

Case of the Dewey Decimal Caper

[Editor:

Anybody can be a P.I. There is no entrance exam or college degree required. All you gotta do is buy a gun, have a car, and hang out your shingle. Anybody can be one. But not every P.I. is a good one. It's just like every cabbie isn't necessarily a good driver.

Spam was a very good P.I., even though he gained his early education in the streets. He learned how to defend himself and stand up for what he believed by using his fist and a little bit of bluff. By no means was he uneducated. No, he went to school like all the other kids. He even graduated well up in standing in his class. For a while he thought college was the way to go and even earned a degree in criminal justice at City College. After which he immediately entered the Police Academy.

So, it wasn't that Spam was uneducated, he just had no use for academia. It didn't hurt any, though, to have someone who was fairly well read close at hand. He lucked into that position the day he hired Cassidy. She was well on her way to getting a law degree when her college career was cut short by an unexpected pregnancy. She dropped out of school to care for her infant son by taking odd secretarial jobs here and there. She rocked on like that for ten years before she stumbled into a job totally different than what she had done in the past. She came to work for Spam.]



Spam tossed the post card in front of him onto the pile of papers that littered his desk. Try as she might, Cassidy could not keep his desk clean. It seemed that Spam functioned a little more

comfortably with a messy desk. He reached over the mess and picked up the phone receiver and began dialing the familiar number of his friend, Dave Frisco. He waited while the ring buzzed in his ears five, six, seven times. Just when he was on the verge of hanging up Lieutenant Frisco picked up the phone.

“Mornin’, Dave,” Spam responded to the voice of his old friend. “You need to put the donuts nearer to your office. I was about to hang up”

He smiled at Dave’s response and then continued, “Life’s tough, Dave. If you’d get there earlier all the jellies wouldn’t be gone.”

Spam chuckled again at the banter between the two friends, and then he changed the subject, “Listen, since you’re having problems getting the proper nutrition over there, why don’t you pay me a visit this mornin’. I got something in the mail that you may be interested in ...*(pause)*... Sure, ten o’clock this mornin’ would be fine ...*(pause)*... Sure, I’ll save you a jelly. See ya at ten then, bye.”

They say you only develop one or two really close friends in your lifetime. Spam considered himself to be very lucky. He had several; Dave Frisco was one of his best. The two men were rookie cops together years ago. There was a bond between them that could never be broken. Even after Spam became disgruntled with the force and struck out on his own as a private-eye, the two men remained tight. Dave cut Spam a little slack and let him in on many of the cases that were worked. It was a good thing for both of them. Spam was very good at investigating and often helped find solutions to difficult cases. In return, Dave opened the resources of the department to Spam, as much as he could and within certain limits.

When Spam received the post card, he knew that he had to share it with Dave. He suspected he was meant to do that. He didn’t know how the sender knew of Spam and Dave’s special

relationship. But, Spam figured the sender intended for the message to get to the authorities, and he wasn't going to disappoint them. He retrieved the post card from his desk and read it again:

"If you want to find the bad guy, I can help. 823 H393p. – Jane Austen"

There were a lot of bad-guys in the city. Spam knew his share of them. But the only one of interest to him right then was the one connected with this note. He turned his attention to the box of donuts next to the coffee pot. There were two jellies left in the box. Spam picked one up, took a bite, and then swallowed some of the hot coffee. If Dave delayed any longer he would miss out on that last jelly. As if on cue, Spam heard the door to his office open and saw his friend enter.

Spam smiled at the lieutenant, "Only one more left, Dave. I was kinda' hopin' you'd be detained. They're really good today."

Dave poured himself a cup of coffee and then retrieved the last jelly donut.

"It's a shame what a man will stoop to just to get a jelly donut. So, what's this mystery message you got me over here to see? You better not be wastin' my time."

"Wouldn't think of wasting good taxpayer money, Dave."

Spam tossed the post card across the desk to a seated Dave, who studied the message, wrinkled his forehead, and then shook his head.

"What's this supposed to be?"

"I'm not sure. But, it looks like someone is trying to get me a message. Only they don't want to come right out and tell me. Maybe they're playing with me. Maybe it doesn't mean anything at all. And, maybe it does mean something and they want me to figure it out.

"Yeah, maybe – but Spam, the cops can't do anything unless there is a crime. I don't have any earthly idea what this is. There's

a lot of bad guys out there who are easy enough to catch without me worrying about a mystery bad-guy. I can't help you on this one, Spam."

Cassidy set her work aside and listened to the two men ponder over the strange post card. She walked over to Dave and spoke, "Can I see that, Dave?"

"Sure Cassidy, be my guest."

Dave handed the card to Cassidy and the two men turned their attention to the attractive girl-Friday. Both men had built a healthy respect of Cassidy's intuition. She was a bright doll and had learned a lot since she had been working closely with Spam. She studied the strange message and then smiled.

"Sillies, this is a book."

"What are you talking about, Cassidy?" Spam asked. "Does that note make sense to you?"

"Well of course it does. This is the Dewey Decimal catalogue number of a book. In fact this number represents a particular book. And, I doubt if your sender is Jane Austen, since she's a 19th-century author. My guess is the writer of this note is letting you know that she's a woman."

"Jeez, Cassidy, you amaze me." Dave chuckled as he finished off the last of his jelly donut. "An' I suppose you can tell me what book that is?"

"Well, I can't, but I know who can. I'll call Phyllis; she works at the city library. Give me a second and I'll tell you."

Cassidy walked to her desk, shuffled through her address book, and dialed the phone number. Spam smiled at Dave as he spoke, "You gotta love her."

Shortly Cassidy hung the phone up and joined the two men who stopped their conversation and waited with interest for her to share with them the name of the book.

“Well, gentlemen, it seems like the name of your mystery book is *The Prisoner of Zenda*.”

The men glance at each other and then spoke in unison, “What’s that mean?”

Cassidy shrugged, tossed the solved mystery post card on the desk, and remarked as she returned to her chores, “How should I know? I’m just a girl-Friday; you’re the great detectives.”

“Well, it wouldn’t make sense to send us a message about a bad guy who is already in prison. If we are intended to catch a bad guy, I assume he is working around us here in the free world. The likelihood is that our man is a con.” Spam mused out loud.

“Makes sense,” Dave continued, “and I’d say he’s probably a new release. So, that means we’ve got a con out there that’s gotten out of jail recently and is getting his hands dirty. Now all we gotta do is figure out who he is and what he’s doin’.”

“Dave, can you have your guys run the record on recent releases, who are living in this area, say within the last six months. We also gotta figure out the connection between this con and Miss. Jane Austen here. She may be a relative or a girlfriend. Check out the immediate families and see if any of them are librarians. Cassidy will check with Phyllis and see if any of her librarian friends have any shady boy-friends. Until we find out what he’s done, that ought to keep us busy.”

“Okay, Spam, I’ll put a man on it. But, I can’t have him on this for long – at least not until we got a crime to solve.”

“I understand, Dave. We’ll work it from this end when you run out of manpower.”

The two friends shared a little small talk and then Dave returned to his office. His work here was finished and so were all the jelly donuts. After he left, Spam picked up the post card and studied it closely. Something just didn’t make sense to the puzzled gumshoe. Eventually, he lay the post card down and turned his attention to Cassidy.

“Cass?”

“Yes, Spam.”

“Cass, something puzzles me about all this.”

“And, what’s that, Spam?”

“Well, if this doll knows this is a bad guy, if she knows what he’s doing and if she wants to rat on him, why not just pick up the phone and tell the cops? Why the mysterious post card?”

“Oh Spam, you really don’t understand women, do you?”

“Well, apparently not, Cass. Why don’t you enlighten me?”

Cassidy’s voice softened as she spoke with a tenderness that was in some way personal, “Spam, she loves him. She can’t bear to be the one to hurt him. But, she is also a person with values and she can’t condone the things he is doing. She can’t turn him in, but she can help you stop him. In a sense she is being supportive of him. She is not doing it; you are. But she’s going to make you work for it. Love is a strong emotion with a woman, Spam.”

Spam studied his girl-Friday, who had become much more than a girl-Friday. Just what that was Spam did not know, or rather did not recognize. Cassidy was special. Spam knew he could not function without her in his life. He tried not to think about it; it got complicated when he thought about it.

“You can tell all that just from that note?”

“Well, maybe I’m using a little female intuition also. But I’d bet your jelly donuts on it.”

Cassidy smiled and returned to her work. Spam watched her for a good long while. He didn’t hide the fact he was watching. She amazed him and he enjoyed the sight of her.



Spam tossed the file folder with the realm of information Dave’s guy had dug up on recently released cons. There were all

sorts of criminals: thieves, murderers, rapist, hoodlums, forgers, pickpockets, blackmailers, and a host of other generally bad guys. Spam figured there would be a lot but not this many. It seemed to him half the city consisted of some sort of crook. So far there wasn't anything to tie anyone on that extensive list to *The Prisoner of Zenda*. What he needed was some more help. It had been a week since he received the first post card. He was now looking forward for the mail. Hoping he'd find another post card.

"Spam, you've got jelly on your tie." Cassidy shook her head and frowned. "I try to keep you cleaned up so you can play with the other boys, but you insist on wearing your food. What am I gonna' do with you?"

Spam smiled at Cassidy, "Just keep on working Cass. I'll get the hang of it sooner or later."

"Well, it's enough to drive a girl to drink. Oh, by the way, you may be interested in this." Cassidy laid the post card on top of the mail she had just sorted. "I think you've been expecting it."

Spam snatched the card from the mess and studied it. He read out loud.

It pays to be careful with who you associate with. 823 D54 ad3. – Nancy

"Okay, Cass, you know the drill. Find out what book this is. Maybe this is the clue that'll lead us to the bad-guy, whoever he is?"

"Sure, Spam. I'll give Phyllis a jingle right now." Cassidy smiled and winked as she added, "What would you do without us ladies?"

Spam nodded and sat back patiently to wait for Cassidy to reveal the next link in the mysterious post cards. It took only a moment and Cassidy slipped a piece of note paper to Spam.