

THE GARDEN MURDER CASE

by S. S. VAN DINE

CHAPTER VII—Continued

"Oh, Markham—my dear Markham!" Vance shook his head sadly. "However . . . As you say. There is something back of the lady's histrionics. She has ideas. But she's circuitous. And she wants us to be like those Chinese gods who can't proceed except in a straight line. Sad. But let's try makin' a turn. The situation is something like this: An unhappy lady slips out through the butler's pantry and presents herself on the roof-garden, hopin' to attract our attention. Having succeeded, she informs us that she has proved conclusively that a certain Mr. Kroon has done away with Swift because of amorous jealousy. The lady herself, let us assume, is the spurned and not the spurner. She resents it. She has a temper and is vengeful—and she comes to the roof here for the sole purpose of convincing us that Kroon is guilty."

"But her story is plausible enough," said Markham aggressively. "Why try to find hidden meanings in obvious facts? Kroon could have done it. And your psychological theory regarding the woman's motives eliminates him entirely."

"It doesn't eliminate him at all. It merely tends to involve the lady in a rather unpleasant bit of chicanery. The fact is, her little drama here on the roof may prove most illuminatin'."

Vance stretched his legs out before him and sank deeper into his chair.

"Curious situation. Y' know, Markham, Kroon deserted the party about fifteen or twenty minutes before the big race—legal matters to attend to for a maiden aunt, he explained—and he didn't appear again until after I had phoned you. Assumed immediately that Swift had shot himself. Doubt inspired me to converse with the elevator boy. I learned that Kroon had not gone down or up in the elevator since his arrival here early in the afternoon . . ."

"What's that!" Markham exclaimed. "That's more than suspicious—taken with what we have just heard from this Miss Weatherby."

"I dare say," Vance was unimpressed. "The legal mind at work. But from my gropin' amateur point of view, I'd want more—oh, much more. However,"—Vance rose and meditated a moment—"I'll admit that a bit of lovin' communion with Mr. Kroon is definitely indicated." He turned to Heath. "Send the chap up, will you, Sergeant?"

Heath nodded and started toward the door.

"And Sergeant," Vance halted him; "you might question the elevator boy and find out if there is any one else in the building whom Kroon is in the habit of calling on. If so, follow it up with a few discreet inquiries."

Heath vanished down the stairs, and a minute or so later Kroon sauntered into the study with the air of a man who is bored and not a little annoyed.

"I suppose I'm in for some more tricky questions," he commented.

After glancing about him, Kroon sat down leisurely at one end of the davenport. The man's manner, I could see, infuriated Markham, who leaned forward and asked in cold anger:

"Have you any urgent reasons for objecting to give us what assistance you can in our investigation of this murder?"

Kroon raised his eyebrows.

"None whatever," he said with calm superiority. "I might even be able to tell you who shot Woody."

"That's most interestin'," murmured Vance, studying the man indifferently. "But we'd much rather find out for ourselves, don't y' know?"

Kroon shrugged maliciously and said nothing.

"When you deserted the party this afternoon, Mr. Kroon," Vance went on, "you gratuitously informed us that you were headed for a legal conference of some kind with a maiden aunt. Would you object to giving us, merely as a matter of record, the name and address of your aunt, and the nature of the legal documents?"

"I most certainly would object," returned Kroon coolly. "I fail to see why you should be interested in my family affairs."

Markham swung round toward the man.

"That's for us to decide," he snapped. "Do you intend to answer Mr. Vance's question?"

Kroon shook his head.

"I do not! I regard that question as incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial. Also frivolous."

"Yes, yes," Vance smiled at Markham. "It could be, don't y' know. However, let it pass, Markham. Present status: Name and address of maiden aunt, unknown; nature of legal documents, unknown; reason for the gentleman's reticence, also unknown."

Markham resentfully mumbled a few unintelligible words and resumed smoking his cigar while Vance continued the interrogation.

"I say, Mr. Kroon, would you also consider it irrelevant—and the rest of the legal verbiage—if I asked you by what means you departed and returned to the Garden apartment?"

Kroon appeared highly amused.

"I'd consider it irrelevant, yes; but since there is only one sane way I could have gone and come back,

I'm perfectly willing to confess to you that I took a taxicab to and from my aunt's."

Vance gazed up at the ceiling as he smoked.

"Suppose," he said, "that the elevator boy should deny that he took you either down or up in the car since your first arrival here this afternoon. What would you say?"

"I'd say that he had lost his memory—or was lying."

"Yes, of course. The obvious retort. Quite." Vance's eyes moved slowly to the man on the davenport. "You will probably have the opportunity of saying just that on the witness stand."

Kroon's eyes narrowed and his face reddened. Before he could speak, Vance went on.

"And you may also have the opportunity of officially giving or withholding your aunt's name and address. The fact is, you may find yourself in the most distressin' need of an alibi."

Kroon sank back on the davenport with a supercilious smile.

"You're very amusing," he commented lightly. "What next? If you'll ask me a reasonable question, I'll be only too happy to answer."

"Well, let's see where we stand," Vance suppressed an amused smile. "You left the apartment at approximately a quarter to four, took the elevator downstairs and then a taxi,



A Settlement Was Reached.

went to your aunt's to fuss a bit with legal documents, drove back in a taxi, and took the elevator upstairs. Bein' gone a little over half an hour. During your absence Swift was shot. Is that correct?"

"Yes," Kroon was curt.

"But how do you account for the fact that when I met you in the hall on your return, you seemed miraculously cognizant of the details of Swift's passing?"

"We've been over that, too. I knew nothing about it. You told me Swift was dead, and I merely surmised the rest."

"Yes—quite. No crime in accurate surmises. Deuced queer coincidence, however. Taken with other facts. As likely as a five-horse win parlay. Extr'ordin'ry."

"I'm listening with great interest," Kroon had again assumed his air of superiority. "Why don't you stop beating about the bush?"

"Worth-while suggestion," Vance crushed out his cigarette and got up. "What I was leadin' up to was the fact that someone has definitely accused you of murdering Swift."

Kroon started, and his face went pale. After a few moments he forced a harsh guttural noise intended for a laugh.

"And who, may I ask, has accused me?"

"Miss Madge Weatherby."

One corner of Kroon's mouth went up in a sneer of hatred.

"She would! And she probably told you that it was a crime of passion—caused by an uncontrollable jealousy."

"Just that," nodded Vance. "It seems you have been forcing your unwelcome attentions upon her, with dire threats; whereas, all the time, she was madly enamored of Mr. Swift. And so, when the strain became too great, you eliminated your rival."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Kroon thrust his hands deep into his pockets. "I see what you're driving at. Why didn't you tell me this in the first place?"

"Waitin' for the final odds," Vance returned. "You hadn't laid your bet. But now that I've told you, do you care to give us the name and address of your maiden aunt and the nature of the legal documents you had to sign?"

"That's all nonsense," Kroon spluttered. "I don't need an alibi. When the time comes—"

CHAPTER VIII

At this moment Heath appeared at the door, and walking directly to Vance, handed him a page torn from his note-book, on which were several lines of handwriting.

Vance read the note rapidly as Kroon looked on with malignant resentment. Then he folded the paper and slipped it into his pocket.

"When the time comes . . ." he murmured. "Yes—quite." He raised his eyes lazily to Kroon. "As you say. When the time comes. The time has now come, Mr. Kroon."

The man stiffened, but did not speak.

"Do you, by any chance," Vance continued, "know a lady named Stella Fruemon? Has a snug little apartment on the seventeenth floor of this building—only two floors below. Says you were visitin' her around four o'clock today. Left her at exactly four-fifteen. Which might account for your not using the elevator. Also for your reluctance to give us your aunt's name and address. Might account for other things as well . . . Do you care to revise your story?"

Kroon appeared to be thinking fast. He walked nervously up and down the study floor.

"Puzzlin' and interestin' situation," Vance went on. "Gentleman leaves this apartment at—let's say—ten minutes to four. Family documents to sign. Doesn't enter the elevator. Appears in apartment two floors below within a few minutes—bein' a regular visitor there. Remains till 4:15. Then departs. Shows up again in this apartment at half-past four. In the meantime, Swift is shot through the head—exact time unknown. Gentleman is apparently familiar with various details of the shooting. Refuses to give information regarding his whereabouts during his absence. A lady accuses him of the murder, and demonstrates how he could have accomplished it. Also kindly supplies the motive. Fifteen minutes of gentleman's absence—namely, from 4:15 to 4:30—unaccounted for."

Vance drew on his cigarette.

"I say, Mr. Kroon, any suggestions?"

Kroon came to a sudden halt and swung about.

He sucked in a deep noisy breath and made a despairing gesture. "All right, here's the story. Take it or leave it. I've been mixed up with Stella Fruemon for the past year. She's nothing but a gold-digger and blackmailer. Madge Weatherby got on to it. She's the jealous member of this combination—not me. And she cared about as much for Woody Swift as I did. Anyway, I got involved with Stella Fruemon. It came to a show-down, and I had to pay through the nose. To avoid scandal for my family, of course. At any rate, we each got our lawyers, and a settlement was reached. She finally named a stiff figure and agreed to sign a general release from all claims. In the circumstances, I had no alternative. Four o'clock today was the time set for the completion of the transaction. My lawyer and hers were to be at her apartment. The certified check and the papers were ready. So I went down there a little before four to clean up the whole dirty business. And I cleaned it up and got out. I had walked down the two flights of stairs to her apartment, and at 4:15, when the hold-up was over, I walked back up the stairs."

Kroon took a deep breath and frowned.

"I was so furious—and relieved—that I kept on walking without realizing where I was going. When I opened the door which I thought led into the public hallway outside the Garden apartment, I found I was on the terrace of the roof. When I saw where I was I thought I'd come through the garden and go down the stairway there. It was really the natural thing to do . . ."

"You knew about the gate leading into the garden, then?"

"I've known about it for years. Everybody who's been up here knows with my knowing about the gate?"

"No. Quite natural. And so, you opened the gate and entered the garden?"

"Yes."

"And that would be between a quarter after four and twenty minutes after four?"

"I wasn't holding a stop-watch on myself, but I guess that's close enough . . . When I entered the garden I saw Swift slumped down in his chair. His position struck me as funny, but I paid no attention to it until I spoke to him and got no answer. Then I approached and saw the revolver lying on the tiles, and the hole in his head. It gave me a hell of a shock. I can tell you, and I started to run downstairs to give the alarm. But I realized it would look bad for me. There I was, alone on the roof with a dead man . . ."

"Ah, yes. Discretion. So you played safe. Can't say that I blame you entirely—if your chronology is accurate. So, I take it, you re-entered the public stairway and came down to the front door of the Garden apartment."

"That's just what I did."

"By and by, during the brief time you were on the roof, or even after you returned to the stairway, did you hear a shot?"

Kroon thought a moment.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Second Co-Ed School
Gullford college, in North Carolina, was the second co-educational school in the United States.

Spots in America That Resist the Melting Pot

Festivals of Various Kinds Call Attention to "Bits of Europe" Here.

2,000 inhabitants. Folk songs are sung to balalaika accompaniment by bearded men and long-haired women.

Finns Settled in Forest Lands.

"Although Finns dwell in small numbers in every state in the Union, they have not found the South appealing, and have settled chiefly in Michigan, Minnesota, Massachusetts, and Washington. From Finland, 'the Land of a Thousand Lakes,' they have been especially drawn to Minnesota. Their physical stamina and experience as lumberjacks in Finland's vast forests have fitted many of them particularly well to take part in America's lumber industry."

"The Finns retain their love of education, flocking to schools and night classes. As in their home land, they build log bathhouses, in which to take steam baths, and carve from birchwood skis which carry them over the fields in rigorous winters. Finland, Suomi, Tarpon Springs, about half way down the west coast of the Florida peninsula, is the home of many a swarthy, mustachioed Greek sponge divers and their families. They came to the warm blue waters of Florida fisheries from the sponge fishing grounds of the Mediterranean, and have made Tarpon Springs famous as a 'sponge city.' Their brightly painted diving boats are patterned after those used in Greek waters. The town supports a Greek Orthodox church, and on January 6 annually celebrates Greek Cross day, a religious fete brought from the homeland.

"Northwestern Pennsylvania has its Russians. Nearly half a century ago, some 'Old Believers,' descendants of seceders from the Russian church in the Seventeenth century, settled in Erie. The Russian colony now numbers about

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Somehow the Proverb Sounded a Bit Off

He had only recently joined the ranks of politicians, and he was anxious that his first speech to his prospective constituents should be a great success, says London Answers.

He spoke for a long time, warning his hearers of the dangers of war and the importance of keeping a large army. Wishing to finish with some quotation, he thought of the proverb about locking the stable door. But he wanted to be a bit more original.

Suddenly he had a brain-wave. "Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, "don't, I beg of you—don't wait till your house catches fire before calling the fire brigade."

Your Job

DO YOU realize that your job is the most important affair in the world, just because it is your job? The way you look at your job makes all the difference to your career. Do you regard it only as a money-making stunt? Or do you consider it a position to be proud of?

If you put your heart and soul into your effort, you are bound to make good and will wake up one fine morning to discover that you are one of the indispensables. The world respects you because it cannot get along without you.—Geoffrey Rhodes.

Toimi, and Toivola are some Minnesota place names that tell of Finnish population.

Shipping Lures Dalmatians.

"For centuries Dalmatians have either tilled the soil or sailed under Ragusan and other flags all over the world. Today these dark, spirited people, with blood of bold sea rovers in their veins, not only man the orange-sailed fishing boats off the Dalmatian coast, but they man American ships and work in fisheries of Louisiana, Florida, and California.

"From green vineyards, gray olive groves, fig and orange orchards steeped in almost perpetual sunshine along the Dalmatian coast, have come many of the large commercial fruit growers of the Pacific coast, particularly those in Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties. Watsonville, south of San Francisco, has a population almost entirely Yugoslavian.

"The majority of fishermen in Provincetown, Massachusetts, are Portuguese. Their ancestors sailed there on whalers from Portugal and the Azores. The city directory is filled with names that sound strange among those of most New England towns: last names such as Silva, Ramos, Furtado, Costa, Zora, Dutra, Cabral, Almeda, Agna, and Corea."

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4.50-21	6.35
4.75-19	6.70
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5.25-18	8.00
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