The Middle Temple Murder

Fletcher Joseph Smith
Title: The Middle Temple Murder

Author: Fletcher Joseph Smith

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THE MIDDLE TEMPLE MURDER

BY

J. S. FLETCHER

NEW YORK
ALFRED A. KNOPF
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THE MIDDLE TEMPLE MURDER
CHAPTER ONE

THE SCRAP OF GREY PAPER

As a rule, Spargo left the Watchman office at two o'clock. The paper had then gone to press. There was nothing for him, recently promoted to a sub-editorship, to do after he had passed the column for which he was responsible; as a matter of fact he could have gone home before the machines began their clatter. But he generally hung about, trifling, until two o'clock came. On this occasion, the morning of the 22nd of June, 1912, he stopped longer than usual, chatting with Hacket, who had charge of the foreign news, and who began telling him about a telegram which had just come through from Durazzo. What Hacket had to tell was interesting: Spargo lingered to hear all about it, and to discuss it. Altogether it was well beyond half-past two when he went out of the office, unconsciously puffing away from him as he reached the threshold the last breath of the atmosphere in which he had spent his midnight. In Fleet Street the air was fresh, almost to sweetness, and the first grey of the coming dawn was breaking faintly around the high silence of St. Paul's.

Spargo lived in Bloomsbury, on the west side of Russell Square. Every night and every morning he walked to and from the Watchman office by the same route—Southampton Row, Kingsway, the Strand, Fleet Street. He came to know several faces, especially amongst the
police; he formed the habit of exchanging greetings with various officers whom he encountered at regular points as he went slowly homewards, smoking his pipe. And on this morning, as he drew near to Middle Temple Lane, he saw a policeman whom he knew, one Driscoll, standing at the entrance, looking about him. Further away another policeman appeared, sauntering. Driscoll raised an arm and signalled; then, turning, he saw Spargo. He moved a step or two towards him. Spargo saw news in his face.

"What is it?" asked Spargo.

Driscoll jerked a thumb over his shoulder, towards the partly open door of the lane. Within, Spargo saw a man hastily donning a waistcoat and jacket.

"He says," answered Driscoll, "him, there—the porter—that there's a man lying in one of them entries down the lane, and he thinks he's dead. Likewise, he thinks he's murdered."

Spargo echoed the word.

"But what makes him think that?" he asked, peeping with curiosity beyond Driscoll's burly form.

"Why?"

"He says there's blood about him," answered Driscoll. He turned and glanced at the oncoming constable, and then turned again to Spargo. "You're a newspaper man, sir?" he suggested.

"I am," replied Spargo.

"You'd better walk down with us," said Driscoll, with a grin. "There'll be something to write pieces in the paper about. At least, there may be." Spargo made no answer. He continued to look down the lane,