

First the quick summary: Mustard with a pistol in Cornwall for money.

Herein 'mask' could be read as 'diamond' if in fact the diamond is the valuable part. The analysis would not change.

Assumed key facts:

That von Boddy's airship was in fact a genuine solo ship, and had no room for a second person.

That the telegram sent from Boddy Manor on about July 20 was in fact sent by von Boddy himself.

\* This means that von Boddy must have abandoned his airship voluntarily, a day or two before July 15, and made his way by parachute / swim / walk to Boddy Manor.

\* This means that von Boddy's reason for abandoning his airship remains unknown. He perhaps intended to 'vanish', and profit from the mask, but there is no concrete evidence to support this supposition. This is the biggest gap in my argument. More will be said about this later.

\* This means that the window hole and floor stain in the airship will remain unexplained. Explanations could be invented, but the text offers zero support for any explanation. These are probably minor gaps in the argument. If they have big significance, then I miss it utterly.

\* This supposition that the telegram was sent by von Boddy, made by me prior to HH's "Aug 21" post, is supported by HH's asides in his final summation of Aug 30.

That von Boddy was joined by someone, from London, on about July 21. Someone he thought was a trusted friend able to advise him about future courses of action.

\* We assume that the advice needed was how to profit from the mask. And perhaps how to vanish safely, and to avoid any of the people who might have a hostile interest in either the mask or the money from the sale of the mask.

That the bones found on Aug 3 were von Boddy. The story offers no proof, but the police and HH seem to accept this, so we will accept it also.

\* Note that there is about two weeks between July 21 and the discovery of the body on Aug 3, enough time for the skeleton to be picked clean by the schools of shad mentioned, assuming that information in the text is accurate.

Various deductions:

That the person called from London by von Boddy was the murderer.

That the mask was hidden, deliberately or accidentally, by von Boddy before his death, and that the murderer could not immediately find it.

\* We assume that in most cases, if the murderer had found the mask, he or she would vanish with it at once, or at least send taunting telegrams from Paraguay the following year.

The murderer threw von Boddy, attached to the trunk, into the ocean.

The time line very strongly suggests that Lady Peacock, Sir Ambrose Peacock, and HH could not have been in England on July 21. There being zero evidence about the airship captain, we will also exclude him from consideration. In addition, HH is not given any real motive, and Ambrose is described as being too impractical and indecisive on his own to manage a murder.

This leaves White, Plum, Mustard, and Brown.

It is extremely unlikely that von Boddy would have called Brown to come and give him advice. They had no existing relationship, no established trust, and furthermore von Boddy had Brown's research papers illegally.

Coming back to von Boddy's presumed decision to try and vanish, and to profit from the mask, the one person most likely to want their share of the mask (from von Boddy's point of view), especially given how freely von Boddy had been spending money in Cairo, was White. I find it very difficult to imagine a trust friendship between von Boddy and White. While a business relationship could have existed, I find it hard to imagine von Boddy wanting to put any trust in that, especially since it appears that von Boddy had been abusing that business relationship.

This leaves Plum and Mustard as the only two friends that von Boddy might have summoned to Cornwall to advise him.

According to the story, Plum arrived much later. Of course, he could have gone to Cornwall, done his stuff, then headed back to Oxford. But there are no hints of this in the story. Also, the telegram went to London and we have no indication that Plum was there. Also, Plum seems to be comfortable in his academic role, with no especial need of money. He may have sold Brown's trunk to von Boddy, or may have simply given it to von Boddy out of friendship. He may have had some expectation of sharing in the profit or in any associated academic glory, but the story does not give much of a role to either of these. His description of the geology of the diamond suggests academic detachment.

This leaves Mustard as the summoned friend. He has the opportunity.

To examine his motivation, we note that he has begun to cheat friends, and has a desperate need for money, and perhaps a desperate need to establish a new life away from his disgrace. It is likely that von Boddy knows of none of those radical changes in Mustard's circumstances (having been in Egypt), and so would have no reason to not continue to trust him as a friend.

Mustard also has a pistol, with a gun being the likely murder weapon. While it is not necessary that we \*know\* that the murderer owns a pistol, it does help that we know that Mustard does own a pistol.

So we have opportunity, motive, and method.

Mustard with a pistol in Cornwall for money.

The exact location of the murder is not known. Easiest and safest for Mustard would be if von Boddy and Mustard went to the coast with the trunk, and Mustard killed him there, but we have no evidence of this, and no obvious excuse Mustard could have given to get von Boddy to do this. Aha, Mustard could have persuaded von Boddy that they needed to get rid of the trunk and its contents by throwing it into the ocean, so that Brown would never know that von Boddy had it. Why von Boddy would be so naive as to accept that excuse heaven knows, but it could have worked.

The bullet hole in the airship window, and the stain, could not be associated, since the airship was presumably in police hands at this time.

What else?

We have the information that Mustard was familiar to, and trusted by, the Boddy Manor housekeeper. He presumably told her some lie about von Boddy's absence, and about his presence, at the manor. There is a story gap in that she does not seem to have been questioned closely, such as about whether von Boddy returned to the manor. Did she even know? Did von Boddy hide there for several days without notifying her, if she lived elsewhere and only came to the manor, say, weekly, or when summoned? And if so did Mustard summon her only after disposing of von Boddy? Or did Mustard have to make up a story? We can perhaps assume that she did NOT know that von Boddy had returned, otherwise she would presumably have said something to the police -- so she probably still believes that von Boddy died shortly before July 15.

Since Mustard did not vanish, we assume that he had not yet found the mask.

The first photo of the mask, taken either by von Boddy or by Mustard, shows the eye glowing. So one or both were evil, or at least had sufficiently evil thoughts.

Possible story hole: Plum says that the eye would glow red in the presence of evil, yet it seems to glow blue-white. The detailed description of the blood diamond backs up Plum's assumption of red as the colour.

The second photo of the mask, being hidden under her dress by Lady Peacock, also shows it glowing blue-white. Either she is evil, or someone nearby is evil. The implication is that the mask was hidden, deliberately or accidentally, under that settee; that Mustard had failed to find it despite having about six weeks during which to locate it; and that Lady Peacock had finally found it. It is not at all clear why he would fail and she would succeed, especially if it glowed when he was near. Nor that nobody else would have noticed it. The place was swarming with people, many of whom might have been evil enough to light the eye, and who could have deduced that the mask was still missing because of the continued presence of all suspects, and could have been looking for it under every stone in Cornwall.

The struggle between Raven and Mustard presumably occurred very soon after Raven found the mask, and so the glow may have been because he was very close, if Raven was not sufficiently evil. He may have been unable to shoot her because of the presence of others in the manor. She presumably has the mask on Aug 30 as HH is making his summary. It is entirely possible, perhaps even likely, that she has already vanished with it, presumably leaving Mustard and Ambrose behind. See HH's final query.

Of course, it is possible that Mustard knew of its location all along, perhaps even hid it himself, but lacked the means to vanish and / or turn the mask into money, and so was stuck at Boddy Manor. Unlikely though, especially as he could still have had some of the money that he won from cheating Ambrose at cards. Enough, at least, to leave the country with the mask.

Mild puzzle: If he had intended to vanish, von Boddy would be giving up his manor, and sullyng his title. Perhaps he had got into a tricky situation, realized that it was more complicated than he had at first thought, and needed advice from a friend.

Anomaly: The text mentions the airship in the "Aug 28" post as if the airship was at Boddy Manor on about July 21. It was in the hands of the police at that time, I believe.

Mild puzzle: HH mentions old spiders on Aug 30. Had he bugged Boddy Manor earlier, perhaps at White's instigation? Or hired by someone else? If so, I can't make any connection with the current mystery.

Mild puzzle: That Brown did not report his baggage loss.

Mild puzzle: The first photo of the mask must have been developed and printed, then put into the trunk. Difficult to imagine how this could have been done in only a few days in Cornwall.

Mild puzzle: How Lady Peacock and Ambrose could have met in Venice. It seems too much of a coincidence. Perhaps it was truly an accident. If there is a deeper explanation, the text offers no hints, though my mind can come up with several unsupported explanations. Or perhaps von Boddy had intended to be nice to Ambrose, and leave him the Manor, and also set Ambrose up with Raven. It's getting tenuous, but maybe he told her of his plans to vanish, in Egypt, and told her of the likelihood that she would be able to run into Ambrose in Venice. Maybe it was a shock to her when she learned on her arrival in England that von Boddy was not vanished, but dead.

Unknown: Whether the person telegraphed by von Boddy had been in on his plans originally, or was only brought in on July 21. I'm assuming the latter.

So that's my very lengthy analysis.

James, for the investigative reporter Richard Arnold