

# 1

The first clue in the case of May Goodwin arrived at our apartment on a hot, steamy July morning in 1903. Emmie had gone shopping and I sat lingering over the morning paper. There was a knock at the door. It didn't strike me as an especially portentous knock, but then I'm never at my knock-discerning best on hot, steamy mornings.

Opening the door revealed an ordinary-looking fellow not much older than myself—certainly less than thirty-five—who bore an expression best described as stupefaction. This was the first mystery of the day: Why was he surprised at my answering the door to the apartment I'd rented two years before? We stood staring at each other until he eventually stammered out his query.

“Is, ah, Miss Meegs in?”

“The ethereal Meegs or her earthly presence?”

“Pardon?”

“No, she's not in.”

“But she is staying here?”

“Well, inasmuch as she can be said to be staying anywhere.”

“Are you her...?”

“Valet.”

“I see.” He looked me up and down. “Well, I have to catch a train for Boston.”

“Perhaps she can write you there?”

“No, no point in that. I'll be leaving for Maine immediately. Could you just tell her, ah..., Mr. Leverton called and I hope to meet with her soon?”

He didn't wait for an answer, just gave me a little nod and ran down the stairs. I closed the door and on passing the hall mirror solved that first mystery. The fellow's look of surprise may have been prompted by my having answered the door in my drawers. A particularly airy pair of drawers. Fortunately, Emmie is not the sort of wife who amuses herself evenings by mending laundry, so on hot, steamy mornings, I can always find something well-ventilated.

When I say this visit was the first clue in the case of May Goodwin I'm speaking broadly. It wasn't a clue to the identity of her murderer, or even that she would be murdered. It was merely a clue that Emmie was up to something. Of course, Emmie is nearly always up to something. Other fellows envy me when I reveal that even after three years I *always* find my wife intriguing. But they mistake the verb for the adjective. Thankfully, the majority of her machinating goes on without my ever catching wind of it. Which suits me fine. I learned long ago that the key to a happy married life with Emmie lies in limiting the time spent entangled in her ill-conceived schemes.

So, though it stirred my curiosity to have a stranger come to the door and ask for my wife under a false name, I was content to accept the most harmless explanation I could imagine. You see, M.E. Meegs is Emmie's pen name. Ergo, this Leverton's call must have been an innocent

result of her literary efforts. And that would have remained my assumption had not the second clue arrived just a little later that same morning.

I'd gone into the bedroom to pack a bag for a trip I was to make that afternoon—investigating a life insurance case in Youngstown—when the phone rang. It was a ticket agent. He asked that I tell Miss Meegs he'd completed the arrangements for her trip to Portland.

“Portland?”

“Yes, Portland, Maine. Leaving tomorrow. The tickets will be waiting at Grand Central under her name. The hotel has her reservation. Good day.”

Under normal circumstances, I'm not the suspicious type. But this intelligence that Emmie was taking a clandestine trip to Portland—under a false name, and while I was expected to be out of town for at least a week—in combination with the recent call of Leverton—inquiring after the same false name, and soon to be visiting Maine himself—began to weigh on my normally complacent mind.

I was torn. Should I proceed to Youngstown and a reasonable chance of earning a \$3,000 fee? Or should I get to the bottom of Emmie's subterfuge (assuming there was a bottom) and thereby safeguard my possibly imperiled marriage? I was considering the merits of each option when I was woken by a providential phone call and relieved of my dilemma. The dead man formerly residing in Youngstown had been discovered alive and well in Chicago. With the claim withdrawn, there was nothing to investigate.

When Emmie arrived home an hour later I pretended to be reading the newspaper. We greeted one another, and then, without lowering the paper, I gave her the news about my trip having been canceled—and observed her reaction from my blind.

“Oh?” She made a futile effort at concealing her consternation. “Is it definitely off?”

“Yes. Isn't that lucky? Now we can take that excursion to the Adirondacks.”

“Adirondacks?” she said uneasily. “It's not really the right time of year, is it?”

“Summer is the usual choice. But suit yourself, it was your idea. How about Maine?”

“Maine?”

I had her squirming now and was enjoying it. But as usual, the little eel was tough to get a grip on.

“It's funny you should mention Maine, Harry. While I was out, I ran into Dot Kotschmar, from my class at college. I'm sure I've mentioned her.”

“Not that I recall, and it's not a name one could easily forget.”

“Well, she's still living up in Maine—Portland, to be precise. And when I told her you were going to be away, she invited me to come up and spend a week with her.”

“And what time was that?”

“What time? Why, just half an hour ago. I saw her as I was passing through Park Row on my way home.”

“Then it's interesting you received a call about your travel arrangements earlier this morning.”

“Did I?”

“Yes, a good two hours before your meeting with dear Dot.”

“Well, the truth is, it was yesterday I ran into her. I was just going to tell you about it.”

“No doubt,” I smiled. “Why don’t I accompany you? I’ll buy a ticket tomorrow.”

“Oh, you wouldn’t enjoy it. We’ll be chatting the whole time. And she lives in a tiny little house.”

“We can take a room at a local inn, and I can spend my days golfing and fishing and whatnot.”

“Golfing and fishing? When have you ever gone golfing *or* fishing?”

“I was planning to concentrate on the whatnot.”

“Well, it’s up to you, Harry. But keep in mind, Maine is a dry state.”

“That means it will be as difficult to find a drink as it is in New York on any given Sunday.”

“I believe the law’s taken a little more seriously there.”

“Well, maybe you’re right. I suppose I should stay here and try to drum up some work.”

This was a ruse to give her the impression I’d been duped. I wasn’t sure what Emmie had planned in Portland, but I was certain it didn’t involve Dot Kotzschmar. Why make a reservation at a hotel? And why travel under an alias? I doubted Dot’s existence entirely until I snuck a peek at Emmie’s yearbook later that evening. She was real, all right. Nevertheless, I felt confident that being saddled with a name like Kotzschmar, she’d have exercised her option and married at the first opportunity.

No, Emmie was up to something. Something involving a strange man, a distant city, and a hotel room reserved under an assumed name. There was nothing for it but to follow her up to Portland. In the meantime, I gave her no hint of my plans—just let her worry. Does Harry know I’m traveling as Meegs? Does he know about the hotel? I sensed her mind was active because she tossed a good deal in bed. And when Emmie tosses in bed, anyone in striking distance of her knee is liable to spend the night dodging it.

She rose before me and I hoped to at last get some sleep when the phone rang. Emmie answered it, and after a longish conversation, came into the room.

“Good news, Harry. I’ve just accepted a job for you. You’re to be in Boston this afternoon. Then proceed to Cape something.”

“Cape something? What sort of job?”

“A fire insurance claim.”

“How much?”

“The claim was for \$40,000. That means you could earn \$4,000.”

“*If* I prove it’s fraudulent. What’s the per diem?”

“He didn’t mention that.”

“Then *you* should have.”

“I’d have thought you’d be happy. This way we can travel together to Boston. I’ll spend

tonight with you and then go on to Portland tomorrow morning.”

Once again the eel had slid from my grasp. Or so we both thought.

Later that morning, we boarded the ten o'clock express to Boston. As soon as we were seated, Emmie picked up her book. I waited about twenty minutes for her to get good and comfortable, then launched my next salvo.

“A fellow stopped by for you, Emmie. Yesterday morning. I'm afraid I forgot to mention it.”

“What fellow?”

“A fellow asking for M.E. Meegs.”

“And you didn't tell me? What if he was a publisher's agent?”

“Sorry. What with my disappointment over the trip to Youngstown being called off, and my surprise at learning about your secret sojourn in Portland, it just slipped my mind.”

“What secret sojourn? I told you all about it. What was the man's name?”

“I believe he said Leverton.”

“Oh. Mr. Leverton.”

“A strange man comes calling for you, and you think you can close the matter with ‘Oh, Mr. Leverton?’”

“Don't be ridiculous, Harry. I've never met the man. You know him as well as I.”

“I've never heard of anyone named Leverton.”

“Yes you have.”

“When?”

“Back when I was writing those pieces for English newspapers.”

“The ones that grossed you thirty-seven cents each?”

She made an unpleasant noise which I took as confirmation, then went on. “Do you remember the Long Island case I reported?” (She said reported, but you may take it as imagined. What any sane person would attribute to delusional hallucination, Emmie attributes to insightful perception.) “That of the immigrant girls being held in a cave near Sag Harbor by a crew of Amazonian white slavers.”

“Yes, I remember now. You had them rescued by some damn Pinkerton.”

“That's right, but you must remember, it was before I was fully informed as to the degree of your antipathy for all things Pinkerton.”

“What's that have to do with this fellow Leverton coming by yesterday?”

“The Pinkerton in my story was named Leverton.”

“I assumed that was a complete fabrication.”

“It was.”

“So, you're saying a fictional character of your creation stopped by for a chat?”

“That seems hardly likely, Harry. My supposition has been that there simply happened to be a Pinkerton named Leverton and he somehow heard about my account. Though how a

detective working in Boston happened upon a story in *The Leek Times and Cheadle News* is a complete mystery.”

“Your supposition ‘has been’? And how do you know he was working in Boston?”

“A month or so after I wrote the story, he came by the apartment.”

“I thought you said you’d never met him?” I asked.

“I haven’t. I happened to be out on both occasions. It was when my mother was visiting, he left a card with her. The address was that of Pinkerton’s Boston office. I never told you about it because I thought it would upset you.”

“Upset me?”

“Yes. And see? It *has* upset you.”

“So you had no idea this Leverton would be calling?”

“None.”

“Still, it’s curious he calls asking for M.E. Meegs and a little later I receive a call from a ticket agent confirming that tickets are being held for one M.E. Meegs.”

“Oh. Well, I made the arrangements in that name... as a lark.”

“A lark?”

“Yes. Just a bit of fun.”

I didn’t doubt that, but at whose expense?

This news that Leverton was a Pinkerton did nothing to allay my worries. I’m of a lineage taught from birth that no creature on earth slithers lower than a Pinkerton detective. The reasoning behind it would be difficult to explain briefly, touching as it does on an obscure Utopian sect and its charming tenets. But you may be sure, no Reese is considered weaned until he can make a fist and shake it menacingly at the mere mention of the name Pinkerton.

My appointment with the fire insurer was for five o’clock that afternoon. But I told Emmie it was for half past three, then took a place near the window of a barroom located across from the Pinkerton office. Shortly before four o’clock, Emmie strolled up to the door and entered. It was just a few minutes later that she emerged. When she was safely out of sight, I made my own way into the vipers’ den.

I asked the girl operating the switchboard if Leverton was in.

“My, ain’t he popular today. Mr. Leverton won’t be back from Maine ’til next week.”

“Where in Maine?”

“A town called Westbrook.”

“That’s nowhere near Portland, is it?”

“Must be. At least that’s the depot he traveled to.”

I thanked her and went off, now more convinced than ever that my little eel was up to something.

At my meeting with the insurer I learned the case involved a hotel that burned down barely two weeks after it had been completed. Then I learned that Emmie had agreed to a per diem of just ten dollars, and that the ten percent fee would need to be split with an arson

investigator already working the case, Ed Ketchum, who I knew never accepted a per diem less than twenty-five dollars. The job had lost all appeal and I was trying to think of a legitimate cause for backing out. Then the great wheel of fortune turned in my favor.

The hotel, or what was left of it, was on Cape Elizabeth. And Cape Elizabeth—as I well knew, and Emmie apparently did not—lies just south of Portland. Now I'd be able to spy on my eel and be paid while doing it.

Yes, things seemed to be going my way. But the thought of heading to a dry state unprepared frightened me. I stopped by a vintner and arranged to have a case of claret sent freight to Portland. And for an extra dollar I had the crate's St. Julien label obscured by one that read "scientific instruments"—a clever suggestion of the salesman's.

Emmie was still sure she'd gotten the better of me and I let her bask in that belief until we were just finishing dinner.

"I received some news this afternoon, Emmie. News I'm certain will please you."

"Oh?" She was already starting to writhe. "What sort of news?"

"Well, this case I'll be working on. It's on Cape Elizabeth."

"Yes, that is good news." She was relieved, but not for long.

"You don't know where Cape Elizabeth is, do you, Emmie?"

"Not exactly. Somewhere on the coast?"

"Yes. Somewhere on the coast—the coast of Maine."

She dropped her cordial into her meringue.

"Just where on the coast of Maine, Harry?"

"Care to guess?"

"Near Portland?"

"Very near."

"How lovely." Normally, Emmie's a very good liar, and hiding her true feelings comes as second nature. But not this time. I'd ordered her another cordial and she was sipping it thoughtfully, no doubt weaving some new web of deception.

Then she leapt from her reverie. "The show!"

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<http://www.harryreesemysteries.com/jewel/>