

**TEN CLUES
FOR
MR. POLKINGHORN**

Charlotte Armstrong

**Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine
January, 1957**

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG**

TITLE: **Ten Clues for Mr. Polkinghorn**

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Amos Polkinghorn, mystery writer

LOCALE: A suburb in the United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Mr. Polkinghorn could see the newspaper headline: NOTED MYSTERY WRITER SOLVES POLICE PROBLEM IN REAL LIFE. It was a cinch for a man with a trained deductive mind who had no less than ten clues.*

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MR. AMOS POLKINGHORN, 49, creator of Daniel Dean, Ace Detective (whose cases no lending library would be without), walked down the driveway of his suburban home one morning to peer up the street for the mailman. The mailman was not even on the horizon. Mr. Polkinghorn, walking back, was very much startled to see, on the edge of the glass curtains in the window next door, a set of fingers.

This was odd, because the house next door was empty. The family was away.

The fictional Daniel Dean would have taken this without the quiver of an eyelash. But Mr. Polkinghorn found his own mouth dry, his knees weak, his heart flopping. He staggered to refuge within his front door and took a full minute to get his breath before he called the police.

Nor, during the interval before they came, could he think of a single clever ruse. Meanwhile, the mailman appeared. Mr. Polkinghorn did absolutely nothing to warn the mailman. He watched (taking care not to let his own fingers or any other part of him show at his window) as the mailman went up upon the Arnolds' porch, put the letters in the slot, and returned to the sidewalk as safely as usual. Mr. Polkinghorn, much relieved, reminded himself that he, Mr. Polkinghorn, was actually doing all a citizen is expected to do; that it was only his occupation that engendered this self-reproach and made him feel that he *ought* to have disguised himself as the mailman. Or something.

By the time the police came, in the shape of a couple of men in plain clothes, Mr. Polkinghorn had managed to work himself into an attitude of intrepid curiosity more becoming to a well-known mystery-story writer. He observed that the plainclothesmen had no ruse. They marched around, found the Arnolds' back door unlocked, and nobody in the house.

On the kitchen table, however, was a big fat clue. The situation suddenly developed a certain piquancy.

The police officers' names were Conners and Farley. They knew who Mr. Polkinghorn was, and what he did, and they didn't mind telling him all they knew about this real-life mystery. In fact, Mr. Polkinghorn noted within himself, the situation was classic. The regular police were presenting the amateur criminologist with a pretty little problem.

Mr. Polkinghorn sat at the Arnolds' kitchen table and listened, lifting his

somewhat snub nose in unconscious longing for the hawk-like profile of his figment of the imagination, Daniel Dean.

Conners said, "Well, sir, this plain cloth cap was made and worn in the State Prison. No doubt about that. Now, ten days ago, three convicts escaped. The alarm's still out. But we *know* what happened to two of them. Seems, one night a week ago, two men showed up in a boatyard upshore a ways and knocked down a fella fussing with his sailboat. The fella didn't get a good look, but he knew they were convicts, all right, from what he heard them say. So the convicts took the boat and went off into the Sound. Boat capsized in a quick squall. Witnesses to the wreck searched all night, but found no bodies. Haven't found them yet. But those two couldn't have made it to shore. So we *know* that two of those three men got themselves drowned. Now, sir, according to the evidence of this cap, the *third* escaped convict must have holed up in this house for the last week or so. Question is, which one was he?"

"This matters?" said Mr. Polkinghorn, casting a keen glance upward. "Yes, I see."

"Matters, because if you got the alarm out for a man, it's better to know who the man is," said Farley. He was youngish and had a nice Irish grin.

"Very interesting." Mr. Polkinghorn pursed his lips.

"You saw his fingers less than forty minutes ago. He couldn't have got very far. Maybe he'll be picked up. Then again, maybe not." Conners implied vast police machinery in motion. "Be easier if we knew which one we were looking for."

"One ought," said Mr. Polkinghorn thoughtfully, "to be able to deduce that." The two policemen were respectfully silent. "How did he dare hide in this house? How did he know it was empty and would remain empty?" mused Mr. Polkinghorn, his wits beginning to work in familiar grooves.

Conners said, "Because this Mrs. Arnold, she pinned a note on the back door for the milkman. Here it is. Says: 'No milk for ten days.' Says: 'Back Tuesday, the tenth.' "

"And that's tomorrow," Farley said. "The man could read, I guess."

"A reasonable deduction," said Mr. Polkinghorn exhibiting Daniel Dean's most charming smile.

"Well, we got the Arnolds on the phone and they're hurrying right back. Be here in a coupla hours. Probably they can tell us if anything's missing, for instance."

“It’s quite possible,” said Mr. Polkinghorn, “that in the meantime we can discover something. I doubt very much, gentlemen”—he was talking just like Daniel Dean, he couldn’t help it—“whether a man can remain in a house for a week’s time and leave no traces of his personality. We should be able to find those traces. That is, if you can tell about the personalities of these three convicts.”

“Tell you what we know?” said Conners. “Sure.”

Mr. Polkinghorn took out pencil and paper. He was thrilled and happy. He saw the publicity already. *Noted Mystery Writer Solves Police Problem in Real Life*. “It was,” he could hear himself saying with a twisted smile, “elementary.”

“One of them,” said Conners, “was named Mario Cossetti. Age 29. Caucasian. Five foot five. 155 pounds. Dark hair, dark eyes. Dark complexion. Artificial right foot. Lost foot in action—navy man. Up for armed robbery. This the kind of thing you mean?”

“Precisely,” said Mr. Polkinghorn, scribbling delightedly. “Anything more about his background?”

“New York City. Lower East Side. Never finished high school.”

“Very good.”

“Yeah. Well, then there was Glenway Sparrow. Age 42. Caucasian. Five foot eleven. 125 pounds. Gray eyes, gray hair.” Conners warmed up to this work. “Never in the service. 4-F. Ex-editor. College man. Up for conspiracy to defraud. A con man, from way back. I hear,” said Conners in a gossipy fashion, “Glen was real mad at the Judge. Also, he’s supposed to be mean and brainy and nervous about his health.”

Mr. Polkinghorn was making neat columns out of this information.

“Third fella was Matthew Hoose. Age 24. Six foot one. 195 pounds. Red hair, blue eyes. Had two years service in the army, where his record is only fair. Went up for manslaughter. Fight in a bar. Comes from Kentucky. Unemployed at time of arrest. Just an unlucky kid, I guess.”

“What do you say, Mr. Polkinghorn?” Farley grinned. “Maybe I should have asked, what Daniel Dean would say.”

Mr. Polkinghorn rose. He was expanding, happily at home in the safe province of the inquiring mind. “Daniel Dean would look around the house,” he announced. “May I?”

Mr. and Mrs. Arnold, with their boy, Bob, and their little girl, Ginny, had

gone down to the seashore for Mr. Arnolds' two weeks vacation. They had long been very pleasant neighbors to Mr. Polkinghorn. Just an ordinary suburban family. Not, of course, his intimates, for they were hardly intellectuals, and besides, they were no fans of Daniel Dean. Nor was there anything about them to make fodder for Mr. Polkinghorn's imagination. Nods and good mornings passed over the hedge, amiable agreements about shoveling snow, and so on. Mr. Polkinghorn had never before set foot in this house.

Now, however, he prowled through it, through every room, with his eyes darting, his brain buzzing furiously. It was a big old rambling house, stuffed full of all kinds of objects, and the tour took Mr. Polkinghorn some time.

At last, however, he sat down again in a kitchen chair and spread his notes on the kitchen table. Farley was already sitting down, yawning a little. Conners, who had trailed Mr. Polkinghorn and stimulated him to lip-pursing and eye-rolling by his stolid presence, now sat down too. These policemen had to wait for the Arnolds' return, anyhow. They were quite willing to listen when Mr. Polkinghorn looked up from rearranging his notes.

"It is a nice little problem," he announced. "A very nice one indeed."

"Whatja find?" said Farley sleepily.

"What," said Mr. Polkinghorn somewhat dramatically, "do you make of that?" He indicated a small dirty scrap of paper on which something had been written in blurring worn pencil marks.

Tom may let ida po but asp san bag.

Farley picked it up and read off the nonsense syllables. "Wherja get this?"

"Under a chair. How did they escape from that prison?" snapped Mr. Polkinghorn, in Daniel Dean's crisp voice. "With outside assistance?"

Conners stared.

"This code message," said Mr. Polkinghorn shrewdly, "must have served a purpose." They both stared at him respectfully. "I suggest it belonged to Sparrow," said Mr. Polkinghorn. "Why? Because he was the brains. I think we may say that if there was a code message from the outside, it would have gone to Sparrow. However," he went on, joyfully dragging in the red herring just as he would have done in Chapter Two, "on the bookshelf in the living room there is a cotton sock. Perhaps you noticed it? New, clean, never worn. One blue-and-white cotton sock." He paused. They didn't respond. "Why only one?" prodded Mr. Polkinghorn. "Did Cossetti, the one-footed man, help

himself to one clean sock to comfort his living foot? Not bothering about the artificial one?”

“See what you mean,” said Conners, though somewhat doubtfully.

“Not conclusive at all, of course,” said Mr. Polkinghorn. “Although I find two more slight indications that point to Cossetti.”

“How many indications you got there?” inquired Conners amiably.

“*Ten*,” said Mr. Polkinghorn. “Of which *three* point to Cossetti, *one* points possibly to Matthew Hoose, *one* may well eliminate him, and *five* of my little indications point, or so it seems to me, to Sparrow.”

“So you’d say it was Sparrow?”

Mr. Polkinghorn didn’t like people jumping to the end of the story. He liked the exposition for its own sake. “Let me continue,” he said, chidingly.

They were silent.

“Now, to go on with Cossetti,” he said. “You have noticed that on the kitchen counter, there, we see seven empty cans. Perhaps it is significant that they have not been thrown out to be collected. Perhaps the man who ate the contents of those seven cans did not wish them to be seen.” His listeners nodded. “All seven of those cans,” said Mr. Polkinghorn, “once held spaghetti.”

“Italian!” said Farley. “And that’s Cossetti.” He looked impressed.

“Exactly. Now, I did not care to touch it since its position may be significant, but under the dining-room table you may have noticed a long rope-like affair, made of neckties, knotted together.”

“Saw that,” said Conners. “What’s it for?”

Mr. Polkinghorn simply had been unable to imagine what it was for unless the unfortunate had thought of suicide—but surely not under the dining-room table! So he shrugged and said, “Whatever it is for, if you examined the knots, you saw that they are elaborate and all different. Whoever made that thing knew his knots. Didn’t you tell me this Cossetti was in the navy?”

Their faces were blank—stunned, he supposed. Mr. Polkinghorn cleared his throat. “But let us leave Cossetti for the moment and go on to Hoose. You noticed the empty liquor bottle? The *only* empty one? There is quite an ample and variegated supply in Mr. Arnold’s liquor closet. But the kind that has been most recently taken is . . . bourbon.”

“*Kentucky!*” said Farley. “Say, I’m getting on to this! What d’ya call it?”

Deducting?”

Mr. Polkinghorn was rather suspicious of the glance that now passed between the two plainclothesmen. It had a wink-like quality. He went on somewhat loftily, deliberately abandoning the suspense hovering about Hoose. “To return to Sparrow. Now, none of the beds, as you undoubtedly noted, seem to have been disturbed. I can only imagine that the man, knowing himself to be hunted, preferred to snatch his sleep on the couch downstairs where he could more easily escape if anyone came. You remarked the afghan? The crushed pillows? Next to that long green couch in the living room you must have seen, on the coffee table, those two empty aspirin bottles. Isn’t it true that this man, Sparrow, was the only one of the three in less than robust health? He is the very thin man, the 4-F, the brainy, nervous, highstrung one. *He* would have been the one of the three to take aspirin.” Mr. Polkinghorn swam along, his confidence increasing. “Also, you may have noticed the pile of old magazines on the floor in there. The scissors? Did you notice that small pieces have been clipped out of those magazines? Did you not tell me that this Sparrow was angry at some Judge? Can you not imagine that he may have been composing an anonymous threat of some kind? Isn’t it a well-known dodge to clip the words of the message from a magazine?” Mr. Polkinghorn could see by their faces that this was not going down very well. “A flight of fancy, perhaps,” he said hastily, “but after all, the man was hiding here, all alone, and for so long a time. How *did* he occupy himself?”

“Eating spaghetti,” said Farley faintly.

“I’ll tell you what he did by day-light,” said Mr. Polkinghorn. “He read. And what did he read? He read some very highbrow, intellectual books. He read, for instance, *The Secret History of the American Revolution*. He read a large volume of *William James*. Also, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*.”

“How do you know?”

“Why, there are six such books on the living-room table, all out of obvious gaps in the shelf.” At this point Mr. Polkinghorn experienced a little bit of a qualm for he had never known and wouldn’t have suspected that his neighbors owned, let alone read, books like these. But he threw the fleeting and somewhat chastening enlightenment away. “The next to the last clue,” he pronounced, “is in the negative. It has to do with Arnold’s clothing. Mr. Arnold is a large man. Now, we do not find any clothing here that pertains to the State Prison, except that cap. It seems likely that our prisoner would have changed his prison-made garments for a suit of Mr. Arnold’s—if *he could have*. But he didn’t.”

“How do we know he didn’t?” demanded Conners.

“Where are the clothes he would have discarded?” asked Mr. Polkinghorn triumphantly. “Now remember those descriptions. Cossetti was short: five foot five. Couldn’t have worn Arnold’s clothes. And by the same token neither could Sparrow, who was so terribly thin. Hoose probably could have worn them. But nobody did. It wasn’t Hoose. Therefore.” To pronounce the word “therefore” at the end of a chain of reasoning was Daniel Dean’s trademark, and Mr. Polkinghorn used it with relish.

“How does it add up, again?” asked Conners, dubiously.

He’s lost, thought Mr. Polkinghorn complacently; don’t suppose he is a chess player.

“Ten points,” the mystery writer recapitulated, glancing at his own neat handwriting where the points were listed in columns under the three names. “The sock for his one foot, the spaghetti for his Italian taste, the knots in the rope of neckties for his sailor’s skill—these three point to Cossetti. But we must remember *against* Cossetti the fact that he, the sailor, might be the leader of the two unfortunates who stole, of all things, a boat.”

“Listen,” said Farley, rather apologetically, “they didn’t *do* so good with the boat. Also, Cossetti was on a battleship, which is not quite the same thing.”

“Now, the bourbon,” Mr. Polkinghorn went on blithely, “does point faintly toward Hoose. But the clothing that has *not* been discarded here points clearly away from him and cancels out the bourbon. Whereas”—he rapped the table with his pencil—“the code message, the highbrow reading matter, the clipped magazines, the aspirin bottles, all point to Sparrow. And *this*,” he said complacently, “seems to me to settle it.”

“What’s that, sir?”

“This,” said Mr. Polkinghorn, “comes from the green couch in the living room and is a gray hair. Hoose had red hair. Cossetti’s was black. But Sparrow has gray hair.” He leaned back, placing the pencil between his lips, and murmured, as Daniel Dean would have done, “Sparrow. Therefore.”

The two plainclothesmen looked uneasy—in fact, unconvinced. Farley had his brows way up and his lids way down and the stretched, blank flesh where the eyes should have been looked skeptical indeed. Conners was actually squirming. “I think I hear a car,” he said. “Must be the Arnolds.”

Mr. Polkinghorn sat at the kitchen table, rolling the pencil in his lips. Ah, well, he was thinking, I’ve told them so. Therefore I can always say I told you

so. Of all glad words—he paraphrased—*de dum de dum*, the gladdest are—I told you so. Ah, well, he'd enjoyed his trifling exercise. One could always make a pleasant little article out of it and turn a penny, and, of course, non-fiction was the thing today.

Then Farley broke his dream by coming back into the kitchen with Mr. Arnold, who smiled and hailed him. "Hi, neighbor! Got *your* fancy brains to working on this crime, I hear."

"We'd like to know, sir . . ." Farley began.

"Don't ask *me*, Sergeant," said Mr. Arnold humorously. "Kitty's roaring through the house." They could, indeed, all hear rapid foot-steps upstairs. "She and the kids will spot anything there is to spot. It's no use asking me. I just pay the rent around here." He sat down and lit a cigarette—a big careless easy-going man. Mr. Polkinghorn couldn't help knowing that Mr. Arnold wasn't shaken in the least by this affair. "Stranger than fiction, huh?" said Mr. Arnold genially. "Well, well . . ."

"I wonder," said Mr. Polkinghorn, with an easy smile, "whether you could tell us about the bottle of bourbon."

"I can't stand bourbon," said Arnold immediately.

"Then you did not empty that bottle?"

"Eh? Oh, that," said Arnold. "Forgot to put it out in the trash can, didn't I? Well, as I say, I can't stand bourbon, myself, but a chap from my office dropped by, the night before we left—to pick up the threads, you know, while I was gone. *He* likes bourbon, so I got rid of it on him. Why?"

Polkinghorn drew his pencil across his list, under Hoose.

"What is all this?" said Arnold.

But Mrs. Arnold now came bursting through the swinging door. She was a plump little person with a great mass of chestnut hair that was not very tidy. She wore a cotton dress with a sweater over it. She had a pack of envelopes in her hand. "Fine bunch of mail, Jim," she said to her husband, disgustedly. "It's 90 per cent bills, as far as I can see. Oh, hello, Mr. Polkinghorn." She gave him a museum-type look—she usually did—as if her prim, withdrawn, and solitary neighbor was a kind of exhibit. "I don't see a thing gone," she told the detectives, "except food. You say it was a criminal? Is *he* gone? Did you look in the cellar?"

"We looked, Ma'am," said Farley.

“None of your husband’s *clothing* is missing?” asked Mr. Polkinghorn briskly, concerned with his little list.

“I don’t think so,” she said. “His blue suit is at the cleaner’s. I asked them to hold it because he only needs that for business. What—?”

With a little confident smile, Mr. Polkinghorn was drawing a line across the name of Matthew Hoose.

“Sit down, Ma’am,” said Farley, “if you don’t mind, and let’s talk about this a little bit.”

“Right,” said Conners, who had come in after her.

“Okay,” she said. “I told Bobby to stay upstairs, but don’t think he won’t be listening behind the pantry door.” She dropped the mail on the table and clasped her hands. “What can I tell you?”

“The thing is, we’d like to know *which* escaped convict was in here.” Farley explained the little problem. “Now, Mr. Polkinghorn, he’s got some ideas . . .”

“Busman’s holiday? Ha, ha,” boomed Mr. Arnold.

Mr. Polkinghorn was frowning wisely at his notes. He spoke up in a businesslike voice. “First, I wish you would tell me if you can, what is the meaning of the rope of neckties?”

“What rope of neckties?” said Mr. Arnold, with a dropping jaw.

“The one under the dining-room table.”

“Bobby tied Ginny to the stake the day it rained,” said Mrs. Arnold pleasantly.

Her husband said, “With whose neckties?”

“Now, Jim, you said you wished somebody would take pity on your weakness. You know you can’t resist your favorite old ties even though the cleaner simply does not get them really clean. You said yourself . . .”

“You gave ’em to Bob!”

“I couldn’t find any rope and he *said* he wanted to practice for his merit badge . . .”

“Knots,” said Farley. “Boy Scout, is he? Yeah.”

“I guess that takes care of my complex about my favorite old ties,” said Bob’s father, resignedly. And then to Mr. Polkinghorn, “What about them?”

But Mr. Polkinghorn was making another pencil line, under Cossetti, this time. “The one unused sock in the living room?” he inquired.

“Oh,” said Kitty Arnold in a minute, “you mean the *fourth* sock?”

“The *fourth* sock?” Mr. Polkinghorn had a brief vision of a four-legged man which he sternly dismissed.

“I made a rag doll for Ginny to take in the car, you know,” she explained. “It takes three dime-store socks. *You* know.” Mr. Polkinghorn *didn't* know—he'd never heard of such a thing! “So, of course, the fourth was just left over. But,” she went on comfortingly, “if I'd had twelve socks and made four dolls, the way I did for the Bazaar, why, it would have come out even.” She beamed at them.

Mr. Polkinghorn was crossing off the sock. He was thinking that Cossetti was fading out of the picture nicely, and he was not at all displeased. “Just to clear this away,” he said, “tell me about those spaghetti cans.”

“Do that,” said Mr. Arnold. “Tell them, Kitty.”

Kitty Arnold's plain face began to get pink.

“Seven cans,” said Mr. Polkinghorn, “and all spaghetti. Is this what the man ate, would you say?”

“Well, no,” she said, “I guess I *will* have to explain that. There was a church Supper—pot-luck, you know?” Mr. Polkinghorn *didn't* know. “There wasn't time,” Mrs. Arnold continued. “We were packing to go away. So I took spaghetti for my contribution, but it wasn't homemade. I cheated,” she confessed. “Oh, I threw in a little seasoning and nobody knew the difference . . .”

“She's just a fraud,” said her husband lovingly. “At the Church, too. At least, in the basement.” He chuckled.

Mrs. Arnold blushed deeper. “But the silliest thing was not to throw out all nine cans at once,” she told them. “I guess I felt kind of guilty, I was afraid somebody might—well—notice. So I threw two out and washed the rest . . . they are perfectly clean. But I thought I'd get rid of them later, two at a time.”

Mr. Arnold laughed heartily while Mr. Polkinghorn crossed off the third and last item under Cossetti and then his pencil came up and drew a line through that name. No logician on earth, Mr. Polkinghorn was thinking crossly, could have divined the real meaning of those spaghetti cans.

“What'd this man eat, then, Mrs. Arnold?” asked Farley.

“Meat, I guess,” she said. “And bread. I had at least two loaves in the freezer and the chopped meat looks awful low to me.”

“Listen,” said Mr. Arnold, “*that* doesn’t necessarily mean a thing. This family does away with one heck of a lot of hamburger.”

“We don’t seem to be getting anywhere with these points,” said Conners, throwing an impatient glance toward Mr. Polkinghorn. “Suppose you tell us what else you know about this man, Mrs. Arnold.”

“Oh, I’d say he slept in Bobby’s bed and read all Bobby’s comic books,” said Mrs. Arnold promptly.

“What makes you think that?”

“Because the bed’s so neat,” she replied. “The corners are made hospital style which I never bother to do. And so is the stack of comic books neat—neater than Bobby Arnold ever piled them.”

Mr. Polkinghorn shook his head, just slightly. It was almost a tremble. “May I go on, please?” he asked in Daniel Dean’s most silken voice. “Tell me, please, why are bits clipped out of all those magazines?”

“Just Bobby,” she said. “I never saw such a boy for ‘sending away’ for things.”

“Natural born sucker for coupons,” said Mr. Arnold.

“And Ginny collects rabbits,” said Mrs. Arnold. “*Pictures* of rabbits, that is. Ever since Easter. *Nothing’s* safe.”

Mr. Polkinghorn’s head had begun to swim—quite perceptibly. But he reminded himself, that his point about the clippings had really been very far-fetched. He drew a line through it, and pressed on. “Those aspirin bottles in the living room? Who put them there?”

“Jeepers,” said Kitty Arnold, casting her eyes down, “You are sure going to think I’m an awful sloppy housekeeper, Mr. Polkinghorn.”

“*You* put them there?” Mr. Polkinghorn began to feel a real alarm.

“They’re Jim’s,” she said. “He had the gripe a couple of weeks ago and nothing would do . . . *he* wasn’t going to stay upstairs in his bed and miss television. So he languished in there on the living-room couch. And I never did get around to throwing out those bottles. There’s an awful lot to keep throwing out around here. But why do you ask?”

Nobody answered. Mr. Polkinghorn marked the aspirin bottles off his list and then he raised the pencil and crossed off the clue of the gray hair, too. His

neighbor, Jim Arnold, had a head of pepper-and-salt and there just was no reliable significance in . . . He looked with some dismay on the case for or against the man, Sparrow. There were only two points left. Two, out of them all. And nobody was speaking. Were the policemen embarrassed for him? He lifted his head and drove hard with the one point he had felt most certain about.

“Well,” he said with just the faintest sneer, “if our friend was upstairs reading comic books, who took out and read those six rather scholarly volumes on the living-room table?”

Mrs. Arnold began to giggle. “Well,” she said, controlling herself so that the giggles changed to mere dimples in her plump cheeks, “nobody was *reading* them, Mr. Polkinghorn. That is, not recently. You see . . .” She must have divined the chagrin Mr. Polkinghorn was feeling because she began to sound soothing. “If you knew the family better, Mr. Polkinghorn, and some of our habits . . . but then no stranger could. We have a little projector for throwing transparencies on the wall. Jim was showing some of them to the man from his office. The table’s just too low,” she said. “It takes those six thick books under the projector . . .”

“I . . . see,” said Mr. Polkinghorn, struggling not to seem as disgruntled as he was. Daniel Dean, *himself*, couldn’t have guessed there had been a projector! Impossible! “I suppose *this* is perfectly clear to you, too?” he said bitterly, and tossed her the last clue of all, the bit of paper with the mysterious symbols on it.

“This?” she said in a wondering tone. “Now where in the world did you find that?”

“Under a chair,” he said, gloomily.

“It’s an old one,” she said.

“An old *what*, Mrs. Arnold?” said Farley gently.

“What *is* it?” She looked at it closely. “Tomatoes, mayonnaise, lettuce, Idaho potatoes, butter, asparagus, sandwich bags,” she read off glibly. “Why, it’s a grocery list, of course. When did we have asparagus, Jim, and baked potat . . . ?”

“Never mind.” Mr. Polkinghorn folded his list. He didn’t care to throw it away in this house. He thought she might giggle. Her husband might guffaw. He thought, crossly, the whole affair would make good fiction, at least. His clues *should* have meant something. If these people didn’t live in such a ridiculous giddy human kind of way. . . .

“So,” said Farley thoughtfully, “we know nothing about this guy but that he reads comic books.”

“Who,” said Mr. Polkinghorn bitterly, “doesn’t?”

Mrs. Arnold sensed that here was some wound she didn’t fully understand. She had tact. She busied her fingers with the envelopes on the table before her. “Jim,” she said suddenly and indignantly, “that darned telephone company has done it again! We don’t know anybody in Paris, Kentucky, to call Long Distance.”

“What!” said Farley. “Lemme see.”

“If you’ll excuse me,” said Mr. Polkinghorn with a really gruesome smile. He went out the kitchen door and through the hedge and back to his sane, neat, lonely house.

It was the younger one, Farley, who came around the next day to talk to Mr. Polkinghorn. “Thought you might like to know the upshot,” he said kindly. “It was Matthew Hoose, all right. He’s just a big dumb wild kid. Went along for the escape because it seemed a good idea at the time. Didn’t like the company he had. So they parted. He found the Arnold house and read on the back door how long it would be empty. So he goes right in, the night of the thirty-first, and calls up his mother back in Paris, Kentucky, and asks her for some money. Says he’s no thief. All he took was the meat and the bread. So his mother *mailed* him the money. That’s why he was watching for the mailman. He knew it was his last day there and he was getting anxious. Oh, they picked him up. Sure. Easy. In the railroad station. He’s not,” said Farley gently, “so terribly bright. Although the army did manage to teach him how to make a bed.”

“It was kind of you to come,” said Mr. Polkinghorn graciously. “Thank you very much.”

“Maybe life’s *not* quite so strange as fiction,” murmured Farley and he smiled his nice smile.

“For my part,” said Mr. Polkinghorn stiffly, “I think the old saw holds.”

He went back to his work table. He was plotting a new one for Daniel Dean. His glazed eye looked out of the window. After a moment, it began to see.

Mrs. Arnold was making for her car with two henna-colored blankets over her shoulder. Bobby trailed after with both hands held together as if some

precious thing were within the cup they made. Mr. Polkinghorn saw the mother glance into the cup of the boy's hands and nod and smile. The little girl, Ginny, was trailing a long white string after her on the grass. There was nothing on the end of the string. They all got into the car. Ginny sat on the two blankets. The boy had had nothing in his hands because now he was clapping them in a gay and jerky rhythm.

Mr. Polkinghorn sighed. He looked back at the paper and put a dainty little check mark on one of his notes. *Murderer must be ambidextrous.*

As for his neighbors, they were to him then and would remain forever an impenetrable mystery.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Ten Clues for Mr. Polkinghorn* by Charlotte Armstrong]