

A Case for Angel, Esqu re

Angel Esqu re

also as:

The Inspector Gets a Brainwave

The Impossible Theft

by Edgar Wallace, 1875-1932

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THERE was a Minister of France—was it Necker?—who suggested on a memorable occasion that the people should eat grass. He was no vegetarian, he was just being rude; and when, on a subsequent occasion, an indignant populace slew him, in some grim way they decorated the body significantly.

If it should happen that the lawless folk of Notting Dale should ever fall upon Police Constable Lee, I doubt not that the jibe with which they will assail him

will have some reference to *sparrows*, for to the mysterious agency of the *little sparrow* is due a great deal of the worthy officer's unpopularity amongst a certain class of people in his salubrious district.

PC Lee, in mufti, stepped round to the marine store of Cokey Salem, and asked to see the proprietor.

Cokey, so-called because of the commodity he runs as a side line to the rag-and-bone business, was not at home.

He shouted down the stairs to his frowsy wife to that effect and PC Lee was not convinced.

After a while, Cokey was induced to come down into the evil-smelling shop, and he did this with an ill grace.

„Hullo,“ he said, gruffly, „what's this—water rates?“

„To be exact,“ said PC Lee, gently, „it's a question of lead pipin', feloniously removed from unoccupied premises, to wit, 914, Kensington Park Road.“

„Ho!“ said the defiant Cokey, „an' what's that gotter do with me?“

„If you'll kindly step round to the station,“ said the police-constable, „I daresay you can explain the whole matter to our inspector in a few words.“

„Suppose I don't?“

„In that case,“ said the thoughtful constable, „I shall be under the painful necessity of takin' you.“

Cokey choked back a wicked word, put on his coat and hat, and accompanied the constable.

„Where did you nose this job?“ he asked, vulgarly.

„A little sparrer,“ said the reflective PC, „happened—“

„I'd like to get hold of that sparrer of yours,“ said Cokey, between his teeth, „I'd wring his blanky neck.“

On the occasion under review, Cokey did not convince a sceptical inspector of his innocence. Nor had he any better luck with a frozen-faced magistrate, who listened dispassionately to Cokey's somewhat involved story. According to Cokey the lead piping found on his premises had

„Fallen like the gentle rain from heaven, upon the place beneath.“

This magistrate, who had never been known to smile, relaxed when Cokey adduced his crowning argument that the piping had been placed in his yard by the police, and committed Cokey to the Middlesex Sessions.

The Chairman of that Court, aided by a bored jury, found Cokey guilty of receiving, and the Chairman having, figuratively speaking, said it would be as much as his place was worth to give him less, sent Cokey to prison with hard labour for nine calendar months.

Whereupon the prisoner, affectionately addressing PC Lee, said that on some future occasion he would have the heart, lungs, and important blood vessels of the impassive officer—though exactly what he would do with them he did not say.

I saw PC Lee some nine months later, and knowing that Cokey was at liberty, I expressed my surprise at finding him still alive.

PC Lee smiled.

„If the Government would give prisoners leave of absence on the day they are sentenced,“ he said, „I daresay he might have caused me inconvenience; but barrin' that, I shall die a natural death. If a chap who had been sentenced

heavily suddenly found himself pardoned, he'd be so overjoyed that he wouldn't have any time to hate me or any other constable, an' even a man who goes to a long term soon loses all the bad feelin' he ever had, an' comes out of *stir* full of a peace-on-earth-an'-good-will feelin'.

„In prison you've got a lot of time to think, an' if a man isn't a lunatic, he works out the situation reasonably an' comes to the conclusion that the constable has only done his duty, an' by the time the sentence is worked out, he's lost all his dislike for the man who lagged him.

„The only time I ever knew a man to bear animosity was in the case of the Newton Lane Robbery.

„If you don't remember the case. I'll give it to you in a few words. A cashier from one of the Ladbroke Grove shops was goin' back to his premises from the bank at Notting Hill Gate, when he was set upon by half-a-dozen roughs, knocked down an' robbed. All this happened in broad daylight, but in an unfrequented little turning, an' the assailants got away.

„It so happened that I was off duty (I was in X Division at the time), but I got to hear of the case when I reported for duty that night.

„The young fellow who was robbed had been taken to the hospital, but as he wasn't so badly hurt, he was allowed to go home. Accordin' to him, he wouldn't be able to recognise any of the party.

„Now, the detection of crime, as I see it, is a simple matter. The criminal is the obvious person. Don't you believe these detective stories that tell you that the feller found with the diamonds in his pocket is the innocent hero—he's only the innocent hero in story books. In real life he's the feller that did the robbery.

„When the police find a little sub-post-office has been robbed, an' the postmaster lyin' bound an' gagged, or when they see a bank clerk lyin' on the floor with the smell of chloroform hangin' round an' the safe open, they know it's 33 to 1 that they've got the robber first pop, an' that the enterprisin' burglar, as the song says, is the young feller found in such a romantic attitude.

„Unprofessional criminals spend too much of their time in preparin' picturesque scenes, an' professional criminals spend too much time in gettin' ready alibis, an' between one an' the other the police have a fairly easy time.

„So that it was only natural that our first suspicions fastened on the feller that had been robbed, an' there were certain features of it that made this view likely. Nobody had seen him attacked, nobody had seen men comin' away from the scene of the crime, an' if he hadn't been so badly injured there would have been no doubt whatever that he was the robber himself, an' the whole *outrage* a fake.

„This might have been the case with the young cashier, only there was a remarkable flaw in the theory. He'd left the bank with five notes for a hundred pounds (which had been drawn for the purpose of sendin' to Russia to settle an account), an' this he placed in a big handbag which he carried, an' which was found open an' empty.

„He was carefully searched, but no money was on him when he was found. He had been seen enterin' the little street. One of the bank clerks, who happened to leave the bank at the same time, had walked with him to the entrance of the street, an' nobody had been seen to leave at either end before he was discovered. If he'd stolen 'em himself—what had happened to the banknotes? He couldn't bury 'em. There was no place in the street itself where

they could have been hidden—you may be sure that we searched every possible hidin' place—an' the police were forced to believe that his story was true.

„The only thing against the man was that his firm had lost money before from their office. Ten, twenty, an' fifty pound notes had vanished, but the cashier was so above suspicion, an' had always insisted upon bein' the first to be searched, that they had never dreamt of connectin' him with any theft, an' had discharged clerk after clerk in consequence.

„It was such an interestin' case that the Yard sent down Mr Angel—you wrote about him didn't you?—a rare nice gentleman, who's always pullin' your leg, but very pleasant with it.

„Our inspector was asked to tell off a man to accompany Mr Angel, an' to my surprise I was chosen instead of some of our smart fellers.

„Lee,' says the inspector, 'you go round with Mr Angel, an' introduce him to some of the *heads* in your neighbourhood.' So, in a manner of speakin', I was put in charge of Angel.

„But, bless you, he didn't want any introducin'! He knew all the toughs: knew Nick Moss, an' Percy Steel, an' Jim the Fence; knew 'em as if he'd been brought up with 'em—an' they knew him.

„We might have saved ourselves the trouble, because we learnt very little from these chaps, except from Nick Moss.

„Hullo, Nick,' says Angel, Esquire, most cheerfully, 'how is the ladder larceny business?'

„Nick grinned a bit sheepish.

„I'm straight now, Mr Angel,' he says; 'the other game's a mug's game.'

„Cutting out all your blessed platitudes,' says Angel, 'which of your college companions did this last little job?'

„If I never move from here,' says Nick, most solemn, 'if I die this very minute, if—'

„Havin' been duly sworn,' says Mr Angel, 'it is unnecessary to go any further—I gather from your interestin', but altogether unnecessary, protestation that you don't know.'

„That's right, sir,' says Nick.

„Mr Angel told me later that he quite believed Nick didn't know for sure, but he thought that he had a suspicion.

„We examined the street where the robbery was committed. It is a street with stables on one side an' little houses on the other, an' connects Portobello Road with Pembridge Road.

„Nobody could give us any information about the robbery; in the majority of cases the first they knew about it was when the cashier had been found lyin' on the side-walk. Next we made a few inquiries about the cashier an' found that he was a most respectable man, with money of his own in the bank, a churchwarden, an' a member of the Young Men's Christian Association. What was most important was, he'd got money of his own in the bank.

„I'm afraid, Lee,' says Mr Angel, 'that this case must go down to history as *The Notting Hill Mystery*,' and so it might have done but for the fact that one of the most curious coincidences happened that you could ever imagine.

„You've heard me talk about my *little sparrow*? It's a wheeze I work on the lads who want to know where I get all my valuable information from. This *cod* of mine got round to Mr Angel's ears, an' he remarked to me, in that jokin' way of his:

„What a pity, Lee, your feathered friend can't supply us with a brilliant word picture of what happened—

„He stopped short sudden, an' frowned thoughtfully.

„By George! says he, 'I wonder if that is possible?'

„I couldn't see what he was gettin' at, so I waited.

„We'll go round an' see our cashier friend,' says Angel, so off we went to a neat little house near Wormwood Scrubbs.

„He was a bachelor, but rented a house, an' he opened the door to us himself, an' invited us in.

„It was a comfortably furnished sittin'-room, an' I saw Angel give a quick glance round as though sizing up the place. The only thing I noticed was that Mr Killun—that was his name—made a hasty attempt to fold up a newspaper that he'd been readin'.

„Killun was a pale-faced youth with uneven features an' a shifty eye, an' I disliked him from the first.

„Readin', Mr Killun?' says Angel.

„Yes,' says Killun, quickly, 'I'm naturally interested in learnin' if the police have any clue as to the people who robbed me.'

„Angel, Esquire nodded, but said nothin'.

„By-an'-bye, he asked carelessly: 'By the way, what are Southern Pacific Preferred?'

„Sixty-four,' said Killun, quick—then checked himself—'at least, I believe so—I don't take much interest in Stock Exchange transactions.'

„I suppose not,' says Angel, an' went on talkin' about the robbery an' about things in general. He touched on the Lincoln Handicap, but Mr Killun said he knew nothin' about racin', an' that was probably so, because Angel referred to the Lincoln as a two mile race, an' no racin' man could have resisted the temptation to correct him.

„We left, an' Angel went away to London to make a few inquiries. He came back that night, an' together we went to Killun's house.

„I want to see the bag you carried the notes in,' says Angel.

„To my surprise the man produced it. I was surprised, because the bag ought to have been in the possession of the police, an' it only shows you how we are sometimes caught nappin', for without that bag the robber might never have been caught.

„Angel took the bag and examined it.

„This is an enormous bag to carry five hundred pound notes in?'

„It's the only one I've got,' said the man, a little sullenly.

„Angel took it under the light an' inspected the inside. Then he laid a sheet of paper on the table an' shook out the contents. There was nothin' in it, except a few crumbs of tobacco, a little dust, an' somethin' that Angel, Esquire picked up an' examined carefully.

„It was a tiny grey feather, an' he nodded slowly.

„Then he turned to Killun.

„I shall take you into custody,' he said, 'on a charge of stealin' five hundred pounds, the property of your employer.'

„It's a lie!' said Killun, hoarsely, an' tried to bolt. But I caught him, an' as he was inclined to be a little bit fresh, I put the handcuffs on him.

„We took him down to the station, an' then went back an' searched the house. On the roof, in a cage, we found a pigeon.

„There's your little bird, Lee,“ says Angel, with a chuckle. „That's one of the little birds that was in Mr Killun's big bag. Not this chap, but others like him. A hundred-pound note fastened with an elastic band round each leg—an' whiff!—goes five hundred. He must have sent three birds.“

„Angel spent some time that night concoctin' a message. He wrote it on a slip of thin paper an' fitted it to the pigeon's leg. Then he flew the pigeon.“

„Next mornin', at eleven o'clock, we arrested an eminent bucket-shop⁽¹⁾ keeper, who turned up outside the Mansion House by appointment—Angel made the appointment.“

„This,“ said PC Lee, impressively, „proves my words, that the real criminal is the obvious criminal. Killun had been speculatin' an' had got into difficulties with the bucket-shop. The man that ran the shop wanted the money, an' bein' a bit of a pigeon fancier, had suggested a way of gettin' Killun out of his difficulties.“

„Killun would take the birds in his bag to the office, an' whenever he could lay his hands on paper money, would nip out into the cloakroom, fix the note, an' fly the bird through a window, an' be back at his desk before anybody noticed his absence.“



⁽¹⁾ Bucket-shop: A fraudulent brokerage operation in which orders to buy and sell are accepted but no executions take place. Instead, the operators expect to profit when customers close out their positions at a loss.