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THE MYSTERY OF A
HANSON CAB
FERGUS HUME

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HANSOM CAB

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CHAPTER FOUR

MR GORBY MAKES A START

‘Well,’ said Mr Gorby, addressing his reflection in the looking glass, ‘I’ve been finding out things these last twenty years, but this is a puzzler and no mistake.’

Mr Gorby was shaving, and as was his usual custom conversed with his reflection. Being a detective, and of an extremely reticent disposition, he never talked outside about his business, or made a confidant of anyone. When he did want to unbosom himself, he retired to his bedroom and talked to his reflection in the mirror. This mode of proceeding was a safe one, and, moreover, relieved his overburdened mind of anything he wished to speak about yet wanted to keep secret. The barber of Midas, when he found out what

was under the royal crown of his master, fretted and chafed over his secret, until he stole one morning to the reeds by the river, and whispered 'Midas has asses ears.' In the like manner Mr Gorby felt a necessity at times to let out his secret thoughts in talk, and as he did not care about chattering to the air, he made his mirror the confidant of his ideas, and liked to see his own jolly red face nodding gravely at him out of the shining glass, like a mandarin. If that cheap little looking glass which Mr Gorby stared at every morning could only have spoken, what revelations there would have been of Melbourne secrets and Melbourne morals. But then, luckily for some people we do not live in fairy land, and however sympathetic Mr Gorby found his mirror, it revealed nothing. This morning the detective was unusually animated in his talk with the looking glass, and at times a puzzled expression passed over his face. The hansom cab murder had been put into his hands in order to clear up the mystery connected therewith, and he was trying to think of how to make a beginning.

'Hang it,' he said thoughtfully strapping his razor, 'a thing with an end must have a start, and if I don't get the start, how am I to get the end?'

As the mirror did not answer this question, Mr Gorby lathered his face, and started shaving in a somewhat mechanical fashion, for his thoughts were with the case and ran on in this manner:—

‘Here’s a man—well, say a gentleman—who gets drunk, and, therefore, don’t know what he’s up to. Another gent who is on the square comes up and sings out for a cab for him—first he says he don’t know him, and then he shows plainly he does—he walks away in a temper, changes his mind, comes back and gets into the cab, after telling the cabby to drive down to St Kilda. Then he polishes the drunk one off with chloroform, gets out of the cab, jumps into another, and after getting out at Powlett Street, vanishes—that’s the riddle I’ve got to find out, and I don’t think the Sphinx ever had a harder one. There are three things to be discovered—First, Who is the dead man? Second, What was he killed for? And Third, Who did it?

‘Once I get hold of the first, the other two won’t be very hard to find out, for one can tell pretty well from a man’s life whether it’s to anyone’s interest that he should be got off the hook. The man who murdered that chap must have had some strong motive, and I must find out what that motive was. Love? No, it wasn’t that—men in love don’t go to such lengths in real life—they do in novels and plays, but I’ve never seen it occurring in my experience. Robbery? No, there was plenty of money in his pocket. Revenge? Now, really it might be that—it’s a kind of thing that carries on most people further than they want to go. There was no violence used, for his clothes weren’t torn, so he must have been taken sudden, and before he knew what the other chap was

up to. By the way, I don't think I examined his clothes sufficiently, there might be something about them to give a clue, at any rate it's worth looking after, so I'll start with his clothes.'

So Mr Gorby after he had finished dressing and had had his breakfast, walked quickly to the police station, where he asked for the clothes of the deceased to be shown to him. When he received them he went into a corner by himself and started to examine them. There was nothing remarkable about the coat, as it was merely a well-cut and well-made dress coat, so with a grunt of dissatisfaction Mr Gorby threw it on one side, and picked up the waistcoat.

Here he found something which interested him very much, and that was a pocket made on the left hand side of the waistcoat, and on the inside.

'Now, what the deuce is this for?' said Mr Gorby, scratching his head; 'it ain't usual for a dress waistcoat to have a pocket on its inside as I'm aware of; and,' continued the detective greatly excited, 'this ain't tailor's work, he did it himself, and jolly badly he did it too. Now he must have taken the trouble to make this pocket himself so that no one else would know anything about it, and it was made to carry something valuable—so valuable that he had to carry it with him even when he wore evening clothes. Ah! Here's a tear on the side nearest the outside of the waistcoat, something has been pulled out roughly—

I begin to see now—the dead man possessed something which the other man wanted, and which he knew the dead one carried about with him. He sees him drunk, gets into the cab with him, and tries to get what he wants; the dead man resists, upon which the other kills him by means of the chloroform which he had with him, and being afraid that the cab will stop, and he will be found out, snatches what he wants out of the pocket so quickly that he tears the waistcoat, and then makes off. That's clear enough, but the question is, what was it he wanted? A case with jewels? No! It could not have been anything so bulky, or the dead man would never have carried it about inside his waistcoat. It was something flat which could easily lie in the pocket—a paper—some valuable paper which the assassin wanted, and for which he killed the other.

‘This is all very well,’ said Mr Gorby, throwing down the waistcoat, and rising. ‘I have found number two before number one. The first question is: Who is the murdered man? He's a stranger in Melbourne, that's pretty clear, or else someone would be sure to have recognised him before now by the description given in the reward. Now, I wonder if he has any relations here? No, he can't, or else they would have made enquiries before this. Well, there's one thing certain, he must have had a landlady or landlord, unless he slept in the open air. He can't have lived in an hotel, as the landlord of any hotel in Melbourne would have recognised him

from the description, especially when the whole place is ringing with the murder. Private lodgings, more like, and a landlady who doesn't read the papers, and doesn't gossip, or she'd have known all about it by this time. Now, if he did live, as I think, in private lodgings, and suddenly disappeared, his landlady wouldn't keep quiet. It's a whole week since the murder, and as the lodger has not been seen or heard of, the landlady will naturally make enquiries. If, however, as I surmise, the lodger is a stranger, she will not know where to enquire, therefore, under these circumstances, the most natural thing for her to do would be to advertise for him; so I'll have a look at the newspapers.'

Mr Gorby got a file of the different newspapers, and looked carefully in the columns where missing friends, and people who will hear something to their advantage are generally advertised for.

'He was murdered,' said Mr Gorby to himself, 'on a Friday morning, between one and two o'clock, so he might stay away till Monday without exciting any suspicion. On Monday, however, the landlady would begin to feel uneasy, and on Tuesday she would advertise for him. Therefore,' said Mr Gorby, running his fat finger down the column, 'Wednesday it is.'

It did not appear in Wednesday's paper, neither did it in Thursday's, but in Friday's issue, exactly one week after the murder, Mr Gorby suddenly came on the following advertisement:—

‘If Mr Oliver Whyte does not return to Possum Villa, Grey Street, St Kilda, before the end of the week, his rooms will be let again.—Rubina Hableton.’

‘Oliver Whyte,’ repeated Mr Gorby, slowly, ‘and the initials on the pocket handkerchief which was proved to have belonged to the deceased were “O. W.” So his name is Oliver Whyte is it? Now, I wonder if Rubina Hableton knows anything about this matter. At any rate,’ said Mr Gorby, putting on his hat, ‘as I’m fond of sea breezes, I think I’ll go down, and call at Possum Villa, Grey Street, St Kilda.’