The Mazaroff Mystery

By J. S. FLETCHER — W. N. U. Service

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THE STORY

Mervyn Holt is engaged by a man calling himself Mazaroff as a traveling companion. After a short tour they put up at the Woodcock inn on Marrasdale moor. They meet, casually, Mrs. Elphinstone and Sheila Merchison. Mazaroff tells Holt they are his wife and daughter and that his real name is Merchison. That night Mazaroff fails to return to the inn and his disappearance is unexplained. Holt meets Sheila and tells her of Mazaroff's disappearance. They go to her cousin's (Verner Courthope) shooting box hoping to find some word of Mazaroff. There they meet Mr. Armintrade and Doctor Eccleshare. Holt is questioned by Police Sergeant Manners and a reporter, Bownas. Mazaroff's murdered body is found. Crole, Mazaroff's lawyer, and Maythorne, private detective, arrive. Valuable diamonds that Mazaroff usually carried are missing. Mrs. Elphinstone scoffs at the idea that Mazaroff is Merchison and produces apparent proofs of his death. A gun, stolen from Musgrave, is found at the scene of the murder. Evidence at the inquest proves Mazaroff was Merchison. His will leaves all to Holt.

CHAPTER IV—Continued

—7—

"You and the deceased gentleman were very close friends, I think?" he said quietly. "Such close friends that he leaves you all his money—a vast fortune!—and appoints you sole executor of his last will and testament—and yet never even mentions the matter of his good intentions and your extraordinary luck to you!" he said, with what was almost a sneer. "You're sure about your memory?"

"I'm sure of something else than my memory!" I retorted hotly. "I know nothing whatever about Mazaroff's will, I never knew he'd made one. And I'm very sure that if his will is found, and I have to handle his money, I shall just transfer it to whom it belongs—to his widow and daughter."

But Crole had got a hand on my arm by that time, and was dragging at me.

"Sit down, Holt, you d—d young ass!" he muttered strenuously. "Sit down!—leave this to me." He, too, got on his legs—his voice sounded suave and placatory as he turned to the coroner.

"I think, sir, that this has scarcely anything to do with the object of this inquiry. I suggest that the inquest be adjourned until—"

"I'm about to do that," broke in the coroner. "During the next few days, more light will doubtless be thrown on all these matters." He turned to the open-mouthed jurymen. "This day fortnight, gentlemen, and in the meantime—"

I paid no heed to the coroner's platitudes about keeping open minds—my own mind was in a whirl of indignation against Mrs. Elphinstone's solicitor. But when I turned in her direction, I saw that Mrs. Elphinstone herself had crossed over from her seat and was talking earnestly to him. Presently he came up to me, with a half-amused, half-ingratiating smile.

"You're a bit hot-tempered, Mr. Holt," he said. "Come, come!—I was only speaking professionally, you know—professional manners, after all, are—"

"Confoundedly offensive, sir, if that's a specimen of them!" I retorted. "You were inferring that—"

"Now, now, I wasn't inferring anything!" he interrupted soothingly. "I've the interest of my client to consider. I say again, it's an odd thing that Mazaroff or Merchison didn't mention his will to you. But the whole thing's odd," he went on, looking round, "and what I suggest is that we legal gentlemen and the parties concerned just have a talk, if we can find a place to talk in."

I took them into the private sitting room which Mazaroff and I had chartered and I still retained—the three solicitors, Mr. and Mrs. Elphinstone, and Sheila. The solicitors did most of the talking that followed: it was all about the chances of recovering the missing will and the possibilities of settling up the original draft—which was wholly in Mazaroff's handwriting and also bore his signature—if no recovery was made. The discussion didn't interest me: I resolved, after what I had heard, that I should never touch one penny of the dead man's money.

Suddenly Crole smote the table at which he was sitting. "Who murdered this man?" he exclaimed, with emphasis. "That's the question! Who murdered him, and why? He was a man of mystery, evidently. And as I've asked before—was he murdered as Mazaroff, or as Merchison? I think we may have to go back—perhaps a long way. But it seems to me that the murder must be cleared up as a start."

Just then Maythorne came in, closing the door behind him.

"Gathered anything?" asked Crole.

"Well—something," answered Maythorne. "No secret about it, either. Manners tells me that a certain man named Parslave, Ralph Parslave, better known as Ratty, who lives in a cottage on the outskirts of Birnside, has never been home since the day of that fair. He's a man who lives by himself and seems to be a sort of odd-job man; occasional drover, game-watcher, rat-catcher—"

"Everybody knows Ratty Parslave!" interjected Sheila. "He's a local celebrity."

"Just so," said Maythorne. "Well, the police have ascertained that he came in here, in company with other men, drovers and so on, returning from the fair, on the evening of the murder. He was one of the company to which Mazaroff stood drinks and cigars. Of course the police have already got a theory—they think that Parslave, who, they say, has been in what they call trouble before, saw Mazaroff make a display—unconsciously—of his money. They think he slipped out of the barroom, perhaps with no very definite intention; that chancing to pass the open door of this private room he saw Musgrave's gun hanging on those hooks, stepped in, took it down and cleared off with it; that he afterward followed Mazaroff across the moor, shot him dead, and robbed him; after that throwing the gun away where it was found, and clearing out with the proceeds of his crime. That, I say, is the police theory."

"Who Murdered This Man?" He Exclaimed, With Emphasis.

"And what do you think of it?" asked Wetherby.

"It's a good theory—from a policeman's point of view," said Maythorne. "There may be a great deal in it. But speaking for myself, I should like to know more about the dead man's personal, private history, recent as well as past. One matter in particular needs clearing up. He told Mr. Holt that he wanted to see some man here at Marrasdale. Who was that man? Did he see him?"

Nobody of course, could answer that question, and the conference broke up.

We buried Mazaroff—or Merchison—that afternoon, very quietly, and in the evening Webster drove Crole, Maythorne and myself to Black Gill Junction, where we caught the night mail for London. For Maythorne was unusually keen on seeing the officials at the Imperial Banking Corporation of South Africa, and on finding out all he could about Mazaroff in general, and the receipt for the registered letter indorsed "BL. D. 1.," in particular. At half past ten next morning we were all three closeted with an important personage of the bank, who, as soon as he knew our business, became keenly interested about Mazaroff and the circumstances of his death. I believed he was going to prove a valuable aid, but as soon as he saw the receipt and its date he shook his head.

"Ah!" he said. "The man who would deal with Mazaroff's account and letters, at the date of this receipt, is no longer here. He was Mr. Armintrade—he left us six months since, to become manager of Courthope's."

I think it was greatly to my credit that I controlled my features and the rest of me when this sudden announcement was made, neither staring nor starting at the mention of Armintrade's name. Even Crole, old and hardened man of law that he was, could not refrain from a very slight start of surprise. Maythorne, of course, showed no surprise; his face, always cheerful and bright, betrayed nothing.

"I know Courthope's—by reputation," he remarked. "Then—you yourself can't tell us anything very much about Mazaroff?"

"I can tell you what I know," replied our informant, evidently quite willing to talk. "We know Mazaroff as a very wealthy man who had extensive dealings in trading affairs, and latterly in diamonds and other precious stones, in the East, and in South Africa. He kept his principal account at our Cape Town headquarters, but for years he has had a smaller account here as well. Lately, he transferred his Cape Town account here; he also realized all his various properties and paid the proceeds in here, with a view to reinvestment in English securities."

"Then you hold a considerable sum of his?" suggested Crole. "We understand that it is about eight hundred thousand pounds?"

"About that, I dare say," assented the manager, almost indifferently. "Rather more, I fancy. Oh, yes—a wealthy man! And the will, you say, is lost?"

"Missing temporarily, we hope," said Crole. "But Postlethwaite has the original draft, in Mazaroff's own handwriting, and signed by Mazaroff. Can you tell us anything of Mazaroff—personally?"

"Next to nothing," answered the manager. "He called here, just once, some time after his arrival in London. I saw him—in this very room. He wasn't here five minutes. He said he was just going for a tour in the north of England, and would look in on his return, a few weeks hence. And—that's all."

A few minutes later we all left. And once outside the great door of the bank, Crole gave Maythorne a sharp glance.

"Um!" he said. "Armintrade!"

"Just so!" said Maythorne. "As you say—Armintrade!"

"A man might have reasons, when a man he knows is murdered under his very nose, for not coming forward to say that he knows him," observed Crole. "But—I think, considering everything, that if I'd been in Armintrade's position the other day I should have said, 'I know this man—he's so-and-so, and I'll tell you all I know about him.' Eh?"

"I'll tell you what I think," Maythorne said. "Armintrade is the man whom Mazaroff wanted to see at Marrasdale moor! Now then—did he see him? Holt doesn't know—nobody knows—at least, nobody that we've heard of. But—Armintrade's the man! Armintrade, as we've just heard, did all Mazaroff's business at the bank we've just left—it was into Armintrade's hands that the registered letter of which I've got the receipt in my pocket would fall. We must have a little talk with Armintrade. But before that—" he paused and waved his hand to a passing taxicab—"before that we're going to examine Mazaroff's rooms and belongings at the Hotel Cecil."

The three of us were presently in the rooms wherein I had first met the dead man. Maythorne made some discoveries that were of use, if of no great apparent moment. In an old trunk he found some schoolbooks: on the flyleaf of each was written the name Andrew Merchison, with dates: these he handed to Crole.

"There's no doubt whatever that he was Merchison," said Crole, turning these things over. "It's not likely that he'd have kept these books else. These will come in handy to show to Mrs. Elphinstone. But I wish there were more papers."

Maythorne, however, found some papers—in a letter case that lay in a drawer, unlocked, in Mazaroff's writing table. These were letters—private letters, all, with one exception, written recently from Cape Town by a Mr. Herman Kloop, who appeared to be a close personal friend of Mazaroff. There was next to nothing about business affairs in them—they were chiefly filled with gossip, club gossip, personal details, and such matters: the sort of stuff exchanged by old cronies. But they had this value, observed Maythorne—he now had a name and address in Cape Town to which he could cable for certain information about the dead man.

The one letter not written by this Mr. Herman Kloop was in the same case that held the Kloop letters, but in an envelope which bore on its flap the impressed seal of the Imperial Banking Corporation of South Africa, with the address of the London branch. Maythorne immediately drew attention to the postmark and date: the letter had been posted in London on the previous 3rd of January.

"From Armintrade to Mazaroff, without doubt," said Maythorne. Then his face fell.

"Written in cipher!" he exclaimed.

The sheet of notepaper was almost filled with writing. But to us it was all so much unmeaning jargon: we could make neither head nor tail of it. There were, however, certain things on the sheet of paper which were plain enough. The paper itself was the ordinary letter paper of the bank, with its title and address engraved at the top of the front page. The letter began in understandable English—Dear Mr. Mazaroff. And it ended in plain English—Yours faithfully, John Armintrade. But all that went between, a hotch-potch of cabalistic words and figures, was so much double Dutch to all three of us.

"A cipher!" repeated Maythorne. "Mazaroff, of course, would have a key. In his pocketbook, no doubt, and therefore stolen. Well!—it's more evident than ever that we must have a little conversation with Mr. John Armintrade."

We left the hotel. Maythorne immediately hurried off to the nearest telegraph office: he was keen on cabling to Mr. Herman Kloop for some highly necessary news of Mazaroff. And as it was then well past noon, Crole and I turned into Romano's for some lunch.

"This is a queer business, Holt," said Crole as we settled down in a comfortable and quiet corner. "I mean—what we've found out this morning. You've seen this man Armintrade?"

"For a few minutes only," I replied.

"What sort is he?" he asked. "You'd have thought that he'd have come forward and said that he'd had business dealings with Mazaroff. Instead—not a word!"

"He looks the sort of man who would probably reply to that that Mazaroff's death was no concern of his," I suggested. "He gives one that impression."

"Aye, well," remarked Crole, "we shall just have to find out a few things—leave it to Maythorne."

I left Crole after lunch and went home to my rooms in Jermyn street. I spent a quiet afternoon there, and a quiet evening, and I went to bed early. And at nine o'clock next morning, in came Maythorne.

"Had a cable late last night from Cape Town," he announced. "Mr. Herman Kloop is in London—at the First Avenue hotel. Come along—we'll collect Crole, and interview Kloop, at once."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Changes Brought About in Food Associations

Nowhere else, save in these United States, is there such a blend of food resources and contrasting food tastes of different racial strains, writes Muriel Allen King in the New York Herald Tribune. In pre-war, pre-prohibition days, there was great pride in local cookery. Certain dishes were indelibly associated with certain sections of the United States. One went to New England to eat clam chowder, brown bread and baked beans; to Texas to get tamales; to Virginia to luxuriate on spicy baked ham and crisp corn pone. There were, possibly, tea rooms in Boston, Kansas City, or in Greenwich village, which nobody knows today, that advertised "real southern waffles," but the Greek lunch counter had not quite erased the idea that certain dishes were appropriate to certain feasts, that certain foods were traditional mates and companions to other foods.

Backbone of a Camel

The backbone of the single-humped camel is not curved upward in the middle, as many people suppose. It is as straight as the backbone of a horse or elephant. Humps on all camels are composed chiefly of fat and they vary in size according to the physical condition of the animals. When they are worked hard and poorly fed their humps shrivel up and become flaccid. Much of the ability of camels to travel long distances over the desert without food and water is due to this extra fat in their humps. The surplus fat is reabsorbed by the body when the animal does not get sufficient food and water. Thus the hump serves as a sort of commissary department from which the animal receives sustenance in time of famine. In certain breeds of sheep extra fat is stored in the tail.—Pathfinder Magazine.

Eyes Never Sleep

What could be more inactive than a person's eyes while he is sleeping soundly? But Prof. Walter R. Miles, a Stanford university psychologist, has completed researches on the state of the eyes during sleep which indicate that the eye muscles perform definite work while the lids are closed. The pupils contract, the eyes are rolled up in the head, then the muscles surrounding the eye pucker up. None of these are relaxation, as commonly supposed. In fact Professor Miles believes that our entire sensory system is more or less active during sleep.—Pathfinder Magazine.

Missing Rembrandts

It is not generally known that there are no fewer than 70 lost Rembrandts, some of them possibly in the possession of very poor people. If they only knew, they might possess the wherewithal to maintain themselves not only in comfort but even in luxury for life. All 70 are described in ancient records as having been painted by the master. One London art dealer has already devoted many years to a quest for these lost masterpieces. Some of them have been missing for centuries. The principal reason why they are still missing is that their owners do not realize their identity.

Daddy's Evening Fairy Tale

MARY GRAHAM BONNER

TURKEYS' PRIDE

"You remember the other day how Grandfather Turkey told us about the way we were well fed when Thanksgiving time was drawing near, and how we were eaten for that day?" asked George Turkey.

"I remember," said John Turkey.

"I've been thinking it over ever since then," said young Master Turkey.

"When we first heard the news," he continued, "that we were going to be fed for a special day and only were going to be fed so that people could eat us, we thought it a little strange.

"You remember that Grandfather Turkey told us that would be the reason for our fine names, but that now in the springtime we must keep our feet dry and not catch cold so we could grow into splendid, strong turkeys?"

"We most certainly do remember it," said the other two turkeys.

"We did feel just a little better after a few moments of Grandfather Turkey's talk," said young Master Turkey, "because he said that it was fine to live a glorious life full of food even if it were not to be for long.

"That cheered us up a bit."

"Yes," said young George Turkey, "that made me feel quite happy again."

"It made me feel the same way," said young John Turkey.

"But I've been feeling happier since then," said young Master Turkey.

"Has it made you happier to think it all over?" asked young George Turkey.

"It has," said young Master Turkey.

"That Cheered Us Up a Bit."

"I've been thinking more about it, and I've been finding out more about it.

"There are a number of old turkeys around the barnyard and they've been telling me all that happens.

"They've been telling more of the same talk as Grandfather Turkey told us.

"They have said that some of us would be eaten when Thanksgiving day came around again, but that it was a long time away.

"I found out more about that day, too, you know.

"It's a day when people are thankful for everything they've got—health, sunshine, happy homes, people who love them and whom they love—and oh, they've got very many things for which to be thankful.

"But mostly they're thankful because a good many years ago this country in which is this barnyard was a very young country and it was through brave men who didn't mind suffering many trials that they could build up the country.

"So people celebrate this day every year to show they are thankful that they are living in this country.

"So we should do our parts, too, if it means that we're to be eaten."

And the young turkeys felt proud that they were singled out for such a fine day as Thanksgiving and in the meantime they could have a very nice summer ahead of them.

POSERS

Eight questions follow. They will test your ingenuity in finding the right answers. Don't worry if they "pose" you, for that is what Posers are supposed to do!

1. What musical instrument did Nero play?
2. What animal was associated with Dick Whittington?
3. On which side of a tree is moss usually found?
4. What is the chief difference between traffic regulations in England and the United States.
5. Where are the world's greatest diamond mines found?
6. When did the "gold rush" to California take place?
7. Is the Pacific ocean east or west of Russia?
8. How many are there supposed to be in a "baker's dozen"?

Answers to Posers.

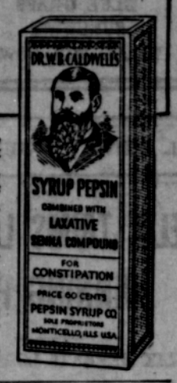
1. A violin. 2. A cat. 3. The north, or shady side. 4. In England traffic keeps to the left; in the United States, to the right. 5. In South Africa. 6. In 1848-9. 7. East. 8. Thirteen.

A Good Crop

Dog Catcher—Do your dogs have licenses?

Small Boy—Yes, sir, they're just covered with them.—Kansas Wesleyan Advance.

Would you like to try this doctor's laxative free of charge?



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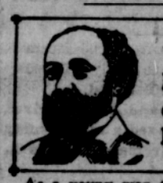
Brazilian City's Elevator

Bahia, in northern Brazil, has an elevator tower containing two elevators to bring people from the plateau to the level of the bay. The city is built on two levels, and each elevator has a capacity of 27 passengers and speed of 700 feet a minute, which means that nearly 4,000 passengers an hour can be carried the distance of 195 feet which separates the two parts of the city.



What this Doctor did for Humanity

As a young man the late Dr. R. V. Pierce, practiced medicine in Pennsylvania and was known far and near for his great success in alleviating disease. Finally he moved to Buffalo, N. Y., and put up in ready-to-use form, his GOLDEN MEDICAL DISCOVERY, the well known tonic for the blood. This strength builder is made from a formula which Dr. Pierce found most effective when in private practice.

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War on Coyotes From Air

Instinctive cunning has failed to protect coyotes against air raids in North Dakota. George Albrecht and William Fisher are the aerial coyote hunters and they are experiencing marked success. Fisher pilots the plane and Albrecht does the shooting.

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Gave Telephonic Consent

Unable to attend the wedding of his daughter, Miss Florence Mills, a graduate of Vassar, Maj. Byron J. Mills "gave her away" over long-distance telephone wires when she was married recently to Albert Hawkins in Calgary, Canada. Major Mills was at his home in Seattle, Wash., when the words came over the wire. "Who giveth this woman away?" "I do," answered the bride's father in Seattle and the marriage ceremony became a fact.

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