

The SEVEN DIALS MYSTERY

By Agatha Christie

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 INSTALMENT XIV.

THE STORY THUS FAR

Gerry Wade is found dead in bed at Chimneys, scene of a house party. Seven out of eight alarm clocks placed in his room to awaken him are lined up on a mantel. The guests are told that death resulted from an overdose of sleeping powder. Jimmy Theisger and Ronny Devereux motor to Gerry's home to tell a sister, Loraine, of Wade's death.

Lady Eileen Brent known as "Bundle," finds a letter Wade had written to his sister making reference to the Seven Dials. Bundle feels certain that Gerry was murdered. En route to London a man, mysteriously shot, staggers into the road in front of Eileen's car. It proves to be Devereux, who dying, whispers: "Seven Dials—tell Jimmy Theisger."

At Jimmy's quarters Bundle finds Loraine. The three of them set out to trail the murderer. From Captain Battle at Scotland Yard Bundle obtains a list of secret societies. That evening with Bill Everleigh, she visits the Seven Dials Club. A watchman, Alfred, is recognized as a former footman at Chimneys.

Cabinet Minister George Lomax plans a party. He has received a warning letter from the Seven Dials Society. Bundle gets an invitation. Meanwhile she hides in the meeting room of the society.

NOW CONTINUE THE STORY

Against the Law
 Bundle nodded. Her own suspicions had been correct, and the modus operandi was much as she had thought it to be. She essayed a further inquiry.

"Who is Mr. Mosgorovsky?"
 "Gentleman as runs this club. Russian gentleman. A very clever gentleman too."

Bundle abandoned the getting of information for the moment and proceeded to other matters.

"A hundred pounds is a very large sum of money, Alfred."

"Larger than I ever handled, my lady," said Alfred with simple candor.

"Did you ever suspect that there was something wrong?"
 "Wrong, my lady?"

"Yes. I'm not talking about the gambling. I mean something far more serious. You don't want to be sent to penal servitude, do you, Alfred?"

"Oh, Lord, my lady, you don't mean it?"

"I was at Scotland Yard the day before yesterday," said Bundle impressively. "I heard some very curious things. I want you to help me, Alfred, and if you do, well—if things go wrong, I'll put in a good word for you."

"Anything I can do, I shall be only too pleased, my lady. I mean, I would anyway."

"Well, first of all," said Bundle, "I want to go all over this place—from top to bottom."

Accompanied by a mystified and scared Alfred, she made a very thorough tour of inspection. Nothing struck her eye till she came to the gaming room. There she noticed an inconspicuous door in a corner, and the door was locked.

Alfred explained readily.

"That's used as a getaway, your ladyship. There's a room and a door on to a staircase what comes out in the next street. That's the way the gentry goes when there's a raid."

"But don't the police know about it?"

"It's a cunning door, you see, my lady. Looks like a cupboard, that's all."

Bundle felt a rising excitement. "I must get in here," she said. Alfred shook his head.

"You can't my lady; Mr. Mosgorovsky he has the key."

"Well," said Bundle, "there are other keys."

Te Meeting Place
 She perceived that the lock was a perfectly ordinary one which probably could be easily unlocked by the key of one of the other doors. Alfred, rather troubled, was sent to collect likely specimens. The fourth that Bundle tried fitted. She turned it, opened the door and passed through.

She found herself in a small, dingy apartment. A long table occupied the centre of the room with chairs ranged round it. There was no other furniture in the room. Two built-in cupboards stood on either side of the fireplace. Alfred indicated the nearer one with a nod.

"That's it," he explained. Bundle tried the cupboard door, but it was locked, and she saw at

once that this lock was a very different affair. It was of the patent kind that would only yield to its own key.

"Tehly ingenious, it is," explained Alfred. "It looks all right when opened. Shelves, you know, with a few ledgers and that on 'em. Nobody'd ever suspect, but you touch the right spot and the whole thing swings open."

"Bundle had turned around and was surveying the room thoughtfully. The first thing she noticed was that the door by which they had entered was carefully fitted round with balze. It must be completely sound-proof. Then her eyes wandered to the chairs. There were seven of them three each side and one rather more imposing in design at the head of the table. Bundle's eyes brightened. She had found what she was looking for. This, she felt sure, was the meeting place of the secret organization. The place was almost perfectly planned. It looked so innocent—you could reach it just by stepping through from the gaming room, or you could arrive there by the secret entrance—and any secrecy, any precautions were easily explained by the gaming going on in the next room.

Idly, as these thoughts passed through her mind, she drew a finger across the marble of the mantelpiece. Alfred saw and misinterpreted the action.

"You won't find no dirt, not to speak of," he said. "Mr. Mosgorovsky, he orders the place to be swept out this morning, and I did it while he waited."

"Oh!" said Bundle, thinking very hard. "This morning, eh?"

"Has to be done sometimes," said Alfred. "Though the room's never what you may call used."

Next minute he received a shock. "Alfred," said Bundle, "you've got to find me a place in this room where I can hide."

Alfred looked at her in dismay. "But it's impossible, my lady. You'll get me into trouble and I'll lose my job."

"You'll lose it anyway when you go to prison," said Bundle unkindly. "But as a matter of fact, you needn't worry, nobody will know anything about it."

"And there ain't no place," wailed Alfred. "Look round for yourself, your ladyship, if you don't believe me."

A Place to Hide
 Bundle was forced to admit that there was something in this argument. But she had the true spirit of one undertaking adventures.

"Nonsense," she said with determination. "There has got to be a place."

"But there ain't one," wailed Alfred.

Never had a room shown itself more unpropitious for concealment. Dingy blinds were drawn over the dirty window panes, and there were no curtains. The window sill outside, which Bundle examined, was about four inches wide! Inside the room there were the table, the chairs and the cupboards.

The second cupboard had a key in the lock. Bundle went across and pulled it open. Inside were shelves covered with an odd assortment of glasses and crockery.

"Surplus stuff as we don't use," explained Alfred. "You can see for yourself, my lady, there's no place here as a cat could hide."

But Bundle was examining the shelves.

"Flimsy work," she said. "Now, then, Alfred, have you got a cupboard downstairs where you could shove all this glass? You have? Good. Then get a tray and start to carry it down at once. Hurry—there's no time to lose."

"You can't my lady. And it's getting late too. The cooks will be here any minute now."

"Mr. Mosgro-what-not doesn't come till later, I suppose?"

"He's never here much before midnight. But, oh, my lady—"

"Don't talk so much, Alfred," said Bundle. "Get that tray. If you stay here arguing you will get into trouble."

Doing what is familiarly known as "wringing his hands," Alfred departed. Presently he returned with a tray, and having by now realized that his protests were useless, he worked with a nervous energy quite surprising.

As Bundle had seen, the shelves were easily detached. She took them down, ranged them upright against the wall and then stepped in.

"H'm," she remarked. "Pretty narrow. It's going to be a tight fit. Shut the door on me carefully, Alfred—that's right. Yes, it can be done. Now I want a gimlet."

"A gimlet, my lady?"

"That's what I said."

A Tiresome Cough Was Left By A Severe Cold

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"I don't know—"

"Nonsense, you must have a gimlet—perhaps you've got an auger, as well. If you haven't got what I want, you'll have to go out and buy it, so you'd better try hard to find the right thing."

Inside a Cupboard
 Alfred departed and returned presently with quite a creditable assortment of tools. Bundle seized what she wanted and proceeded to bore a small hole at the level of her right eye. She did this from the outside, so that it should be less noticeable, and she dared not make it too large lest it should attract attention.

"There, that'll do," she remarked at last.

"Oh! but, my lady, my lady—"

"But they'll find you—if they should open the door."

"They won't open the door," said Bundle, "because you are going to lock it and take the key away."

"And if by chance Mr. Mosgorovsky should ask me for the key?"

"Tell him it's lost," said Bundle, briskly. "But nobody's going to worry about this cupboard—it's only here to attract attention from the other one and make a pair. Go on, Alfred, some one might come at any time. Lock me in and take the key and come and let me out when every one's gone."

"You'll be taken bad, my lady. You'll faint—"

"I never faint," said Bundle. "But you might as well get me a cocktail. I certainly need it. Then lock the door of the room again—don't forget—and take all the door keys back to their proper doors. And, Alfred don't be too much of a rabbit. Remember, if anything goes wrong, I'll see you through."

"And that's that," said Bundle to herself when, having served the cocktail, Alfred had finally departed.

She was not nervous lest Alfred's nerve should fail and he should give her away. She knew that his sense of self-preservation was far too strong for that. His training alone helped him to conceal private emotions beneath the mask of the well-trained servant.

Only one thing worried Bundle. The interpretation she had chosen to put upon the cleaning of the room that morning might be all wrong. And if so—Bundle sighed in the narrow confines of the cupboard. The prospect of spending long hours in it for nothing was not attractive.

MEETING OF THE SEVEN DIALS
 It would be well to pass over the sufferings of the next four hours as quickly as possible. Bundle found her position extremely cramped. She had judged that the meeting, if meeting there was to be, would take place at a time when the club was in full swing—somewhere probably between the hours of midnight and 2 a.m.

She was just deciding that it must be at least six o'clock in the morning when a welcome sound came to her ears, the sound of the unlocking of a door.

In another minute the electric light was switched on. The hum of voices, which had come to her for a minute or two rather like the far-off roar of sea waves, ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and Bundle heard the sound of a bolt being shot. Clearly some one had come in from the gaming room next door, and she paid tribute to the thoroughness with which the communicating door had been rendered sound proof.

In another minute the intruder came into her line of vision—a line of vision that was necessarily somewhat incomplete but which yet answered its purpose. A tall man, broad shouldered and power-

ful looking, with a long black beard, Bundle remembered having seen him sitting at one of the baccarat tables on the preceding night.

This, then, was Alfred's mysterious Russian gentleman, the proprietor of the club, the sinister Mr. Mosgorovsky. Bundle's heart beat faster with excitement. So little did she resemble her father that at this minute she fairly glowed in the extreme discomfort of her position.

His Face Masked
 The Russian remained for some minutes standing by the table stroking his beard. Then he drew a watch from his pocket, and glanced at the time. Nodding his head as though satisfied, he again thrust his hand into his pocket, and, pulling out something that Bundle could not see, he moved out of her line of vision.

When he reappeared again she could hardly help giving a gasp of surprise.

His face was now covered by a mask, but hardly a mask in the conventional sense. It was not shaped to the face. It was a mere piece of material hanging in front of the features like a curtain in which two slits were pierced for the eyes. In shape it was round and on it was the representation of a clock face, with the hands pointing at 6 o'clock.

"The Seven Dials!" said Bundle to herself.

And at that minute there came a new sound—seven muffled taps. Mosgorovsky strode across to where Bundle knew was the other cupboard door. She heard a sharp click and then the sound of greetings in a foreign tongue.

Presently she had a view of the newcomers.

They also wore clock masks, but in their case the hands were in a different position—4 o'clock and 5 o'clock respectively.

Both men were in evening dress—but with a difference. One was an elegant, slender young man wearing evening clothes of exquisite cut. The grace with which he moved was foreign—rather than English. The other man could better be described as wiry and lean. His clothes fitted him sufficiently well, but no more, and Bundle guessed at his nationality even before she heard his voice.

"I reckon we're the first to arrive at this little meeting."

A full pleasant voice with a slight American drawl and an inflection of Irish behind it.

The elegant young man said in good, but slightly stilted English: "I had much difficulty in getting away tonight. These things do not always arrange themselves fortunately. I am not, like No. 4 here, my own master."

Bundle tried to guess at his nationality. Until he spoke she had thought he might be French, but the accent was not a French one. He might possibly, she thought, be an Austrian, or a Hungarian, or even a Russian.

The Proceedings Begin
 The American moved to the other side of the table and Bundle heard a chair being pulled out.

"One o'clock being a great success," he said. "I congratulate you on taking the risk."

Five o'clock shrugged his shoulders.

"Unless one takes risks—" He left the sentence unfinished.

Again seven taps sounded and Mosgorovsky moved across to the secret door.

She failed to catch anything de-

finite for some moments, since the whole company were out of sight, but presently she heard the bearded Russian's voice upraised.

"Shall we begin proceedings?"

He himself came round the table and took the seat next to the armchair at the top. Sitting thus, he was directly facing Bundle's cupboard. The elegant five o'clock took the place next to him. The third chair that side was out of Bundle's sight, but the American, No. 4, moved into her line of vision for a moment or two before he sat down.

On the near side of the table also only two chairs were visible, and as she watched a hand turned the second—really the middle chair—down. And then with a swift movement one of the newcomers brushed past the cupboard and took the chair opposite Mosgorovsky. Whoever sat there had, of course, their back directly turned to Bundle—and it was at that back that Bundle was staring with a good deal of interest, for it was the back of a singularly beautiful woman very much décolleté.

It was she who spoke first. Her voice was musical, foreign—with a deep seductive note in it. She was glancing toward the empty chair at the head of the table.

"So we are not to see No. 7 tonight?" she said. "Tell me, my friends, shall we ever see him?"

"That's darned good," said the American. "Darned good! As for 7 o'clock—I'm beginning to believe there is no such person."

"I should not advise you to think that, my friend," said the Russian pleasantly.

A Tiny Black Mole
 There was a silence—rather an uncomfortable silence, Bundle felt. She was still staring as though

fascinated at the beautiful in front of her. There was a black mole just below the shoulderblade that enhanced the whiteness of the skin. Bundle that at last the term "beauteuse," so often read in real meaning for her, she quite certain that this woman a beautiful face—a dark face with passionate eyes.

She was recalled from her agonizings by the voice of the man, who seemed to act as a of ceremonies.

"Shall we get on with our No. 2?"

He made a curious gesture his hand toward the turned chair next to the woman, every one present imitated, ing to the chair as they did.

"I wish No. 2 were with us tonight," he continued. "There many things to be done. Unsettled difficulties have arisen."

"Have you any report?" the American who spoke.

"As yet—I have nothing him." There was a pause. "I not understand it."

"You think it may have—astray?"

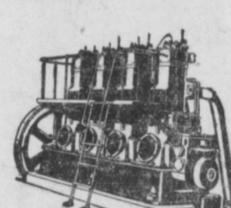
"That is—a possibility. 'In other words,' said 3 softly, 'there is—danger.'"

He spoke the word delicately and yet with relish.

The Russian nodded forward. "Yes—there's danger. Too is getting known about us—this place. I know of several who suspect." He added that "They must be silenced."

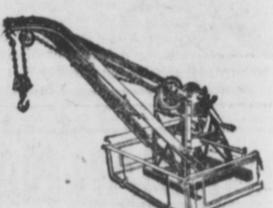
Bundle felt a little cold pass down her spine. If she to be found, would she be silent? She was recalled suddenly to attention by a word.

(To be continued)



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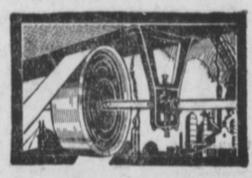
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