

THE CASE OF THE SIX PILES

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"Good evening, Sir. I am Lewis Steinbeck from the Star-Democrat."

"With a name like that I can see why you would want to be a writer. Do come in. Follow me to the den. Tell me, what is this all about?"

"Strange Powers, Chief Editor, asked me if I would like to do a feature story on you. He called you Lieutenant Arthur Jamison, the Poetic Detective. He said you had the uncanny ability to solve cases from clues implanted in lines of verse."

"Thank him for the appellation. But those cases were few and far between. Not all victims are literate. The victim always has a desire to leave a clue which would pinpoint the killer. Too often this is not possible. In rare instances the victim may leave a far-fetched clue, hoping someone in authority will understand."

"Do you have a case the paper could use?"

"Two years ago, I investigated the murder of Mr. Morrow, a psychiatrist. I remember it very well because he was the only man I knew who had a number for a first name. What do you think it would be?"

"A 2?"

"You are the first person to give the right answer. Let me give you the highlights of the case. The cleaning woman had discovered the dead body. I found the corpse sitting in a chair behind a desk. He had been shot in the chest but had lived long enough to arrange six piles on the desk top. The first was the empty pen holder. The second was two aspirins. The third was four rubber bands. The fourth was eight paper clips. The fifth was nine pennies, three quarters and four dimes. The sixth was an indeterminate number of playing cards. The balance of the deck was clutched by rigor mortis.

"I had the unpleasant task of notifying his wife, Abigail, of her husband's death. She appeared flustered. She had had a hard time balancing her bank account and the bank had advised her again of overdrawing her account. She did stress her husband's wry sense of humor. He always chided her of removing her Freudian slip before she went to sleep. She did mention three patients her husband had been counseling.

"The first patient was an Indian, Fantom Ironhorse. I questioned

him in his tepee which was located in the middle of the city dump. He insisted that he would leave his fragrant abode as soon as he received his rightful heap of money. A lawyer was handling his suit against a shopping mall which was situated on ancestral land rightfully his. Psychiatrist Morrow had counseled him on how to cope with the agony of waiting.

"The second patient was a foul-mouthed comedian, Howie Rotterdam. He didn't seem to mind his decrepit room in a broken-down hotel. He was out of breath from jogging. He said his doctor had told him to take a suppository seven days running but had neglected to tell him how much time he should run each day. He had a hard time getting show dates because his act was more shock than humor. Even in his ordinary speech every tenth word rhymed with spit or luck. Morrow hadn't done a thing for him.

"The third patient was Phyllis Steen, a high-school principal. When I visited Broadview I thought I was in a war zone. Guards were stationed in corridors, and before I questioned her, patrolmen had arrested two boys for carrying knives. She said she would miss the psychiatrist because he helped her cope with the dilemma of an unpleasant task or unemployment.

"After the interview I went back to the scene of the crime. I kept looking at the six piles and ransacked my mind as to what I had learned in mathematics. Finally a thought hit me. I picked up the sixth pile and counted the number of cards. The results verified my premise.

"My conclusion was not evidence you could present in court, but it did focus my concentration and I was able to induce a subsequent confession.

"Here is a poem I created to commemorate the occasion. When you solve it, call me. Tell me the number of cards in the sixth pile, and you have my approval to publish."

Enigma strange educe. Shrink's hint plagues mind of great profession.
 Random choice exhorts reason. In manner sage reckon piles.
 Germane option ponder. Was one holder notion poetic?
 Outburst prime resolve. Take two pills with potion noetic.

Cryptic murder entreats. Four bands. Guess. Which one of clients sue?
 Increased rate surmise. Eight paper clips. Is quaint science clue?
 Thread primary scan. Sixteen coins. Focus insane indict.
 Elation mystic impel. Sixth pile ordain, invite.

Mortal caprice outwit. State conclusion of vain insight.
 Adverse ordeal negate. Thrill as inner page reconciles.
 Likelier killer prove. Stress nemesis, fate: progression.