

## **IF PARROTS COULD TALK**

**BY AHMED THOMSON (aged 14)**

My policing duties obliged me to visit my old chum Andrew Croissant, a much underappreciated private detective. I knocked on his door and he pulled it open beaming with pleasure.

“Greetings Inspector Flat!”

“I’m hoping you’ve been rather bored lately” I said, “as I was wondering if you would like to help me in my case...’

Presumably he didn’t have much else to occupy him as it didn’t take much persuading before he was following me to the scene of the crime.

We were granted admittance to the rather grand house by a Constable and we made our way to the study of the deceased; one Cuthbert Cliff. A dark blood stain spread across papers that were strewn across the desk where the body had been, a revolver lay on the desk.

“Time of death about 7pm yesterday evening according to the doc.” I said, “The valet was off work yesterday which would put him out of the picture. He says the gun was Mr Cliff’s.”

Croissant commented on the dustiness of the room and pulled some papers from the blood-stained pile. From a dimly lit corner of the study a parrot made itself known with a squark. Croissant went over to stroke the bird and was rewarded with a pecked finger

eliciting some very uncharacteristic swearing. To our surprise the parrot swore back with such profanity that I don't care to repeat.

I'd already considered the pool of potential suspects, staff and recent visitors, and had arranged for them to attend the house later that day. I had the job of interviewing the them but this was Croissant's forte so I let him take the lead. First was the niece of the deceased; we invited Ms Amanda Cliff into the sitting room.

"Ms Cliff, what brought you to your uncles house?"

"I came by Hanson."

"I meant *why* were you here yesterday..." Croissant said dryly

"My mother received a letter from her long-lost brother asking my brother and myself to finally meet him..."

"Why didn't your mother join you?" Croissant asked.

"The very next day we received a second letter asking that we come alone, he said his health wasn't good and couldn't receive many people."

"What time did you leave Ms Cliff?"

"Around 7pm yesterday evening."

Croissant turned to her brother Fredrick.

"How is your financial position Mr Cliff?"

He paused then said "Oh, I am quite well off..."

Noticing the worn threads of Fredrick's coat cuff, Croissant interrupted him "Or perhaps you're in need of money and your uncle's death may be of benefit to you?"

Fredrick shrugged, "well of course we could all do with a bit of money, but I'm hardly pleased with my uncle's death, though I didn't really know him..."

"What if I told you that his will leaves all he owned to his valet Eugene." The news didn't cause much reaction in the pair.

The valet, Eugene Ransome, came in looking nervy and distracted.

"Do you realise that you have come into you employers entire fortune Mr Ransome?"

"Oh no Sir, I wasn't expecting any money save perhaps for a small legacy." he said giving a rather forced looking smile.

Referring to the paper he found, Croissant asked, "Did you also know that your late employer was writing a new will?" Ransome claimed ignorance of his deceased employer's legal affairs and was allowed to leave the sitting room.

Next, we interviewed the cook much to her annoyance.

"Are the doors always locked" Croissant asked

"I don't know, Sir."

"How long have you been working here?"

"Just a week Sir, why? Trying to pin it on me!"

After a fruitless few minutes, we accepted she really didn't know anything.

Returning to the study Croissant poured us a whisky from the service trolley before sitting down safely out of the parrot's reach. A few sips later he suddenly shot up and started to search for an address book.

"We need to visit Mrs Beatrice Cliff" he exclaimed, grabbing his coat.

Upon arriving at her house, we were shown into the sitting room. Croissant inquired about a photograph,

"Is this your brother? Can we borrow it?"

"Yes, you can take it if you like. It's quite old but I have a copy."

Unexpectedly Croissant said,

"Did he swear much?"

"He was very polite, bit of a bore really, certainly not foul mouthed." She was about to ask why but Croissant had already got up to leave.

"I fancy a talk with the younger Mr and Ms Cliff."

We arrived back at the house and Croissant asked for an audience with all those assembled. Once they were sat down in the sitting room, he showed them the photograph.

"This is the late Cuthbert Cliff."

There was a bang as the valet dropped the tray he was holding and bolted. A couple of my men who I'd stationed outside grabbed and shackled him. Knowing the game was up he reluctantly confessed to the deed.

Turning back to the room Croissant explained "You see, you hadn't met with Cuthbert Cliff. The valet was disguised as him, keeping the real Cuthbert drugged and safely

out of the way until after your visit. Knowing that Cuthbert had just discovered your existence he knew he would surely change his will in your favour. Posing as Cuthbert Cliff he hired a new cook and announced he was letting the 'valet' off for the night. Then he killed the real Cuthbert and slipped out with his keys.

"I first suspected when I saw how dusty the room was, would Mr Cliff allow this valet such sloppiness. I also found that Cuthbert didn't swear so the parrot must have picked it up from someone else. Ransome's big mistake was not considering there was an eye witness. This case would have been even easier if parrots could talk..."

© Ahmed Thomson