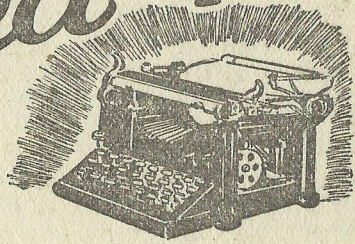


THE CASE OF

The Poisoned "T"



HAWKE was sitting at his desk, looking thoughtfully out of the window, an untouched tea-tray in front of him, when a dark-haired, well-tailored and plainly agitated young man was shown into the room.

"Sit down, Mr Freeman," said the detective, "and have a cup of tea."

The visitor started.

"I say," he exclaimed, "you surely don't recognise me from——"

"Of course not. You haven't reached stardom yet. Besides, I rarely go to the cinema."

"Then how do you know who I am?"

"The gentleman standing by the lamp-post over the road is Detective-Sergeant Brown, of Scotland Yard. I happen to know that he is working on that film studio case, and, when I caught sight of him a moment ago, I naturally surmised he had followed someone here. Someone connected with the case. Now, what person connected with that case should be calling on me? Who but the young man who is almost openly suspected of having killed Arthur Grant?"

The caller's agitation increased as he gazed out of the window.

"So," he gasped, "I've been followed here? I—I'm likely to be arrested at any moment."

Hawke leaned back in his chair and eyed Freeman searchingly.

"I don't think so," he remarked, "unless you perform some incriminating act. You see, the police are worried.

They can't fathom exactly how Grant met his death. You're being followed simply because there's a shortage of evidence."

"I swear I didn't do it, Mr Hawke. You don't think I did, do you? That invitation to a cup of tea——"

"No, no, Mr Freeman. That was not an innuendo. The analyst has discovered no trace of poison in Grant's cup of tea. Now, supposing you calm yourself, and sit down and tell me the whole story?"

Freeman sat down.

"As you know," he began, "Grant was a scenario writer, and the young lady whom I hope to marry, Miss Elsie Thorn, had been working as his typist. It's true I was jealous. Grant had a reputation as a lady's man. Besides, he had been trying to persuade her to finish with me.

"The night before last," continued Freeman, "Grant was in his office in a corner of the big studio, working late on a script. I was hanging about in the background, feeling very irritated, because I was waiting to take Elsie out, and I felt that Grant was only making the work an excuse to detain her.

"When I inquired how long she would be, Grant said not more than half an hour, and asked me if I would slip across to the canteen and get him a cup of tea. I did so, and then stood just outside the office talking to Brock."