

The SEVEN DIALS MYSTERY

By Agatha Christie

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THE STORY THUS FAR

There's a house party on at Chimneys, an estate outside London, occupied for the present on lease by Sir Oswald and Lady Cotte. Guests are late to breakfast, especially Jimmy Thesiger and Gerry Wade, much to the annoyance of Lady Cotte.

Rupert Bateman, secretary to Sir Oswald, suggests an alarm clock by way of assuring that Wade in particular gets up next morning at a more reasonable hour. They plan to place eight clocks in Wade's room once he is asleep. Bateman, known as "Pongo," places the clocks, and yet next day at noon Wade is still in bed. At 12:20 he is found dead by a servant. Dr. Cartwright declared death due to an overdose of sleeping powder. Seven clocks, not eight are found lined up in Wade's room. Thesiger and Ronny Devereux motor to Gerry's home to inform a sister, Loraine Wade, of her brother's death.

Lord Caterham, owner is back at Chimneys. His daughter, Lady Eileen Brent, called "Bundle," finds a letter written by Wade indicating that his death was not accidental. While motoring to town, Bundle thinks she has run down a man. He proves to be Ronny Devereux, who, mysteriously shot and dying whispers: "Seven Dials—tell Jimmy Thesiger."

Bundle learns of a place called Seven Dials, Cabinet Minister George Lomax has received a warning letter.

NOW CONTINUE THE STORY

INSTALMENT VIII.

"Well, one never knows with these dashed telephones. The number is 103. Got it?"

"103. Thank you, Bill."

"Yes, but I say—what do you want it for? You said you didn't know him."

"I don't, but I shall in half an hour."

"You're going round to his rooms?"

"Quite right, Sherlock."

"Yes, but I say—for one thing he won't be up."

"Won't be up?"

"I shouldn't think so. I mean, who would if they hadn't got to? Look at it that way. You've no idea what an effort it is for me to get here at 11 every morning, and the fuss Codders makes if I'm behind time is simply appalling. You haven't the least idea, Bundle, what a dog's life this is—"

"You shall tell me about it tomorrow night," said Bundle hastily.

She slammed down the receiver and took stock of the situation. First she glanced at the clock. It was five and twenty minutes to 12. Despite Bill's knowledge of his friend's habits, she inclined to the belief that Mr. Thesiger would by now be in a fit state to receive visitors. She took a taxi to 103 Jermyn Street.

AT 103 JERMYN STREET

The door was opened at 103 Jermyn Street by a perfect example of the retired gentleman's gentleman.

His face, expressionless and polite, was such a face as may be found by the score in that particular district of London.

"Will you come this way, madam?"

He ushered her upstairs into an extremely comfortable sitting room containing leather-covered armchairs of immense proportions. Sunk in one of those monstrosities was another girl, rather younger

than Bundle. A small, fair girl, dressed in black.

"What name shall I say, madam?"

"I won't give any name," said Bundle. "I just want to see Mr. Thesiger on important business."

The grave gentleman bowed and withdrew, shutting the door noiselessly behind him.

There was a pause.

"It's a nice morning," said the fair girl timidly.

"It's an awfully nice morning," agreed Bundle.

There was another pause.

"I motored up from the country this morning," said Bundle, plunging once more into speech. "And I thought it was going to be one of those foul fogs. But it wasn't."

"No," said the other girl. "It wasn't." And she added: "I've come up from the country, too."

Bundle Meets Loraine

Bundle eyed her more attentively. She had been slightly annoyed at finding the other there. Bundle belonged to the energetic

He was one of Gerry's greatest friends."

"I know. Well—he's dead."

Lorraine's lips parted in surprise.

"Dead! But he always seemed so fit."

Bundle narrated the events of the preceding day as briefly as possible. A look of fear and horror came into Loraine's face.

"Then it is true. It is true?"

"What's true?"

Not a Natural Death

"What I've thought—what I've been thinking all these weeks. Gerald didn't die a natural death. He was killed."

"You've thought that, have you?"

"Yes. Gerry would never have taken things to make him sleep."

She gave the little ghost of a laugh. "He slept much too well to need them. I always thought it queer. And he thought so, too—I know he did."

"Who?"

"Ronny. And now this happens. Now he's killed, too." She paused



At the end of ten minutes Jimmy was ready to face his unknown guests.

order of people who like "to get on with it," and she foresaw that the second visitor would have to be disposed of and got rid of before she could broach her own business. So it was not a topic she could introduce before a stranger.

Now, as she looked more closely, an extraordinary idea rose in her brain. Could it be? Yes, the girl was in deep mourning; her black silken ankles showed that. It was a long shot, but Bundle was convinced that her idea was right. She drew a long breath.

"Look here," she said. "Are you by any chance Loraine Wade?"

Lorraine's eyes opened wide.

"Yes, I am. How clever of you to know. We've never met, have we?"

Bundle shook her head.

"I wrote to you yesterday, though. I'm Bundle Brent."

"It was so very kind of you to send me Gerry's letter," said Loraine. "I've written to thank you. I never expected to see you here."

"I'll tell you why I'm here," said Bundle. "Did you know Ronny Devereux?"

Lorraine nodded.

"He came over the day that Gerry—you know. And he's been to see me two or three times since.

and then went on: "That's what I came for today. That letter of Gerry's you sent me—as soon as I read it, I tried to get hold of Ronny, but they said he was away. So I thought I'd come and see Jimmy—he was Ronny's other great friend. I thought perhaps he'd tell me what I ought to do."

"You mean—" Bundle paused. "About—Seven Dials?"

Lorraine nodded.

"You see—" she began

But at that moment Jimmy Thesiger entered the room.

Visitors For Jimmy

We must at this point go back to some 20 minutes earlier. To a moment when Jimmy Thesiger, emerging from the mists of sleep, was conscious of a familiar voice speaking unfamiliar words.

His sleep-ridden brain tried for a moment to cope with the situation, but failed. He yawned and rolled over again.

"A young lady, sir, has called to see you."

The voice was implacable. So prepared was it to go on repeating the statement indefinitely that Jimmy resigned himself to the inevitable. He opened his eyes and blinked.

"Eh, Stevens?" he said. "Say that again."

"A young lady, sir, has called to see you."

"Oh!" Jimmy strove to grasp the situation. "Why?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

"No, I suppose not. No," he thought it over. "I suppose you couldn't."

Stevens swooped down upon a tray by the bedside.

"I will bring you some fresh tea, sir. This is cold."

"You think that I ought to get up and—er—see the lady?"

Stevens made no reply, but he held his back very stiff and Jimmy read the signs correctly.

"Oh! very well," he said. "I suppose I'd better. She didn't give her name?"

"No, sir."

"H'm. She couldn't be by any possible chance my Aunt Jemima, could she? Because if so, I'm damned if I'm going to get up."

"The lady, sir, could not possibly be any one's aunt, I should say, unless the youngest of a large family."

"Aha," said Jimmy. "Young and lovely. Is she—what kind is she?"

"The young lady, sir, is most undoubtedly strictly comme if faut, if I may use the expression."

"You may use it," said Jimmy graciously. "Your French pronunciation, Stevens, if I may say so, is very good. Much better than mine."

"I am gratified to hear it, sir. I have lately been taking a correspondence course in French."

"Have you really? You're a wonderful chap, Stevens."

Another Young Lady

Stevens smiled in a superior fashion and left the room. Jimmy lay trying to recall the names of any young and lovely girls strictly comme if faut who might be likely to come and call upon him.

Stevens re-entered with fresh tea, and as Jimmy sipped it he felt a pleasurable curiosity.

"You've given her the paper and all that, I hope, Stevens," he said.

"I supplied her with the Morning Post and Punch, sir."

A ring at the bell took him away. In a few minutes he returned.

"Another young lady, sir."

"What?"

Jimmy clutched his head.

"Another young lady; she declines to give her name, sir, but says her business is important."

Jimmy stared at him.

"This is damned odd, Stevens. Damned odd. Look here, what time did I come home last night?"

"Just upon 5 o'clock, sir."

"And was I—ar—how was I?"

"Just a little cheerful, sir—nothing more. Inclined to sing 'Rule Britannia.'"

"What an extraordinary thing," said Jimmy. "Rule Britannia! eh? I cannot imagine myself in a sober state ever singing 'Rule Britannia.' Some latent patriotism must have emerged under the stimulus of—er—just a couple too many. I was celebrating at the Mustard and Cress, I remember. Not nearly such an innocent spot as it sounds, Stevens." He paused.

"I was wondering—"

"Yes, sir?"

"I was wondering whether under the aforementioned stimulus I had put an advertisement in a news paper asking for a nursery governess or something of that sort."

Stevens coughed.

"Two girls turning up. It looks odd. I shall eschew the Mustard and Cress in future. That's a good word, Stevens—eschew—I met in

marked Bundle. "I told him I was coming round to see you, and he said you wouldn't be up."

"Well, I'm up now," said Jimmy encouragingly.

"It's about Gerry," said Loraine. "And now about Ronny—"

"What do you mean by 'and now about Ronny'?"

"He was shot yesterday."

"What?" cried Jimmy.

Bundle told her story for the second time. Jimmy listened like a man in a dream.

"Old Ronny—shot," he murmured. "What is this damned business?"

He sat down on the edge of a chair, thinking for a minute or two, and then spoke in a quiet, level voice.

"There's something I think I ought to tell you."

"Yes," said Bundle encouragingly.

"It was the day Gerry Wade died. On the way over to break the news to you—he nodded at Loraine—"in the car Ronny said something to me. That is to say, he started to tell me something. There was something he wanted to tell me, and he began about it, and then he said he was bound

by a promise and couldn't go on. "Bound by a promise," said Loraine thoughtfully.

"That's what he said. Naturally I didn't press him after that. He was odd—damned odd—through. I got the impression that he suspected—well, foul play. I thought he'd tell the doctor. But no, not even a hint. So I thought I'd been mistaken. In afterward, with the evidence as all—well, it seemed such a clear case. I thought my suspicions had been all bosh."

"But you think Ronny still expected?" asked Bundle.

Jimmy nodded.

"That's what I think now. Well, none of us have seen anything since. I believe he was playing a lone hand—trying to find out the truth about Gerry's death and what's more I believe he did find out. That's why the doctor shot him. And then he tried to send word to me, but could not get out those two words."

"Seven Dials," said Bundle, shivering a little.

"Seven Dials," said Jimmy gravely. "At any rate we've got that go on with."

(To Be Continued Tomorrow)

That old troublesome word "IF"

ONCE upon a time most people were worried a lot by "If." A few still are. You can tell them if you listen to them when they're shopping.

- "If you are sure that rug won't fade . . ."
- "If you're positive this is pure wool . . ."
- "If you'll guarantee these eggs as fresh . . ."
- "If you think this washing machine will work better than the other one . . ."
- "If . . . if . . . if . . ."

The trouble with such people is—they don't read the advertisements. People who do read them do not have to depend upon "ifs" in their buying. They know what they are getting, because they have the definite, printed, reiterated assurances of the advertiser.

Most people nowadays do read the advertisements. They shop intelligently and quickly. They know beforehand what they want, why they want it, how much they will have to pay, and where to go.

Intelligent buyers substitute "know" for "if" by reading the advertisements

Embarassing Moments

