

By
MARTEN CUMBERLAND



Mate in Three Moves

THE Cleveham Bois shooting affair will probably be still fairly fresh in the minds of the public. Journalistically speaking, the thing happened at a slack time, and the papers made the most of it. The crime, too, though not particularly dreadful in itself, held elements of drama and sensation owing to the startling revelations that followed swiftly upon the actual shooting.

Loreto Santos, at the time, was living at Torndale, where he had taken a cottage for the summer. The house was called a cottage though it possessed ten bedrooms, five reception rooms—one of which had been immediately converted into a music-room—a billiard-room, several acres of garden, and a large garage.

Loreto had been living a lonely man's existence, owing to the fact that his sister Cleta was away on the Norfolk Broads with a party of friends. Loreto, therefore, dwelt alone, though as luck would have it, at the time of the Cleveham Bois affair, Inspector Comfort, of Scotland Yard, was on a visit to his friend. The Inspector was an ardent fisherman, and as Torndale provided excellent fishing, and the detective had manœuvred a well-earned vacation, nothing was more natural than

the fact that Loreto should invite the other to share his rural seclusion.

Loreto himself was rather bored by the country. He was essentially a man of the cities, although he had been reared on the Argentine pampas. He loved metropolitan life, with its constant interplay of mind upon mind, its continually shifting scenes of vivid human drama and comedy.

Loreto was a conscientious sybarite, with a discriminating taste for the fleshpots; he loved a good cuisine, and wines that need no bush. He liked to be within easy distance of the best classical concerts, and the sight of an author taking his curtain upon a first night never failed to produce a thrill.

As for the country—he held that when you had seen one rose or tree, you had seen the lot.

To Loreto, it was other people's gods who had made the country; his had made the town.

Despite Inspector Comfort's sojourn at Torndale, Loreto would probably have left the place long since if it had not been for one thing.

In a weak moment he had promised to play the Rimsky Korsakov concerto for a friend of his who conducted an excellent amateur orchestra that performed frequently for charity's sweet sake.

Undoubtedly, if one has to practise five hours a day at the piano, the country is the place to work in, since it affords fewer distractions to the conscientious sybarite.

Loreto, therefore, dwelt at Torndale, and sat for hours at his Bösendorfer, and it was in the music-room that Comfort found him, when the good inspector returned one morning without catch of fish, but with a flush of excitement upon his broad, pallid face.

MATE IN THREE MOVES

'Just my luck, Santos,' growled the inspector, dropping his rod and tackle on to a chair. 'If I ever try to snatch a holiday, there's bound to be someone who goes and gets himself murdered! Here's a shooting affair within twelve miles of us, and the Yard want me to go over and take on the case.'

Loreto nodded without stopping his playing.

'It's hard luck,' he conceded. 'On a rainy morning like this the fish should rise, but now, I suppose, you are once more the fisher of men? Who has been murdered, and where?'

'As a matter of fact, it may only be attempted murder,' said Comfort. 'The thing happened last night at Cleveham Bois. Old Dr. Robertson was shot at close range, in his cottage. The old man was alone, for his partner, Dr. Wilcox, left yesterday morning for a holiday at Brittlesea. Dr. Robertson lies in Cleveham Bois hospital in a critical condition. Bullet pierced a lung, and it's doubtful if he lives.'

'Well,' said Loreto, cheerfully, 'I wish you success in your case. It should be pretty easy. Easier than this damned concerto,' he added. 'By Jove! These composers have no decent feeling or regard for the executant! Look at this passage in octaves! It's marked at 120, metronome time, and I'll swear that the thing's impossible. I shall have a stiff wrist for the rest of my life!'

Comfort looked at his friend uncertainly. Inspector Comfort, of the Criminal Investigation Department, was a big man, even larger and heavier in build than Santos. The Inspector's appearance was one of plump, easy, good-nature, bordering almost upon sleepy content: the air of sleepiness was entirely fictitious, however, and had been the undoing of many an enterprising crook.

MARTEN CUMBERLAND

At the moment Comfort's broad round face registered a mixture of surprise, tinged with regret.

'But,' he said, in a pained tone—'but surely you'll come over to Cleveham Bois with me? You'll come and have a look round, won't you?'

Loreto twirled round upon his music-stool.

'Why should I?' he demanded. 'A man has been shot, and your problem is to find out who did it. That sort of thing doesn't interest me. You know my methods, Watson—I mean Comfort. I am only concerned with the anticipation and prevention of crime. I don't care a hang about tracking down criminals and punishing them. This crime has happened; there's no question of prevention, and, therefore, it leaves me cold.'

Comfort took a tobacco-pouch from his pocket and began to fill a pipe. His shrewd, dark eyes were on Loreto's face.

'There may still be a question of prevention,' he said slowly. 'The old doctor is not dead yet. So far, it has only been attempted murder.'

'Do you mean there may be another attempt if the doctor lives?'

Comfort shrugged his broad shoulders.

'Why not? The whole affair is strange. Shooting, in a quiet village like Cleveham Bois, is unusual, to say the least of it. Then, there's another reason why this case might interest you: Dr. Robertson was shot while he was engaged in a game of chess. He was found dead beside the board and men.'

Loreto looked at the other quickly.

'That should simplify things enormously,' he observed. 'Surely the number of chess-players in Cleveham Bois is not great?'

MATE IN THREE MOVES

'Very few,' returned Comfort. 'The local men got on to that at once. Apparently there was only the parson who was known to play occasionally with Robertson. And apart from the parson's impeccable reputation, he happens to have a perfect alibi.'

Loreto rose to his feet and gazed through the window to where a fine sheet of rain descended over the lawn and rose-trees.

'The case seems rather curious,' he remarked.

'Then come along with me,' said Comfort, quickly pressing his advantage. 'You may find something that will interest you—and me. Anyhow, you can't sit at that piano all day, and you don't like walking in the rain.'

Loreto smiled.

'Right,' he said. 'You win! I'll just put some boots on and order the car.'

Five minutes later the big Daimler was twisting and turning through the lanes that led towards Cleveham Bois. Loreto looked out upon the wet trees and glistening hedges, and cursed the English summer. Comfort leaned back luxuriously and puffed at his pipe.

In half-an-hour they had come to the scene of the tragedy, and the car had drawn up before a pleasant red-roofed cottage, in front of which a small crowd had long ago assembled. Upon the front garden gate a conventional brass plate informed the world that Dr. Robertson and Dr. Wilcox practised medicine at this address.

The local police were in charge of things, and upon Comfort introducing himself, a sergeant showed the Inspector and Loreto at once to the scene of the crime.

A pleasant, broad, oak-panelled room confronted them, a room that was very simply furnished and had no

MARTEN CUMBERLAND

carpet to cover the red-tiled floor. A number of books flanked one wall; a large gate-legged table was set in the middle of the room, and, close to the lattice-paned window, was a smaller table containing chess-board and men. The latched front door of the cottage opened immediately upon this room.

'This is the dining-room, and principal living-room of the house,' explained the sergeant. 'Dr. Robertson used this room a good deal, though Dr. Wilcox occupies an upstairs room most of his time. There is another consulting room where both doctors receive patients. This is where Dr. Robertson was found, early this morning, by the daily woman who works for him. The woman's name is Tapping, and she found the old doctor lying there beside that chess-table. He was unconscious, and had been shot at close range. He had evidently been playing chess with someone. You see there is a chair at each side of this chess-table, and one of the pieces was found clenched in the doctor's hand.'

The sergeant moved towards the small table, and showed exactly where the unconscious body of Dr. Robertson had been found. He was even so obliging as to lie down himself in the position occupied by the unfortunate doctor.

Inspector Comfort gave a quick glance round, and his eyes went to the lattice-paned windows, one of which was opened slightly.

'Was that window open this morning, sergeant?' he asked.

'Yes, sir,' replied the sergeant. 'Mrs. Tapping is quite an intelligent woman, and she acted wisely. She left everything untouched, and telephoned the police and hospital at once. I found that window open, just as

MATE IN THREE MOVES

it is now, and obviously it could have been opened wider from the outside. It is possible that the doctor may have been shot from the window.'

'H'm! The front door was unbolted?'

'Yes, sir. But in these small country villages that means nothing. Very possibly the doctor never bolted his door at night.'

Inspector Comfort took a pace or two about the room.

'Of course, Dr. Robertson has not recovered consciousness? He is not able to speak?'

'No, sir. His condition is very critical. There has been internal hæmorrhage, I believe. The bullet pierced the lung. The surgeon at the hospital reckons that the doctor was shot about one o'clock this morning. He often sat up late playing chess.'

'There is no possibility of it being a case of attempted suicide?'

'No, sir. The shot was not fired at so close a range as that, and no weapon was discovered. Also, I think it is pretty obvious that Dr. Robertson was playing chess with someone at the time. That is the most baffling part of the business, sir. Who was he playing chess with? Was it this unknown opponent who shot the doctor, or was he only a witness to the crime? Of course there may have been some strange visitor to the village last night, someone who was a chess-player, and a murderer!'

'Where is Dr. Wilcox?' asked Comfort abruptly. 'He is a much younger man than Dr. Robertson, isn't he?'

'Yes, sir. Dr. Robertson took him for a partner, as he believed in a combination of youth and age. Dr. Wilcox supplied audacity and a knowledge of the latest theories, while the older doctor had caution and ex-

perience. At least, that is what Dr. Robertson used to say himself. The two gentlemen were very fond of one another, sir. Dr. Wilcox is frightfully upset about the whole affair. He telephoned early this morning from Brittlesea. He wanted Mrs. Tapping to send him on his shaving tackle, which he'd forgotten to pack. When he heard the news he was in a terrible state, and he's coming back here in his car as quickly as he can. It was lucky he telephoned, for no one knew what hotel at Brittlesea he had gone to until he rang up from the Grand this morning.'

Comfort took a pace or two about the room, busy with his thoughts. Loreto, all this time, was examining with great interest the interrupted game of chess. He had seated himself in the chair that would have been occupied, presumably, by Dr. Robertson's unknown opponent, and Loreto's light-grey eyes travelled over the board and noted the position of every man. Not content with this, he drew a pencil from his pocket and annotated the game on the back of an old envelope.

The sergeant, a young, fresh-faced man with a small, straw-coloured moustache, looked at Loreto with considerable surprise.

Looking up, Loreto caught the man's eyes fixed upon him, and smiled gently.

'This is a most interesting game,' he said. 'I suppose sergeant, the chess-pieces also have been left entirely undisturbed?'

'Yes, sir. They are just as they were when Dr. Robertson was playing the game.'

'And you said the doctor was discovered with a piece clenched in one hand. Was that piece a knight,

MATE IN THREE MOVES

by any chance? A piece like this?' Loreto held up a white knight as he asked his question.

The sergeant nodded vigorously.

'Yes. That was the piece.'

Inspector Comfort swung round and eyed his friend keenly. The detective knew quite well, from past experience, that Loreto's questions were never idle ones, however bizarre they might appear.

'Discovered something?' he asked quickly.

Loreto shrugged his shoulders.

'I don't know,' he returned. 'Possibly. I can't be sure.'

He rose to his feet and, approaching the latticed window, put his head out and looked at the flower-beds below the casement.

Comfort turned to the sergeant.

'I'd like to see this Mrs. Tapping,' the Scotland Yard man said. 'Afterwards I'll run up to the hospital and have a word with the surgeon there. Possibly, by that time, Dr. Wilcox will have returned from Brittlesea.'

'Very good, sir,' responded the sergeant. 'Would you like to examine the rest of the house first?'

'No,' said Comfort. 'That will do later.'

Loreto withdrew his head from the casement and turned towards his friend.

'Well, I'll be off, Comfort,' he said. 'I must get my five hours' practice in. I'll send the car back for you, and expect you when I see you. Good morning, sergeant.'

'You don't want to hear what Mrs. Tapping has to say?' asked Comfort.

'No,' said Loreto, with a smile. 'You can tell me all about it later. To me the most interesting thing in this case is the game of chess on that board.'

MARTEN CUMBERLAND

He nodded to the others and walked out of the cottage, while the young sergeant stared at his retreating figure in amazement.

A moment later, the drone of the Daimler engine rose on the air, and died away in the distance.

That day Loreto lunched alone, and it was after three in the afternoon before Comfort returned to find his friend still struggling with octaves, whilst a metronome ticked away remorselessly on the top of the piano.

'Well,' said Comfort, 'this affair has ended quickly, thank God! The man who shot Robertson has given himself up.'

'Indeed! Who was it? By the way, you'll have some lunch? They have some ready for you.'

'Thanks,' accepted the inspector. 'The fellow who shot Robertson is a man called Felton—Alfred Felton. He's a grocer at Cleveham Bois. He came to the station after you left me, and gave himself up.'

Loreto rang the bell, and a servant entered immediately, with a tray containing a cold but appetising meal.

'Forgot all about food,' said Comfort, seating himself before the repast. 'Do you know, human nature is a queer thing. This fellow Felton walked into the station as cool as brass. It appears he had borrowed some money from Dr. Robertson, and the thing got on Felton's mind, though there's no reason why it should, for we've looked into the chap's accounts, and his financial position is all right.'

Loreto lighted a cigarette and puffed at it reflectively. 'I have a theory that all murderers and would-be murderers are partly mad,' he said.

Inspector Comfort took a huge mouthful of salad, and nodded his head. 'You may be right,' he conceded.

MATE IN THREE MOVES

'Anyway, among other things, Felton seemed embittered by the fact that Robertson grew finer roses than he!'

'And so he shot the doctor?'

'Yes. He shot him from the window. Robertson had been teaching Felton chess so that he could get a game when the parson couldn't play. Felton rode on his bicycle to Robertson's place last night, and the two men played chess until very late.

'Felton intended to kill Robertson, and, about one in the morning, whilst they were in the middle of a game, Felton excused himself on the plea of going out into the garden to see that his bicycle was all right. He went into the garden, pushed open the window, and fired, almost point-blank, at the doctor. Felton saw his victim fall, and felt sure he was dead. No one heard the report, and, quite coolly, it seems, Felton mounted his machine and rode slowly back to his own house about a mile away.'

The Inspector took a mighty draught of beer, and wiped his lips. 'Thank Heaven the thing's over!' he said. 'After all, my holiday may not be entirely spoilt.'

Loreto had risen to his feet, and he now looked carelessly at the long ash on his cigarette.

'I shouldn't congratulate yourself too soon,' he remarked. 'Felton never committed this crime.'

'What?' Comfort looked at his friend incredulously. 'When the man comes with a full and detailed confession! What makes you suppose Felton didn't shoot the doctor?'

'Let's get his story right,' said Loreto, carefully. 'The man says he was in the middle of a game of chess with the doctor, and then Felton went out into the garden and shot the doctor through the window?'

'Yes, that's right.'

'Well, it's wrong. Felton is lying.'

'But why should he?'

'He's mad,' stated Loreto. 'You know yourself that there is seldom a murder, or any spectacular crime committed, but what one or two lunatics come to the police with full confessions of guilt. Felton is one of this type.'

Inspector Comfort cut himself a piece of cheddar.

'That's right,' he agreed. 'Of course we thought of that. I had Felton examined by the hospital surgeon, and also by Dr. Wilcox, who has just returned from Brittlesea in his car. Wilcox is an analytical psychologist, and rather an expert on brain trouble. Both men declare Felton to be in his right mind, though naturally labouring under considerable stress of excitement. Wilcox, by the way, is frightfully cut up about this business. He's a decent young fellow, and he can't bear to return to the house yet. The place is still in police hands, and Wilcox is lodging temporarily at the Red Lion.'

Loreto lit a fresh cigarette, and took a pace or two about the room.

'All the same,' he said, 'Felton is mad. It is not always easy to judge these cases. By the way, did he produce the revolver with which he shot Robertson?'

'No. He says he threw it into the Thorn. That's a pretty rapid stream, and deep; we're trying to find the gun at the point where Felton threw it away, but so far we haven't succeeded.'

Loreto smiled.

'It's wonderful how well these lunatics work out their story,' he remarked. 'Well, Comfort, I should start on a fresh tack, because I can assure you that Felton never did this thing.'

MATE IN THREE MOVES

‘But how do you know?’

‘Because I happen to possess a knowledge of chess,’ said Loreto, cryptically.

Inspector Comfort laughed, and felt for his pipe.

‘Santos,’ he said, ‘I’ve the greatest respect for your intellectual equipment. I’ve seen it in action, and it’s been mighty useful to me at times. But I assure you that it will take more than a knowledge of chess to save Alfred Felton. If Robertson dies, Felton will be brought before a jury and probably hanged. Unless Robertson saw the man who shot him, and recovers sufficiently to say that it was not Felton—which, personally, I think a most improbable event—then Felton will be for it! At the very least, he will go down for a pretty long stretch; so if you consider that an injustice, and Felton innocent, you had better get busy!’

The Inspector smiled broadly over his pipe, but to his surprise Loreto’s face was grave, and he threw his cigarette into the empty grate.

‘You are right, *amigo*,’ he said, crossing the room and ringing for a servant. ‘I have to prevent, not only a crime, but a possible miscarriage of justice. I shall probably be away all to-night, but I shall return to-morrow, and, in the meantime, you must make yourself at home here.’

A servant answered the bell and Loreto gave some orders. ‘Pack my bags, Gates—just enough things for a single night—I am returning to-morrow. Tell Charles to bring the Daimler round, and then I shan’t need him. I shall drive the car myself.’

Inspector Comfort listened to all this and watched with surprise a new and energetic Loreto.

‘Where are you going?’ asked the detective.

MARTEN CUMBERLAND

Loreto smiled.

'That's my little secret,' he said. 'I shall return to-morrow. Meanwhile, I should really study that interrupted game of chess.'

Still laughing, he went out of the room, leaving a mystified and thoughtful police-inspector behind him.

That evening Loreto drove his car into Brittlesea, and went to the Grand Hotel, where he made a few enquiries. He slept that night at the hotel, and the next morning drove back to Cleveham Bois. The journey back was slow, for Loreto stopped at every petrol-filling station, and at each one he asked certain questions.

In Cleveham Bois he ran into his friend Comfort, and the Inspector was triumphant.

'Hullo!' he cried. 'Since you've been away things have been happening. We've found the revolver that Felton threw into the river, and Dr. Robertson has rallied in a most marvellous fashion. It is possible that the old man may be able to speak some time to-day. At least, he's conscious, though his condition is still critical.'

'Can I see the revolver?' asked Loreto, and the detective took him along to the police-station and showed him the weapon.

'It's a very common type of gun,' said Comfort, 'and it will be difficult to trace it. The most important thing about it is that it bears out Felton's confession. You're wrong there, Santos: that chap is not mad, though he may be a little eccentric.'

Loreto made no answer. He examined the revolver and then, leaving the police-station, went up to Dr. Robertson's house.

Here Loreto made a thorough search, not only

MATE IN THREE MOVES

examining the room where Dr. Robertson was shot, but the garden and all the other rooms as well.

Two hours, at least, he spent in the house, and most of the time he was examining the private papers of the two doctors. Like an accountant, he went through pass-books, old cheque counterfoils, and a varied assortment of documents.

Early that afternoon he called at the Red Lion and asked to see Dr. Wilcox. The doctor was in his room, and Loreto was soon facing a slim dark young man, whose pale blue eyes were in sharp contrast to his smooth black hair.

‘Mr. Santos?’ said the doctor enquiringly, looking at the card he held in his hands. ‘Will you sit down? I hope your business won’t take long, because, as you probably know, I’m in great trouble just now. My friend and partner lies in the hospital, between life and death, and I was just going to visit him when you called.’

Loreto seated himself in an arm-chair and looked round the best bedroom of the Red Lion with a grim little smile on his lips.

‘Dr. Wilcox,’ he said, ‘I shan’t take up much of your time, and when I’ve said what I have to say perhaps you may not find it necessary to visit your partner.’

The young doctor had been standing when Loreto began to speak, but at his last words the man sank slowly on to his bed, and Loreto saw the slim brown hands clench themselves tightly.

‘I don’t understand,’ he said. ‘I must go and see Dr. Robertson. What is there likely to prevent me?’

‘I shall prevent you,’ said Loreto calmly. ‘My young friend, one attempt at murder is enough. There must be no more. If Dr. Robertson recovers he may or may

MARTEN CUMBERLAND

not know that it was you who shot him through the window. In any case, I must have a written confession from you in order to save this poor imbecile Felton.'

At these words the young doctor sprang to his feet and stood glaring at his accuser. A strange look came into Wilcox's pale blue eyes; his slim brown hands came quickly forward.

'Wilcox,' said Loreto sharply, 'the revolver you threw into the river to corroborate Felton's story is now at the police-station. Without it you will have no chance of doing me physical violence. Believe me, man to man, I could pull you to pieces like a rag doll!'

Loreto eyed his man coolly, and, quite suddenly, the young doctor seemed to collapse. All attempt at bluff fell away from him. White to the lips, he stared at Loreto and stammered a question.

'How . . . how much do you know?'

'I know all about it,' returned Santos. 'I know that you always hated Robertson, though he was fond of you, at least when you two first went into partnership. The old man made you his heir, and insured his life in your favour. You got into a mess financially—mainly through a woman in London—and you planned to kill Robertson.'

'Two days ago you went for a holiday, and left in your car for Brittlesea. You went straight to the Grand Hotel, which you knew quite well, and engaged a room, which you have occupied before. This room is on the first floor, and it is quite easy for an active man to climb from its window and drop a few yards to the garden below. At eleven o'clock you went to bed, after telling the porter to call you at eight the next morning. Once in your bedroom you locked the door, dropped from the window into the gardens, and went straight to a night

MATE IN THREE MOVES

garage on the outskirts of Brittlesea, where you had already arranged to hire a motor-cycle.

'Two hours' hard riding brought you back to Cleveham Bois, and as you crept across the garden you saw a light in Dr. Robertson's house, and peering through the window, you saw your partner seated before a chess-board.

'You shot him with the revolver found in the river, and, thinking him dead, you remounted your motor-cycle and rode hard for Brittlesea.

'It was comparatively easy to regain your hotel bedroom without being seen, and, no doubt you thought you had established a sufficiently good alibi. There would be a dozen witnesses to prove that you spent the night at Brittlesea, and as long as you were unsuspected you were fairly safe.

'I, however, suspected you, and I made enquiries at garages and petrol-filling stations, where I secured evidence as to your movements.'

Loreto paused, and the young doctor gave a groan.

'What are you going to do?' he asked.

'To clear Felton I must have a written confession from you,' said Loreto. 'It is doubtful whether Robertson knows who shot him, and in any case, the old man may not recover. You must write your confession now, and when that is done I wash my hands of you. It will be some time before Felton's life is definitely endangered by legal process, and in that time you can make your escape if you like. I do not believe in social revenge or capital punishment, Wilcox. I don't want you gaoled or hanged, but I must save an innocent man.'

The young doctor stared at the other for some moments, and then a slow flush came to his pale cheeks.

MARTEN CUMBERLAND

'You will give me a chance of escape?' he faltered.

'Yes. Write your confession, and I'll hold it up as long as possible. In three weeks you could get to Buenos Aires—not a bad place to hide in—though, of course there will be no insurance money for you if your partner dies.'

Slowly the young doctor seemed to take a grip on his nerves, and to recover his self-control. He looked furtively at Loreto.

'Suppose I certified the man Felton as insane?' he pleaded. 'The man's mad, of course. They wouldn't hang him.'

Loreto shook his head.

'Felton must be cleared, Wilcox, and the Insurance Company protected, incidentally. I must have your confession, and that is the sole condition on which I give you a chance of escape. Come, there is pen and paper on the table there. Write.'

Trembling from head to foot, Wilcox staggered across the room, and, while Loreto watched him, opened a cupboard and took out a bottle of brandy and a tumbler. A glass of the raw spirit he tossed down his throat, and then he seated himself at the table and picked up a pen.

'You had better dictate the confession you want,' he said hoarsely. 'I can't think, I can't think!'

So Loreto dictated a clear and concise confession, watching the other while he wrote the words and signed at the foot of the paper.

'Thanks,' said Santos, and thrust the document into his pocket. 'Good-bye, Wilcox. I really recommend Buenos Aires; it's one of the best places for people who wish to lose themselves. Who knows, you might do great things there under another name.'

MATE IN THREE MOVES

That night, at dinner, Inspector Comfort commented on the fact that Dr. Wilcox had gone to London.

'Queer him going off at this moment,' said Comfort. 'He said he wanted to get some drugs in London, but I should have thought he could have sent for them. By the way, Robertson is better, but he has not yet been able to speak.'

The next day the Inspector left his host's house early in the morning, but returned about mid-day with a gleam of excitement in his eye.

'Great Snakes!' were his first words. 'This is the quickest and most unexpected case I was ever engaged on.'

Loreto looked at his friend's agitated face quickly.

'Shoot,' he invited.

'Well, the whole thing is over now, and, by Jove, you were right! Felton never shot the doctor; his tale was the babbling of a lunatic. Young Wilcox poisoned himself early this morning in a London hotel. Before he died he confessed everything to the hotel manager and a couple of the servants. He tried to kill Robertson, first because he hated the older man, and secondly because Robertson had insured his life for a large amount in Wilcox's favour, besides making the younger man his heir.'

'Indeed,' said Loreto.

'Yes,' replied Comfort, nodding excitedly. 'Just fancy that young hypocrite—and he made out that Felton was sane! Robertson, by the way, has now recovered enough to speak, and he says he's never played chess with Felton in his life. I've got a London specialist on to Felton now, and the specialist finds Felton most interesting. Great snakes! The fellow took me in and put

MARTEN CUMBERLAND

me on the wrong scent all right. If it hadn't been for his story I'd have tumbled to Wilcox's faked holiday trip, and all that.'

'Of course you would,' agreed Loreto, and the Inspector stared at his host with sudden understanding.

'You knew all this,' Comfort accused. 'You not only knew that Felton was insane and innocent, but you knew that Wilcox had attempted murder.'

Loreto nodded gravely.

'I found that out at Brittlesea, and by various letters and papers in Dr. Robertson's house.'

'But, without seeing Felton, how did you know he was mad and his story false?'

'It was a question of knowing chess,' explained Loreto, and, seeing the surprised look on his guest's face, he rose to his feet and brought forward a chess-board and men, and a magazine devoted to chess.

While Comfort watched, Loreto rapidly laid out some of the chess men upon the board.

'I don't know whether you recognise the position of these men,' he said, 'but this is precisely the position that was on the chess-table beside the unconscious body of Dr. Robertson.'

Comfort nodded his head.

'Yes,' he said. 'When you talked so much about the game I had a good look at the board, and I remember the position.'

'Good!' said Loreto. 'Well, the position of these men told me, directly I looked at the board, that Dr. Robertson, if he had been playing with anyone, had been playing with an expert. No novice could have arrived at a position like this. So when Felton said he'd just been learning the game I knew he hadn't played this game

MATE IN THREE MOVES

with the doctor. Felton knew nothing about chess. He said he was in the middle of the game when he went out into the garden and shot the doctor. As a matter of fact, this position is not the middle of a game, it's the conclusion. Black cannot escape a mate in three moves, and would, therefore, resign.'

The Inspector whistled softly.

'I see. Felton's story tripped up on chess technique.'

'Absolutely. What is more, as I soon discovered, Dr. Robertson had no opponent at all. He had been playing with himself, or, to speak more accurately, he had been playing through a game by himself. I thought there was something vaguely familiar in the position of these men on the board!'

Loreto, as he spoke, opened the chess-magazine he had held tucked under one arm.

'Look at this illustration, Comfort,' he said, pointing to a printed page. 'You need not know anything about chess to see that this diagram illustrates the position on Dr. Robertson's board. Do you see?'

'This is, as a matter of fact, a game played between Bratza and Coates at the Hastings tournament two months ago. This game won the brilliancy prize for the Englishman and it is one that chess enthusiasts have studied pretty carefully since.

'Now you can see why I knew Felton's story was all lies, and knew that the man was mad. Knowing so much, I looked elsewhere for the real criminal, and found him.

'As a matter of fact, I had a written confession from Wilcox yesterday, though it will not be necessary to produce that now. Poor devil! He paid in full, Comfort.'

Comfort nodded, and stared at the chess-board with unseeing eyes.