

The Garden Murder Case

by S. S. VAN DINE

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SYNOPSIS

Philo Vance, famous detective, and John F. X. Markham, district attorney for New York county are dining in Vance's apartment when Vance receives an anonymous telephone message informing him of a "disturbing psychological tension at Professor Ephraim Garden's apartment" advising that he read up on radio-active sodium, consult a passage in the Aeneid and counseling that "Equanimity is essential." Professor Garden is famous in chemical research. The message, decoded by Vance, reminds him that Professor Garden's son Floyd and his puny cousin, Woodie Swift, are addicted to horse-racing. Vance says that "Equanimity" is a horse running next day in the Rivermont handicap. Vance is convinced that the message was sent by Dr. Siefert, the Gardens' family physician. He arranges to have lunch next day at the Gardens' penthouse. Vance is greeted by Floyd Garden and meets Lowe Hammle, an elderly follower of horse racing. Floyd expresses concern over Swift's queer actions. Mrs. Garden, supposedly ill, comes downstairs and places a \$100 bet on a horse. Gathered around an elaborate loud speaker service, listening to the racing are Cecil Kroon, Madge Weatherby and Zalia Graem, who bet varying amounts on the race. There is tension under the surface gaiety. Zalia and Swift are not speaking terms. Kroon leaves to keep an appointment before the race starts. Miss Beeton, a nurse, and Vance bet on "Azure Star." Swift recklessly bets \$10,000 on "Equanimity" and goes to the roof garden to hear the results. Floyd follows Swift, remaining away several minutes. Zalia answers a phone call in the den. Soon after the announcement that "Azure Star" wins, the guests hear a shot.

CHAPTER III—Continued

Vance was the first on his feet. His face was grim as he moved rapidly toward the archway. I followed him, and just behind came Garden. As I turned into the hallway I saw the others in the drawing-room get up and move forward.

As we hurried down the hall Zalia Graem opened the den door.

"What was that?" she asked, her frightened eyes staring at us.

"We don't know yet," Vance told her.

In the bedroom door, at the lower end of the hall, stood the nurse, with a look of inquiring concern on her otherwise placid face.

"You'd better come along, Miss Beeton," Vance said, as he started up the stairs two at a time. "You may be needed."

Vance swung into the upper corridor and stopped momentarily at the door on the right, which led out upon the roof. This door was still propped open, and after a hasty preliminary survey through it, he stepped quickly out into the garden.

The sight that met our eyes was not wholly unexpected. There, in the low chair which he had pointed out to us earlier that afternoon, sat Woodie Swift, slumped down, with his head thrown back at an unnatural angle against the rattan head-rest, and his legs straight out before him. He still wore the ear-phone. His eyes were open and staring; his lips were slightly parted; and his thick glasses were tilted forward on his nose.

In his right temple was a small ugly hole beneath which two or three drops of already coagulating blood had formed. His right arm hung limp over the side of the chair, and on the colored tiling just under his hand lay a small pearl-handled revolver.

Vance immediately approached the motionless figure, and the rest of us crowded about him. Zalia Graem, who had forced her way forward and was now standing beside Vance, swayed suddenly and caught at his arm. Her face had gone pale, and her eyes appeared glazed. Vance turned quickly and, putting his arm about her, half led and half carried her to a large wicker divan nearby. He made a beckoning motion of his head to Miss Beeton.

"Look after her for a moment," he requested. "And keep her head down." Then he returned to Swift.

"Every one please keep back," he ordered. "No one is to touch him."

He took out his monocle and adjusted it carefully. Then he leaned over the crumpled figure in the chair. He cautiously scrutinized the wound, the top of the head, and the tilted glasses. When this examination was over he knelt down on the tiling and seemed to be searching for something. Apparently he did not find what he sought, for he stood up with a discouraged frown and faced the others.

"Dead," he announced, in an unwontedly sombre tone. "I'm taking charge of things temporarily."

Zalia Graem had risen from the divan, and the nurse was supporting her with a show of tenderness.

"Please, Miss Beeton," he said, "take the young lady downstairs immediately." Then he added, "I'm sure she'll be all right in a few minutes."

The nurse nodded, put her arm firmly about Miss Graem, and led her into the passageway.

Vance waited until the two young women were gone; then he turned to the others. "You will all be so good as to go downstairs and remain there until further orders."

"But what are you going to do, Mr. Vance?" asked Mrs. Garden in a frightened tone. "We must keep this thing as quiet as possible. . . . My poor Woody!"

"I'm afraid, madam, we shall not be able to keep it quiet at all." Vance spoke with earnest significance. "My first duty will be to telephone the district attorney and the homicide bureau."

Mrs. Garden gasped. "The district attorney? The Homicide bureau?" she repeated distractedly. "Oh, no! . . . Why must you do that? Surely, any one can see that the poor boy took his own life."

Vance shook his head slowly. "I regret madam," he said, "that this is not a case of suicide. . . . It's murder!"

Following Vance's unexpected announcement there was a sudden silence. Everyone moved reluctantly toward the door to the passageway. Only Garden remained behind.

"Is there a telephone up here?" Vance asked.

"Yes, certainly," replied Garden. "There's one in the study."

Garden brushed past us with nervous energy, as if glad of the opportunity for action. He threw open the door at the end of the passageway and stood aside for us to enter the study.

"Over there," he said, pointing to the desk at the far end of the room, on which stood a hand telephone. "That's an open line. No connection with the one we use for the ponies, though it's an extension of the phone in the den." He stepped swiftly behind the desk and threw a black key on the switch box that was attached to the side of the desk.

"By leaving the key in this position, you are disconnected from the extension downstairs, so that you have complete privacy."

"Oh, quite," Vance nodded with a faint smile. "I use the same system in my own apartment. Thanks awfully for your thoughtfulness. . . . And now please join the others downstairs and try to keep things balanced for a little while—there's a good fellow."

Garden took his dismissal with good grace and went toward the door.

"Oh, by the way, Garden," Vance called after him, "I'll want a little chat with you in private, before long."

Garden turned, a troubled look on his face.

"I suppose you'll be wanting me to rattle all the family skeletons for you? But that's all right. When you're ready for me you've only to press that buzzer on the bookshelves there, just behind the desk."

He indicated a white push-button set flush in the center of a small

square japanned box on the upright between two sections of the bookshelves. "That's part of the intercommunicating system between this room and the den. I'll see that the den door is left open, so that I can hear the buzz wherever I am."

Vance nodded curtly, and Garden, after a momentary hesitation, turned and went from the room.

As soon as Garden could be heard making his way down the stairs, Vance closed the door and went immediately to the telephone. A moment later he was speaking to Markham.

"The galloping horses, old dear," he said. "The Trojans are riding roughshod. Equanimity was needed, but came in too far behind. Result, a murder. Young Swift is dead. And it was as clever a performance as I've yet seen. . . . No, Markham,—his voice suddenly became grave—"I'm not spoofing. I think you'd better come immediately. And notify Sergeant Heath, if you can reach him, and the medical examiner."

He replaced the receiver slowly. "This is a subtle crime, Van," he meditated. "Too subtle for my peace of mind. I don't like it—I don't at all like it. And I don't like this intrusion of horse-racing. Sheer expediency. . . ."

He went thoughtfully to the north window and looked out on the garden. The rattan chair with its gruesome occupant could not be seen from the study, as it was far to the left of the window, near the west balustrade.

"I wonder. . . ."

He turned from the window abruptly and came back to the desk. "A few words with the colorless Garden are indicated, before the minions of the law arrive."

He placed his finger on the white button in the buzzer box and depressed it for a second. Then he went to the door and opened it.

Several moments went by, but Garden did not appear, and Vance again pressed the button. After a full minute or two had passed without any response to his summons, Vance started down the passageway to the stairs, beckoning me to follow.

As he came to the vault door on the right, he halted abruptly. He scrutinized the heavy calamine door for a moment or two. At first glance it seemed to be closed tightly, but as I looked at it more closely, I noticed that it was open a fraction of an inch, as if the spring catch, which locked it automatically, had failed to snap when the door had last been shut. Vance pushed on the door gently with the tips of his fingers, and it swung inward slowly and ponderously.

"Deuced queer," he commented. "A vault for preserving valuable documents—and the door unlocked. I wonder. . . ."

CHAPTER IV

The lights from the halls shone into the dark recess of the vault, and as Vance pushed the door further inward a white cord hanging from a ceiling light became visible. To the end of this cord was attached a miniature brass pestle which acted as a weight. Vance stepped immediately inside and jerked the cord, and the vault was flooded with light.

"Vault" hardly describes this small storeroom, except that the walls were unusually thick, and it had obviously been constructed to serve as a burglar proof repository. The room was about five by seven feet, and the ceiling was as high as that of the hallway. The walls were lined with deep shelves from floor to ceiling, and these were piled with all manner of papers, documents, pamphlets, filing cases, and racks of test-tubes and vials labeled with mysterious symbols. Three of the shelves were devoted to a series of sturdy steel cash and security boxes. The floor was overlaid with small squares of black and white ceramic tile.

Although there was ample room for us both inside the vault, I remained in the hallway, watching Vance as he looked about him.

Vance leaned over and picked up a batch of scattered typewritten papers which had evidently been brushed down from one of the shelves directly opposite the door. He glanced at them for a moment and carefully replaced them in the empty space on the shelf.

"Rather interesting," this disarray," he observed.

"The professor was obviously not the last person in here, or he would certainly not have left his papers on the floor. . . ." He wheeled about.

"My word!" he exclaimed in a low tone. "These fallen papers and that unlatched door. . . . It could be, don't you know? There was a suppressed excitement in his manner. "I say, Van, don't come in here; and, above all, don't touch this door-knob."

He knelt down on the tiled floor and began a close inspection of the small squares, as if he were counting them. His action reminded me of the way he had inspected the tiling on the roof near the chair in which we had found young Swift. It occurred to me that he was seeking here what he had failed to find in the garden.

"It should be here," he murmured. "It would explain many things—it would form the first vague outline of a workable pattern. . . ."

After searching about for a minute or two, he stopped abruptly and leaned forward eagerly. Then he took a small piece of paper from his pocket and adroitly flicked something onto it from the floor. Folding the paper carefully, he tucked it away in his waistcoat pocket. Although I was only a few feet from him and was looking directly at him, I could not see what it was that he had found.

"I think that will be all for the moment," he said, rising and pulling the cord to extinguish the light. Coming out into the hallway, he closed the vault door by carefully grasping the shank of the knob. Then he moved swiftly down the passageway, stepped through the door to the garden, and went directly to the dead man. Though his back was turned to me as he bent over the figure, I could see that he took the folded paper from his waistcoat pocket and opened it. He glanced repeatedly from the paper in his hand to the limp figure in the chair. At length he nodded his head emphatically, and rejoined me in the hallway. We descended the stairs to the apartment below.

Just as we reached the lower hall, the front door opened and Cecil Kroon entered. He seemed surprised to find us in the hall, and asked somewhat vaguely, as he threw his hat on a bench:

"Anything the matter?"

Vance studied him sharply and made no answer; and Kroon went on:

"I suppose the big race is over, damn it! Who won it—Equanimity?"

Vance shook his head slowly, his eyes fixed on the other.

"Azure Star won the race. I believe Equanimity came in fifth or sixth."

"And did Woody go in on him up to the hilt, as he threatened?"

Vance nodded. "I'm afraid he did."

"Good Gad!" Kroon caught his breath. "That's a blow for the chap. How's he taking it?"

He looked away from Vance as if he would rather not hear the answer.

"He's not taking it," Vance returned quietly. "He's dead."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

STAR DUST

Movie • Radio

By VIRGINIA VALE

THE Women's National Radio committee has named the Rudy Vallee hour as the best variety program on the air, and Bing Crosby's loyal host of followers are so upset that letters of protest are pouring into radio stations and newspaper offices. Correspondents agree that the Vallee program is always a grand show, but they point out that Bing's hour gives much greater variety, since it consistently includes the greatest musicians as well as popular songs, comedy and dramatic sketches.

Warner Brothers cabled Errol Flynn in Ireland to return to the studio at once to start work in a new picture, but the cable was undelivered as the adventurous Errol had already set out for Spain.

First news from there was that he had been injured in a rebel attack and for a few hours groups of anxious friends stood disconsolately around the studio talking about what a grand guy he is. Nobody felt like working until the welcome news came that his injury was slight and that he would be able to return soon.

As summer approaches and radio programs call it a season, radio singers look wistfully toward the big rewards of Hollywood engagements. Two who have already landed engagements are Jessica Dragonette and Lanny Ross. Miss Dragonette will appear in a Bobby Breen picture called "Make a Wish." Lanny Ross will join the ever-growing ranks of Grand National company.

Victor Schertzinger, who composed the never-to-be forgotten "Marcheta" and who is a splendid director believes he has a story that will catapult Ross right into the front ranks of film idols.

Being just the husband of a popular Hollywood actress is no career for an ambitious young man, according to Leonard Penn, who left the New York stage to come to Hollywood with Gladys George, and George McDonald who left his newspaper job when he married Jean Parker. Penn is being tested by M-G-M, and George McDonald is being tested by Paramount.

Gail Patrick, the only survivor at the Paramount studio among all the girls who won in their "Panther Woman" contest a few years ago, has at last attained real recognition. Not only will she be featured in "Artists and Models" with Jack Benny, she will get one of the best dressing rooms on the lot. It was built years ago for Pola Negri and was later occupied by Clara Bow.

Every time Sam Goldwyn spends a few days away from the studio, he catches up on all the newest national fads and promptly arranges to use them in pictures. Recovering from a cold at Tucson, Arizona, a few days ago, he was impressed by a trailer camp. Promptly he bought a story called "Heaven on Wheels" and cast Barbara Stanwyck for the lead.

Fred Astaire is so determined to have Carole Lombard in the first film that he makes without Ginger Rogers that he is postponing production until she is free. And James Stewart is so determined to play opposite Ginger Rogers in her solo starring vehicle that he is pleading with M-G-M to release him from working in Luise Rainer's next. It is so much fun working with Astaire or Rogers that players are willing to give up better roles in order to be with them.

ODDS AND ENDS . . . Dick Foran won't finish any more pictures with an embrace. It seems that the juvenile audiences who so enjoy his pictures shrieked in derision when he went romantic. . . . M-G-M has thwarted Elissa Landi's plan to ride in the hunters' trials at Palm Springs. They won't let her risk her neck while she is making "Thirteen Chair" for them. . . . Claire Windsor, too long absent from the screen, will return in support of Constance Bennett in "Topper". . . . Luise Rainer has dyed her hair bright red for "The Emperor's Candlesticks" and likes it so well she is going to leave it that way. . . . Whenever 20th Century-Fox needs Wallace Beery for scenes of "Slave Ship" they page him as the circus. Ever since the days when he traveled with a circus as elephant valet, he has loved hanging around the sand-dust tent.

Western Newspaper Union.

The Oldest Ball Club Cincinnati claims to have the oldest professional baseball club in the country. The Reds were founded in 1869.

A Winsome Quartette



THERE was a lull in the mid-morning activities of the Chic Twins (in aprons this time) and their week-end guests when the candid camera caught this gay quartette.

The guests are wearing—let's have a close-up—sports dresses because they are so all purpose: tennis frocks go shopping just as often as not. The spectator model to the right with its unusual use of buttons is demure enough to wear when calling on one's Sunday school teacher and yet would have sufficient swing to "belong" in the gallery at the golf tournament. Summer days offer so many unexpected opportunities that these dresses are chosen as equal to any informal occasion.

The aprons on the charming hostesses to the left are both cut from one pattern. The clever miss will never overlook a pattern package that offers two such charming numbers for the price of one. The exhibit is over now; feature in one yourself in the very near future by ordering these patterns today.

The Patterns. Pattern 1276 is designed in sizes small (34 to 36), medium (38 to 40), large (42 to 44). Medium size requires 1 3/4 yards of 39-inch material. Pattern 1915 is designed in sizes 14 to 20 (32 to 42). Size 16 requires 3 1/2 yards of 35-inch material.

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The Oppressor

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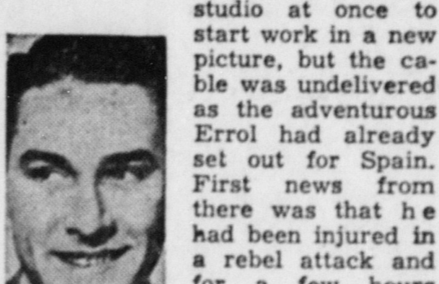
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"Rather Interesting, This Disarray," He Observed.



Errol Flynn



Fred Astaire