DRAWN FROM DEATH

by LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.

Ron Chironna

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The three police officers exchanged puzzled glances and shifted their feet bewilderedly. A victim of a crime was supposed to make the police welcome, but this victim greeted them as though they themselves were the burglars, returned for a second go.

Max Beerbohm faced them irritably. As the man of the house, his mother had summoned him to deal with this unexpected complication. Max did not like complications. Also, he still wore evening dress, having not long since returned from the theatre. It seemed somehow inappropriate to confront a police sergeant and two constables wearing the tails of formal evening dress, but the unpleasant events of the evening had begun so soon after his return home that he had not had time to change.

He said sarcastically, “In Montagu Square, which is only two squares away, a sensational murder occurred several days ago, and according to the newspapers, there is no solution in sight. A disgusting potpourri of lesser crimes are inflicted on the citizens of London every day, and yet the Metropolitan Police are still able to spare a sergeant and two constables to investigate a burglary that didn’t happen.

Why three of you?”

Sergeant Ashburn said apologetically, “It’s the address, sir.”

“Surely Upper Berkeley Street is an eminently respectable address!”

“Exactly, sir. We ‘ad a report of a burglary here, and at one of these ‘ouses that usually means plate, jewellery—a considerable poke. If we gets onto it quick, like, we ‘as a chance of recovering what was stolen and also coming down on the thief.”

“You keep saying you had a report of a burglary at this address. To the best of my knowledge, there was no burglary and no report. Where did this ‘report’ come from?”

“One of the maids, sir, screamed to Constable Price, who chanced to be passing by, that you’d ‘ad a burglary, and ‘e summoned help.”

Max turned his gaze from one expectant police countenance to another.

“Two points,” he said. “First, address or not, the members of this household belong to a very special class, the impoverished rich. We are regarded with contempt by those who are richer as well as by those who are poorer, but we enjoy certain advantages, one of them being that our homes don’t get burgled. A burglar expecting to acquire sudden wealth here is a silly optimist. As for the second—follow me.”

He led them up the stairs to his room on the top floor. “I had just returned from the theatre and was telling my sister about the play when I heard a scream. A maid had chanced to look into my room and found it—like this.”

He opened a door. The sergeant clucked his tongue sympathetically. “Made a mess, didn’t ‘e?”

The room was a shambles—furniture overturned, contents of desk drawers scattered across the floor, papers strewn everywhere. The warm breeze of a June evening could be felt through the open window.

The sergeant carefully picked his way through the debris and looked out the window. “Got in this way, did ‘e?”

“It would seem so,” Max said, “although I confess I can’t imagine how he did it.”

“Some of them sneaksmen could give a bloomin’ fly lessons. But we’ll ‘ave a look. ‘E might have come in by the front door and left the window open as a blind.”

“Walking through the house twice without being seen?” Max asked sceptically.

The sergeant nodded. “People see mostly what they expect to see. Your servants don’t expect to see a burglar prowling about, so a glimpse of one might not register at all. What did ‘e take?”

“Nothing,” Max said.

“Do you ordinarily keep valuables here?”

Max shook his head. “I lent my Mona Lisa to the Louvre many years ago, and they refuse to return it. You know how Frenchmen are. The British Museum is almost as bad. It has my First, Second, and Third Shakespeare Folios. There is nothing here except my own scribbles and sketches, and their value—I can tell you, sadly—would not interest any self-respecting burglar. As far as I’ve been able to determine, he took nothing.”

“‘E must have thought there was something valuable here,” the sergeant persisted. “‘E went to considerable trouble to find it.”

Max shook his head again. “I’m telling you—I am newly employed as a dramatic critic for The Saturday Review. My remuneration is five pounds a week. At that rate it will take me a lifetime or two to accumulate enough to interest burglars. All of this makes no sense whatsoever.”

“Maybe something you own has a value you don’t know about,” the sergeant said thoughtfully.

“Unless the burglar confused one of my drawings with something of Rembrandt’s, not even the most desperate thief could find anything here worth stealing.” He patted the man’s sturdy shoulder. “Here’s a bit of sound advice for you. Concentrate on catching the murderer and don’t trouble yourself over some madman’s irrational foray into my room. There will be less fuss for everyone that way, especially for me. I definitely do not care for fuss.”

“We’ll get the murderer,” the sergeant promised. “‘E can’t get away. The young lady marked ‘im, you see. Put up quite a fight, she did, while ‘e was strangling ‘er. Raked ‘is hands good. There was blood and strips of flesh under ‘er fingernails. We’ll get ‘im, all right. But about your burglary...” He glanced around and shook his head. “No one seeing this room could doubt someone wanted something and wanted it badly. As you clean up this mess, keep your eyes open. I suspect there is, after all, something missing. Try to find out what it is. Do you have any property elsewhere?”

“Only some drawings. I lend them, I sell them when I can, I send them to publishers to be considered for publication, I leave them with dealers for exhibit and sale. Usually I have a few on hand, but at this moment there are only some scribbled notes for my Saturday Review articles. No state secrets, no lurid confessions of the socially prominent, nothing.”

The sergeant looked around again. “Maybe ‘e found what he was looking for. ‘E looked hard enough. If ‘e didn’t find it, ‘e’ll look elsewhere. Take it from me—a man who’d tear a room apart like this is desperate to find something.”

Max usually breakfasted with his mother, Mrs. Eliza Beerbohm, and his sister, Constance. When he joined them the next morning, some order had been restored to his room but none at all to his wounded feelings. A burglary, he reflected, makes a person feel violated. His mother had reacted to the mess in his room by murmuring something about properly punishing the person responsible, but Max hushed her. “Proper punishment” suggested a tedious series of court appearances, not to mention notoriety of a kind that benefited no one except the newspapers, and he wanted none of it.

Constance was reading a lurid report in one of those papers about the latest developments in the Montagu Square murder. Popular rumour made the young woman, Miss Letty Tapping, the mistress or former mistress of several prominent men. Scandals within scandals were hinted; the police, it seemed, were eager to converse with Lord George Pallister, Duke of Arlington; with Sir Gordon Wade, M.P.; with Viscount Jeffrey Sandell, eldest son of the Earl of Dunston; with Jamison Weyman, a wealthy baronet; and with Colonel Thornton Poggs, D.S.O., alleged to have distinguished himself in many obscure battles about the Empire. Oddly enough, none of these men seemed to be available for questioning.

“Do you know any of them, Max?” Constance asked.

Max, who had been paying no attention, was jolted back to reality. The violence done to his room had been a major disruption in his life, and he disliked disruptions. He was not interested in murders.

“Know them? Why would I know them?”

“I mean—have you drawn any of them?”

“Probably,” Max said lightly. “A man with the character to become a suspect in a murder case ought to have an interesting face. I’m sorry, I wasn’t listening. Who were they?”

Constance read the names again.

“Yes, I’ve drawn all of them,” Max said. “Colonel Poggs is the only one who is totally uninteresting. I drew him for that reason—to see whether his face could somehow be made interesting. It couldn’t. Lord George Pallister is ‘The Beard,’ of course, beard and moustache. Any portrait of him would show a mass of hair with a rim of face around it and an unusually sharp nose protruding—an amazing achievement for a relatively young man. He is the anti-social peer, rarely seen anywhere, always taking himself off to remote places, where apparently he lives a hermit’s life, so it figures that he wouldn’t be available for questioning or anything else. Sir Gordon is distinguished for his luxurious side-whiskers and his small nose.

The viscount looks like an errant schoolboy. Jamison Weyman, who is a man with a very great wealth and a very small title, tries unsuccessfully to look as though the two are in balance. His large nose and meagre moustache are against him."

"How interesting that you should know all of them!" Constance exclaimed.

Max shrugged modestly. He made it a point to be familiar with the face of anyone who was a suitable subject for his pencil, and that included the nobility, politicians, public figures of every kind, anyone at all of note. He collected faces—in his mind—from newspaper pictures, art galleries, all kinds of public occasions, private occasions like parties, at theatres, in lawcourts, or in the galleries of the House of Commons. Some of his collected faces he met accidentally in the street.

He stored his impressions, for he never drew directly from life. He waited until his memory had coalesced them into his own unique satiric view of the subject. Two years previously, in 1896, a collection of his drawings had been published, Caricatures of Twenty-Five Gentlemen. Many had appeared singly in other publications. Max was an anomaly—not quite famous, not yet, but becoming known as a writer as well as an artist.

But surely he had not yet reached that level of distinction where anyone would have considered it worthwhile to steal from him. The ransacking of his room was a major disturbance in his life—not so much because of the mess it left but because it made no sense.

He quickly swallowed the remainder of his breakfast and hurried away, murmuring something about errands. He was still brooding, and he felt an urge to complain to something, though he couldn't have said exactly what he meant to complain about. Fate, perhaps. Fate had always been kind to him in the past. Could it be that he had somehow displeased her?

He was impeccably dressed, as always. Max was a dandy and took pride in it. He was not merely correctly but artistically dressed at all times. He looked after his own wardrobe, pressing his clothes and ironing his silk hats. Fortunately, the violator of his room had left his wardrobe untouched, and Max would never have allowed a trifling domestic catastrophe like having his room torn apart prevent his making morning calls properly attired with hat, cane, and gloves. His first stop was the Mannerly Galleries, the Oxford Street shop of James Mannerly, an art dealer specialising in prints, etchings, and drawings, and there he abruptly walked into a scene uncomfortably reminiscent of the one he had experienced in his home the night before.

Chaos had struck randomly about the shop, and several police officers were contemplating the scene with solemn puzzlement.

Mannerly came hurrying to meet him. "Max!" he exclaimed. "I am devastated. I meant to send you a message, but the police insisted that everything be checked to see what is missing, and what with one thing and another—how did you find out

about it?”

He was a large, untidy, unpleasant-looking man, and his enemies claimed his success was due to the fact that any work of art looked better in his presence.

“What happened?” Max asked.

“Someone broke in last night and made this ghastly mess, but the only things they seem to have stolen are your drawings.”

Max carefully righted an overturned chair and sat down in it. “My drawings?”

Mannerly nodded.

“I suppose I should be flattered that somewhere in London there is one Beerbohm collector,” Max mused. “One active Beerbohm collector, I suppose I should say. These weren’t very good drawings. As you know, they were only a few leftover odds and ends that I gave you to fill out your display. I would have been surprised if any of them sold. Why would anyone bother to steal them?”

Mannerly raised his hands perplexedly. “Art thieves are unpredictable. Some are knowledgeable enough to take only the one or two most valuable things in a collection. They scorn touching anything else. Others take whatever they can and hope it will turn out to be valuable.”

“Who is the police officer in charge?” Max asked.

“Sergeant Hoskin. He’s in back checking for jemmy marks or whatever it is police do. Just a moment.”

Mannerly moved with a quickness surprising for his bulk. He returned with a dour, lank police officer who obviously took a grim view of life and everything connected with it. Mannerly performed the introductions. “Max Beerbohm—he’s the artist whose drawings were stolen.”

Sergeant Hoskin eyed Max narrowly. “What would you say your drawings were worth?”

“If I had received five pounds for each one, I would have felt blessed by whatever fairy it is who watches over financiers, but I don’t think James was asking five pounds.”

“Three,” Mannerly said. “As you said, they weren’t very good drawings.”

Hoskin scowled. “Twelve drawings stolen, you would have been glad to sell them for three pounds each, total loss about thirty-five pounds and probably less, not much of a burglary. An unusual amount of damage done, though. If all he wanted was those drawings, why didn’t he just take them and leave?”

“Unfortunately, the mystery goes far deeper than that,” Max said. “Last night,

while I was at the theatre, my room in my mother's home on Upper Berkeley Street was burgled."

The sergeant procured a chair for himself. A boring case had suddenly become interesting. "What was taken?"

"As far as I've been able to tell, nothing. But whoever did it left a far worse mess there."

"Perhaps he went to your quarters looking for drawings before he came here. Did you have any drawings there?"

"None. I gave everything I had on hand to James to fill out his display."

"Who was in charge of the police investigation?"

"A Sergeant Ashburn."

"I know him," Sergeant Hoskin said.

"He thought I might possess something of value without knowing it. Are you positive, James, that one of my drawings wasn't a masterpiece in disguise?"

Mannerly shook his head emphatically. "There is no way we can make the estimated value more than thirty-five pounds."

"Just a moment," Sergeant Hoskin said. "You're an artist—"

"And a writer. And a dramatic critic," Max added.

"And you've done other drawings?"

"Many."

"Are any of them worth more than the three-pound value you put on these?"

"I certainly hope so!"

"In that case, the burglar, hearing that some of your work was on display here, may have been hoping to steal one of those better drawings. Where are they?"

Max stared at him. He had the feeling of having been suddenly tumbled into an utterly strange landscape, like that of Alice in Wonderland. He and his sisters had often speculated on what life in such a place would be like. Now he knew. All rules of logic had been suspended. Why steal a drawing by Max Beerbohm? He could, very quickly, produce another. In fact, he could reproduce a copy of every stolen drawing from memory and do it far quicker than the time the originals had taken.

"Ackroyd Galleries on Old Bond Street," Max said. "Special exhibit, 'Twelve Drawings by Max Beerbohm.'"

Sergeant Hoskins turned to a constable. “Get over to the Ackroyd Galleries and find out whether anything unusual has happened there.”

“Ackroyd Galleries?” the constable repeated, his face screwed up in puzzlement.

“On Old Bond Street,” Max said again. “Near the Royal Arcade.”

The constable’s expression brightened, and he hurried away.

Max’s newly discovered illogical world continued to spin around him until the constable returned. Then it fractured into very small pieces.

“They had a burglary at the Ackroyd Galleries last night,” the constable announced. “The place is a mess, just like here, but nothing was stolen but this gentleman’s twelve drawings.”

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Max attended the Haymarket Theatre that night with a friend, the artist Wilson Steer. Steer had a mind that was most singularly focused on art. When he talked about a play, his comments were principally directed at the scenery. That night the scenery had been abominable, and when they left the theatre, Steer enlarged upon this as they walked along.

Max listened silently. His thoughts were still in a turmoil over the burglaries. Further, this was Wednesday night. The following day, Thursday, was his day of agony, the day when his Saturday Review article had to be written. He had taken Steer to the theatre with him in the hope that the artist might contribute an insight he could base his article on, but Saturday Review readers were unlikely to appreciate dramatic criticism that treated a play as an art exhibit.

Before the play began, Steer had tried to talk Max out of the funk he was in by applying logic. “Max, be reasonable. You’re twenty-five years old. You stand at the beginning of a career everyone expects will be brilliant, but you are better known as a writer than as an artist, and your art, that of a caricaturist, is highly specialised and one-dimensional—especially so with you, since you work with a pencil. No mad collector is going around London stealing your work. No collector could possibly be that demented. No one has a vendetta against you. You’re one of the most popular men in London. Hostesses love you. Whenever they need an extra male to match with a visiting spinster cousin, you are always available, and you arrive impeccably dressed and exude charm all evening no matter how plain the cousin is. You are a gem. Forget this business of stolen drawings—you can do all of them over again in an hour or two, can’t you? Call all of it a stupid mistake and get on with your life.”

By the time they left the theatre, Steer had already forgotten the stolen drawings. They walked along together, Steer—tall and sturdy with a bristling moustache—towering over the slender, diminutive Max and expounding truisms of

colour and form at him, none of which, it seemed, Steer had detected in the scenery of the play they had just seen. Max only half listened. The article he must write on the morrow already loomed heavily over him—he had no idea what he was going to write about—and the puzzle of his stolen drawings hung over him just as oppressively.

As they reached Shaftsbury Avenue, chaos erupted. There were shouts, the screech of heavy wheels turning suddenly, the neighing of horses. Max felt himself jerked bodily into the air. Something struck his head, and he was momentarily dazed. Behind him came a continued shouting, crashes and thuds, and the utterly unreal reek of beer splashed about in quantities.

Steer said calmly, “Don’t you ever look about you? Lucky for you you weren’t walking with Will Rothenstein. He’s much too small to perform a rescue like that.”

Max’s head ached. His top hat was in his hand, though he had no recollection of picking it up or having it handed to him. It had been crushed, ruined.

“What happened?” he asked Steer.

“Stupid driver of a brewer’s dray must have been half asleep when something frightened his horses. They came right at us. Fortunately, one of us was looking about. I plucked you from under the horses’ hooves.” He laughed and slapped Max on the back. “So you’ll live to write that article tomorrow after all. What are you going to write about? The drama of being run down by a brewer’s dray?”

“Saturday Review readers wouldn’t find that any more interesting than the other topics I’ve been able to think of,” Max said sadly. “The problem is, I have no idea what would interest them.”

“Then write about something that interests you,” Steer said.

He hailed a four-wheeler, and he boosted Max into it and announced his intention of seeing him safely to his door. “You shouldn’t be allowed out after dark,” he said.

At the Beerbohm residence, Constance took one look at Max’s disarrayed appearance and wailed, “How terrible! And on Wednesday night too! How will you get your article written?”

Mrs. Beerbohm arrived a moment later and added her own wail. “Poor Max! And tomorrow’s Thursday. How will you manage?”

“By forgetting all this,” Max said, “and getting a good night’s sleep.” He thanked Steer for saving his life and assorted smaller favours and hurried off to bed, where he was quite unable to sleep at all.

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The article got written. An elderly actress had charmingly played the part of a young girl in the play he had seen with Steer, and Max began with a glowing tribute to her performance and enlarged on this to discuss the fantasy inherent in any theatrical presentation. It was late when he finished. He delivered his copy himself and went home to tumble into bed. That night, Thursday, he slept soundly. He had escaped his bondage for another week.

At the breakfast table on Friday morning, his mind had returned to the stolen drawings. Constance was reading aloud the latest news on the Montagu Square murder. Mrs. Beerbohm was listening absently while mentally organising her next dinner party. She planned a dinner party as lavishly as the Lord Mayor planned a formal procession, with the result that the Beerbohm exchequer, limited as it was, remained perpetually in strained circumstances.

Max also listened absently. He did not stir himself until Constance finished the article. “You didn’t mention any of those illustrious suspects you were talking about the other day,” he observed.

“This is the Times,” Constance said. “It doesn’t mention suspects unless they really are suspects. That was the Morning Observer I was reading the other day. It must bribe someone in Scotland Yard to give it the latest gossip. All of those men had been linked with Miss Tapping at one time or another, so of course the police wanted to check on their whereabouts when she was murdered. But the police are no longer interested in them.”

“Does that mean all five convinced the police that they had alibis?”

“They didn’t exactly convince the police because some of them haven’t been found yet. The Duke of Arlington is fishing in Scotland and has been since the first of the month; he has a private fishing camp there. Sir Gordon Wade is sailing with friends in the Irish Sea. Viscount Sandell is staying with friends in Cornwall. Jamison Weyman was in Manchester on business at the time of the murder and is still there. None of them could conveniently come forward when asked to, you see. Colonel Poggs returned from the Continent the day after the murder, and he easily satisfied the police that he had been in Berlin when it happened. So all of them are eliminated.”

“‘Private fishing camp’ is the word for it where Lord George Pallister is concerned,” Max observed. “He thinks the human race was a mistake, and he has as little to do with it as possible. The Viscount Sandell has no home of his own and is always outstaying his welcome with someone. He will never be at a loss for an alibi. Whatever happens, he will have been someone’s guest at the time. Jamison Weyman is always travelling on business when he is wanted. Sir Gordon Wade is a sailing fanatic. It is even rumoured that he sails boats in his bathtub—at his age. As for Colonel Poggs, he was never where he was needed in battle, or so it is said, so it shouldn’t surprise the police that he wasn’t available when they wanted him. What a motley group of suspects! If I were a police officer, I would arrest the lot.”

“But they aren’t suspects any longer! The police know where they were at the time of the murder and have been able to eliminate all of them.”

“I see,” Max said. He suddenly saw something very clearly, something that had happened the day of the Montagu Square murder: Max had strolled over to Manchester Square to visit the Wallace Collection and was on his way home. He was meditating on a considerable problem as he walked along. He wasn’t satisfied with one of the drawings in the group he planned to place for exhibit at the Ackroyd Galleries. He wanted to replace it with something better, but he had nothing to offer.

In Gloucester Place, he all but collided with a man who was skulking along in a furtive sort of way. The skulking figure’s clean-shaven face was unfamiliar to Max, but it seemed oddly reminiscent of someone, and this jolted his mind to furious activity. There also had been something odd about the figure’s hands, but that didn’t fully register until later. He made no sketch, since he always drew from memory, but he clearly perceived the drawings he would make and the caption it would carry. He hurried home, drew it, delivered the twelve drawings to the Ackroyd Galleries for the planned exhibit, and destroyed the drawing he disliked.

He hadn’t given the skulking figure another thought, but now, looking back on the experience, Max was able to see it—and a number of other things—in an entirely different perspective. One of those things was his adventure with the brewer’s dray. He sent a telegram to Wilson Steer. “Come at once. I need you.” Then he retired to his room and redrew all twelve of the stolen Ackroyd drawings.

By the time he finished, Steer had arrived, panting perplexities. He had expected to find Max on his deathbed, and he considered it just like the impractical Max to send for an artist instead of a doctor when he found himself dying.

Max explained himself, and Steer’s large frame inflated further with indignation. “Do you mean to say that idiot dray driver tried to run us down on purpose?”

“That is exactly what I mean to say—except that the target was me, not you. Not that the person who engaged the driver would have shed any tears because you accidentally got in the way.”

“Now I understand,” Steer said. “You need a bodyguard.”

“Just until tomorrow night,” Max said, “but I must appear to be carrying on as though I don’t suspect anything. That’s why I sent for you. You can be my guard without arousing anyone’s suspicions because we are often seen together.”

“Where do you want to go?”

“First, to the Ackroyd Galleries.”

“Along the way, we will stop at my studio,” Steer said. “I keep a revolver there. If some idiot dray driver tries to run us down again, I’ll shoot him.”

At the Ackroyd Galleries, Max conferred with Edward Unwin, the galleries' director. Unwin, distinguishedly bearded, looked like an artist himself—and was. He was fond of Max, but it seemed to him that Max was asking a great deal this time. "All those advertisements will cost money," he protested.

"I'll try to get Scotland Yard to pay for them," Max promised.

"If I had to depend on that, I would starve," Unwin grumbled.

"The advertisements are to appear in as many of tomorrow's newspapers as possible," Max persisted, "and you are to display this drawing in your window all day tomorrow."

In the end, Unwin agreed to what Max asked.

"Where next?" Steer asked.

"Scotland Yard."

"No, you don't. Someone may be following us, and if he saw you go to Scotland Yard, it would give the show away."

Steer hailed a four-wheeler and told the driver to drive to Winsor & Newton in Rathbone Place. They were the colourmen from whom he bought his paints. Once inside, a whispered word of explanation gained them exit into a mews, where their four-wheeler was waiting. Steer repeated this manoeuvre twice more, at a bookseller's and at an engraver's. Finally, after studying the traffic behind them with care, he considered it safe to make for Scotland Yard.

But he had one belated practical question. "Once we get there, how are you going to get in? One doesn't just walk in off the street, announce that one has important information for the commissioner, and immediately receive honoured guest status."

"I didn't think about that," Max said, "but getting into Scotland Yard can't be much different from gaining admission anywhere. You have to know someone. Let me think."

Max probably knew less about the police than anyone else in London, but he instinctively realised that talking with the constable whose beat included Upper Berkeley Street would not accomplish what he wanted. Hence his mission to Scotland Yard, but he hadn't given any thought to whom he wanted to see there. Now he knew. He wanted to start at the top.

He gave the cab driver new directions and called on a businessman, an old friend of his father's. That gentleman did not know the commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, but he did know someone who did. That was their next stop. As a result, Max and Steer arrived at New Scotland Yard armed with a letter of introduction.

It almost did not help them. Young men lavishly got up in full morning dress, which Max was, were such an oddity at police headquarters that Max stood out like a South American parrot in a flock of sparrows. The officers' inclination was to lock him up at once and then question him, but Max persisted and got his letter delivered.

The letter said—after the conventional pleasantries—"These two gentlemen are Mr. Max Beerbohm, who is distinguished in London's art, literary, and dramatic circles, and his friend Wilson Steer, an artist. Mr. Beerbohm can tell you who the Montagu Square murderer is. He also can tell you how to catch him. Sincerely..."

As Max expected, this brought him a prompt interview. The commissioner, Sir Edward Bradford, had a formidable reputation—his history included the amputation without chloroform of an arm mangled by a tigress in India—but in appearance he was mild enough and his manner was friendly.

"I heard about your stolen drawings," he said. "I have a secretary who collects police oddities, and he pounced on that one. Are the stolen drawings somehow connected with the murder?"

"They are," Max said. "The thief not only attempted to eliminate the drawings; he also attempted to eliminate the artist." He described his adventure with the brewer's dray. "This is why I have Wilson with me. He is acting as my bodyguard until this is resolved."

"And how did you manage to identify the murderer?" Sir Edward asked.

Max told the full story of the skulking figure and what had followed. Sir Edward listened attentively. When Max finished, he asked, "Do you think he will attempt to steal your new drawings?"

"He will. He also will make another attempt on the life of the artist. He has no choice."

Sir Edward nodded slowly. "Agreed. He has no choice. Either way we will have a legal mess on our hands, but that isn't your doing. Very well. We will set the trap. Mr. Steer looks very capable, but we don't know what he may have to deal with. Do you want a police guard?"

Max shook his head. "That would be too conspicuous. I'll keep Wilson with me and try to behave as normally as possible. It will be an interesting experience. I've never lived dangerously before."

"And tomorrow night? If you want to be present to see the trap sprung, you will have to dress differently."

"Of course I'll dress differently. I wouldn't dream of going out in the evening in morning clothes," Max said.

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Saturday afternoon Steer escorted Max on another roundabout through several shops whose owners he knew and finally smuggled him through the rear door of the Ackroyd Galleries. The police were already there in force, having arrived singly pretending to be customers. The manager's office was crowded.

Edward Unwin regarded the growing gathering with a scowl. "I hope there will be less damage this time," he said.

"We won't give him time to damage anything," a police inspector promised.

Ackroyd Galleries was comprised of several rooms arranged in labyrinth fashion, and visitors often got confused and found themselves contemplating drawings or paintings a second time. This was deliberate. "An artwork always looks better on its second viewing," Unwin said. "Familiarity is the most important element in the layman's appreciation of art." The layout of the galleries guaranteed that a thief looking for a single group of drawings would find the task far more difficult than anticipated, but the police had no intention of allowing the thief time for a leisurely search.

Closing time came; the galleries emptied of visitors and customers. Max, resplendent in evening dress, placed a chair in a dark corner and arranged himself so as to do as little damage as possible to the crease in his trousers.

"A fine thief-catcher you would make," Steer announced.

"I am not here to catch a thief," Max said. "I have a grievance against him, so I am here to see him captured, but I will be perfectly content to watch. Some men are destined to keep the wheels of life turning; others have a powerful inclination to watch them do it. I am a watcher."

"I am not," Steer said. "If I get my hands on this thief, I will keep him turning, all right—inside out."

Two hours later, Max announced in a whisper, "I never knew time could pass so slowly."

"That's always the case when one has nothing to do but wait," Steer returned.

When the long wait finally came to an end shortly after one o'clock, everyone was taken by surprise, especially the police. For one thing, the lock on the rear door was picked so quickly and expertly that the thief was inside in what seemed like an instant. For another thing, there were three of them. One headed directly for the front of the store; the others moved towards the exhibit of Beerbohm drawings with a sureness that could only have come from careful advance inspection of the premises.

The thief in the front of the store was reaching for the drawing on display in the window when the police closed their trap. All three of the thieves fought like demented wildcats, and there simply were not enough police on hand to fulfill the

inspector's pledge of no damage to the premises. Wilson Steer delightedly waded into the fray and exacted a measure of revenge for the errant dray driver.

Finally, the thieves were immobilised, lights were called for, and the cloths that covered their faces ripped off. Max indicated one of them with a chortle—the sharp nose and furtive look were familiar.

"May I present—Lord George Pallister, Duke of Arlington, and two of his low friends."

A police constable scrutinised His Lordship perplexedly. "Blimey! What's become of 'is 'air? Did 'e shave it off?"

"If he ever had it," Max said. "I always thought he displayed far too much beard and moustache for such a young man. Find his residence, and you may find a choice assortment of false whiskers. But hair isn't the evidence you need. Take his gloves off."

The police did so—with another struggle—revealing a pair of hands deeply and repeatedly scratched.

"If he's not the Montagu Square murderer, he'd better have a good explanation for this," the inspector said. "All right, all right," he added, as his captive began to babble hysterically. "You can tell us all about it at headquarters. Bring Mr. Beerbohm's drawings—they're evidence."

"The caricature of Lord George Pallister is the one in the window," Max said. "That should be all you'll need. Let the galleries continue to exhibit the others. The publicity will provide Unwin with some small compensation for being invaded and wrecked twice."

* * * *

Sir Edward Bradford called on Max the following Tuesday. Max entertained him in his mother's drawing room since he had none of his own.

"His Lordship still isn't talking," Sir Edward said. "Probably he never will. Since he's a peer of the realm, he can't be tried in an ordinary assizes, but that's none of our concern. Wherever he's tried, a case against him must be presented, and that's what we're preparing. We've accumulated a mass of evidence already. His Lordship was leading a double life. He pretended to go off by himself to the wilds of Scotland or Wales, and instead he assumed a second identity in London, where he consorted with his mistress, Letty Tapping, and was well known in London's underworld. As we understand the case, he had a falling out with his mistress, attempted a reconciliation, and lost his temper and strangled her—getting his hands thoroughly and viciously scratched in the process.

"After the murder, he was in a desperate hurry to put as much distance between himself and Montagu Square as possible before he risked hailing a cab.

When he rushed past you in Gloucester Place, he must have recognised you."

"I'm sure he did," Max said. "He doesn't often appear in public, but I can remember being present at two dinners he condescended to attend, and I've encountered him once or twice at public gatherings. As for why he would remember an unimportant writer and artist—I've heard it said that I dress conspicuously."

"I wonder where anyone would get that idea," Sir Edward murmured.

"Once seen, always remembered—that's a dandy's fate."

"In any event, he did recognise you, and when he saw a caricature of himself listed among the drawings Ackroyd was exhibiting, he went to see it. The bandaged hands told him you had recognised him. You had seen him in London near the scene of the murder shortly after it occurred, which meant that as long as you were around to give evidence, his carefully contrived Scottish alibi was worthless." He paused and scrutinised Max. "I still consider it remarkable that you recognised him without his beard."

"I've trained myself to imagine what faces would be like with different features or with the features exaggerated. Even so, it was a belated recognition. I didn't realise that I'd seen him until several days later. At the time, my mind was searching for a subject for a drawing to replace one I didn't like in the group I had put together for the Ackroyd exhibit. To me he was a stranger with something about him that weirdly reminded me of Lord George Pallister—which was just the inspiration I was searching for.

"I went home and drew a new caricature of Lord George Pallister, but due to some odd twist of memory, I drew him like the stranger I had just seen—a Lord George skulking along in a great hurry as though fearing to be seen. I gave the caricature the caption, 'Lord George Pallister skulks from the House of Lords after calling the Earl of Walmly a tarradiddler.' You may remember that several weeks ago he denounced the earl in such strong language that he was officially reprimanded for it. But by another odd twist of memory, I made both of his hands crudely bandaged, just as the stranger's hands were bandaged. Perhaps I sensed some symbolism in this that I was only half aware of. So the caricature was really a drawing of the stranger with the Duke's beard added."

Sir Edward nodded. "When he saw the drawing, he knew it was evidence that could get him hanged for murder. That set in motion everything that followed. He didn't do all of it himself, of course. We have confessions from the two low friends who were captured with him. One of them turned your room inside out, and the other, an expert locksmith turned thief, accompanied the duke to the two exhibits to steal your drawings. The duke was trying to divert attention from the theft of the caricature of himself by handing us a much larger mystery. Then it occurred to him that you probably could redraw the caricature of him from memory, and he hired a dray driver to trail after you when you left the theatre and contrive to have an

accident. No doubt he planned other accidents when that failed, but before he could carry any of them out, he learned from the newspaper advertisements that you did redraw the caricature, and he found it on display in Ackroyd's window. As you anticipated, he arranged to steal it at the earliest opportunity. We have the complete case now—with you as our star witness."

Max cringed.

"He'll have to be judged by a court of his peers," Sir Edward went on, "which will give the nobility something to do and the newspapers ample scandal to draw moral lessons from for weeks to come."

"The newspapers will miss the real moral lesson," Max said. "One should never make an afternoon call unless properly attired, and that includes both hat and gloves. If the duke had worn gloves when he called on Letty Tapping, he could have concealed the damage to his hands inconspicuously, I wouldn't have drawn him with bandaged hands, and he might have escaped the law altogether. When a nobleman dresses with such poor taste, we shouldn't be surprised that he is also capable of murder."