

# 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 Riverbend 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 who meets Vance in the drawing room. Vance is introduced to Markham and Heath. Then Vance turned to the sergeant. "I think you'd better have either Snitkin or Hennessey remain down here and see that no one leaves the apartment for a little while." He addressed Garden. "I hope you don't mind."

"Not at all," Garden replied complacently. "I'll join the others in the drawing-room. I feel the need of a highball, anyway." He included us all in a curt bow and moved up the hall.

"We'd better go up to the roof now, Markham," said Vance.

It was murder; and that outline is exactly the concatenation of events which the murderer wants us to accept. We are supposed to arrive at the obvious conclusion of suicide. Suicide as the result of losing money on horses is by no means a rare occurrence. It is not impossible that the murderer's scheme was influenced by this account. But there are other factors, psychological and actual, which belie this whole superficial and deceptive structure." He drew on his cigarette and watched the thin blue ribbon of smoke disperse in the light breeze from the river. "To begin with," he went on, "Swift was not the suicidal type. In the first place, Swift was a weakling and a highly imaginative one. Moreover, he was too hopeful and ambitious—too sure of his own judgment and good luck—to put himself out of the world simply because he had lost all his money. The fact that Equanimity might not win the race was an eventuality which, as a confirmed gambler, he would have taken into consideration beforehand. In addition, his nature was such that, if he were greatly disappointed the result would be self-pity and hatred of others. He might, in an emergency, have committed a crime—but it would not have been against himself. Like all gamblers, he was trusting and glib; and I think it was these temperamental qualities which probably made him an easy victim for the murderer . . ."

## CHAPTER VI

"But see here, Vance," Markham leaned forward psychically. "No amount of mere psychological analysis can make a crime out of a situation as seemingly obvious as this one. I must have more definite reasons than you have given me before I would be justified in discarding the theory of suicide."

"Oh, I dare say," nodded Vance. "But I have more tangible evidence that the johnnie did not eliminate himself from this life."

"Well, let's have it," Markham fidgeted impatiently in his chair.

"Imprimis, my dear Justinian, a bullet wound in the temple would undoubtedly cause more blood than you see on the brow of the deceased. There are, as you notice, only a few partly coagulated drops, whereas the vessels of the brain cannot be punctured without a considerable flow of blood. And there is no blood either on his clothes or on the tiles beneath his chair. Meaning that the blood has been, perhaps, spilled elsewhere before I arrived on the scene—which was, let us say, within thirty seconds after we heard the shot—"

"A far-fetched theory," muttered Markham. "All wounds don't bleed the same."

Vance ignored the district attorney's objection.

"And please take a good look at the poor fellow. His legs are stretched forward at an awkward angle. The trousers are twisted out of place and look most uncomfortable. His coat, though buttoned, is riding his shoulder, so that his collar is at least three inches above his exquisite mauve shirt. No man could endure to have his clothes so outrageously askew, even on the point of suicide—he would have straightened them out almost unconsciously. The corpus delicti shows every indication of having been dragged to the chair and placed in it."

Markham's eyes were surveying the limp figure of Swift as Vance talked.

"Even that argument is not entirely convincing," he said dogmatically, though his tone was a bit modified; "especially in view of the fact that he still wears the ear-phone . . ."

"Ah, exactly!" Vance took him up quickly. "That's another item to which I would call your attention. The murderer went a bit too far—there was a trifle too much thoroughness in the setting of the stage. Had Swift shot himself in that chair, I believe his first impulsive movement would have been to remove the head-phone, as it very easily could have interfered with his purpose. And it certainly would have been of no use to him after he had heard the report of the race. Furthermore, I seriously doubt if he would have come upstairs to listen to the race with his mind made up in advance that he was going to commit suicide in case his horse didn't come in. And, as I have explained to you, the revolver is one belonging to Professor Garden and was always kept in the desk in the study. Consequently, if Swift had decided, after the race had been run, to shoot himself, he would hardly have gone into the study, procured the gun, then come back to his chair on the roof and put the head-phone on again before ending his life. Undoubtedly he would have shot himself right there in the study—at the desk from which he had obtained the revolver."

Vance moved forward a little as if for emphasis.

"Another point about that head-phone—the point that gave me the first hint of murder—is the fact that the receiver at present is over Swift's right ear. Earlier today I saw Swift put the head-phone on for a minute, and he was careful to place the receiver over his left ear—the customary way. But now the head-phone is on in reversed position, and therefore unnatural. I'm certain, Markham, that head-phone was placed on Swift after he was dead."



The Nurse Informed Vance That the Key Was Where It Always Kept.

CHAPTER V—Continued

Garden shrugged carelessly, as if the matter was neither important nor unusual.

"Probably," he suggested, "the pater didn't shut the door tightly when he went out this morning. It has a spring lock."

"And the key?"

"The key is a mere matter of form. It hangs conveniently on a small nail at the side of the door."

"Accordingly," mused Vance, "the vault is readily accessible to anyone in the household who cares to enter it."

Vance went to the door. "Miss Beeton," he called, "will you be good enough to run upstairs and see if the key to the vault door is in its place?"

A few moments later the nurse returned and informed Vance that the key was where it was always kept.

Vance thanked her and, closing the den door, turned again to Garden.

"There's one more rather important matter that you can clear up for me—it may have a definite bearing on the situation. Can the garden be entered from the fire exit opening on the roof?"

"Yes, by George!" The other sat up with alacrity. "There's a gate in the east fence of the garden, just beside the privet hedge, which leads upon the terrace on which the fire exit of the building opens. When we had the fence built we were required to put this gate in because of the fire laws. But it's rarely used, except on hot summer nights. Still, if anyone came up the main stairs to the roof and went out the emergency fire door, he could easily enter our garden by coming through that gate in the fence."

"Don't you keep the gate locked?"

Vance was studying the tip of his cigarette with close attention.

"The fire regulations don't permit that. We merely have an old-fashioned barn-door lift-latch on it."

We could hear the sharp ringing of the entrance bell, and a door opening somewhere. Vance stepped out into the hall. A moment later the butler admitted District Attorney Markham and Sergeant Heath, accompanied by Snitkin and Hennessey.

"Well, what's the trouble, Vance?" Markham demanded brusquely. "I phoned Heath, as you requested, and brought him up with me."

"It's a bad business," Vance returned. "Same like I told you. I'm afraid you're in for some difficulties. It's no ordin'ry crime. Everything I've been able to learn so far contradicts everything else." He looked past Markham and nodded pleasantly to Heath. "Sorry to make you all this trouble, Sergeant."

"That's all right, Mr. Vance," Heath held out his hand in solemn good-nature. "Glad I was in when the chief called. What's it all about, and where do we go from here?"

Mrs. Garden came bustling energetically down the hallway.

"Are you the district attorney?" she asked, eyeing Markham fero-

# what Irvin S. Cobb thinks about:

**Curing Stuttering.**  
CHIN LEE, ARIZ.—Away up here in the Indian country comes a newspaper, saying some expert at correcting human utterance has turned up with a cure for stuttering.

But why? By his own admission, nearly all stutters can sing and most of them can swear fluently, thus providing superior emotional outlets in two directions. One of the smartest criminal lawyers I know deliberately cultivated a natural impediment in his speech. In courtroom debates it gave him more time to think up either the right questions or to figure out the right answers.



Irvin S. Cobb

And one of the most charming voices I ever heard belonged to a Louisiana girl whose soft southern accents were fascinatingly interrupted at intervals by a sudden stammer—like unexpected ripples in a gently flowing brook.

## How to Relax.

BEFORE I started out here, feeling somewhat jumpy after wrestling a radio program for six months, Jimmy Swinnerton, the artist, who's one of the most devoted friends these high mesas ever had, advised me to try stretching out on the desert sands as a measure for health and complete relaxation and a general toning up.

"Just lie down perfectly flat," he said. Then he took another look at my figure. "Anyway, lie down," he said.

So today I tried it. Another friend, John Kirk, the famous Indian trader, helped me pick out a suitable spot on the Navajo reservation that was forty miles from the nearest habitation.

But the site I chose was already pre-empted by a scorpion with a fretful stinger and an irritable disposition that seemed to resent being crowded. So I got right up again. In fact, I got up so swiftly that Kirk said it was impossible to follow the movement with the human eye. It was like magic, he said.

## Speed Crazy Drivers.

WHY the hurry, Sonny Boy? I see you almost daily. You're roaring through populous streets or skidding on hairpin turns or whirling at sixty perilous miles an hour around the kinked and snaky twists of mountain roads like some demonic bug racing along the spine of a coiled rattler.

If I am one to say, you probably have primed yourself for this senseless speeding on that most dangerous of all mixed tipples—the fear-some combination of alcohol and gasoline. Or perhaps, like the blind mule of the folklore tale, you just naturally don't care a dern. One thing is plain: Despite the high percentage of mortality your breed is on the increase.

So, again, echoing the question which the coroner must frequently ask at the inquest, why the hurry, Sonny Boy?

It can't be that anybody wants you back at the place where you've been or that anybody else will be glad to see you at the place where you're going.

Really now, Sonny Boy, what is all the hurry about?

## Civilization's Predicament.

FEEL it my duty to call attention to the following warning, recently published:

"The earth is degenerating in these latter days. . . bribery and corruption abound. . . the children no longer obey their parents. . . it is evident that the end of the world is approaching!"

However, it should be added that this prediction is not, as might be assumed from its familiar ring, the utterance of some inspired observer of the present moment. It is a translation from an Assyrian tablet, dated 2800 B. C.

So, if the fulfillment of the doleful prophecy has been delayed for 4,737 years it seems reasonable to assume that it may be some months yet before civilization flies all to pieces.

## Waning States' Rights.

AS I watch commonwealth after commonwealth below the Mason and Dixon line tumbling over one another to embrace centralized authority in exchange for federal funds for local projects, I'm reminded of a trip which a friend of mine out here just made.

He's a descendant of the Lees and he decided to pay a pious pilgrimage to the last remaining stronghold of the late Southern Confederacy. So he went to the only two states that voted last fall for states' rights, making his headquarters in the ghost city of Passamaquoddy.

He reports that, in both Maine and Vermont, the secession sentiment is getting stronger all the time and that there's a growing tendency to name boys for Jeff Davis rather than Ethan Allen or Neal B. Dow.

IRVIN S. COBB.

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# AROUND the HOUSE



**Making Cocoa**—Cocoa loses that raw taste if made with half milk and half water, then boiled. More nutritious and digestible, too.

**Milk Puddings**—Orange peel shredded very finely makes an excellent flavoring for milk puddings. It is a pleasant change from nutmeg when added to rice pudding or baked custard.

**Cleaning Combs, Brushes**—A teaspoon of ammonia in a quart of water will remove all grease and dirt from combs and brushes, after which they should be rinsed and dried in the sun.

**Fitting Your Hat**—If you have a tight felt hat, hold it in the steam of a boiling kettle. When the felt is thoroughly damp it is easy to stretch it to the right size.

**Stewed Macaroni**—Boil one pound macaroni in milk and water for three-quarters of an hour, adding one-fourth ounce butter, salt, and an onion stuck with cloves. Afterwards, drain the macaroni, add three ounces grated cheese, a little nutmeg, pepper, and a little milk or cream. Stew gently for five minutes and serve very hot.

**Devilled Egg Lillies**—Hard cook as many eggs as there are to be servings. Chill, then peel carefully. With a sharp knife cut strips from the large end to the

center; remove yolks, mash and season with salt, pepper, mayonnaise and a little Worcestershire sauce. Carefully refill cavities having the white strips form the petals of the "lily." Lay each on a bed of curly endive. Accompany with these straws.

**Tough Pastry**—Too much water will make pastry tough.

**Keeping Cheese Moist**—To prevent it from becoming dry, keep it wrapped in butter muslin, or in the glazed hygienic paper in which some bread is wrapped.

**Protecting Mirrors**—Keep mirrors out of the sun—it will cause spots and other blemishes.

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## Foreign Words and Phrases

Toute medaille a son revers. (F.) Everything has its good and its bad side.

Ad nauseam. (L.) To the point of disgust.

Laissez ces vains scrupules. (F.) Discard or lay aside those vain scruples.

Entr'acte. (F.) Between the acts.

Argumentum ad absurdum. (L.) An argument intended to prove the absurdity of an opponent's argument.

Chacun pour soi et Dieu pour tous. (F.) Everybody for himself and God for all of us.

Bon marche. (F.) A bargain.

Chronique scandaleuse. (F.) A scandalous story.

Empressement. (F.) Eagerness.

Pater patriae. (L.) The father of his country.

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