



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 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 says Coe had been dead for hours when a bullet entered his head. He had been stabbed. The investigators find a wounded Scotch terrier in the house. Vance declares 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 did Archer. Heath brings in the dagger which killed both men. Vance, searching Brisbane Coe's coat, finds some waxed thread attached to a bent pin, and a darning needle. It is learned that Wrede once had a dog, which he gave to a friend, a Doberman Pinscher. Gamble finds a lipstick in Coe's wastebasket, indicating that a woman called on the murdered man the night of his death.

CHAPTER VII—Continued

We went into Brisbane Coe's room, which was at the front of the house on the west side. On the north wall beside the window was a series of simple built-in bookshelves extending to the ceiling. There were, I estimated, between three and four hundred volumes on them, all neatly and meticulously arranged.

Vance went to the window and threw up the shades, and began running his eye systematically over the volumes.

For so small a number of criminological volumes, Brisbane Coe's collection was unusually complete. In surveying the titles one got the impression that, had he gone in for crime, he would have been highly practical rather than subtle.

Vance glanced over the books rapidly but carefully.

"It should be here, y' know," he murmured, as if to himself, "unless it's been taken away."

He got up and began to check the volume numbers of the various sets of books. When he came to a red-and-gold set of the "Aussensetter der Gesellschaft" he gave a nod and stepped down to the floor.

"A volume missing," he announced. He scanned the upper bookshelves carefully. "I wonder..." Then he dropped on his knees and began going more thoroughly over the section of fiction.

When he had come to the lowest shelf he reached forward and took out a thin red-and-gold volume.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed. "That's deuced interestin'. Markham, it's significant that the missing volume of the 'Aussensetter der Gesellschaft' should be found cheek by jowl with a book dealing with a pin."

Markham took his cigar from his mouth, stood up, and faced Vance with a serious face.

"I see what you mean," he said. "You think that Brisbane, by the help of these books on criminology, worked out some way of bolting Archer's door from the outside, by the use of those pins and string."

Vance gave an affirmative nod.

"Either Brisbane or some one else. It was quite a technical operation. He picked up the 'Aussensetter der Gesellschaft' volume. 'I think I'll do a bit of pryin'—if you could bear to wait for me a short while.'"

Markham made a gesture of acquiescence.

The three of us left Vance alone in Brisbane's room, and as I closed the door, I saw Vance stretch himself out on the davenport with the two books.

An hour later he came to the head of the stairs and called down to us. We joined him in Archer's bedroom.

"I think I've found a solution to one phase of our problem," he announced seriously, when we were seated. "But it may take a bit of working out." He opened the book. "The tale, as I gather at a hasty reading, relates of a dead man found locked in a vault with a key to the door on the table before him. The vault door was locked from the outside, of course. . . . Here's the explanatory passage: 'No other word he spoke, but took something from his pocket; it was a reel of stout cotton. Then from his waistcoat he produced a new pin, and with great care and solemnity tied the thread to the end of the pin, Tab watching him intently. And all the time he

was working, Rex Lander was humming a little tune, as though he were engaged in the most innocent occupation. Presently he stuck the point of the pin in the center of the table, and pulled at it by the thread he had fastened. Apparently he was satisfied. He unwound a further length of cotton, and when he had sufficient he threaded the key upon it, carrying it well outside the door. The end he brought back into the vault, and then pushed it out again from the inside through one of the airholes. Then he closed the door carefully. He had left plenty of slack for his purpose and Tab heard the click of the lock as it was fastened, and his heart sank. He watched the door fascinated, and saw that Lander was pulling the slack of the cotton through the air-hole. Presently the key came in sight under the door. Higher and higher came the sagging line of cotton, and the key rose until it was at the table's level, slid down the taut cotton, and came to rest on the table. Tighter drew the strain of the thread and presently the pin came out, passed through the hole in the key, leaving it in the exact center of the table. Tab watched the bright pin as it was pulled across the floor and through the ventilator. . . . That's the way the author worked his locked door."

"But," objected Markham, "There was an open ventilator in the door, and space beneath the door. These conditions are not true here."

"Yes—of course," Vance returned. "But don't overlook the fact that there was a string and a bent pin. At least they are common integers in the two problems. . . . Now, let's see if we can combine those integers with certain common integers of another case." He opened the other book, "Konrad," Vance explained, "was a truck driver in Berlin nearly fifty years ago. His wife and five children were found dead in their cellar room; and the door—a ponderous affair without even a key-hole or space around the molding—was securely bolted on the inside. The case was at once pronounced one of murder and suicide on the part of the mother; and Konrad would have been free to marry his inamorata (whom he had in the offing) had it not been for an examining magistrate of the criminal court, named Hollmann. Hollmann for no tangible reason, did not believe in the suicide theory, and set to work to figure out how Konrad could have bolted the door from without. . . . Here's the revelatory passage—if you'll forgive my rather sketchy translation of the German: 'Hollmann determined, as a last resort, to give the entire door, both inside and outside, a microscopic examination. It required hours of labor, but in the end he was rewarded. Just above the bolt he found on the inside, close to the edge of the door, a very small hole which was barely discernible. Opening the door he inspected the outside surface directly opposite to the hole on the inside. But there was no corresponding hole visible. Hollmann did find on the outside of the door, however, a small spot on which the paint seemed fresher than that on the rest of the door. He borrowed a hatpin from one of the tenants of the building and heating it, ran it through the hole on the inside. With but little pressure the heated hatpin penetrated the door, coming out on the outside exactly in the center of the newly painted spot. Moreover, when Hollmann withdrew the hatpin a piece of tough horsehair adhered to the pin; and on the pin was also discernible a slight film of wax. . . . It was obvious then how Konrad had bolted the door from without. He had first bored a tiny hole through the door above the bolt, looped a piece of horsehair over the bolt's knob, and slipped the two ends through the hole. He had then pulled the bolt-knob upward until the horsehair loop was disengaged, withdrawing the horsehair through the hole. A piece of the horsehair had, however, caught in the hole and remained there. Konrad had then filled up the hole with wax and painted it on the outside, thereby eliminating practically every trace of his criminal device.'"

Heath, as Vance finished reading, leaped to his feet.

"That's a new one on me," he stood scowling at the door. "The cases in those two books are easy enough to understand but neither of 'em will work here."

"Maybe the two together will work," suggested Vance. "Look at the wall just to the right on the jamb and opposite to the bolt. Do you see anything?"

"I don't see much," he grumbled. "Right in the crack of the jamb

and wall there's what might be a pinhole."

"That's it, Sergeant!" Vance rose and went to the door, and Markham and I followed him. "I think I'll try the experiment I have in mind."

We all watched him with fascinated interest. First he reached in his pocket and drew forth the two pieces of string and bent pins and the darning needle he had found in the pocket of Brisbane Coe's overcoat. By means of his pocket knife he straightened one of the pins and inserted it in the hole Heath had found in the wall at the edge of the jamb, giving it several taps with the handle of his knife to drive it in rather securely. He then threaded the other end of the string in the darning needle and passed it through the keyhole into the hall, removing the needle and letting the string fall to the hall floor. After this operation he bent the other pin securely round the upright knob of the bolt, passed the string over the pin he had driven into the wall, and, threading this second string into the darning needle, passed it also through the keyhole to the hall. He then opened the door about 18 inches, drawing the two strings partly back through the keyhole in a loop to permit the door to swing inward without disturbing his mechanism.

"Let us see if the device works," he said, with an undercurrent of suppressed excitement. "You stay in the room while I go outside and manipulate the strings."

He bent down and passed under the two strings into the hall. Then he closed the door gently. Presently we saw the string which was attached to the bolt knob go taut, as Vance drew it slowly through the keyhole. Passing over the pin in the wall, which acted as a pulley, the string described a sharp angle, with the pin in the wall as the apex. Slowly Vance drew the string from outside and the bolt, getting a straight pull around the pin, began to move into its socket on the jamb. The door was bolted!

The next thing we saw was the tightening of the other string—the one attached to the head of the pin in the wall. There came several jerks on the string—the pin in the wall resisted several times and bent toward the source of the pull. Finally, it was disengaged from the wall; and it was then drawn upward from its depending position, disappearing through the keyhole.

"Grassi neither moved nor spoke. Perhaps he regretted the bargain he had made with you," Vance continued. "Perhaps he decided to call the deal off, after thinking it over alone with his treasures. . . . Perhaps he thought it best to inform you immediately of his decision so you would not talk of the transaction to Doctor Montrose. . . ."

Still Grassi did not move, but the inevitable impression he gave was that Vance had guessed the import of the telephone call he had received at the curator's home the night before.

"I can well imagine how you felt, Mr. Grassi," Vance went on, without alteration of tone. "But really, y' know, you shouldn't have threatened him."

Suddenly the Italian's pent-up emotions broke forth.

"I had every right to threaten him!" he burst forth, the blood rushing back to his face. "For a week I have been negotiating—meeting his constantly increasing prices. Finally, yesterday, we reached an understanding. He puts it in writing, and I cable to Italy announcing my success. Then he rejects the agreement; he tells me he will not sell—that he has changed his mind. He insults me over the telephone; he says I would break every vase he owned before he would let me have them."

Vance gave a mirthless smile.

No wonder you were a bit disconcerted at the sight of those Ting yao fragments! . . . But, Coe didn't smash the vase, Mr. Grassi. That desecration was achieved—inadvertently—by the person who killed him. Most unfortunate, what?"

Vance got to his feet wearily.

"That will be all for the present," he said.

Grassi made a low bow and left the room.

Markham addressed Vance as soon as Grassi was out of hearing.

"A curious and ominous situation, Grassi is refused the collection, on which he has obviously set his heart and staked his honor; and he threatens Coe. Then he disappears for three hours, saying he took the wrong train; and this morning Coe is found dead, with all the superficial indications of a suicide."

"But why should he also stab Brisbane?" Vance asked dispiritedly.

"And why the revolver? And why the bolted door? And especially why the Scotland?"

"You were counting a great deal on the dog this morning," Markham observed.

"Yes, yes—the dog." Vance lapsed into silence for a while, his eyes gazing out of the east window.

"And no one here liked dogs—no one but Wrede. Funny he should give his pet away. . . . Vance's voice was scarcely audible; it was as though he were thinking out loud."

"A Doberman Pinscher . . . too big, of course, to keep in a small apartment. And I wouldn't take Wrede for a dog lover. Too unsympathetic. . . . I think I'll have converse with him."

He stepped to the telephone. A moment later he was talking with Wrede. The conversation was very brief, but during it Vance jotted down some notes on the phone pad. When he had replaced the receiver Markham gave an exasperated grunt.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Whales Timid, Affectionate
Zoologists say whales, biggest of mammals afloat, are timid and even affectionate.

"He was shutting to and fro over our complicated transportation system—according to his tale," smiled Vance. Then he turned to the detective. "I say, did Doctor Montrose give you any tidbits of gossip regarding Grassi's call?"

"Nothing, sir. Except that the Italian was called up on the phone during dinner."

When the detective had gone Vance went to the telephone and called Doctor Montrose at his home. After a few minutes' conversation he hung up the receiver and paced up and down.

"That phone call to Grassi," he murmured—"very strange. Doctor Montrose says it upset Grassi terribly. Hardly finished his dinner, and seemed in a hurry to get away. The phone was in the hall just outside the dining room door and Montrose couldn't help hearing some of Grassi's end of the conversation. Montrose says he protested bitterly against the message he received—called it an outrage, and intimated strongly that he would take steps. . . . Steps—now what could that mean? and who could have called him and upset him? Who knew he was going to Montrose's for dinner? . . . Perhaps Brisbane. . . . or Archer. . . ."

Vance sat down and inhaled deeply of his cigarette.

"Archer—yes, it could have been. . . . Sergeant, suppose you fetch the signor."

Heath went from the room, and Vance said to Markham: "Ceramics, I opine. Nothing would be so likely to stir up Grassi as a disappointment along that line. . . ."

The Italian was ushered in by the sergeant; and Vance went straight to the point.

"Who telephoned to you, Mr. Grassi, at Doctor Montrose's yesterday during dinner?"

Grassi gave a slight start; then looked defiantly at Vance.

"It was a personal matter—my own affair."

"It was Mr. Archer Coe who phoned you, was it not, Mr. Grassi?" came Vance's flat and unemotional voice.

Grassi neither moved nor spoke. Perhaps he regretted the bargain he had made with you," Vance continued. "Perhaps he decided to call the deal off, after thinking it over alone with his treasures. . . . Perhaps he thought it best to inform you immediately of his decision so you would not talk of the transaction to Doctor Montrose. . . ."

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THE LETTER S
A Christmas Story



Salina's and she had not seen him for years; but she would know him in a million, for she had always loved him. He was busy cutting fancy figures on the ice. She stood watching him, her heart skipped beats as she did so.

He must have felt the strong contact of her thought, for suddenly he looked in her direction, but she quickly turned the other way. Then he skated more fiercely than ever, cutting a huge letter "S." She skated about pretending not to notice, but when he started off toward the far end of the lagoon she glided over to where he had cut the figures. There was the old-fashioned letter "S" and another and still another. There were "S's" all over. How she wondered if they represented the regular ice-cutter's "S" or if she really dared hope that they might by any chance stand for "Salina."

The snow was becoming heavier and more cumbersome and she noticed that most of the skaters had already left for home and celebrations. All the way homeward she was thinking about Jean Elroy and stopping at intervals to trace his name in the snow. She must have written it a dozen times or more. The gifts she had been expecting for Christmas suddenly appeared insignificant and useless in comparison to the one vital gift—the love of Jean.

Only with a mighty struggle was Salina endeavoring to join in the Christmas celebrations, for her heart was nearly breaking.

"What is the matter, Salina?" questioned mother, as Salina almost choked with the lump in her throat.

"Nothing, Mother dear, only the Christmas spirit," answered Salina, bravely.

At this very moment Jean was hurrying home whistling merrily, his skates swinging over his shoulders. Suddenly he stopped short at seeing his own name displayed all over the snow, here, there and everywhere. "What on earth could that mean?" It was beautifully lettered and in a girl's handwriting!

Jean, stooping, carefully noted the letters in their every detail. He was determined to learn who the girl could be, who had so thought of him on Christmas eve that she had scrolled his name all over the snow.

Jean quickening his pace, reached home, luckily before the celebrations had begun and skipped up the staircase two steps at a time to his own room. Most excitedly he dug through his belongings in search of a box of old valentines from school days. It was missing! Where could it be?

"Mother, have you seen my valentines?" shouted Jean.

"They are decorating the walls of my room, my dear brother!" taunted Clara-Bell.

The next moment Jean was tearing down the valentines regardless of his sister's protestations.

"Here it is! I knew it! This is the one!"

Crushed in the hand of Jean was a small, red, lace-trimmed heart with the words, "To Jean, from Salina." 'Twas an exact duplicate of the letters in the snow. Now he knew! Dear old Salina! His childhood sweetheart!

Who could be calling on a Christmas eve? They all wondered.

"You had better go, Salina," said Mother, sweetly.

Salina went, brushing aside a rear as she did so.

She opened the door as if in a dream sense. She had apparently lost all sense of reality for the moment.

"Salina!" said Jean.

"Jean, dear," replied Salina. The "dear" just slipped out from her heart before she knew it.

"My name in the snow," said Jean.

"The letter 'S,'" whispered Salina.

"Merry Christmas!" shouted the whole family.

Western Newspaper Union.

HOW TO SHOOT

By Bob Nichols
Shooting Editor, Field and Stream

FREQUENTLY one runs across the shooter who declares he could not do good work in the field without the aid of the matted rib on his shotgun barrel. Of course all American double-barrel shotguns have this matted sighting rib, and there seems to be more excuse for it on the double-tube gun. But the shooters who hold enthusiastically to the necessity for the matted sighting-rib are usually those who shoot single-barrel repeating guns.

I personally do not favor a sighting-rib of any description, matted or otherwise, on a single-tube shotgun. For two reasons.

In the first place the rib adds weight to the gun. And what is more to the point, the rib adds weight at the muzzle where any awkward excess weight should certainly be avoided. Added weight out beyond the support of the hands tends to make the gun muzzle-heavy, unwieldy to handle, slow to swing.

In the second place, the matted rib on the single-tube tends to command too much attention from the eye. Which means that in pointing and aiming, too much of your eyesight is unconsciously drawn to the gun when it should be concentrated on the target. The eye loves straight lines. To prove this, stand on the edge of a cornfield when the crop is only about a foot high and casually glance at various spots in the field. The first impression your eye registers is of the long straight sighting line. Instead of only 30 per cent of your eyesight being concentrated on the gun, 60 per cent on the target, and 10 per cent on the area immediately surrounding the target—you may find yourself devoting a full 50 to 60 per cent of your eyesight on the gun.

No man can hope to become a really fine upland wingshot if his matted-rib gun demands that much of his eye attention. It will make a slow shot of him. He may do well enough when the shooting is in the clear open spaces. But when the cover gets dense and the birds go booming out in twisting, turning flight through the tops of the briars, then the slow-aiming shot has a tough time of it. And many a reproachful look he will get—and deserve—from his faithful old dog.

I feel reasonably certain that some of the leading gun makers of England have already recognized this fault of the too-prominent rib on the upland field gun. For I have run across a number of their fine double-tube guns that are matted with smooth inconspicuous ribs ground concavely on top, and are firely without the matted surface that is so likely to command an excess of eye attention. The ribs on these guns are polished to the same stain-smooth finish of the barrels in aiming one of these fine guns one is not at all conscious of the rib "pulling" too hard on one's eye sight.

Of course, if one's gun does not fit him, then I can see why the matted rib on top would become quite necessary. But on the other hand, if a man's upland gun does not fit him, then he has no business using it anyway. He will never realize his potential shooting skill with such a gun, and should take immediate steps to make the necessary stock adjustments so that his gun will fit.

In duck shooting, especially on high-flying pass shooting, it is not so absolutely essential that a man's gun shall fit him. It can have too much drop at the heel of the stock, have long cumbersome barrels, and be greatly over-weight, and yet he can do good work with it. Because in this type of wingshooting you have plenty of time to adjust yourself to your gun. You see your game coming from a distance. With deliberate movements you aim at most as with a rifle. Your hold must be very accurate because of the long range. This type of duck gun is almost a mathematical instrument. But the upland gun is the tool of an artist!

Western Newspaper Union.

Reasons for Slipping of Human Intelligence

One reason why average human intelligence is deteriorating was suggested at a recent meeting of the Institute of Handicraft Teachers, in London, by Prof. Raymond Butler, head of the Aston Technical college at Birmingham. It is next to Nature's method of training brains by joint use of brains and hands.

Evolutionists believe that the first steps toward human intelligence were taken ages ago by tree animals whose lives required precise co-ordination of hands and eyes; to leap safely between branches, to seize fruits or nuts to eat, to repel enemies, and so on.

Modern tests of how children learn also indicate that similar joint training of hand and eye to work together is an important help in improving individual brains, according to the Baltimore Sun.

Novadays this joint training of hand and eye is rare. Many popular games, such as cross-word puzzles, require none of it. Education has become largely book learning. Even handwriting has deteriorated

HAS WALKED FAR TO WORK

After walking five miles to work and five miles back home every working day for 54 years, a man has been presented a medal by the manager of a factory at Manolis, France. In that time he has hiked 78,000 miles, equal to three times the distance around the world.

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.

And Farther
Many a thing whispered into an ear is heard the town over.

Appetite gone?

A simple thing, perhaps . . . yet a very serious one, resulting in loss of strength . . . body weakness . . . and possibly many other ills. So why not check-up and snap back to the zest of eating and well being. You will find S.S.S. a great, scientifically-tested tonic—not just a so-called tonic, but one specially designed to stimulate gastric secretions and also having the mineral elements so very necessary in rebuilding the oxygen-carrying hemo-globin of the blood to enable you to "carry on." Do try it. Unless your case is exceptional, you should soon enjoy again the satisfaction of appetizing food and good digestion . . . sound sleep . . . renewed strength. Remember, "S.S.S. makes you feel like yourself again."

Do not be misled by the efforts of a few unethical dealers who may suggest substitutes. You have a right to insist that S.S.S. be supplied you on request. Its long years of preference is your guarantee of satisfaction.

the world's great blood medicine

Simple Words Best
Great thinkers say great things usually in simple words because they see what ordinary men do not, how much they mean.

Head COLDS

Put Mentholatum in the nostrils to relieve irritation and promote clear breathing.

MENTHOLATUM Gives COMFORT Daily

To relieve Eczema Itching and give skin comfort nurses use Resinol

The One to Watch
The one you need to keep the closest eye on is—yourself.

CREOMULSION
Your own druggist is authorized to cheerfully refund you money on the spot if you are not relieved by Creomulsion.

COUGHS

FEEL TIRED, ACHY— "ALL WORN OUT?"
Get Rid of Poisons That Make You Ill

Is a constant backache keeping you miserable? Do you suffer burning, scanty or too frequent urination; attacks of dizziness, rheumatic pains, swollen feet and ankles? Do you feel tired, nervous—all unstrung?

Then give some thought to your kidneys. Be sure they function properly, for functional kidney disorder permits poisons to stay in the blood and upset the whole system.

Use Doan's Pills. Doan's are for the kidneys only. They help the kidneys cleanse the blood of health-destroying poisonous waste. Doan's Pills are used and recommended the world over. Get them from any druggist.

DOAN'S PILLS
WNU-U 40-34

Beautiful SKIN—needs more than cosmetics
Beauty of skin comes from within. When constipation clogs the pores with intestinal wastes, the skin is unhealthily. Internally with Garfield Tea. Helps relieve the clogged system promptly and effectively. At your drug store 25c & 10c

Garfield TEA