



by S.S. Van Dine  
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**SYNOPSIS**

Philo Vance, expert in solving crime mysteries, is called in to investigate the supposed suicide of Archer Coe.

**CHAPTER I—Continued**

"It looks as if our suspicions were unfounded," he said in a low voice. "Coe is sitting in his chair, a black hole in his right temple, and his hand is still clutching a revolver. The electric lights are on. . . . Look, Vance."

Vance was gazing at an etching on the wall at the head of the stairs. "I'll take your word for it, Markham," he drawled. "Really, y' know, it doesn't sound like a pretty sight. And I'll see it infinitely better when we've forced an entry."

At this moment the front door bell rang violently, and Gamble hastened down the stairs. As he drew the door back, Sergeant Ernest Hennessey burst into the lower hallway.

"This way, Sergeant," Markham called. Heath and Hennessey came noisily up the stairs.

"Good morning, sir." The sergeant waved a friendly hand to Markham. Then he cocked an eye at Vance. "I mighta known you'd be here. The world's champion trouble-shooter!" He grinned good-naturedly, and there was genuine affection in his tone.

"Come, Sergeant," Markham ordered. "There's a dead man in this room, and the door's bolted on the inside. Break it open."

Heath, without a word, hurled himself against the crosspiece of the door just above the knob, but without result. A second time his shoulder crashed against the crosspiece.

"Give me a hand, Hennessey," he said. "That's a bolt—no foolin'. Hard wood."

The two men threw their combined weight against the door, and now there was a sound of tearing wood as the bolt's screws were loosened.

During the process of battering in the door, Wrede and Grassi mounted the stairs, followed by Gamble, and stood directly behind Markham and Vance.

Two more terrific thrusts by Heath and Hennessey, and the heavy door swung inward, revealing the death chamber.

The room, which was at the extreme rear of the house, was long and narrow, with windows on two sides. There was a bay window opposite the door, and a wide double window at the left, facing east. The dark green shades were all drawn, excluding the daylight. But the room was brilliantly lighted by an enormous crystal chandelier in the center of the ceiling.

At the rear of the room stood an enormous canopied bed, which, I noticed, had not been slept in. On the right was a large embayed book-case filled with octavo and quarto volumes, and, facing the door was a mahogany kidney-shaped desk covered with books, pamphlets and papers—the desk of a man who spends many hours at literary labor. To the left of this desk, in the east wall, was a large fireplace. Gas logs were in the grate. About the walls hung at least a dozen Chinese scroll paintings. Had there not been a bed and a dressing table in the room, one would have taken it for a collector's sanctum.

These details of the room, however, protruded themselves upon us later. What first focused our attention was the inert body of Archer Coe, with its quiet pallid face and the black grisly spot on the right temple. The body was slumped down in a velour upholstered armchair beside the desk.

There was an expression of peace on the thin aquiline features of the dead man; and his eyes were closed as though in sleep. His right hand—the one nearest the fireplace—lay on the end of the desk clutching a carved ivory-inlaid revolver of fairly large caliber. His left hand hung at his side over the tufted arm of the chair.

There was a straight Windsor chair behind the desk, and I could not help wondering why Coe had selected the armchair at the side of the desk, facing the door. Was it because he had considered it more comfortable for his last resting place in life? The answer to this passing speculation of mine did not come for many hours; and when it did come, as a result of Vance's deductions, it constituted one of the vital links in the evidential chain of this strange and perplexing case. Coe's body was clothed in a

green silk-wool dressing gown which came near to his ankles; but on his feet, which were extended straight in front of him, was a pair of high, heavy street shoes, laced and tied. Again a question flashed through my mind: Why did Coe not wear bedroom slippers with his dressing gown? The answer to this question also was to prove a vital point in the solution of the tragedy.

Vance went immediately to the body, touched the dead man's hand, and bent forward over the wound in the forehead. Then he walked back to the door with its hanging bolt, scrutinized it for a moment, ran his eye around the heavy oak framework and lintel, and turned slowly back to the room. A frown wrinkled his brow. Very deliberately he reached in his pocket and took out another cigarette. When he had lighted it, he strolled to the west wall of the room and stood gazing at a faded Ninth century Chinese painting.

In the meantime the rest of us had pressed around in the body of Coe, and stood inspecting it in silence. Wrede and Grassi seemed appalled in the actual presence of death. Wrede spoke to Markham.

"I trust I did right in advising Gamble to call you before breaking in the door. I realized now that if there had remained a spark of life—"

"Oh, he was quite dead hours ago," Vance interrupted, without turning from the painting. "Your decision has worked out perfectly."

Markham swung about.

"What do you mean by that, Vance?"

"Merely that, if the door over-ruled with solicitous friends, and the body handled for signs of life, and all the locked-in evidence probably destroyed, we would have had a deuced difficult time arrivin' at any sensible solution of what really went on here last night."

"Well, it's pretty plain to me what went on here last night. It was Heath who projected himself, a bit belligerently, into the talk. 'This guy locked himself in, and blew his brains out. And even you, Mr. Vance, can't make anything original outa that.'"

Vance turned slowly and shook his head.

"Tut, tut, Sergeant," he said pleasantly. "It's not I who am going to spoil your simple and beautiful theory."

"No?" Heath was still belligerent. "Then who is?"

"The corpse," answered Vance theory."

Before Heath could reply, Markham, who had been watching Vance closely, turned quickly to Wrede and Grassi.

"I will ask you gentlemen to wait downstairs. . . . Hennessey, please go to the drawing room and see that these gentlemen do not leave it until I give them permission. . . . You understand," he added to Wrede and Grassi, "that it will be necessary to question you about this affair after we have had the verdict of the medical examiner."

The two, followed by Hennessey, passed out of the room and down the stairs.

"And you," said Markham to Gamble, "wait at the front door and bring Doctor Doremus here the moment he arrives."

Gamble shot a haunted look at the body, and went out.

Markham closed the door, and then wheeled about, facing Vance, who now stood behind Coe's desk gazing down moodily at the dead man's hand clutching the revolver.

"What's the meaning of all these mysterious innuendos?" he demanded testily.

"Not innuendos, Markham," Vance returned quietly, keeping his eyes on Coe's hand. "Merely speculations. I'm rather interested in certain aspects of this fascinating crime."

"Crime?" Markham gave a mirthless smile. "It was all very well for you to theorize before we got here—and I was inclined to agree with you that suicide seemed incompatible with Coe's temperament—but facts, after all, form the only reasonable basis for a decision. And the facts here seem pretty clear-cut. The door was bolted on the inside; there's no other means of entrance or exit to this room; Coe is sitting here with a revolver in his hand, and a hole in his right temple. There is no sign of a struggle; the windows and shades are down, and the lights burning. How, in Heaven's name, could it have been anything but suicide?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Vance shrugged wearily. "But it wasn't suicide—really, don't y' know." He frowned again. "And that's the weird part of it. Y' see, Markham,

It should have been suicide—and it wasn't. There's something diabolical—and humorous—about this case. Humorous in a grim, satirical sense. Some one miscalculated somewhere—the miser was sitting in a game with the cards stacked against him. . . . Positively amazing!"

"But the facts," protested Markham.

"Oh, your facts are quite correct. As you lawyers say, they're irresistible. But you have overlooked additional facts."

"For instance?"

"Regard yon bedroom slippers." Vance pointed to the foot of the bed where a pair of red slippers were neatly arranged. "And then regard these heavy boots which the corpse is wearing. And yet he has on his dressing gown, and is sitting in his easy chair. A bit incongruous, what? Why did the hedonistic and luxury-loving Coe not change his footwear to something more relaxing for this great moment in his life? And note that haste was not a factor. His robe is neatly buttoned; and the girdle is tied in an admirable bow-knot. We can hardly assume that he suddenly decided on suicide half-way through his changing from street clothes to negligee. And yet, Markham, something must have compelled him—to sit down, stretch his legs out, and close his eyes before he had finished the operation of making himself sartorially comfortable."

"Your reasoning is not altogether convincing, Markham countered. 'A man might conceivably wear heavy shoes with a dressing gown.'"

"Perhaps," Vance nodded. "I shan't be narrow-minded in these matters. But, assuming Coe is a suicide, why should he have chosen this chair facing the door? A man bent on doing a workmanlike job of shooting himself would instinctively sit up straight, where he could perhaps brace his arms and steady his hand. If he were going to sit by the desk at all he would, I think, have chosen the straight chair where he could rest both elbows on the top and thus insure a steady, accurate aim."

"His arm is on the end of the desk," Vance said.

"Oh, quite—and in a rather awkward position—eh, what? Considering how low the easy chair is, Coe could not possibly have had his elbow on the desk when he pulled the trigger. If so, the shot would have gone over his head. His arm was necessarily lower than the desk when the gun was fired—if he fired it. Therefore, we must assume that after the bullet had entered his brain, he lifted his right arm to the desk and arranged it neatly in its present position."

"Maybe yes and maybe no," muttered Heath, after a pause during which he studied the body and raised his own right hand to his forehead. Then he added aggressively: "But you can't get away from that bolted door."

Vance sighed.

"I wish I could get away from it. It bothers me horribly. If it wasn't for the fact that the door was bolted on the inside, I'd be more inclined to agree that it was suicide. A man of Coe's intelligence wouldn't plan suicide and then deliberately make it difficult for anyone to reach his body. What could he have gained by securely bolting the door on the inside so that it would have to be broken in? The act of shooting would have been over in a second; and there was no danger of his being disturbed in his own bedroom. Had he killed himself he would have wanted Gamble—or some one else—to find him at the earliest possible moment. He would certainly not have placed deliberate difficulties in their way."

"But," argued Markham, "your very theory contradicts itself. Who but Coe could have bolted the door on the inside?"

"No one apparently," answered Vance with a dispirited sigh. "And that's what makes the affair so dashed appealin'. The situation reads thus: A man is murdered; then he rises and bolts the door after he arranges himself; and later he slays his departed in an easy chair so as to make it appear like suicide."

"That's a swell theory!" grunted Heath disgustedly. "Anyway, we'll know more about it when Doc Doremus gets here. And my bet is he's going to wash the whole case up by calling it suicide."

"And my bet is, Sergeant," Vance replied mildly, "that he's going to do nothing of the sort. I have an irresistible feeling that Doctor Doremus will inform us that it is not suicide."

Heath screwed his face into a questioning frown and studied Vance. Then he snorted.

"Well, we'll see," he mumbled.

Vance paid scant attention. His eyes were moving over the desk. At one side of the blotter lay a quarto volume of "Li Tai Ming Ts'u T'ou P'u," by Hsiang Yuan-pien.

"You see, Markham," he said, "Coe was apparently dreaming of his latest acquisition in peach-bloom shortly before he departed this life. And it is rather safe to assume that a man contemplating suicide does not indulge his acquisitiveness and investigate the history of his ceramic wares just before sending a bullet into his brain."

Markham waited without answering.

"And see's something, else rather significant," Vance pointed to a small pile of blank note paper in the middle of the blotter. "This

paper is lying a little on the bias, in the position that a right-handed man would place it if he contemplated writing on it. And, also, note that at the head of the first page is yesterday's date—the Wednesday, October 10—"

"Ain't that natural?" put in Heath. "All these birds who commit suicide write letters first."

"But, Sergeant," smiled Vance, "the letter isn't written. Coe got no farther than the date."

"Can't a guy change his mind?" Heath persisted.

Vance nodded.

"Oh, quite. But in that case, the pen would, in all probability, be in the holder set. And you will observe that the pen container is empty, and that there is no pen visible on the desk."

"Maybe it's in his pocket."

"Maybe," Vance stepped back and bending over, ran his gaze over the floor round the desk. Then he knelt down and looked under the desk. Presently he reached out his arm and, from beneath the right-hand tier of drawers, drew forth a fountain-pen. Rising, he held the pen out.

"Coe dropped the pen, and it rolled under the desk." He placed it beside the note paper. "Men don't ordinarily drop fountain pens in the middle of writing something, and then fall to pick them up."

Heath gazed in silence, and Markham asked:

"You think Coe was interrupted in the midst of writing something?"

"Interrupted? . . . In a way perhaps." Vance himself seemed puzzled. "Still there are no signs of a struggle, and he is reclining on an easy chair at the end of the desk. Furthermore, his features are quite serene; his eyes are closed peacefully—and the door was bolted on the inside. . . . Very strange, Markham."

He walked to the shaded window and back, stoking leisurely. Suddenly he stopped and lifted his head, looking Markham straight in the eyes.

"Interrupted—yes! That's it! But not by any outside agency—not by an intruder. He was interrupted by something more subtle—more deadly. He was interrupted while he was alone. Something happened—something sinister intruded—and he stopped writing, dropped the pen, forgot it, rose, and seated himself in that easy chair. Then came the end, swift and unexpected—before he could change his shoes. . . . Don't you see? Those shoes are another indication of that terrible interruption."

"And the gun?" asked Heath contemptuously.

"I doubt if Coe saw the gun, Sergeant."

**CHAPTER II**

**A Strange Discovery.**

AT THIS moment the front door downstairs opened and shut with a bang, and we could hear a rather strident feminine voice addressing the butler.

"Morning, Gamble. Take my clubs and tell Liang to rustle me up some tea and muffins."

Then there came a sound of footsteps on the stairs, and Gamble's appealing voice said:

"But Miss Lake, I beg of you—just a moment, please."

"Tea and muffins," came Miss Lake's voice curtly; and the footsteps continued up the stairs.

Markham and Heath and I stepped toward the door just as the young woman reached the upper landing.

Miss Hilda Lake was a short, somewhat stockily built woman of about thirty, strong, resilient and athletic-looking. Her blue-gray eyes were steady and, I thought, a trifle hard; her nose was small and too broad for her face; and her lips were full though unemotional. Her yellow-brown hair was cut short and combed straight back from a broad, low forehead.

As she reached the head of the stairs and saw Markham, she came forward with a swinging stride and held out her hand.

"Greetings," she said. "What brings you here so early? Business with uncle, I suppose." She ran her eyes appraisingly over Heath and me as she spoke and frowned. Then before Markham could answer she added: "Anything wrong?"

"Something seriously wrong, Miss Lake," Markham replied, trying to bar her way into the room. "If you will be so good as to wait—"

But the young woman, with an aggressive gesture, brushed past us and entered the room. The moment she caught sight of Archer Coe she went swiftly to him and knelt down, putting her arm about him.

"Hey! Don't touch that body!" Heath stepped quickly up to her and put his hand on her shoulder none too gently, pulling her to her feet.

She swung toward him angrily, her feet wide apart.

Markham stepped diplomatically into the breach.

"Nothing must be touched, Miss Lake," he explained, "until the medical examiner arrives."

She regarded Markham calculatingly.

"Is it also against the law to tell me what's happened?" she asked.

"We know little more than you do," Markham returned mildly. "We have just arrived, and we found your uncle's body exactly as you see it."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

**MONK, THE HERO**  
By R. H. WILKINSON  
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"THE Fine Films Motion Picture company," said Elmer Stone, "returned to its location in the vicinity of the Suncook river, below Fred Barrow's lumber camp, the second year after Monk Saladine had won temporary fame in 15 minutes' time by plucking the leading lady of a film, then in the process of production, from the white waters of the lower rapids."

"Monk, you know, joins us boys at the Barrow's camp every year for the winter's cutting. He is a powerfully built youth, good-natured and loving, though at times decidedly trying. He has a superlatively complex, a manner of boasting and imagining hair-raising experiences in which he always plays the heroic role."

"Fortunately we of the Barrow's camp know and like Monk. We tolerate him because of his kind and gentle soul. And because each winter we attempt to make him the butt of some practical joke which will cure him once and for all of his loquaciousness."

"This year was by no means an exception. Monk had monopolized the majority of our evenings with long and detailed recitations of his experiences during the preceding summer, and by spring we were fed up, tired of the clatter of his tongue, bored to death at sound of him. And, as usual, the boys began putting their heads together, striving to think of some plan whereby Monk would be taught the folly of his ways."

"It was the movie company that gave Dipper McGege the idea for the suggestion. The Fine Film people had become established near the lower rapids at about the same time our spring drives were getting under way. Fred Barrows informed us they planned to take some shots of the drive, to be used in the filming of a Northwest thriller."

"Fred also said that the company's director would pay handsomely to secure a double to replace his leading man during an especially breath-taking episode."

"Whereas none of us were eager to risk our necks for the sake of a few extra dollars, Dipper McGege strolled one day over to the movie lot and inquired after the job. That night he conveyed to us the nature of the doubling act and proposed, also, that of all us boys, Monk Saladine was the man to fill the bill."

"Monk wasn't present at the moment, and Dipper went into details. It seems that the hero of the story was supposed to be scaling the cliff, which overlooks the river just above the lower rapids. He is carrying in his arms the leading lady. Midway down the cliff the hero's foot slips and he plunges into the river below and is swept away into the rapids. It was, declared Dipper, this episode in the drama which caused the leading man to get cold feet and demand the substitution of a double."

"It was a risky piece of business even for a man experienced in that sort of work. But if anyone could accomplish the act it was Monk Saladine, though we suspected even he would display some reluctance when the proposition was offered. However, Dipper had foreseen this difficulty."

"Dipper's plan was to sell Monk the idea of accepting the doubling position, using as a persuasive measure the fact that he would win fame as a picture actor. This, thought Dipper, would be entirely suited to the talkative one's vanity. No need, declared Dipper, to mention the inevitable plunge into the river. It would never occur to Monk that it was impossible to descend the cliff. It would never occur to him, either, that all the credit for the hazardous experience would go to the leading man who, of course, would be safely installed on solid ground."

"The plan was a good one, and as Dipper had predicted, Monk fell in with it heartily enough. His mind was a single-track affair, and he pictured himself as the hero of a movie drama."

"Dipper had previously conversed with the movie director, and it had been agreed not to mention the river plunge, or that we boys would be waiting on the rocks below in the rapids should danger of drowning threaten our hero."

"The day for the 'stunt' arrived, and Monk, after listening to detailed instructions from the director, took his place on the cliff above the river. Below on the rocks we boys arranged ourselves and settled down to enjoy the episode. Camera men were placed with their machines at various points up and down the river and on the cliff above."

"Suddenly we heard the cry 'camera' and saw Monk appear on the edge of the cliff. He held in his arms the limp form of a girl. Without hesitation he began over the cliff's edge and stepped the perilous descent."

"Hardly had he got underway before we saw a commotion on top of the cliff. We heard shouts and saw wildly gesticulating figures. And we noticed, also, that the girl in

Monk's arms had begun to struggle wildly. The camera men and directors who were stationed at the foot of the cliff also began to shout and point.

"Puzzled, we sat still and watched, conscious of a feeling that something had gone wrong. And then above the roar of sound we caught a word or two and guessed what had happened."

"It was Dipper's fault. Dipper had failed to tell Monk that before beginning his descent of the cliff he was supposed to substitute the leading lady, whom he was rescuing, for a dummy. And if the directors had mentioned the substitution to Monk, he had, under the excitement of the moment, overlooked the fact."

"He was making that perilous descent with a live girl in his arms, unsuspecting that sooner or later it was inevitable that the precarious holds which the cliff offered, give way, and he plunge into the river below."

"Things looked bad; worse because there was now no stopping him."

"Down he came, inches at a time. Breathlessly we watched, doubtful, regretful, afraid."

"And then suddenly it happened. Monk had reached a point midway down the cliff and had paused. The girl in his arms was quiet now, probably having fainted. We saw him clutch frantically at an outgrowing bush, saw the bush tremble, saw Monk reach for another, fall; saw him sway outward, clutching wildly at the crumbling earth, saw him plunge into space, still gripping the girl; saw his body turn over once and come hurtling down toward the river."

"We were on our feet, waiting for them to come to the surface, skeptical about their fate. Alone, with our help, Monk might have been saved. But with the girl on his hands, it was twice as difficult. We knew he wouldn't think twice about himself when the girl was in danger."

"Suddenly two heads bobbed above the surface. Monk shook the water from his eyes, reached out and grabbed the girl and began swimming toward the opposite shore, away from us. We shouted for him to turn, but a moment later realized he'd used his head. The current on our side would have swept them into the rapids."

"It looked like a losing fight even at that. The current was swift; the girl was a dead weight. But Monk was not only fighting to save himself and the girl from death, he was fighting for his vanity."

"Just how he accomplished the feat only Monk can tell. And in the telling he will leave nothing for the imagination; nor any doubt as to his own heroism. We have heard the tale a hundred times since, and can do naught but listen and condemn Dipper for thinking up such a fool idea."

"For Monk not only reached the opposite bank and saved the girl, but the cameras caught every move of the rescue. Every detail of the adventure was recorded by the machines. And the film later proved to contain more realism than the director had ever dreamed about."

"Monk was pronounced a hero, given a bonus in addition to the promised reward, and offered a contract to stunt for the company during the summer."

"But, in spite of everything, Monk returns to the Barrow's camp each fall for the winter's cutting, and to entertain us with stories of his exaggerated experiences. Of course, we haven't told him how our plan to cure him of his loquaciousness went haywire. He'd never believe us, after what happened."

**Pious Parties Complain of Annoyance to Camels**

The road from Jidda to Mecca is a sand track, worn to a thin powder by the passage of countless plodding camels. A few years ago camels had the road almost to themselves save for a few very decrepit motor buses, which, for a fantastic fee, took the richer pilgrims to Mecca with quite as many bumps and alarms as they would have experienced had they been on camel back.

The guides are loud in protest and abuse of the motors, which fling choking clouds of dust all over the pilgrims.

"Away, thou son of a dog! By Allah! What an invention of the devil! May your bones break and be burnt to cinders by the sun!"

But in another few years the poor cameleers may have still more cause to protest, for the road along which the pilgrims travel will probably be the route of the proposed Jidda-Mecca railway.

The loading of pilgrims on the camels at Jidda is a revelation to the westerner. The hotelkeeper produces a flimsy ladder, and amid birdlike screams, up scramble father and mother and perhaps a baby or two, to the canopy which adorns the animal's back.

Once inside the canopy, the passengers behave like dogs settling into their baskets for the night, twisting and turning among their baggage to make comfortable beds for the long journey ahead.

Finally they look for all the world like so many Roman emperors and empresses reclining after a particularly large meal, says the National Geographic Magazine.

**Personality**  
"You are known to others," said Hi Ho, the sage of Chinatown, "less by your personality than by that of a servant who meets a stranger at the door."

**Housewife's Idea Box**



**FOR ICE-BOX COOKIES**

An ice cream container makes an excellent mold for ice-box cookies. Press your cookie mixture into the carton firmly. Put on the cover. Place it in the refrigerator. When you are ready to bake, tear away the cardboard and you have a perfectly shaped cylinder to cut up into cookies.

THE HOUSEWIFE.  
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WNU Service

**Swamp's Mysteries Now Hidden for All Time**

The dismal Pymatuning swamp near Espyville, Pa., is disappearing beneath dollars impounded by a million-dollar state dam, closing its secrets to mankind forever.

Natives of this boggy area 25 miles south of Lake Erie insist that strange monsters, survivors of their species of an earlier geological era, roamed in the semi-tropical heart of the swamp.

Biologists, skirting the fringes of its mucky depths, found unknown plants and animals believed to have survived the Glacial age. Beautiful orchids, poisonous reptiles and carnivorous plants abounded there.

Natives say the half-rotted hull of the ship Griffith, abandoned by De Soto after the expedition up the Shenandoah river was bogged in the marsh over 350 years ago.

The Delaware Indians called the swamp "the dwelling place of the crooked-mouth man." They warned of a "great spirit of many shapes," which rose from the swamp with the moon.

White men laughed and began to explore. Some never appeared again. Skeptics discounted the stories told by the few who returned. Soon the truth will be covered with 5 to 14 feet of water.

**Week's Supply of Postum Free**

Read the offer made by the Postum Company in another part of this paper. They will send a full week's supply of health giving Postum free to anyone who writes for it.—Adv.

**Man and Mirror**

Men have a penchant for sneering at the vanity of women and cite the fatal fascination a mirror holds for them. But did you ever see a man pass up a mirror? And did you ever study his maneuvers? If he thinks he's alone he'll give his visage the once over and register complete approval of the reflection. But if there is anyone around, he behaves in a thoroughly masculine manner. If he isn't making ostentatious efforts to straighten his cravat, he