

## THE DISCARDED PICTURE FRAMES

by

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(spelling & punctuation corrected by author 2013)

### FIRE BUGS

Slam! went the door of the Clarion Editor's office as it slammed shut after Ross the reporter. "And don't come back until you have a good scoop!" boomed the editor making Ross's ears burn. "Remember that if a dog bites a man that is not news but if a man bites a dog that is news."

"O brother," Ross said to himself. I don't know how many times I have heard that. It's not my fault when Lady Selwyn was wearing a diamond necklace that I thought it was news." As Ross turned to go down the stairs of the Clarion Offices, he was stopped short by the cutting remark of, "Don't you know what a scoop is?" from Sam. "You should see what I've got in the papers. I bet a flea could write a better scoop than you."

"I don't know about a flea but I bet I could write a better scoop than you by next week," replied infuriated Ross.

"I'll take you on all right. Shake, the loser to shout both at the cafeteria."

As Ross stalked away, he heard the Editor congratulating Sam on his scoop which got in the headlines. "I wonder what his scoop was," he muttered. "I will go to the Kan Tong Café to think things over." Ross climbed into his car and drove off. It took him a long time to find a parking place because a Chinese wedding was taking progress in the church next door to the Café. He paid for some coffee and sat down again. On the seat beside him was the daily Clarion which the Café provided for the use of their customers. Picking it up he glanced at the Headlines to find the scoop of Sam's. He found this, "Smuggling ring broke up. 22 men arrested". After reading it he flung the paper down on the chair and heaved a sigh. "If all his scoops are like that it will take a lot to beat him," Ross murmured. "The trouble is he seems to have reporter's luck." Sipping at his coffee he again glanced at the Clarion. "Here's something," Ross said. In tiny unimportant print was, "Fire Bugs Suspected." Again, Ross read the Clarion to find that three houses had been burnt to the round and ten valuable pictures valued at \$250,000 in the private art galleries of the houses were burnt as well. As well as that one of the owners of the houses was a dear friend of Ross. "I must visit her at her new residence to show my sympathy. She must have had quite a shock to have her belongings burnt like that," thought Ross. "Good, her residence is also published. I'll visit her right now." After he drank his coffee he departed from the café.

### A VISIT

Ross was a tall person, pleasant to cope with and cheerful. He was new to his job of reporting and he so wanted to make a good scoop, He had met Mrs Grundy whom he was going to visit at a beach where he had saved her from drowning. He was a boy at the time. Finally, Ross arrived at Mrs Grundy's residence where she was staying with her sister, Miss Huggit. It was a two-storey house built in mid-Victorian time. The house was centred in rolling lawns and gardens of the most beautiful flowers. A fountain was bubbling happily by the house. Everything looked luxurious. The sisters certainly had money. In the early oil strike days, their father had gathered dollars upon dollars in the fields. Ross walked up the steps and rang the bell. A plump Butler answered the door. "I have come to see Mrs Grundy," Ross said. He was ushered down a dark oak panelled hall to a warm room. Seated around a fire were the two sisters each reading a book. "I am very sorry to know of your house being burnt," said Ross. "My deepest sympathy." "Thank goodness everything was insured," answered Mrs Grundy. "It started at night when I was in bed asleep. I might have been burnt if it wasn't for the initiative of a young couple passing by. All my household were out at the time. I was hurried out of my bed just in time before the fire spread to my bedroom. The firemen tried very hard to get the fire under control but it was all in vain." The twin sisters and Ross passed the time away very happily. Soon it was time for Ross to go. "By the way Ross," remarked Mrs Grundy as he was leaving. "I had metal frames on my collection. When the fire had subsided, the frames weren't there. The fire must have been so hot that they were melted."

"Could you take this old carpet to the dump?" asked Mrs Huggit.

“Certainly,” replied Ross. He picked up the carpet and was ushered out by the Butler. “Be seeing you next week,” shouted out the sisters.

“He’s a good boy,” Mrs Grundy said to her sister when Ross had driven away.

## **FOOTPRINTS**

The rubbish tip was a fair distance away but it was in the direction of home. The tip was on a level surface with all the rubbish in mounds. Everything was helter-skelter. Tins, papers, furniture, and dirt were all bundled on top of each other. Wind sweeping over the mounds would blow dust and paper to another mound. The mounds were placed in a complete circle with a small passageway for vehicles. Tyre marks could be seen churning up the mud. Pools of water were scattered over the sloshy ground. The place stank to high heavens. Now and then a sweet smell would pass with the wind making you thankful of the outer world. Ross drove his car through the entrance and parked. He squelched his way over to a pile and threw the carpet on it. The carpet landing made a miniature rubbish fall bringing debris to Ross’s feet. Among the tins, paper, and other debris which fell down there were six picture frames. Ross paused awhile pondering over where he had seen them before. Then he remembered. They were the frames of the pictures he had seen he had seen in Mrs Grundy’s collection. “This is getting more curious and more curious,” Ross said. “These frames were meant to have been in the fire.” After picking the frames up and carting them to his car to dump them in the back seat he glanced back once more. There were footprints going to the pile; a skid at the pile and then footprints going back to a set of tyre marks. The left back tyre must have had a small patch on it because the marks weren’t even. The patch made a mark every six odd feet so the tyres must have been about two feet high. Ross drove away with his thoughts leaving the tip behind him. When he had gone a solitary black figure appeared from behind a pile where he had been spying on Ross.

## **SUSPICIONS ARISING**

Ross sped along the main highway to Mrs Grundy’s house. Thoughts were racing through his mind. “Were the pictures ever burnt at all? What were the frames doing at the tip? Was the house first burgled then burnt so no trace of the thieves’ burglary could be seen?”

Ross’s car swayed this way and that as it gathered speed. Soon he was travelling at 70 mph. At that speed he arrived at the house. He jumped out, took the frames out of the back seat, raced up the steps with them pausing to ring the bell. Once again, he was ushered into the sitting room. “Mrs Grundy,” Ross said dramatically, “Are these your picture frames?”

“Why yes, they are mine. Where did you find them?”

“I found them at the tip,” replied Ross. “I think that thieves were in your house at the night of the fire two days ago. They most probably had taken the pictures with the frames, set fire to your house and left. I found traces of them at the tip where they had thrown the frames away.”

“Then my valuable pictures are still about?” said Mrs Grundy in a weak voice.

“Yes,” replied Ross. “I will ring the police up right now.” After informing the police and giving them the particulars Ross started again for home. When he had washed, shaved, and eaten his tea Ross set off for the “Shopping Centre” because it was shopping night. He hurried to get parked squeezing in between two cars and set off for Milne’s to buy new seat covers for his car. Ross selected two leopard skin covers and spent the rest of his time buying groceries for his larder. At nine o’clock, closing time, Ross set off for his car carrying all his shopping. There were loaves of bread, jam, honey, sauce, and a host of oven fresh biscuits. After piling his shopping into the back, he wiped all the windows since it was frosty. The car in front which was yellow and the one behind which was blue tightly crammed Ross’s car preventing him from moving. Suddenly Ross straightened up. The blue car had tyres two feet high and the left back tyre had a patch on!

## **FOILED**

Ross stared at the blue Humber in silence. Inspecting the car, he was quite sure it was the thieves’ car. The wheels had fresh deep dark brown clay on them. The only place in the city where there was this type of clay was at the tip. Ross climbed into his car deciding to wait for them and follow them. Wisely Ross had taken the number of the number plate. It was 981068.

After what seemed an hour’s duration the door of the hotel opposite swung ajar and three dark figures treaded their way to the Humber. Noticing the position Ross was in one of them, a thickset man with a flock of greasy hair apologised to him. He stepped into his car and sped off. Ross had a bit of trouble over starting. Finally, the car gave a purr and a chug but it was too late. Immediately Ross gave

chase. "Blow," Ross said, "I have lost them." He still kept going on the chase though by driving up the side street. He reached an intersection. Speeding away at the other end of the street was the blue Humber. Ross tailed behind them a hundred yards or so. The Humber turned down a side street. Ross's car also turned down the side street. Still keeping behind the chase, he was abruptly stopped as the blue Humber turned up the driveway of a house with spacious grounds. Ross drove past the house parking in the next street. He crept back to the tall gaunt house. Everything was silent. He climbed over the railings of a fence and hid behind a tree just as a black Sedan squealed its way up the drive. The front door opened and a stream light slid past the door. The door slammed shut. Once more there was silence. A black cloud crept past the moon blotting out the light. Keeping cover behind bushes and shrubs, Ross's blood curdled as he saw a huge bloodhound bounding for him mouth open with saliva dripping from its fangs. Luckily Ross was a lover of dogs and the bloodhound liked him. Putting his hand in his pocket Ross pulled out a lump of sugar left at the café. The dog swallowed it and, wagging its tail, licked Ross. Suddenly the bloodhound bounded off. Creeping up to a lighted window Ross peered in. It was a while before the smoke and whisky fumes lifted. Seated at a table were ten men smoking or drinking. What was on the table made Ross's eyes pop out. Ross felt at prickling sensation at the back of his spine. It was the feeling which old ladies talk of when someone walks over your grave. Ross spun around but it was too late. A Negro with a ferocious snarl on his lips swung a sand bag at Ross's head. Ross sank, his head whirling. Then all was in oblivion.

## **JEWELS**

The chief of the smuggling gang gave a hearty puff at his cigar and swallowed the remains of his whisky. "Who was that person whom Joe coshed?" asked Carlo for that was the smuggler's name.

"Aw, just a snooping friend of that spinster whom we stole those pictures from," replied "Oily Sam", waving his hand at the table. Spread on the table were jewels of all descriptions with the masterpieces. Sam gave a last look at his mug brimming with beer and began.

"My gang have left him in the cellar trussed up. He will drown when the tide creeps in under the cellar."

"That's what snoopers deserve," remarked Carl. Sam agreed. Sam picked a green diamond.

"This is a nice a sparkler if there is one. It must be worth a couple of thousand at least," he gloated. Indeed, it was a splendid diamond. "You can keep it if you keep me and my gang undercover until the hue and cry dies down. Those are cops are pressing hard on me," Carlo said.

"It's a deal," smiled back Sam.

Suddenly a shivering howl pierced the still night. "Blast that durn dog" blurted out Sam. "Here Jo," he commanded, "See if you can keep that hound quiet."

The burly Negro left the room carrying a bump of meat. He flung the meat out of the door. "Here your varmint," he grunted. The two gangs continued boozing and soon there was haze in the room again. "Two more hours till high tide," remarked one of the boys.

"Yes," laughed the others. The two gangsters started to have a game of poker.

## **THE TIDE**

A creeping figure crept through the trees of the mansion. Suddenly he stiffened then he relaxed. Bounding for him howling for joy was a bloodhound. "Quiet," he whispered.

The young man's name was Gerald Trounson. He had been at prison for three years and now was on parole. Four years back two men had come to him asking if they could stay at his mansion as was advertised in the paper. The mansion formerly belonged to his father. Gerald agreed. Six months had elapsed until Gerald found that they were using his house as a thieves' den. When these men caught Gerald snooping, they stole the deeds of the mansion and framed a crime upon him. He was sent to prison for four years. Good conduct had let him out on parole. He knew the crooks had hidden the deeds and the stolen articles he was supposed to have stolen somewhere in the mansion. Gerald was going to find and sneak back the deeds and take the haul away to the police to prove his innocence.

Gerald felt his way with his dog, Kim, to the back of the house. He walked down the stairs which were cut in the cliff to the seashore. Gerald then sneaked into a secluded cave. This cave was an entrance under the mansion made by the rushing sea tide. He switched on his torch and with his dog treaded his way to the back of the cave. They were confronted by a solid wall of rock. Under eye level was an iron grill which Gerald's father had placed three years back. Gerald tugged away at the grill finally breaking it away from its securings. He let in Kim following after him. When he stood up at the other side of the wall, he felt the water of the sea lapping at his feet. He switched off his torch and felt

his way for the cellar door. Suddenly he stumbled over something. Pots, pans, and barrels fell over him as he tried to regain his balance. Gerald heard the skid of chairs upstairs and the sound of running feet. "Quickly," he cried to his faithful hound, "Run and hide." The obedient dog rushed through the hole and lay down on the beach outside puzzling why his master didn't want him near him. The cellar door opened and a beam of light fell into Gerald's face. He heard Sam grate out, "Why, if it isn't my dear friend Trounson. What are you doing on my property?" at this he laughed harshly and then cruelly flung out, "Come on you scamp. What are you doing here? So you won't talk eh! Never mind that. Truss him up Joe." Turning, he glanced at the huddled form of Ross. "You are going to have company." He then stalked away with his men. The door was slammed shut and bolted. The tide slowly crept along the floor and fingered the couple. The position certainly looked grim. The game of poker continued upstairs and the two could hear the laughter of the men. They turned a deaf ear and a bitter heart towards the cackling. They both wished to speak to each other but they were both gagged. It was now one hour to high tide.

## **KIM RESCUES**

Kim lay outside the cave his flanks shivering. Why had his master sent him away? His master had not come out of that hole yet. He shivered again as he felt the water creep up the shore to him. He waited a bit longer. Still his master had not come out of the hole. He started as his keen ears heard a door being slammed. Once more there was silence. He noticed the water was seeping towards the camel humped cave. His master still had not come out of the cave. He crept to the hole and sniffed. He smelt bad men. Walking silently on four paws he crept down the cave. He was starting to go through the second hole when he smelt his master, Gerald. There was another person's smell mingled with it but it was a friendly smell. Kim wagged his tail and went into the cellar. Lying on the floor were Gerald and Ross. He first freed his master by biting through his bonds. "Kim," choked out Gerald, "you have saved my life." He gave Kim a hug and a pat with Kim licking him in return. Gerald fetched from his pockets a torch and a knife to free his feet. On the cellar floor beside him he found Ross. He also cut his bonds. Both asked questions by the dozens and each story can be told. "So you see," ended Gerald, "I don't know where the deeds are in this house."

"We had better get out of here first," replied Ross. "We had better block up the entrance. The water is coming in fast." They both took their coats off and stuffed them in the hole. The water was now waist deep and Kim was floundering until he found a floating barrel to crawl on. The water still gushed in and now it was chest level. "I'm afraid one of us will have to swim out but that would be leaving one of us in here with Kim. Can you swim Ross?" "No, I can't," was Ross's reply. Gerald gazed up at the roof of the cellar. The ceiling was fifteen feet high from the floor. "I will try to swim out," he said. "The water line is five feet from the ceiling so you will be safe enough if the gangs don't decide to come down here." Climbing on a barrel Gerald dived into the water and through the grill. Ross and Kim were left on a barrel each.

Gerald swam out of the grill opening and kicked his way down the narrow cave. He thought his lungs would bust. He swam on till what seemed eternity until he saw light ahead. He broke the surface of the water with a gasp. He took deep breaths for a moment and then struck out for the shore. He had swum in an undercurrent but he still bravely kept on rewarded with getting to the shore. Gerald looked back at the cliffs. It was sure a high tide tonight. He hurried down a street looking for a police station. It was 11.30 pm when he saw the welcoming light of the station.

## **SAVED**

Ross eased himself on a barrel with Kim and watched Gerald disappear as he plunged into the cold salt-water. He turned off the torch to save the batteries after having checked to see if Kim was safe. Everything was in pitch darkness. He heard the men above finish a game and then start another. He started calculating. Another five feet of water and he would float up to the water level for high tide. The water was rising at eight feet per hour. Another 40 minutes and then it would be full high tide. Ross looked at his luminous watch. It was now 11-15 pm. Gerald should be swimming for the shore now. He settled down for a long wait. Kim had gone to sleep now. Ross decided he would sleep as well. He lay down and closed his eyes. As he was tired, he soon fell asleep. The seconds ticked away as the water level rose. Suddenly he was awakened. He heard cheering above. "I suppose one of them has won a good deal," he muttered. He lay down again. He still felt himself rising. He casually switched on the torch and shone the light up on the wall. The water was at the highest level where he could see the dirty water-mark. "It will soon stop," he thought. Ross heard Kim stir and then waken. He patted the dog. He heard the paintings turn towards him. He then fondly tickled the dog under the chin. Ross realised that

the water was still rising. "It must be a fairly high tide tonight but it will soon stop," he whispered to Kim. Later he was alarmed as he felt himself still rising. He felt upwards. He could feel lightly the rough surface of the ceiling. He felt panicky. Above was noise upon noise of chairs overturned. He floated up another foot. Now Ross's head scraped the ceiling. Kim howled sadly. Ross wished that Gerald would hurry to come to the cellar. "He must of been delayed; drowned for instance, no he couldn't of had." He thought he was a goner, when upon hearing steps on the stairs coming down to the cellar. The door opened and Ross was partially blinded by a stream of light. He heard a voice shout out, "They are still alive!"

Kim rushed up the steps and upon jumping on Gerald started licking him. He was brought to his senses by Gerard saying, "Well, how are you?" Many helping hands helped him out of the water. Ross was taken away to get dry clothes on. Later in the sitting room an officer took down the notes while both told their stories. Continuing after he had arrived at the station Gerald told his story of how he had directed the Police to the mansion to the house and help capture the gangs. Gerald ended by saying, "Carlo admitted having framed the robbery on to him and given the deeds to a member of his gang to put it in a wall safe. I now have the deeds." As the police took the prisoners away a high officer said to the two, "We will need your at Branshire Court tomorrow. There is also a reward for the capture of these prisoners." As the two went to bed after a night's work of suspense Ross said to Gerald, "Mrs Grundy said that she was very happy when she had the pictures returned. I'm very happy for her." He added, "Sam will be surprised when he sees my scoop. It's sure to be in the headlines tomorrow."

**THE END**