

**ANNA
AND THE
JEWEL
THIEVES**

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by

MORTIMER TUNE

Illustrations by David Kelley



www.blackapollo.com

First published in Great Britain by

BlackApolloPress

www.blackapollo.com

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ISBN 9781900355728

In memory of

David Kelley

Artist, Poet, Scholar

en famille



Chapter 1

Mr and Mrs Marple of Prairieview, Iowa, and their ten-year-old daughter, Anna, were about to take their first trip abroad, though they didn't know it yet.

Mr Marple had a small business manufacturing tea cosies – those cute, little knitted pullovers for tea pots – but the Iowa tea cosy market had been rather sluggish of late and the future of this furry device which had done so much to help thousands of chipped ceramic vessels keep warm on cold midwestern nights was somewhat less than optimistic. In fact, Mr Marple's financial situation looked very grim.

Then, one day, he received a letter which read: "Dear Mr Marple, we heard you were having some difficulties paying your bills. Here is a credit card to help you out. With it you can charge your purchases and then pay them off slowly. Buy anything, go anywhere you like. Have a good time! Yours truly, The Bank."

"Fine," said Mrs Marple, when her husband showed

her the Bank's letter. "Let's go to Europe!"

"Go to Europe? Are you crazy? We're going bankrupt!" Mr Marple shouted at his wife, though he regretted his rudeness a moment later.

"Then this will be our last chance, won't it?" said Mrs Marple with some logic. "Certainly we can manage four or five days abroad. Besides, with this new credit card we might as well go now, while our business is off, and pay our bills later, when things begin to improve for us."

"Maybe you have a point," Mr Marple agreed. "Which country would you like to visit?"

"Well," replied Mrs Marple, tapping a finger on her chubby cheek, "I've always wanted to go to England to visit the Queen. Perhaps we could even convince her to buy some of our tea cosies. I hear the English drink a lot of tea."

"All right," said Mr Marple, beginning to feel the thrill of impending adventure (for, in fact, he had always wanted to go to some strange and far-off country, and the thought of combining it with a business trip seemed to make perfect sense). "I'll call the travel agent."

“And France to see the Eiffel Tower...” Mrs Marple continued.

“Both England and France?” Mr Marple said, quickly revising the imagined itinerary in his mind. “Don’t you think that’s a bit too much for an extended weekend?”

“And Italy to see the Spanish Steps...”

“All in five days?” asked Mr Marple. And then scratching his balding head he added, “Aren’t the Spanish Steps in Spain?”

Mrs Marple answered her husband’s question patiently. “We can’t afford any more than five days even with a credit card, but if we plan our trip with the same efficiency we use to run our business then I’m sure we can manage three small countries in that length of time. As for the Spanish Steps, they are in Rome which is a city in Italy. And it is because of these serious gaps in your education that our daughter, Anna, be given the chance to see the world, lest she end up as provincial as her father.”

Mr Marple nodded his head in agreement because he knew, down deep, that what his wife said was true. His geography was very poor and he had never travelled

further than Council Bluffs, a mere twenty minutes from his home town of Prairieview.

And so, on a moderately warm Saturday, the 5th of May, at six o'clock in the morning, Mr and Mrs Marple and Anna, found themselves flying several thousand feet over the Atlantic Ocean on their way to London. If they had known the strange adventures which lay in store for them, it is possible they would have tried to convince the pilot to swing the plane around in the sky and turn back.



Chapter 2

One of the less commonly known items from the manual of Royal Housekeeping is that every other Saturday of the month the Queen's jewels are sent out for a good scrubbing, waxing and polishing. Traditionally, this job was done by the Palace itself, but due to necessary cost-cutting measures, it was now being farmed out to a little shop in North London called Mary's Café and Diamond Cleaner's.

Mary's is one of the few cafés left where you can read the morning paper, eat a breakfast of sausage, eggs and grilled tomatoes (kippers on Friday), while getting your diamonds cleaned all at the same time. And be you royalty or just an ordinary, everyday person, you can be assured of the same exceptional standard of service (though the fried bread may leave something to be desired).

Each alternate Saturday, Mary herself drives up to Buckingham Palace to collect all the jewellery in need of cleaning. She comes alone in the very early hours of

the morning, driving a little red Mini which she parks by the front entrance. Then she toots her horn three times (though very quietly so as not to wake the Queen). That is the signal for the butler to bring out the jewels.

The jewels are packed in little velvet bags tied securely with a lavender ribbon and are carried out on a silver tray. Mary takes these little bags of jewels and puts them in the back of her car next to the sausages she has just picked up from the wholesale butcher (not out of disrespect, mind you, but simply because the car is so tiny). Then she drives back to North London where the jewels will be polished in a small room off the kitchen while the sausages are being grilled for all the patrons who had brought in their own jewels for cleaning and are waiting for their breakfasts to be served.

Now, also in London, there lived a gang of misfits who were training to be thieves. The head of the gang was Fat Al who really was fat and smoked cheap cigars besides. The second in command was Little Albert, who was quite short and tried very hard to look like Fat Al, whom he much admired, by wearing the same cloth cap

Fat Al had once worn (even though it came down over his eyes) and sticking out his tummy. Finally there was Henry-the-Nose who was tall and thin and wore thick glasses over his sleepy eyes and had a great, big, red schnozz that was very sensitive to the touch. Henry was a little dim, but he could also be quite loveable.

Before they had decided to become thieves, the three of them had been musicians. Little Albert had played an old, beat-up banjo, Fat Al had played a triangle (which made a little dinging sound when he tapped it with a thin glass rod), and Henry-the-Nose had played a used bicycle horn which he had found in a rubbish bin. The height of their musical career was several months before when they had played to a crowd of thousands underneath Piccadilly Circus in one of the tunnels leading to the Bakerloo line. Unfortunately, when they divided the day's takings collected in Fat Al's cap, they only found three American pennies, a strange Japanese coin with a hole in it and twenty-five metal rings from the tops of soft drink cans.

The idea came to them one morning just before a concert they were to give deep under Leicester Square

when they had stopped for tea at Mary's.

"Three milky teas," Fat Al had said when Mary came over to their table, holding a little notebook and a pencil which she used to take down the orders.

"Right you are, luv," said Mary. "No sausages or fried bread today?"

"No," said Fat Al, who really would have loved some sausages and fried bread, but couldn't afford it. "I'm on a diet," he explained.

"Everyone's on a diet these days," said Mary in a commiserating sort of voice. And then, turning to Little Albert and Henry-the-Nose, she looked at them inquisitively and said, "How about you lads?"

"We'll have three milky teas, too," said Little Albert, who always ordered the same thing as Fat Al.

"So that'll be nine milky teas then?" asked Mary.

"I just want three," said Henry-the-Nose.

Mary scribbled down the order and then, as an afterthought, she said, "No diamonds that need cleaning or polishing today?"

"Not today," said Fat Al.

"Oi!" said Henry-the-Nose. "Do we look like we 'ave

diamonds ‘at need cleaning?’”

“No,” said Mary. “I used to know right away if a customer wanted their diamonds cleaned or just a quick sausage and egg. But not any more. Times have changed.”

“Not for us they haven’t,” said Little Albert looking under the table at his flappy shoes.

After Mary had gone to fill their order, Henry-the-Nose looked at his mates through his thick glasses that made his eyes as big and round as fish bowls. “Do yer suppose she really cleans diamonds ‘ere?” he asked.

Fat Al gave Henry-the-Nose a look of disgust. Then he reached over and gave Henry’s nose a tweak (which wasn’t very nice and made Henry sneeze, but Fat Al just couldn’t help himself).

“What does the sign on the window say?” asked Fat Al.

Henry-the-Nose turned around and looked at the window. “ow should I know? It’s written backwards, i’n’it?”

“Try looking at it with your head upside down,” suggested Little Albert, attempting to be helpful.

Henry-the-Nose bent his head toward the floor and

looked at the window again, following Little Albert's advice. "I still can't read it!" he complained.

Fat Al lit up a cheap cigar, took a puff and then closed his eyes. "The sign says 'Mary's Café and Diamond Cleaners'. Now why do you think the sign would say that if she didn't clean diamonds?"

Henry-the-Nose was still thinking this one out when Mary brought them their nine cups of tea. "Drink up, luvv," she said. And then she went away.

Little Albert plunked three cubes of sugar in each cup just like Fat Al had done, stirred each of them twice, just like Fat Al did, and drank them one by one, following Fat Al's every gesture.

Meanwhile Henry-the-Nose was still pondering the question Fat Al had asked. Finally, he blinked his wide, fish-bowl eyes and said, "I dunno, Fat Al. Why would it say 'Mary's Café and Diamond Cleaners' if she didn't clean diamonds?"

Fat Al made a face and reached across the table and tweaked Henry's nose again causing him to sneeze twelve sneezes in quick succession. "It says that because she does clean diamonds!" he replied with some

exasperation.

Henry's nose lit up from his fit of sneezing and also because he had an idea. "Oi! Maybe we should steal 'em, Fat Al!"

"No," said Fat Al, "that wouldn't be right. We don't know who they belong to."

"Don't you remember our motto?" Little Albert asked Henry-the-Nose. "It's steal from the rich and give to the poor," he reminded him.

"No, you lump head!" Fat Al sighed. "That's Robin Hood's motto. Our motto is 'Steal from the rich and give to ourselves!'"

"Oh, yeah," said Little Albert, suddenly recalling that they had, indeed, discussed this point before.

"And until we find out if these diamonds belong to someone very rich, we can't steal them!" said Fat Al.

The other two nodded their heads in agreement.

Fat Al took a puff on his smelly cigar and leaned forward with a mischievous smile on his face. "But let's keep our eyes open, lads. Maybe there'll be something for us at that!"



Chapter 3

For the next few days, Fat Al, Little Albert and Henry-the-Nose kept a watch on the café. Then, early one Saturday morning, when Mary left in her Mini, they followed on their two-man bicycle with Fat Al and Henry-the-Nose peddling like mad and Little Albert sitting on the front handle bars with his legs crossed as if he were a ship's masthead.

They followed her all the way to the wholesale butchers, where she picked up her weekly supply of sausages and then on to Buckingham Palace, where she collected the Queen's jewels. They would have continued to follow her all the way back to her café, except Henry-the-Nose insisted on stopping at Hyde Park to feed the ducks that live in the Serpentine Lake.

That evening the gang held a meeting at their flat on Plympton Road.

“OK,” said Fat Al, lighting a cigar and looking at his two comrades in crime, “does anyone have any questions?”

Henry-the-Nose raised his hand.

“You don’t need to raise your hand,” said Fat Al.

At first Henry-the-Nose looked slightly confused. Then, after a moment’s consideration, he raised his foot.

“You don’t have to raise either your hand or your foot to speak,” said Fat Al, starting to turn red. “Just tell us what’s on your mind!”

Henry-the-Nose felt the top his head. “I don’t think anything is on it, but I can’t see ‘cause it’s inside me noggin...”

“SPEAK!” Fat Al shouted.

“Is the Queen rich?” asked Henry-the-Nose.

Both Fat Al and Little Albert began to laugh. They laughed so hard that they cried. “Is she rich?” said Fat Al through his chortling. “Does a porpoise have hair?”

Henry-the-Nose thought a minute. “I dunno. Does a porpoise ‘ave ‘air?” He looked at Little Albert.

Little Albert stopped laughing and scratched his head. “I don’t know either.” He looked at Fat Al.

Fat Al’s face was growing very red.

“I think ‘e’s angry,” said Henry-the-Nose, pointing

over at Fat Al.

“Yeah. Very angry,” said Little Albert.

“My Mum used to get angry. Did yers?”

Little Albert shook his head. “Only when I wore my shoes to bed.”

“Shut up!” shouted Fat Al at the top of his lungs and he leaned over and tweaked Henry’s nose with his left hand and Little Albert’s nose with his right. Which was the only way he knew to restore order, but it didn’t do much to endear him to his friends.

After Henry-the-Nose stopped his fit of sneezing and quiet once more prevailed, Fat Al answered the question in a more straightforward way. “The Queen is the richest woman in all of England!” he said.

“How do you know?” asked Little Albert, who was still upset at having his nose tweaked.

“How could she afford the mortgage on that great, big palace if not? And Buckingham isn’t her only palace, she’s got palaces all over England and Scotland and even Wales. And every palace is filled to the top with gold and jewels. Once – and I read this in a newspaper so I know it’s true – her sink was stuffed up and she had

to call a plumber. And do you know what the plumber found jammed in the pipe? A great, big diamond ring, that's what! She must have taken it off when she was doing the washing up and it fell into the drain. And she didn't even miss it!"

