

A Word from Bob Andrews

Hello, fellow detectives.

My name is Bob Andrews, and some of you may know me as the Records and Research part of The Three Investigators. Along with my friends Jupiter Jones and Pete Crenshaw, we established our detective agency to investigate mysteries of any kind. If you have read some of our cases before, you know that often what starts out as seemingly common can turn out to have a lot more behind it.

The case you are about to read is one that took place some time back. In fact, we mentioned this case at the end of *The Mystery of the Stuttering Parrot*, when we told our mentor that we had several inquiries of cases to solve. One case involved the mystery of why someone kept changing the address numbers on houses in a particular neighborhood. We didn't immediately investigate the case because of other pressing matters...a whispering mummy, a green ghost, and other mysteries that you've read about. However, we did get around to it in our spare time, and you can see why what looked like common vandalism led to a much bigger puzzle.

In case you need a brief introduction to my fellow investigators and me, I can tell you that Jupiter Jones is the leader of our firm. He is an intellectual type but is a good friend to all who know him. When he was a young child, he was an actor and consequently developed the habit early in life of memorizing things and remembering seemingly boring details. That serves him well now in our detective agency, where sometimes little details turn out to be important. He is slightly stocky, which makes him the target of some teasing at times, but he takes it in stride. Orphaned at a young age, Jupiter lives with his aunt and uncle in a home next to the Jones Salvage Yard, a place where we have our secret Headquarters. Jupiter has a workshop in one corner of the junkyard, and we have secret entrances through the junk, but I'll talk more about that later as we get to that point of the story.

Pete Crenshaw is the Second Investigator in our firm. He is quite athletic, and you can understand why Jupiter would want Pete to be around for dangerous missions. However, despite his physical prowess, Pete is somewhat ...averse to danger; so that sets up situations from time to time where Pete resists some of Jupiter's more outlandish ideas.

As for me, I contribute to the research part of the firm as well as doing field work. I had an injury to my leg awhile back and still have some trouble with it from time to time. However, I love a good mystery and can't wait to share this latest one with you.

So sit back and enjoy. It's going to be an interesting ride.

BOB ANDREWS
RECORDS AND RESEARCH

Chapter 1

The crime had already happened, but no one except the criminal knew it.

“I believe this the correct neighborhood, Worthington.” Jupiter Jones spoke from the rear seat of the Rolls Royce limousine to the chauffeur of the splendid automobile.

“Yes, Master Jones,” Worthington, the British driver replied, as he turned left into a rather grand entrance to a neighborhood of rather large homes.

Some people might think it unusual for a teenager to be driven around in such a luxurious car, but Jupiter Jones had won 30 days’ use of the Rolls in a contest some time before. The original term of use for the car had expired, but a grateful client of The Three Investigators detective firm had made financial arrangements for the continued use of the vehicle.

Jupiter sat in the back seat with Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews, his partners in The Three Investigators. They were on their way to investigate the mysterious happenings of a community in Rocky Beach, California, where they all lived.

“Bob, while we continue our journey, perhaps you could review again the details as presented in the correspondence,” Jupiter requested of Bob Andrews.

Bob was about to respond when Pete Crenshaw interrupted. “Wait a minute. Let me see if I’ve got this one right for once. You’ve asked Bob to tell us again what the letter said, right?” Pete was loyal to his friend Jupiter, but at the same time, Pete couldn’t resist giving Jupiter a hard time about his use of long words to convey simple ideas.

“Precisely,” Jupiter replied, “I’m pleased to see that your vocabulary has gradually expanded. It will make for better communication.”

“Oh, brother.” Pete blew out a full breath. “The day that I want to start talking like that is the day that I have my head examined. How can we be a team when we don’t even understand what you say?”

“Perhaps things would progress better if you would permit Bob to speak,” Jupe suggested.

“I don’t see how,” Bob Andrews entered the conversation with a grin, “I can’t add anything to the arguing that you two are doing at the moment.”

“I meant that you could go ahead and give us the details of the case again,” Jupiter said.

“Of course. Here goes.” Bob opened his notepad that he carried to remind himself of important facts and events. “Not long after the story appeared in the newspaper about our solving *The Mystery of the Stuttering Parrot*, we received several letters asking us to investigate strange things that were happening. One letter involves a mysterious occurrence in this neighborhood in which the address numbers on several houses are being changed. The letter comes from a Mr. Trenton, who reports that, four times in two weeks, he had discovered the numbers on his mailbox out front have been changed. I then called him on the telephone to set up a time when we could come to visit.”

“Quite promising,” Jupe commented. “The oddity of this intrigues me. Thus far, when we start a case where something baffling happens, we have a worthwhile case to solve.”

“Speak for yourself,” the Second Investigator retorted. “The oddity of this does not intrigue me at all. If I had my way, we would have the most boring cases around. I prefer boredom. In fact, I thrive on it. In short, I wish for once that we would have a simple case of finding a lost clock that happened to be misplaced. Dealing with some of these thugs that we’ve run into has not been a lot of fun.”

“Perhaps not, but you cannot deny that a certain level of excitement has kept things interesting.”

“I can attest to that,” Worthington spoke up from the driver’s seat of the Rolls. “I must say that I have rather enjoyed having some youthful adventures with you. I hope you gentlemen will pardon my interruption of your conversation, but we seem to have arrived at the address.”

All three boys peered out the windows of the vehicle. They had pulled up in front of an older home near the end of a street. All around grew lush vegetation, and a mailbox near the curb with the street address: 807 Wolfram Road.

As they got out of the Rolls, Pete took in the scenery. The house was on a corner lot; so as they pulled up on the side street, they had seen a pretty good view of the grounds. He noticed that the yard, though empty of most vegetation except for grass, was kept quite well. The grass was neatly trimmed with no clippings visible, and the few hedges around the house were all clipped with great precision. He followed Jupe and Bob up the driveway to a sidewalk that led to the front door. In the driveway was a relatively new car that needed a wash and had some boxes in it.

Pete almost bumped into Jupiter Jones, who paused suddenly at the bottom of the steps leading to the front door. "Other than the fact that Mr. Trenton is well off financially, is somewhat disorganized, hires someone to tend his lawn, and prefers the indoors, I can glean nothing else," Jupiter said.

"What?" Bob and Pete practically yelled the question almost simultaneously.

"We've been here less than 60 seconds and you can tell all that already?" Pete asked. "We've seen the same things you've seen and heard the same things, which I might add are nothing, yet you're ready to write the guy's biography. Do you have his employment records? How do you know he has a lawnkeeper? He could cut his grass himself."

Jupe walked up the steps and rang the doorbell. "Perhaps we can have a lesson in deductive reasoning after we leave," he said.

"Come on, First," Bob put in. "Can't you tell us some of it now?"

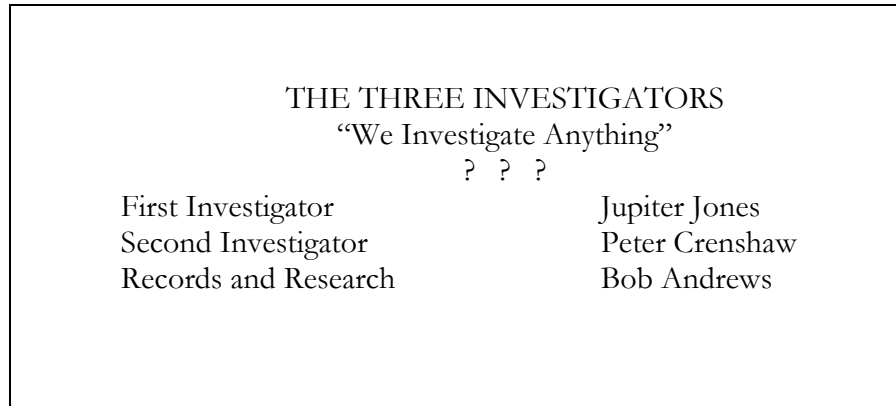
Jupiter ignored them both and pressed the doorbell a second time. Bob sighed. He knew Jupe would tell them his detecting secrets in due time. It was just like him to dangle some information in front of them without explaining it.

The front door opened, and a middle-aged man greeted them. "Hello, gentlemen. You must be the Three Investigators that I read

about in the newspaper. Please come in. My name is Clark Trenton, and I'm looking forward to having you solve my little mystery."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Trenton," the First Investigator said formally. "My name is Jupiter Jones. This is Pete Crenshaw, and my other associate is Bob Andrews, whom you spoke to on the telephone. Here is one of our business cards."

Jupiter produced a professional-looking card that he had printed on a printing press back at the Jones Salvage Yard. The card said:



"Yes, yes," Mr. Trenton said, "Come have a seat in the living room, and I'll try to tell you about the problem that I've been having."

He led them down a long hallway and into a somewhat large sitting room. Bob and Pete took seats where Mr. Trenton indicated, but Jupe began walking around the spacious room, observing framed pictures on the wall and other items that were on display.

"So, what do the question marks mean on your business card?" Mr. Trenton asked.

As usual, Pete and Bob expected the question. It had been a brainstorm of Jupiter's to use the question mark on the card because it always prompted potential clients to ask about them. After all, question marks weren't that common in advertising, and Jupe

believed that anything that made people remember the Three Investigators would help their publicity.

“The interrogation mark,” Jupiter said from across the room, “is our trademark. We propose to investigate any mystery that is brought to us. So the question mark stands for unsolved riddles, mysteries, or other puzzles that require our attention.”

Mr. Trenton nodded. “That is quite reasonable, and I certainly hope that you can solve what has been happening here. After I saw the article in the newspaper about your finding a lost painting, I knew that your young minds would be what I need to help me. I have hesitated to call the police if it should turn out to be simply a teenage prank. Whether it is, I do not know. I know only that I do not like to feel like my privacy is being invaded, and that is how I feel.

“I have lived in this neighborhood for about 15 years now. My wife and I were originally from the eastern part of the country, and when I was able to retire, we sought to live somewhere that would be different than what we had experienced before. She died a few years ago, and I remained here. Up until now, I have never had any troubles in this neighborhood, but in the last several weeks, I have noticed several times that the numbers on my home have been changed.

“Since we’re a small community and have a central office for the neighborhood, we were able to discover that the numbers had been switched on two other homes as well. Since then, it’s happened again, the most recent being two nights ago.”

“Maybe it’s your lawnkeeper, Mr. Trenton,” Pete said. He was still thinking about Jupiter’s mysterious conclusion that Mr. Trenton had a lawnkeeper. “He must be around here quite a bit.”

“My lawnkeeper?” Mr. Trenton was visibly surprised. “How do you know that I have a lawnkeeper?”

Pete turned red. He had jumped ahead with an assumption, and he had absolutely no idea what had led Jupiter to know that Mr. Trenton had a lawnkeeper.

“Well, Mr. Trenton, we’re detectives,” Bob Andrews quickly put in. Bob was determined to help Pete out of this sticky situation.

“Right,” Pete said, “and we, uh -- detect.” Pete didn’t want to admit that he didn’t have the foggiest idea how the boys knew about the lawnkeeper, but he couldn’t think of a way out of the question either.

Jupiter Jones turned away from an oil painting that he had been admiring. “Actually, Mr. Trenton, we observed the immaculate condition of your lawn. When compared to the condition of your car in the driveway, which is somewhat dirty at the moment and cluttered with some boxes, it appeared likely that the same person was not responsible for both your lawn and your car. Hence, it seemed probable that you had someone take care of the lawn, while you took care of your car.”

“Oh,” Mr. Trenton said, “When you explain it like that, it does seem quite logical. However, while I can’t rule out my lawnkeeper, I can’t imagine why he would do anything like that. As you may have noticed, this is a relatively private community. There’s only one way in and one way out—that’s to prevent people from driving through if they don’t live here. Part of our community requirements is that our lawns be kept in top condition, and many of us use a lawnkeeper for that purpose. In fact, the man who tends my lawn also keeps a dozen or more yards here in the neighborhood. I would be surprised if he would risk his reputation and his business on a silly prank.”

“Well, if you give us his name, we can determine if he is indeed the guilty party,” Jupe pointed out.

“Certainly,” Mr. Trenton replied as Bob prepared to write, “His name is Ronald Corley.”

“Ronald Corley,” Bob repeated as he wrote, “Got it.”

“Mr. Trenton,” Jupe said, all business now, “To help in a logical approach to this, I must ask certain questions in a particular order. First, have you noticed if the switching of house numbers occurs on a particular day of the week?”

“No,” replied Mr. Trenton, “At the time I wrote the letter, I believe that it had happened four times. Since then, it’s happened once more. Once it was on Monday, once it was on a Tuesday, once it was on a Thursday, once it was on a Friday, and once it was on a

Saturday. However, it has never happened more than twice per week and never two nights in a row.”

“Hmm...” The First Investigator was thinking hard. “So no pattern of the day of the week seems to exist at the moment. How about times of the day? Were these switches happening at night while everyone slept?”

“That seems quite possible,” Mr. Trenton said. “However, many of us lead active lives and are gone quite often during the day; so it wouldn’t be hard for someone to do it during the day.”

“When the numbers are switched, are they preserved in the same order? I mean, your house number is 807. When the numbers are put on someone else’s house, is the number still 807, or are the numbers mixed up?”

Mr. Trenton pondered for a moment. “In all honesty, I do not know. I hadn’t really thought to ask about that. It’s not the sort of thing that immediately comes to mind.”

“Do you have any enemies?” Jupiter asked.

“I’m not aware of any. You don’t generally assume that you have enemies, but I can honestly say that I don’t know of anyone who is upset with me,” replied Mr. Trenton.

“I guess the next thing to do is to ask your neighbors about their experiences,” Juve stated. “Could you tell us which homes have been affected?”

“Certainly. The first house belongs to Anthony Driggers. He lives down the street here. House number is 815. The other one lives on the other side of the street in the next block. The name is Janet Alexander. She’s a widow. House number 918.”

Since there didn’t seem to be much else to ask, the boys bade Mr. Trenton farewell and departed through the front door of the house and began the walk back to the Rolls. All three were deep in thought. It was a mystery, to be sure. However, there was not a lot to go on, and detective work requires some clues.

As the boys prepared to get into the Rolls, Jupiter stopped and looked around. Then he turned to Bob and Pete.

“At the present, we do not seem to have much in the way of evidence. Perhaps we can gain something more by observing the

community. Bob, what do you see as you look around from this vantage point?”

Bob turned a full circle. “Gee, Jupe, not a lot. The houses are spaced out more than I’ve seen in other neighborhoods. Everyone’s lawn is well-kept, no doubt because of the community requirement. And all the homes are large homes.”

Jupe turned to Pete. “How about your observations, Pete?”

“Well, I haven’t seen any kids around. It seems like mostly older people living here. And it looks like there’s a fence or row of hedges that separates all the yards from each other.”

“Precisely.” The First Investigator was obviously pleased with the conclusions of his partners. “You’ve both pointed out some interesting facts. Sometimes it’s not just what a person says that is important; often, just some good observations can help a great deal.”

Bob and Pete looked at each other quizzically. Pete spoke first. “Now what do we do with these observations? Call a press conference?”

“No. First, we write them down, and then we start piecing things together. To begin with, the homes are spaced apart and there’s a fence or hedge separating the yards. What does that tell you, Bob?”

Bob thought hard. He hadn’t expected this line of questioning. “You’ve got me, Jupe. It doesn’t seem to matter.”

“Oh, but it does. Imagine that you are wanting to switch the house numbers. It is quite fortuitous that the homes in this neighborhood have some distance between them with a physical barrier between them. Think about it--”

“Whiskers, Jupe,” Pete interrupted, “Now you’re throwing out a big word again. Fortuitous. What in the world does that mean?”

“Simply that it is quite fortunate. Because of the spacing of the homes and the separation between yards, it is not easy for a person to see what is happening in someone else’s yard. So the perpetrator could change the numbers in Mr. Trenton’s yard without too much risk of being seen.”

Bob was catching on to Jupe's ideas now. "And the fact that there aren't any kids in the neighborhood means that someone is coming in from the outside. If kids are the ones that are doing it, that is."

"Sure," Pete agreed, "There's only one way in and one way out, and if there aren't kids living here, they must come in from outside. That's a big risk. They'd be more likely to be noticed, since they're kids. I'd bet that it's not kids at all."

"Sound thinking," Jupe said. "Now we're getting somewhere. I suggest that we interview the other two residents whose numbers are being switched and see where we go from there. There may be more to this than meets the eye."

As usual, Jupiter was right.

END OF CHAPTER 1