THE INSPIRATION OF MR. BUDD

by Dorothy L. Sayers

£500 REWARD The Evening Messenger has decided to offer the above reward to any person who shall give information leading to the arrest of the man, William Strickland, who is wanted by the police in connection with the murder of the late Emma Strickland at 59, Acacia Crescent, Manchester.

DESCRIPTION OF THE WANTED MAN The following is the official description of William Strickland: Age 43; height 6 ft 1 or 2; complexion rather dark; hair silver-grey and abundant, may dye same; full grey moustache and beard, may now be clean-shaven; eyes light grey; left upper eye-tooth stopped with gold; left thumb-nail deformed by a recent blow.

Speaks in rather loud voice; quick, decisive manner. Disappeared, may have left, or will try to leave, the country.

Mr. Budd read the description through carefully once again and sighed. It was most unlikely that William Strickland should choose his small and unsuccessful saloon, out of all the barbers’ shops in London, for a haircut or a shave, still less for 'dyeing same'; even if he was in London, which Mr. Budd saw no reason to suppose.

Nevertheless, Mr. Budd committed the description, as well as he could, to memory. It was a chance — and Mr. Budd's eye was always fascinated by headlines with money in them.

He put the newspaper down, and as he did so, caught sight of his own reflection in the glass and smiled, for he was not without a sense of humour. He did not look quite the man to catch a brutal murderer singlehanded. He was well on in the middle forties — with a small paunch and pale hair, five feet six at most, and soft-handed, as a hairdresser must be.

Even razor in hand, he would hardly be a match for William Strickland, height six feet one or two, who had so fiercely beaten his old aunt to death. Shaking his head doubtfully, Mr. Budd advanced to the door, and nearly ran into a large customer who dived in rather suddenly.

"I beg your pardon, sir," murmured Mr. Budd, fearful of losing ninepence; "just stepping out for a breath of fresh air, sir Shave, sir?"

The large man tore off his overcoat without waiting for Mr. Budd's helping hands.

"Are you prepared to die?" he demanded abruptly.

The question fitted in so alarmingly with Mr. Budd's thoughts about murder that for a moment it quite threw him off his professional balance.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he stammered, and in the same moment decided that the man must be a preacher of some kind. He looked rather like it, with his odd, light eyes, his bush of fiery red hair and short chin-beard.

"Do you do dyeing?" said the man impatiently.

"Oh!" said Mr. Budd, relieved, "yes, sir, certainly, sir."

A stroke of luck, this: dyeing meant quite a big sum.

"Fact is," said the man, "my young lady doesn't like red hair. She says it attracts attention. Dark brown, now — that's the colour she has a fancy for. And I'm afraid the beard will have to go. My young lady doesn't like beards."

"Will you have the moustache off as well, sir?"

"Well, no, no, I think I'll stick to that as long as I'm allowed to, what?" He laughed loudly, and Mr. Budd approvingly noted well-kept teeth and a gold stopping. The customer was obviously ready to spend money on his personal appearance.

In fancy, Mr. Budd saw this well-off and gentlemanly customer advising all his friends to visit "his
"I see you have been using a tint before, sir," said Mr. Budd with respect. "Could you tell me ...,?"
"Eh?" said the man. "Oh, yes. Well, fact is, as I said, my fiancé's a good bit younger than I am. As I expect you can see I began to go grey early, my father was just the same — all our family. So I had it touched up — grey bits restored, you see. But she doesn't like the colour, so I thought, if I have to dye it at all, why not a colour she does fancy while we're about it, what?"
Lightly talking about the feminine mind, Mr. Budd gave his customer's hair the examination of trained eye and fingers. Never, never in the process of nature could hair of that kind have been red. It was naturally black hair, prematurely grey. However, that was none of his business. He received the information he really needed — the name of the dye formerly used, and noted that he would have to be careful. Some dyes do not mix kindly with other dyes.
Chatting pleasantly, Mr. Budd worked on, and as he used the roaring drier, talked of the Manchester murder.
"The police seem to have given it up as a bad job," said the man.
"Perhaps the reward will liven things up a bit," said Mr. Budd, the thought being naturally uppermost in his mind.
"Oh, there's a reward, is there? I hadn't seen that."
"It's in to-night's paper, sir. Maybe you'd like to have a look at it."
The stranger read the paragraph carefully and Mr. Budd, watching him in the glass, saw him suddenly draw back his left hand, which was resting carelessly on the arm of the chair, and push it under the white apron.
But not before Mr. Budd had seen it. Not before he had taken conscious note of the horny, deformed thumb-nail. Many people had such an ugly mark, Mr. Budd told himself hurriedly, but the man glanced up, and the eyes of his reflection became fixed on Mr. Budd's face in a serious examination.
"Well," said Mr. Budd, "the man is safe out of the country by now, I reckon. They've put it off too late."
The man laughed, "I reckon they have," he said. Mr. Budd wondered whether many men with smashed left thumbs showed a gold upper left eye-tooth. Probably there were hundreds of people like that going about the country. Likewise with silver-grey hair ("may dye same") and aged about forty-three. Undoubtedly.
There came back to him the exact number and extent of the brutal wounds inflicted upon the Manchester victim an elderly lady, rather stout, she had been. Glancing through the door, Mr. Budd noticed that the streets were full of people. How easy it would be...
"Be as quick as you can, won't you?" said the man, a little impatiently, but pleasantly enough. "It's getting late. I'm afraid it will keep you overtime."
"Not at all, sir," said Mr. Budd. "It doesn't matter at all."
No, if he tried to rush out of the door, his terrible customer would jump upon him, drag him back, and then with one frightful blow like the one he had given his aunt ....
Yet surely Mr. Budd was in a position of advantage. A decided man would do it. He would be out in the street before the customer could get out of the chair. Mr. Budd began to move round towards the door.
"What's the matter?" said the customer. "Just stepping out to look at the time, "sir," said Mr. Budd softly and stopped. He retreated to the back of the shop, collecting his materials. If only he had been quicker — more like a detective in a book — he would have observed that thumbnail, that tooth, put two and two together, and run out to give the alarm while the man's beard was wet and soapy and his face buried in the towel. Or he could put lather in his eyes — nobody could possibly commit a murder or even run away down the street with his eyes full of soap.
But after all, Mr. Budd didn't have to arrest the man himself.
"Information leading to arrest" — those were the words. He would be able to tell them the wanted man had been there, that he would now have dark brown hair and moustache and no beard. It was at this moment that the great Inspiration came to Mr. Budd.

As he fetched a bottle from the glass-fronted case he remembered an old-fashioned wooden paper-knife that had belonged to his mother. Hand-painted, it bore the inscription "Knowledge is Power". Mr. Budd now felt a strange freedom and confidence; he removed the razors with an easy, natural movement, and made light conversation as he skilfully applied the dark-brown tint.

The streets were less crowded when Mr. Budd let his customer out. He watched the tall figure cross Grosvenor Place and climb on to a 24 bus.

He closed the shop door, and in his turn made his way, by means of a 24, to the top of Whitehall. Mr. Budd was interviewed by an important-looking inspector in uniform, who listened very politely to his story and made him repeat very carefully about the gold tooth and the thumbnail and the hair which had been black before it was grey or red and was now dark-brown.
"But there's one thing more," said Mr. Budd — "and I'm sure to goodness," he added, "I hope, sir, it is the right man because if it isn't it'll be the ruin of me."

Nervously he crushed his soft hat into a ball as he leant across the table, breathlessly uttering the story of his great professional betrayal.

The Miranda docked at Ostend at 7 a.m. A man burst hurriedly into the cabin where the wireless operator was just taking off his headphones.
"Here!" he cried; "this is to go. There's something up and the Old Man's sent over for the police. The Consul's coming on board." A message to the English police:
"Man on board answering to description. Ticket booked name of Watson. Has locked himself in cabin and refuses to come out. Insists on having hairdresser sent out to him. Have communicated Ostend police. Await instructions."

The Old Man with authoritative gestures cleared a way through the excited little knot of people gathered about First Class Cabin No. 36, for several passengers had heard of "something up". Sternly he bade the stewards and the boy to stand away from the door. Terribly he commanded them to hold their tongues. Four or five sailors stood watchfully at his side. In the sudden silence, the passenger in No. 36 could be heard pacing up and down the narrow cabin, moving things, clattering, splashing water.

Presently came steps overhead. Six pairs of Belgian police boots came tip-toeing down the stairs. The Old Man glanced at the official paper held out to him and nodded.

The Old Man knocked at the door of No. 36.
"Who is it?" cried a harsh, sharp voice.
"The barber is here, sir, that you sent for."
"Ah!" There was relief in the tone. "Send him in alone, if you please. I have had an accident."

At the sound of the bolt being carefully withdrawn, the Old Man stepped forward. The door opened a chink, and was slammed to again, but the Old Man's boot was firmly pushed into the opening. The policemen hurried forward. The passenger was brought out.
"Strike me pink!" screamed the boy, "strike me pink if he ain't gone green in the night!"
"Green!"

Not for nothing had Mr. Budd studied the complicated reactions of chemical dyes. In the pride of his knowledge he had set a mark on his man, to mark him out from all the billions of this overpopulated world. Was there a port in all the world where a murderer might slip away, with every hair on him green as a parrot — green moustache, green eye-brows, and that thick, springing mass of hair, vivid, flaring midsummer green?

Mr. Budd got his £ 500. The Evening Messenger published the full story of his great betrayal. He
trembled, fearing this dangerous fame. Surely no one would ever come to him again.
On the next morning an enormous blue limousine rolled up to his door. A lady, magnificent in furs
and diamonds, swept into the saloon.
"You are Mr. Budd, aren't you?" she cried. "The great Mr. Budd? Isn't it too wonderful? And now,
dear Mr. Budd, you must do me a favour. You must dye my hair green, at once. Now. I want to be
able to say I'm the very first to be done by you. I'm the Duchess of Winchester, and that awful
Melcaster woman is chasing me down the street — the cat!"
If you want it done, I can give the number of Mr. Budd's parlours in Bond Street. But I understand it
is a terribly expensive process.