



by S.S. Van Dine
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WNU SERVICE

SYNOPSIS

Philo Vance, expert in solving crime mysteries, investigates the supposed suicide of Archer Coe. District Attorney Markham and Vance go to Coe's house. They find Wrede, a friend of Coe's, there; also Signor Grassi, a guest. The door of the death chamber is bolted from the inside. They force it. Coe is clothed in a dressing gown, but wears street shoes. Vance says it is murder. The medical examiner finds evidences of a crime. He says Coe had been dead for hours when a bullet entered his head. It is proved that Coe was fully dressed when he was stabbed. They find a wounded Scotch terrier. Vance takes the dog to a veterinarian, declaring the animal should prove an important connecting link. Gamble says Brisbane Coe, Archer's brother, left for Chicago the previous afternoon, but his dead body is discovered in a coat closet in the Coe home. Vance interrogates the Chinese cook, Liang, and afterwards finds a bit of porcelain from a Chinese vase, with blood on it. Brisbane died from a stab in the back, as in Archer's case.

CHAPTER V—Continued

Lips stared straight ahead. His Wrede moved, but no sound came from them.

"Tell us what you know about this double murder, Mr. Wrede," Vance went on with grim relentlessness.

"A shiver ran over Wrede's body. I know nothing about it," he replied after a painful pause. "Gamble told me this morning that Brisbane was in Chicago."

"He started for the station yesterday afternoon, but returned here last night—to meet his death."

"Why—should he return?" stammered Wrede.

"Have you any ideas on the subject?"

"I? The man's eyes opened wide. 'Not the slightest idea.'

"What do you know of the conditions here at the Coe house yesterday? I would like as full a description as you can give."

"I was here talking to Archer Coe from ten to twelve yesterday morning—"

"About ceramics—or Miss Lake?"

Wrede caught his breath.

"Both," he answered weakly. "The fact is, Archer and I had a somewhat bitter session regarding my coming marriage with Miss Lake. But it was nothing unusual. He was, as you may know, violently opposed to the marriage. Brisbane took part in the discussion, and called Archer some rather harsh names. . . ."

"And after that?"

"I lunched in my apartment. Then I went to an auction at the American art galleries. But I had a bad headache. So I came home around three, and lay down. I did not leave my apartment again until this morning, when Gamble phoned me."

"You live next door, do you not?"

"The first house to the east, across the double vacant lot."

"Who owns the vacant lot?"

"It is part of the Coe estate."

"And you remained in your apartment from three o'clock yesterday afternoon until this morning?"

"That's right. I had a beastly headache. . . ."

"Did you see Miss Lake yesterday?"

"Yes, in the morning when I was here. The fact is, I made an appointment with her for last night at the Country club. But when I got home yesterday afternoon I called her up by phone and excused myself. I was in no condition for dancing."

"Mr. Grassi substituted for you," said Vance.

Wrede's eyes clouded, and he set his jaws.

"So she told me this morning."

"When Gamble phoned you this morning," Vance asked, "what was your mental reaction to the news?"

Wrede frowned.

"That would be difficult to analyze. . . . I was not overfond of Archer," he admitted; "and I was not personally distressed by the report of his death. But I was extremely puzzled. It was not like Archer to take his own life; and—frankly—I had very grave doubts. That is why I advised Gamble to get in immediate touch with Mr. Markham."

"You acted wisely," Vance observed, with a tinge of sarcasm. "But if you did not believe that Archer Coe had committed suicide, there must have been to your mind another possibility—in wit; that of murder. Who, Mr. Wrede, do you think would have had sufficient motive to commit the crime?"

Wrede did not answer at once. He appeared sorely troubled and ran his fingers several times through his hair.

"That is a question I have been

trying to answer all morning," he replied without looking at Vance. "One may speculate, of course, but it would not be fair to voice those speculations without definite evidence of some kind. . . ."

"Mr. Grassi?"

"I—really, Mr. Vance, I'm not well acquainted with the man. He was after Coe's collection of Chinese ceramics; but that would hardly constitute a motive for murder."

"No-o," Vance smiled frigidly. "What about Miss Lake?"

Wrede almost leaped from his seat.

"That suggestion is outrageous!" he cried, glowering at Vance. "How dare you—?"

"Spare me the drama," Vance cut in, with a contemptuous smile. "I'm deuced difficult to impress."

Wrede sat back, with a mumbled remark which we could not make out.

"What do you think of Liang, the cook?" Vance asked next.

The man glanced up with a swift, shrewd look.

"Liang, eh? That's quite different. There's something secretive and underhand about that Chinaman. I've never wholly understood his being here. He's certainly not a cook by profession; and from my apartment window I've often seen him sitting on the rear porch writing for hours. My impression is he's a spy of some kind. And he knows Chinese art. I distrusted him from the first." Wrede nodded his head sagely. "If you knew more of what was back of his presence here, you might know more of Archer Coe's death. . . . At least," he hastened to add, "that is my impression."

Vance stifled a mild yawn.

"The oriental temperament is full of mystic potentialities," he commented. "And my own impression is that Liang knows something about what happened here last night. But, as you suggest, a motive in that direction is still lacking. On the other hand, you yourself had abundant motive for going away with Archer Coe."

"Archer was admittedly opposed to your marriage with his niece," Vance went on. "And until he died Miss Lake was limited to a small allowance. She would have received her patrimony at Archer's decease. Thus, if you had successfully put Archer out of the way, you would have at once gained a fairly wealthy bride—with no obstacles. Is it not so, Mr. Wrede?"

The man gave a harsh laugh.

"Yes, I suppose so. As you point out, I had ample motive for murdering Archer. But, on the other hand, I would have had no reason whatever for murdering Brisbane."

"Ah, yes—Brisbane. Quite—quite. That second corpse complicates the whole matter."

"Where was Brisbane's body found, may I ask?"

"In the closet at the end of the lower hall. . . . You didn't perchance, open the coat closet this morning?"

"No!" Wrede shuddered. "But I came very near it. Instead, I threw my hat on a chair in the drawing room."

He lapsed into retrospection. Presently Vance resumed his interrogation.

"By the way, Mr. Wrede, are you interested in Chinese ceramics?"

"Not particularly. I have a few pieces, but I'm no expert. However, I couldn't help learning something about the subject during my long association with Archer."

Vance walked to the table behind the davenport, and pointed at the Tao Kuang vase.

"What's your opinion of this Ting yao?"

Wrede rose and came forward.

"Ting yao?" There was a perplexed look in his eyes. "That's not a Ting yao, is it?"

"I don't believe it is. But I was under the impression that Archer Coe kept a Ting yao vase of the same shape on this table."

Wrede stood, his hands behind him, looking down at the vase. Suddenly he said:

"By Gad, he did, Mr. Vance! But this isn't the vase." He looked at Vance questioningly. "Has this vase anything to do with—?"

"It's difficult to say," Vance replied. "It merely struck me as peculiar that Archer would have a vase like this in his collection."

"It is peculiar," Wrede turned his attention again to the table. "This vase might have been substituted for the other."

"It was," said Vance laconically. "Aha!" Wrede, for some reason I could not understand, seemed pleased; and I asked myself if he were thinking of Grassi.

Vance glanced at his watch.

"That will be all, Mr. Wrede,

You'd better run along and get some lunch. But we may want you tomorrow. Will you be at your apartment?"

"Yes, all day." He hesitated. "May I see Miss Lake before I go?"

"By all means. And you might break the news to her of Brisbane's death."

Wrede went out, and we could hear him mounting the stairs. Markham rose nervously.

"What do you make of the fellow?" he asked.

"Peculiar character—far from appealing. I wouldn't choose him for a boon companion."

"It occurred to me," said Markham, "that he might have opened the hall closet this morning, and, because of what he saw, told Gamble to phone me."

"It's possible," Vance nodded. "The same thought flitted through my mind. Anyway, it's safe to conclude he doesn't care a great deal for Grassi. It struck me he was jealous of the Italian. But Wrede's real passion of hatred is directed toward the cook. He has sized up Liang pretty accurately. . . . It's strange that Archer, with his Sinological knowledge, didn't suspect Liang's true status."

"Maybe he did," Markham suggested, without interest.

Vance looked up quickly and took his cigarette from his lips.

"My aunt! Maybe he did! . . . There came a pounding of heavy footsteps on the hall stairs, and the next moment Beaming was standing in the door, beaming triumphantly. He held something in his hand and, crossing to the table, he threw the object down for our inspection.

It was one of the most beautiful and interesting Chinese daggers I have ever seen. The blade tapered from a thickness of about half an inch at the guard to a stiletto-like point, and was partly encrusted with dried blood. That this dagger was the murder weapon was obvious at one glance.

"Good work, Sergeant," said Vance. "Where did you find it?"

"Under the cushion seat of the easy chair where we found the dead yao this morning."

"Oh, I say! Really? In Archer Coe's bedroom?" Vance seemed agog.



"But This Isn't the Vase—"

tonished at Heath's announcement. "Most amazing! . . ."

Heath watched him a moment and then looked back at the dagger.

"And not a chance to pick up a fingerprint," he complained with disgust. "A silk handkerchief. He chewed viciously on his burnt-out cigar.

"No—no fingerprints," murmured Vance without lifting his eyes from the floor. "But that isn't the chief difficulty, Sergeant. Brisbane Coe was stabbed hours after Archer Coe was stabbed. The whole thing is mad. . . ."

He continued pacing in a brown study. Suddenly he drew up short.

"Sergeant! Bring me Brisbane Coe's topcoat—the black-and-white tweed one—from the hall closet." His voice held a tinge of excitement.

Heath left the room and returned shortly with the garment.

Vance began turning the pockets inside out. From the left-hand outside pocket he drew forth two pieces of fine, waxed linen string about four feet long. He was about to throw these to one side, when he suddenly bent forward and inspected them. One end of each piece of string was tied securely to a large bent pin.

Heath was looking on with rapt fascination.

"And what might that be, Mr. Vance?" he asked.

Vance did not answer, but put his hand again into the left-hand pocket of the topcoat. When he withdrew it he was holding a long slender piece of steel.

"Ah!" he exclaimed with satisfaction.

We all looked down at it wonderingly. It was perhaps the last thing in the world we expected to see.

The object which Vance had taken from the pocket of Brisbane Coe's coat was a darning needle!

CHAPTER VI

More Bloodstains.

MARKHAM looked from the needle back to the little pile of string, and then at Vance.

"Well, what does that mean—if anything?" he asked.

Vance slowly picked up the needle

and the two pieces of string and put them in his own coat pocket.

"It means deviltry, Markham. And it means that we are dealing with a shrewd, subtle, and tricky brain. The technique of this crime had been thought out to several decimal points—and then everything went wrong. The murderer was forced to add complications to his plot to cover himself. And he has confused the issue out of all recognizability. . . ."

"But who used this string and needle? And for what purpose?"

Vance looked up gravely.

"If I knew who used them, I'd have an important key to the entire situation. The fact that they were in Brisbane's topcoat means little. That is the logical place that anyone would have put them after having used them. It's always safe, don't you know, to throw suspicion on a dead man."

Markham stiffened and his eyes became hard.

"You believe the same person killed both Brisbane and Archer?"

Vance nodded. "Undoubtedly. The technique of both murders was the same; and the same weapon was used in both killings."

"But," argued Markham, "the dagger was found in Archer's bolted bedroom."

"That's another incredible complication," Vance returned. "Really, you know, the dagger shouldn't have been there. It should have been here in the library."

"Here?" Markham uttered the word with astonishment. "But why in the library? Neither man was killed here."

"I wonder. . . ." Vance leaned over the table, deep in thought. "It would have been the logical place . . . and yet neither body was found here. . . ."

"Why was this room the logical place?" Markham asked sharply.

"Because of this substituted Tao Kuang vase and the broken piece of Ting yao porcelain with the blood on it—" He stopped abruptly and his eyes drifted into space. "That bloodstained Ting yao! . . . Ah! What happened after that? . . . The vase was broken?—what would the stabber have done then? Would he have gone out, taking the blood with him? . . . No! He wouldn't have dared!—it wouldn't have fitted in with his sinister purpose. He would have been afraid. He was hiding something, Markham. . . ." Vance looked about the room. "That's it! He was hiding something! . . . Twice he hid it. . . . and then something unexpected happened—something startling and upsetting. The corpse should have been here in the library, d'ye see; and therefore the dagger had to be here.

"I have a theory, Markham—a theory to account for this certain contradictory phases of this case—but I wouldn't dare express it—yet. It's too outlandish. And moreover, it doesn't fit two-thirds of the facts. . . . But give me a few minutes. Let me see if I can verify one important item in my theory. If I'm able to find what I'm looking for, we'll be a little farther along."

He walked to the mantelpiece and stood before a large blue-green vase.

"A beautiful example of Tsui se," he said, running his fingers over the glaze. He put his finger in the neck. "Too small," he commented, and moved to another vase—a bottle-shaped, dark-red specimen—at the further end of the mantel.

"One of the most perfect examples of Lang yao I've ever seen—ox-blood, or sang de boenf, as we call it." He fingered the vase lovingly and held it toward the light.

Vance set the vase back on the cabinet, and let his eyes run over the other ceramic specimens in the room. But he did not linger over any one of them. He gave them merely a casual inspection. He seemed to be searching for some particular type of vase, for he would hesitate here and there, shake his head as if in rejection, and pass on to other pieces. At last he completed his rounds and halted. There was a distinct look of disappointment on his face as he turned back to us.

"I'm afraid my theory is a mere broken reed," he sighed.

He came back slowly toward the center of the room where we were grouped about the davenport and the circular table. As he reached the end of the library table, he halted and looked down at a small low teakwood stand on which stood a cornucopia-shaped white vase. Vance approached the vase.

"That's dashed interesting!" he murmured. "A piece of late Ting yao—from the Yung Cheng era, I should say."

He picked up the vase and began inspecting it.

"A rather thick biscuit, and decorated in relief; copied from an ancient bronze. . . . Angular crackling in the glaze, which is brittle and glossy. . . . A very beautiful and perfect specimen."

As he talked, he moved toward the window and held the vase to the light in such a manner that he could look inside it.

"I believe there is something here," he said. Moistening his finger on his tongue, he put his hand deep into the vase. When he withdrew it there was a red smear on the end of his finger.

"Yes, quite so," he said, looking closely at his finger.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Recall Origin of "Stone Broke"

The expression "stone broke" originated from the old custom of breaking a craftsman's stone bench when he failed to pay his debts.

HOW TO SHOOT
By Bob Nichols
Shooting Editor, Field and Stream

EVERY year in the United States when the hunting season rolls around, more than 7,000,000 healthy boys and robust men take to the field, gun in hand. Reports of hunting accidents begin drifting in to the newspapers. Some come back blinded by a careless load of shot from a friend's gun. Others come back with hands and arms and legs blown off. Some never get back alive.

The pity of the whole bloody business is that there was almost never a hunting accident yet that wasn't caused by somebody's needless, foolish carelessness. The only plausible excuse for the accident might be where a hunter faints in the field and falls on the muzzle of his gun. All other accidents are inexcusable.

So far as I can remember, I have never yet met a really good shot who was careless with his gun, loaded or unloaded. Every good shot knows that once or twice during his life his gun may go off unexpectedly. He's always ready for it when it happens. His accidentally let-off load plows harmlessly into the ground, or up into the air, where it can hurt no one.

Merely from the practical standpoint, it is smart to be careful with your gun. You will be invited on enjoyable and successful hunting parties much more often, where the careless man with a gun never gets a second invitation. Careless gun handling is simply bad shooting manners. You make everybody near you nervous and uneasy. You get yourself disliked. Real sportsmen have nothing but anger and contempt for you. Be careful and gentlemanly in your gun handling and you will have much more pleasure hunting, have more good friends—and, important too, you may live longer.

Never keep a shotgun loaded about the house. Never leave shells where childish hands can slip them into the gun. Never point an "empty" gun at anything you do not wish to KILL.

When loading your gun in the field, never slip the shells in until you have looked through the barrel to see that there is not a bit of cleaning rag or other obstruction. Obstruction in the barrel will burst your gun on firing.

If you should fall in the field, again open your gun and look through the barrel. You may have filled the muzzle with mud, or snow, either of which will burst the gun on firing.

Never cross a fence with your gun cocked, or with the safety off. Put your gun through the fence muzzle first and lay it on the ground. Never stand it up against the fence. You may jar it down as you clamber over. Hundreds of careless gunners have crossed fences—and the Great Divide—at the same time, through that act.

When you meet friends or strangers in the field and stop to chat and pass the time of day, break your gun if it is a double barrel—let the other man see that it is safe. Other types of guns, shove the safety on, and let the friend or stranger see you do it. This is only careful courtesy.

Never get into a car with a loaded gun. Never load your gun while still in your car. Never permit anyone else to have a loaded shotgun in the car you are in.

Never shoot heavy loads in an old gun that was manufactured long before the modern high-pressure loads were invented. To do so may result in having your hand or face torn off. Consult your local gun dealer about what loads your gun will stand. He should be able to tell you.

Never shoot at game on a level through brush that you can't see beyond—your partner or another hunter may be there. Think before you shoot. You have more time than you imagine. Never hesitate to call another gunner down for carelessness. Call him down hard. Every real sportsman will applaud you.

Be careful! You'll never be a good shot until you're a CAREFUL shot.

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Napoleon Was a Failure as Writer, Record Shows

Eighteenth century documents recently brought to light establish the little-known fact that Napoleon Bonaparte, before he became a military conqueror, had a burning ambition to become a great writer, writes J. P. Bowles in the Golden Book Magazine, who says that he spent seven years in vain efforts to write, successively and, finally, in chaotic, gave up with the remark: "I no longer have the petty ambition to become an author."

Between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four, the documents disclose, Napoleon made nine separate attempts to gain a career as a writer, but met with nothing but disappointment.

In one of the two short stories there appears the following significant sentence—the last sentence of the second story: "To what lengths," exclaimed Napoleon, "can the mad desire for fame carry a man?"



REASON FOR DISSENSION

Mrs. Wray had died, and dad wanted to put up some sort of memorial to her. A stained-glass window in the local church being suggested, dad agreed, and left all arrangements in the hands of the minister.

At length the window arrived, and was fitted into position, and dad, in an unusually excited frame of mind, went out to view it.

The minister escorted the old chap into the church, and, with a flourish, indicated the window, which depicted an angel.

"How do you like it?" said he.

Dad gazed at it thoughtfully.

"No good," he grunted.

"Why, what's your objection?"

"It ain't a bit like the old woman."

—London Tit-Bits.

TOO MANY "SWEET SOUNDS"



Top Flat Tenant—Say, Miss Nightingale, you'll have to stop this singing at all hours of the night or I'll complain to the landlord.

The Solid Truth

Maisie, the film star, looked down in the mouth.

"What's the matter, honey?" asked her co-star.

"The director," murmured Maisie. "He told me that I'm getting rather fat and losing my sex appeal."

The other star shrugged her shoulders.

"What did I tell you, my dear," she said. "It's dieting you want. You can't eat your cake and have 'it,' too."—London Answers.

Enough Is Sufficient

Old Pa Stubblefield—That kid Homer wants me to pay his debts again.

Old Ma Stubblefield—That boy's young and you got to make allowance.

Old Pa—I made him a monthly allowance to start with and I've raised it twice. Now I'm through makin' allowances.

Pursuit of Knowledge

"Is your boy Josh learning much in college?"

"I don't know," answered Farmer Cornstossel. "Judging by some of his favorite magazines, I'm inclined to think he has found out a lot of things he's keepin' to himself."

Burned Kid

"I want to let you in on the ground floor," said the enthusiastic slicker. "Nothing doing," replied the intended victim. "I learned from one experience that all those ground-floor are full of trapdoors that drop you down into the cellar."

Recognition

"Do you think we ought to recognize Russia?"

"I don't know," answered Senator Sorghum. "Russians shouldn't expect to be mistaken for Santa Claus simply because they wear large whiskers."

Sure Would

Miss Gusher—How wonderful to see that volume of water tumbling down Niagara falls.

Guide (bored)—How much more wonderful it would be to see it all going up the other way.

Joint Account

No Imagination There

"Most of the trouble we have is imaginary," said the philosopher.

"Which proves you never have tried to eat molasses candy with store teeth," snapped the other one. —Cincinnati Enquirer.

Her First

He—Have you decided what we'll give your old aunt for her ninety-first birthday?

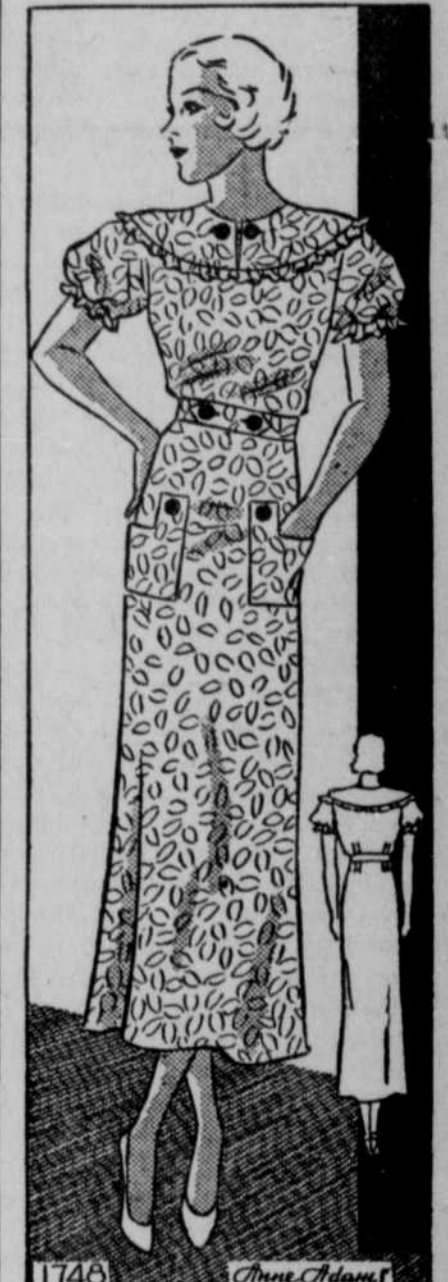
She—No. But, now I come to think of it, the poor old maid has had very little pleasure all her life. You might just write her an anonymous love-letter.—Vancouver Province.

MORNING FROCK ALL WILL ADMIRE

PATTERN 1748

Here is a morning frock that women just love on sight—and before which impressionable males go down like ninepins. Maybe it is that feminine little frill at the edge of the yoke that does the trick and maybe it's the come-hither of those little puffed sleeves—and again maybe it is just the whole pretty package. As to the cause we are a bit hazy, but there is no doubt about the effect. If you are the kind of woman who just must improve upon a thing, however good—or if you need two new morning frocks—try making one of plain material with a contrasting yoke and belt trim.

Pattern 1748 is available in sizes 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30 and 32.



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HOME HAPPINESS

"Would you marry for wealth?"

"No," answered Miss Cayenne, "I couldn't think of being bothered with a person who is constantly worried about his income tax."

Blissful Ignorance

Tommy came home from school the other day and said: "Mother, we've got a poor teacher. Why, she doesn't even know a horse."

"Oh," said mother. "What makes you think that, Tommy?"

"Well, I did a drawing of a horse and she asked me what it was." —Ashington Collieries Magazine.

SOMETHING OF A NOVELTY



"You seem very patient with shoppers, young man. Don't mind showing goods."

"I used to canvass from door to door. It's a novelty to me to find people even willing to look at the stuff."

The Leader

WRIGLEY'S SPEARMINT

THE PERFECT GUM