's wife before she married Parker had been a flame of mine, but he had known all about it, and we had often spoken of it during his wife's lifetime. The prosecuting attorney got hold of this intimacy and built up on it a theory of motive for the murder, handling it so plausibly that it had a marked effect not only on the jury, but on the spectators and those who followed the trial in the newspapers.

He pictured the volcano of jealousy that had smoldered in my breast till the opportunity came, when I could strike for revenge. So graphic, so picturesque was his description of my condition that he almost convinced me.

The pistol found under Parker's pillow should have confirmed my evidence, for I was put on the stand in my own defense, but the prosecuting attorney claimed that I had placed it there for that express purpose. He even attempted to prove that the pistol had belonged to me and brought forth a witness who swore that he had seen it in my possession. This was a clincher on his theory and naturally turned many against me who had previously believed in my innocence.

However, it was impossible to convict me on such evidence. At the conclusion of the trial the judge virtually directed the jury to acquit me. Nevertheless they wrangled over my case for two days, then reported that they could not agree. I was finally discharged with the understanding that I would not again be tried, but in the eyes of the public I was a condemned murderer.

The object of my life now became the finding of Parker's murderer. But where should I look for him? My counsel had made inquiries that might lead to any one who had a grudge against Parker and had failed completely. But there was no reason why I should not go on hunting. I secured access to Parker's papers and spent hours in careful examination of them. Not a word in them gave the slightest clew to any enemy. The police had exhausted the matter of evidence of any tracks the murderer might have left behind him at Parker's house. He had not even left a footprint.

I hired detectives to work with me

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