

# THE MAY MYSTERY

by OCTAVIUS ROY COHEN

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued

—10—

Jim nodded approvingly. "Fine work, John. I never could find out how you detectives manage to think of all those things."

"Quit kidding, Jim."

"I ain't kidding; on the level, I tell you. Now me—I'd have come in here and looked the body over and remembered how it lay. But I never would have been positive sure after that because it would just have been my memory. I can see now."

He opened the door and stepped into the hall. From where he stood he could see that section of the chalk mark which denoted the position of Thayer's feet and ankles.

"That's what Carmine said he saw, Jim."

"I see..."

Jim walked back into the room and began following the door again.

"Did you look over his papers?" asked the fat man.

"Sure."

"Anything?"

"I think so. I found his bank book for one thing. He deposited some large amounts and there isn't a question that he was getting them from Max Vernon."

"Any other deposits?"

"Yes. Some small, and others as high as a couple of hundred. But there ain't any record of where they came from."

"Any letters?"

"A few."

"From girls?"

"Plenty. Especially from Irv Welch—Larry's sister. Want to read 'em?"

"Mushy."

"I'll say. And how! The kid was crazy about that bird and no mistake. He was her first love and all that sort of thing. There wasn't a thing in the world she wouldn't do for him."

Jim Harvey was staring into the sunshine beyond the closed window when there was a queer, soft light in his usually expressionless eyes.

"I reckon I've read 'em, John. I never could get a whole lot out of love letters."

Regan flushed. He knew Harvey hadn't meant to rebuke him... but as a girl who never would have suspected that mountains of flesh of being a sentimentalist!

There was an awkward silence, which Regan broke.

"What now, Jim?"

"Now? Golly! I dunno. What do you reckon I ought to do?"

Again Regan felt baffled. There were no more questions—and this was when he believed Harvey was utterly stupid.

"Would you like to see Farnum and Cleon now?"

"No. I reckon not."

"Don't you want to talk to Mike Carmine?"

"I guess he knows a lot about Thayer and Vernon both."

Jim's eyes lighted, as though at a new and very pleasing idea.

"That's a swell thought, John. Where'll we find the junior?"

They located Mike Carmine in the basement of the fraternity house. Regan explained that Harvey was in charge of the case and wished to question him.

There was silence for several minutes during which the swarthy janitor eyed the expressive countenance of Harvey with wonder and bewilderment. When Jim did speak, his tone was quiet—almost a whisper.

"You were here all day on May first, Mike?"

"Yes, sir. I was nowhere else."

"Of course you knew Mr. Thayer pretty well, didn't you?"

"Carmine made an expressive gesture. 'I know him very good. He is one fine feller.'"

"And Mr. Vernon?"

"Also he is a fine feller, Meester Thayer."

"Do you know Miss Antonette Peyton?"

"The black eyes of the junior dated with enthusiasm. 'I know her good. She is—'

"'Sunk! She is a fine feller. I understand. Jim produced his golden toothpick and toyed with it. 'Was Miss Peyton in this house the day Mr. Thayer was killed?'"

"Yes, sir. She was here."

"Have you ever heard of her coming here before?"

"Oh, no, sir. Ladies, she do not come to this fraternity house."

"Did you see Mr. Vernon on May first about half-past one o'clock?"

"Yes, sir."

"What?"

"Doing what?"

"I see him doing two things. First he goes into Meester Thayer's room, and look time beyond that I see him leave the house."

"You didn't see him leave Mr. Thayer's room?"

"No, sir."

"Where were you when you first saw him?"

"I was cleaning hall on the second floor."

"That was when you saw him go into Thayer's room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice anything queer in the way he looked? Anything different from his regular expression?"

"How I know was Meester Vernon mad? He go into Meester Thayer's room, but always he do that on account those two fellows is very friends forever. No, Meester Harvey—I cannot say was Meester Vernon mad because I was just cleaning hall and I do not know."

"You like Mr. Vernon?"

"You wouldn't want to see him in trouble, would you?"

"No, sir—I do not be happy to see Meester Vernon in trouble."

"And so you wouldn't like to remember if he was mad or not?"

"Carmine's black eyes narrowed as they flashed to the face of the detective.

"I would not say something about Meester Vernon. I do not know Meester Harvey. If I know he is mad, I say he is mad. If I only see his face, I do not tell you I guess he is mad, because Meester Vernon he is always nice to me."

Harvey nodded approvingly. "Fine boy, Mike. You and I ought to get along great. Now, you say you see Vernon leave the fraternity house?"

"Yes, sir, I see that."

"Where were you?"

"I was work downstairs—back of the house—when I see Meester Vernon come down before he leave."

"Was he in a hurry?"

"Yes, sir—he come down the steps pretty fast."

"Do you remember if he had anything in his hands?"

"No, sir. In his hands, no, sir. But he have a bundle under his arm."

"Do you remember if he was wearing the same suit when he left the fraternity house that he had on when he entered?"

Carmine hesitated. When he answered it was as though honestly he was distressed. "I feel not sure he was not wear the same suit."

"You think he changed his clothes between the time he visited Thayer's room and the time he left the house?"

"I think yes. But I do not know for sure."

"Do you know Mr. Larry Welch?"

"Yes, sir. He is one fine feller."

"Did you see him on May first?"

"No, sir, I did not see him any."

"You didn't see him come to this house or leave it?"

"No, sir, I did not see him at all. Of course I hear everybody talk that he have been here to see Mr. Thayer. But me, I do not see even one eye on him."

"Now, suppose you tell me what happened after Mr. Vernon left the fraternity house?"

"I was work in the back down stairs when I see Meester Vernon go away. Then I get my mop and floor and I go up to second floor, do not see anybody else. I go up there, so I start waxing the floor and after 'while I look over and I see Meester Thayer's door is a little bit open. I look again, and I see his foot and also his legs and I think right away it is funny he should be lying down on the floor because that is funny thing to do. 'Then my mind says to me that maybe Meester Thayer, he is drunk and I think I will put him on the bed so he can sleep it away. I do not want the other fellows to know Meester Thayer is drunk in the fraternity house because that is not nice except when they have a party I walk to the door."

"The chunky frame of the janitor seemed to shrivel at the remembrance and there was a wild light in his eyes."

"I go in the room, Meester Harvey, and right away I see that Meester Thayer he is not drunk, but he is through his face with his hands and rocked back and forth. 'He is all blood, Meester Harvey. I touch him once, and then Meester Harvey, something take hold of me—here—and I get frightened and scared and I do not know any more until I am downstairs with Meester Farnum and Meester Gleason and they say, 'What the matter, Mike? And that is all, sir—because anything else I do not remember because I am so afraid when I see that blood.'"

Regan related as the story finished. He glanced at the prodigious detective to see what effect it had made. Harvey was lying back in his chair with eyes half closed, apparently oblivious to everything. And when he spoke it was in a casual—almost disinterested—voice and about something else.

"Who did you like best, Mike—Vernon or Thayer?"

Carmine did not hesitate.

"Meester Thayer, sir. I like him most best."

"Why?"

"The swarthy face turned brick red, but the man did not evade.

"I like Meester Thayer best, sir, because I feel like him and me, we are partners."

"Huh? What you mean? Partners?"

"I mean... I do not like to say this, sir, because you are policeman, but I promise to tell the truth. Meester Thayer and me, we do much business with each other."

"What sort of business?"

"Thinks."

Regan sat up very straight. This was something entirely new to him.

"You mean," asked Jim, "that Thayer was a bootlegger?"

Carmine made a gesture of horror.

"Oh, no, sir. Meester Thayer, he is one fine feller. He only get the orders and I buy the whiskey for him. It is me which are the bootlegger. He paused for a moment in obvious embarrassment, and then made a further explanation. "But I am not common bootlegger, Mr. Harvey. I get whiskey only for the college fellows, and always I am careful that it is good stuff."

Jim Harvey appeared to be absorbed in the mechanism of his patent toothpick. His eyes were focussed on that device when he spoke again to Carmine.

"Are you a regular bootlegger, Mike?"

"Oh, no, sir. I would not do nothing like that—only for the college fellows. The junior's eyes flashed to Regan's stern face. "I hope I do not get to jail because I tell you that, sir."

"You won't," promised Harvey. "Will he, Regan?"

"Whatever you say, Chief."

Harvey pursued his inquiry. "How was this liquor thing worked, Mike?"

"It was thisaway, Meester Harvey. Always sometimes the boys give a party which the faculty they do not understand about, so they want liquor. Meester Thayer, he says he knows where he can get real stuff which has never been cut. So they give him the money and he orders it for them."

"I see... And you and he would split the difference, eh?"

"Yes, sir. For real thing, the fellows they pay me one hundred dollars a case. I pay for it sixty dollars a case, and Meester Thayer he take twenty dollars and I take twenty dollars."

"Then you were close friends, eh?"

"Oh, no, sir. Meester Thayer, he is ver' fine gentleman and he would not be friends with no janitor."

"I see... He certainly was a fine gentleman, Mike—no mistake about that. Thayer and Vernon were pretty good friends, weren't they? Did you ever hear them quarrel?"

"No, sir. Not one time even."

"Let me see... about one week ago, sir. It was a nice party. They wanted two cases."

"Two hundred dollars' worth?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you get it?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Did Thayer pay for it?"

"Right away quick, sir, all except the forty dollars which he keeps for himself."

"Did Thayer usually pay you when he ordered the whiskey or only after the boys paid him?"

"After the fellows they pay him. You see, it is for them and so he should not pay me until he get the money off them."

"And when he died, Mike, did he owe you anything?"

"No, sir. Meester Thayer, he did not owe me one cent."

"Good," Harvey nodded himself to his feet, and nodded to the janitor. "That'll be all, Mike."

"You do not ask me no more questions that it is good stuff."

"Thank you for everything."

Regan led the way into the hall and thence upstairs to the main floor.

"What now, Harvey? Would you like to see Max Vernon's room?"

"You've searched it, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Find anything?"

"Not a thing. But I thought—"

"My God, you're a thorough bird. Well, let's go. But Lady! how I hate those steps."

Harvey pointed the top floor and Regan conducted him into a small, but handsomely furnished room, resplendent with pennants, pillows, tennis rackets and numerous lithographs depicting picturesque dancers in various conditions of deshabille.

But despite the markedly collegiate tone, there was more than a touch of taste in the general arrangement. In a corner was a delicate statuette perched on a teakwood table. And over the mantel was a costly pair of curtain weapons. A fencing foil, a broadsword, a Malay kris, an Arab scimitar, a rusty revolver of Civil war days, a Phillips' sword, a bow and arrow of genuine Indian origin. Harvey glanced at them, and then at the arrangement of the room.

"It was cozy, in a youthful, happy-go-lucky sort of way. Harvey casually opened the dresser drawers and rummaged indifferently through the masses of expensive linen. He opened the door of the hanging closet and exclaimed over the multitude of tailored suits disclosed.

"Vernon sure must be a snappy dresser, John."

"Looked that way to me," answered Regan enthusiastically. "I always did wish I could afford them kinds of clothes. I'll bet there ain't a suit in your lot that cost less'n a hundred bucks."

Harvey sank into a chair and lighted a cigar. "Ain't it funny to think of a kid like Vernon having it easy like he did and then get mixed up in a nasty mess like this?"

"You tell me, Jim. That's one reason I was glad to get you on the case. They're a nice sort, these kids. I didn't want to think so. I thought they were a bunch of crazy high hats, but, by golly! they ain't. I haven't met a one who didn't strike me that he'd be a real guy if he wasn't so damn educated."

Harvey moved his head laboriously toward the mantel.

"What's all the military equipment?" he asked, referring to the knives and swords on the wall.

"I asked about that," said Regan. "He leaves 'em here. Carmine collected a good deal and he's sort of collected these things. That funny-looking one is from where the Max boys live. I think they call it a bolo, or whatever it is the Philippines use. Vernon was a nut about 'em."

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