

**THE STRANGE CASE
OF MR.
JOCELYN THEW**

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The strange case of Mr. Jocelyn Thew by E. Phillips Oppenheim

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*Weyburn
Barrow 1921*

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

JAMES CRAWSHAY, Englishman of the type usually described in transatlantic circles as "some Britisher," lolled apparently at his ease upon the couch of the too-resplendent sitting-room in the Hotel Magnificent, Chicago. Hobson, his American fellow-traveller, on the other hand, betrayed his anxiety by his nervous pacing up and down of the apartment. Both men bore traces in their appearance of the long journey which they had only just completed.

"I think," Crawshay decided, yawning, "that I shall have a bath. I feel gritty, and my collar—heavens, what a sight! Your trains, Hobson, may be magnificent, but your coal is filthy. I will have a bath while your friend the policeman makes up his mind whether to come and see us or not."

His companion treated the suggestion with scant courtesy.

"You will do nothing of the sort," was his almost fierce objection. "We've got to wait right here until Chief Constable Downs comes along. There's something crooked about this business, something I don't understand, and the sooner we get to the bottom of it the better."

The Englishman pacified himself with a whisky and soda which a waiter had just brought in. He added several lumps of ice, and drained the con-

tents of the tumbler with a little murmur of appreciation.

"It will be confoundedly annoying," he admitted quietly, "if we've had all this journey for nothing."

Hobson moistened his dry lips with his tongue. The whisky and soda and the great bucket of ice stood temptingly at his elbow, but he appeared to ignore their existence. He was a man of ample build, with a big, clean-shaven face, a square jaw and deep-set eyes, a man devoted to, engrossed wholly by, his work.

"See here, Crawshay," he exclaimed, "if that despatch was a fake, if we've been brought here on a fool's errand, they haven't done it for nothing. If they've brought it off against us, you mark my words, we're left . . . we're bamboozled . . . we're a couple of lost loons! There's nothing left for us but to sell candy to small boys or find a job on a farm."

"You're such a pessimist!" the Englishman yawned.

"Pessimist!" was the angry retort. "I'll just ask you one question, my son. Where's Downs?"

"I certainly think," Crawshay admitted, "that under the circumstances he might have been at the station to meet us."

"He wouldn't even talk through the 'phone," Hobson pointed out. "I had to explain who we were to one of the inspectors. No one seemed to know a goll-darned thing about us."

"They sent for him right away when you explained who you were," Crawshay reminded his companion.

Hobson found no comfort whatever in the reflection.

"Of course they did," he replied brusquely. "There's scarcely likely to be a chief constable of any city in the United States who wouldn't get a move on when he knew that Sam Hobson was waiting for a word. I haven't been in the Secret Police of this country for fifteen years for nothing. He'll come fast enough as soon as he knows I'm waiting; but, all the same, what I want to know is, if that despatch was on the square, why wasn't he at the depot to meet us?"

Their conversation was interrupted by the tinkle of the telephone which stood upon the table between them, the instrument which both men had been watching anxiously. Hobson snatched up the receiver.

"Police headquarters speaking? Right! . . . Yes, this is Sam Hobson. I'm here with Crawshay, of the English Secret Service. We got your despatch. . . . What's that? . . . Well? . . . Chief Constable Downs is on the way, eh? . . . Just started? Good! We're waiting for him."

Hobson replaced the receiver upon the instrument.

"Downs is coming right along," he announced. "I tell you what it is, Mr. Crawshay," he went on, recommencing his walk up and down the apartment, "I don't feel happy to be so far away from the coast. That's what scares me. Chicago's just about the place they'd land us, if this is a hanky-panky trick. We're twenty hours from New York, and the *City of Boston* sails to-morrow at five o'clock."

The Englishman shook himself and rose from his recumbent position upon the sofa. He was a man of youthful middle-age, colourless, with

pleasant face, a somewhat discontented mouth, but keen grey eyes. He had been sent out from Scotland Yard at the beginning of the war, to assist in certain work at the English Embassy. So far his opportunities had not been many, or marked with any brilliant success, and it seemed to him that the gloom of failure was already settling down upon their present expedition.

"You don't believe, then, any more than I do, that when a certain box we know of is opened at the Foreign Office in London it will contain the papers we are after?"

"No, sir, I do not," was the vigorous reply. "I think they have been playing a huge game of bluff on us. That's why I am so worried about this trip. I wouldn't mind betting you the best dinner you ever ate at Delmonico's or at your London Savoy that that box with the broken seals they all got so excited about don't contain a single one of the papers that we're after. Why, those blasted Teutons wanted us to believe it! That's why some of the seals were broken, and why the old man himself hung about like a hen that's lost one of its chickens. They wanted us to believe that we'd got the goods right in that box, and to hold up the search for a time while they get the genuine stuff out of the country. I admit right there, Mr. Crawshay, that it was you who put this into my head at Halifax. I couldn't swallow it then, but when Downs didn't meet us at the depot here, it came over me like a flash that you were right, that we were being had."

"We ought, perhaps, to have separated," the Englishman ruminated. "I ought to have gone to New York and you here. On the other hand, you

must remember that all the evidence which we have managed to collect points to Chicago as having been the headquarters of the whole organisation."

"Sure!" the American admitted. "And there's another point about it, too. If this outsider who has taken on the job for them should really turn out to be Jocelyn Thew, I'd have banked on his working the scheme from Chicago. He knows the backways of the city, or rather he used to, like a rat. Gee, it would be a queer thing if, after all these years, one were to get the bracelets on him!"

"I don't quite see," Crawshay remarked, "how such a person as this Jocelyn Thew, of whom you have spoken several times, could have become associated with an affair of this sort. Both the Germans and the Austrians at Washington had the name of being exceedingly particular with regard to the status of their agents, and he must be entirely a new-comer in international matters. From the dossier you handed me Jocelyn Thew reads more like a kind of modern swash-buckler spoiling for a fight than a person likely to make a success of a secret service job."

"Don't you worry," Hobson replied. "Jocelyn Thew could hold his own at any Court in Europe with any of your Embassy swaggerers. There's nothing known about his family, but they say that his father was an English aristocrat, and he looks like it, too."

"It was you yourself who called him criminal, the first time you spoke of him," Crawshay reminded his companion.

"And a criminal he is at heart, without a doubt," the American declared impressively.

"Has he ever been in prison?"

"He has had the luck of Old Harry," Hobson grumbled. "Up in New York they all believed that it was he who shot Graves, the Pittsburg millionaire. The chief commissionaire will have it that he was the head of that Fourteenth Street gang of coiners, and I've a pal down in Baltimore who is ready to take his oath that he planned the theft of the Vanderloon jewels—aye, and brought it off, too! But I tell you this, sir. When the trouble comes, whoever gets nabbed it's never Jocelyn Thew. He's the slickest thing that ever made a million dollars on the cross."

The door was opened by the floor waiter, who held it while a thin, dark man, dressed in civilian clothes of most correct cut, passed in. Hobson gripped him at once by the hand.

"Captain Downs, sir," he said; "this is my friend, Mr. Crawshay, who is connected with the English Embassy over here. You can shake hands with him later. We're on a job of business, and the first thing before us is to get an answer from you to a certain question. Did you send this despatch or did you not?"

Hobson handed over to the new-comer the crumpled telegraph form which he had just produced from his pocket. The latter glanced through it and shook his head.

"It's a plant," he announced. "I'm sorry if the use of my name has misled you in any way, but it was quite unauthorised. I know nothing whatever about the matter."

Hobson remained for a moment silent—silent with sick and angry astonishment. Crawshay had glanced towards the clock, and was standing now with his finger upon the bell.