

THE CHESTERMARKE INSTINCT

J.S. FLETCHER

JOVIAN PRESS

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When the manager of a small bank in the English village of Scarnham failed to appear to open the bank on a Monday morning, it was assumed to be a matter of a missed train. But when the bank's owners reported missing securities and Lady Ellersdeane's jewels - worth a hundred thousand pounds - can't be found, things take a more serious turn. Has the manager, formerly a pillar of honesty, absconded with the missing items, or has something more sinister occurred? When a body is found at the bottom of an abandoned lead mine, the latter seems more likely. Wallington Neale, the bank's assistant manager, must discover whether it is a case of embezzlement or if the events the result of... The Chestermarke Instinct!

The Chestermarke Instinct Details

Date : Published December 18th 2017 by Jovian Press (first published 1918)

ISBN :

Author : J.S. Fletcher

Format : Kindle Edition 312 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Classics

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Cindy says

Love this audiobook. It's free in eBook and audio form at:
LibriVox.org and Gutenberg.org

Jenny says

Have to come back to this one some other time.

Apé says

Another classic crime whodunit (and what on earth is going on?) tale from JS Fletcher. Written in the early 1900s by West Yorkshire man JS Fletcher, I think this tale is set somewhere in W. Yorkshire – although I can't be sure. It is set in a little rural village called Scarnham, which has a moor out the back, and there's some Yorkshire speech by some of the working class characters – it's not 'the other' but rather 't'other'. I first thought it was set right on the south coast because people referred to coming down to Scarnham from London – as if to suggest the village is south of London. But then when the detective gets the train back to London, the first stop is Nottingham. So they definitely can't be in the very south of England, or else that is one confused train.

Compared to a couple of other JS Fletcher's I have read, a lot of the action in this one is focused in Scarnham itself, rather than dashing about all over the country in chase of the bad guys. So there is much trotting back and forth across the market square to question various involved parties. It does keep the pace up though, and there are more revelations and witness statements than you can shake a stick at. And there's no dull waiting for collaborating evidence. They jump to conclusions based on very little, which thankfully turn out to be right. If you're wanting a good account of police procedure, this probably isn't for you. But it has such charm from a bygone time and style of mystery writing, that it's the kind of cosy story that you can just curl up with and forget about the real horrible nature of modern life for an hour or two.

As with a lot of these books women play a minor role. There's a couple of bit characters – the inn keeper's wife and the housekeeper, who flit in and out to provide evidence, but the only real female character of any impact is Betty Forsdyke, the niece, who comes "down" from London to visit her uncle. She is keen to solve the mystery, and is quite an active, dynamic person, but even she is restricted by the times, and when there's a potentially unpleasant scene (eg. A dead body) she's asked by the men if she could just remain in the background so that she doesn't see anything upsetting. But she gets her womanly wish at the very last sentence or so as it's strongly hinted at that she is now engaged (no sarcasm what so ever on my part! Oh yes, this is a child of its time and women apparently had limited roles and aspirations).

So, the mystery? Mr Horbury is a bank manager, who simply disappears in a puff of smoke on Saturday evening. No one realises until Monday morning when Neale (Mr Horbury's ward and employee) and the bank clerks turn up for work and the bank is all locked up. The partners of the bank, the Chestermarkes – Gabriel the uncle and Joseph the nephew, arrive and unlock the premises. Then added to the worry of Mr Horbury's disappearance, there are the missing securities from the bank safe, and Lord whatever-his-name-was's wife's jewels, which had been left with Mr Horbury for safe keeping a few weeks ago. No one seems to know anything about them. What can be going on? Then a body is found in the collapsing mine vents on

the common land near the town, and things just continue to grow more complicated. The Chestermarkes are a pair of snooty, sneering and generally unpleasant men (with rather unfitting biblical names), but are they just a pair of unpleasant people or are they also up to something?!?! Gabriel's always off to London and Joseph has a strange building in his back garden that no one is allowed into.... It is all jolly, wholesome fun of a bygone time.

Pamela says

This was one of the better Fletchers. None of them, including this one, are what anyone would consider great literature, but they are oh so good for a lazy afternoon.

Starry says

Another preWW2 mystery. A bank manager in a small English town goes missing, as do jewels and securities.

Good story with action and pacing plus an interesting puzzle. My main criticism is the characterization: I didn't end up feeling particularly attached to any character or convinced of the detective's abilities. Also (minor issue), the author mentions early in the novel that the old town is full of hidden passages-- disappointing that nothing comes of this.

Kathy says

I loved the book from beginning to end. I'll definitely be reading more free books by this author.

Jessica Powell says

This one was quite dark for Fletcher - money lenders, kidnap, torture - as well as the usual array of characters with the 'whip hand'. It was a fun page turner of a murder mystery all the same though the ending, as usual, felt a little rushed.

alibrivoxfan says

I enjoy mysteries and thought this was particularly good.

Julie says

Good classic mystery. A missing bank manager is thought to just be late coming back on the train, but he never shows up. His niece arrives & insists on getting the best detective to come. The police, the niece, a

bank assistant, the detective and an earl all join in to figure out what happened to the man as well as some missing securities & jewelry. Add the complication of a dead body of another man & you have a good mystery. You kind of get suspicious of who might have been involved early in the story, but follow it through to the solution, there are some surprises.

Julia says

First published in 1918, this is the fourth murder mystery by J. S. Fletcher that I have read. A young assistant bank manager hates his boring job at a little town in rural England, and despises the unlikable bank owners. But then things get interesting: the bank manager, formerly considered totally honest, disappears, along with many of the bank securities, mortgages, gold, and the wildly valuable jewels belonging to the Duchess. The manager's wealthy niece arrives, an assertive and dynamic young woman, and gets the police and detectives moving on the case. With the help of a wandering tinner, a dead body is found in a deep, abandoned mine on the moors. He is identified, and seems somehow to be connected with the bank manager's disappearance. There are lots of new questions and twists that keep turning up, all the way until the explosive ending. An enjoyable read. I listened to this book as a free audio download from LibriVox.org.

Pat says

Another great who-done-it by Fletcher

P. says

What is the Chestermarke instinct? Keep your eye on the main chance? Don't let anything or anyone get in your way? They're sleek and sneaky scoundrels to be sure. For the most part this is a decent read, even if it just stops dead, leaving a fair number of unresolved issues hanging after the big explosive moment. It's startlingly abrupt, even for Fletcher.
