

Arty

By Bill Wolfe

“Thank you, your Honor, if I may continue? On the morning of April eleventh, at the hour of ten-and-a-quarter, I observed that the suspect had coal ash, the same as found at the murder scene, on his left shoe and a small smudge on the right shoulder of his waistcoat. I then followed him to the foundry, where I observed him removing a small bundle from his ditty, and attempting to throw it into the furnace. At this point, I apprehended him and charged him with the crime.”

“And how were you dressed, when you apprehended Alderman Peters, Detective?”

“Your Honor?”

“Were you, in fact, dressed as a common ragamuffin, and in shirtsleeves, no less, when you placed the honorable Alderman under arrest?”

“Why yes, your Honor, I was. In that part of town, my disguise allowed me to move about without drawing undue attention. The suspect turned on several occasions to see if he was being shadowed, and looked right past me, every time.”

“This is most improper behavior for a New York City Police Department Detective, I must say. Propriety, when dealing with an elected official of this great city, should be observed at all times. I assure you that Commissioner Roosevelt will hear of this outlandish breach of etiquette. Teddy and I will be dining together, this evening, as a matter of fact.”

“I understand, your Honor, but it was the only way to catch him before he destroyed the evidence.”

“I note a slight accent, Detective, were you born here, in this country?”

“Your Honor, with all due respect, I can’t see at all how my circumstances are relevant to this case.”

“Your ignorance is of no concern to me, Detective. You will answer the question, or be charged with contempt.”

“Your Honor, my parents moved me to this country in 1860, when I was one year of age, from Scotland. That was two years before The Plague became rampant, and all emigration from what used to be called the British Empire, was blocked. My mother was an avid reader of history, and suspected that the London and Paris outbreaks of 1858, would spread.”

“Quite right, Detective. Perhaps your foreign background will explain your unfamiliarity with our basic tenants. In this great Republic, a man has a right to destroy his own property—and the revolver you recovered is clearly Alderman Peters’ private property—at any time he chooses.

The ownership of a weapon, by a responsible gentleman is a constitutionally guaranteed, absolute Right.”

“That it is clearly the same caliber used to murder this poor woman, is irrelevant. There are thousands of these in the city, since The War. And yes, before you interrupt, I read your treatise on matching a bullet to a specific gun, but this nonsense of ‘ballistics’ is not an accepted, scientific technique, so I cannot take it into consideration. Because the Alderman was about to destroy the test bullet you fired, I will not charge you with theft for firing his revolver without his consent. That bullet was not yours to use, Detective, and you would be well advised to keep your pet theories out of your official investigations.”

“But the letters, your Honor. He was about to throw those into the furnace, as well.”

“Detective, I have already ruled that the correspondence between the good Alderman and this unfortunate woman are a private matter, and though they show a shameful lack of regard for public decency on the Alderman’s behalf, this Court does not engage in malicious scandalmongering. And furthermore, since the poor woman is not here to contradict the Alderman’s claim that she returned them to him, we simply must accept his account. You have no witnesses of any kind to suggest that merely because the door to her tenement flat was forced, means that the letters were—in fact—stolen and not returned to him prior to her demise, as he claims.”

“Your Honor, the cut on the suspect’s left hand is precisely the type of wound that whomever forced that door received. I found fresh blood and a small amount of flesh on the splintered shards of the door jamb.”

“Detective, I have a small cut on my thigh, am I to be charged next?”

“But, your Honor!”

“I have had enough of this insolence, Detective. Unless you have more compelling evidence than you have presented here, today, I will dismiss the charges against Alderman Peters, forthwith.”

“Nothing else, your Honor.”

“One more thing, Detective. You have made quite a name for yourself for your handling of the Vanderbilt diamond theft, and Mrs. Astor’s opinion of your talents is unshakable. But you mark my words, young fellow, no amount of social support will save you if you ever again try to bring charges against a gentleman of Alderman Peters’ standing with such shoddy, irrelevant or circumstantial evidence. Tammany Hall is a thing of the past, but there are still ways to deal with public servants who forget their station. Mayor Strong will not be in office, forever.”

“Detective Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle, the Court thanks you for your testimony and your service to the great city of New York. You may step down.”

The End