

The GARDEN MURDER CASE

by S. S. VAN DINE

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CHAPTER VIII—Continued

"By George! I did hear something, now that you put it that way. I thought nothing of it at the time, since Woody was already dead. But just as I re-entered the stairway there was an explosion of some kind outside. I thought it was a car back-firing down in the street, and paid no attention to it."

"That's very interesting . . . Vance's eyes drifted off into space. 'I wonder . . . But to continue your tale. You say you left the roof immediately and came downstairs. But there were at least two minutes from the time you left the garden to the time I encountered you entering the apartment at the front door. How and where did you spend these ten intervening minutes?'"

"I stayed on the landing of the stairs and smoked a couple of cigarettes. I was trying to pull myself together."

Heath stood up quickly, one hand in his outside coat pocket, and thrust out his jaw belligerently toward the agitated Kroon.

"What kind of cigarettes do you smoke?" he barked.

The man looked at the Sergeant in bewilderment, and then said: "I smoke gold-tipped Turkish cigarettes. What about it?"

Heath drew his hand from his pocket and looked at something which he held on his palm.

"All right," he muttered. Then he addressed Vance. "I got the stubs here. Picked 'em up on the landing when I came up from the dame's apartment."

"Well, well," sneered Kroon. "So the police actually found something! . . . What more do you want?" he demanded of Vance.

"Nothing for the moment, thank you," Vance returned with exaggerated courtesy. "You have done very well by yourself this afternoon, Mr. Kroon. We won't need you any more."

Kroon went to the door without a word.

"A good story," Markham commented dryly when Kroon had gone.

"Yes, yes. Good. But reluctant," Vance appeared disturbed. "Do you believe it?"

"My dear Markham, I keep an open mind, neither believin' nor disbelievin' . . . Prayin' for facts. But no facts yet. Drama everywhere, but no substance."

There was a rustle in the passage-way, and Madge Weatherby came rushing into the study, with Heath following and protesting vigorously. It was obvious that Miss Weatherby had dashed up the stairs before anyone could interfere with her.

"What's the meaning of this?" she demanded imperiously. "You're letting Cecil Kroon go, after what I've told you? And I"—she indicated herself with a dramatic gesture—"I am being held here, a prisoner."

"The fact is, Miss Weatherby," said Vance, returning to his chair, "Mr. Kroon explained his brief absence this afternoon lucidly and with impelling logic. It seems that he was doing nothing more reprehensible than conferring with Miss Stella Frumon and a brace of attorneys."

"Ah!" The woman's eyes glared with venom.

"Quite so. He was breaking off with the lady for ever and ever."

"Is that the truth?" Miss Weatherby straightened in her chair.

"Yes, yes. No subterfuge. Kroon said you were jealous of Stella. Thought I'd relieve your mind."

"Why didn't he tell me, then?"

"There's always the possibility you didn't give him a chance."

The woman nodded vigorously.

"Yes, that's right. I wouldn't speak to him when he returned here this afternoon."

"Care to revamp your original theory?" asked Vance. "Or do you still think that Kroon is the culprit?"

"I—I really don't know now," the woman answered hesitantly. "When I last spoke to you I was terribly upset. . . . Maybe it was all my imagination."

Vance looked at the woman quizzically. "Since you're not so sure that Kroon did the deed, have you any other suggestions?"

There was a tense silence. Miss Weatherby's face seemed to contract. She drew in her lips.

"Yes!" she exploded, leaning toward Vance with a new enthusiasm. "It was Zalia Graem who killed Woody! She had the motive, as you call it. She's capable of such things, too. There was something between her and Woody. Then she chucked him over. He didn't have enough money to suit her. You saw the way they acted toward each other today."

"Have you any idea as to how

she managed the crime?" Vance asked quietly.

"She was out of the drawing-room long enough, wasn't she?"

"Poignant question. Situation very mysterious," Vance rose slowly and bowed to the woman. "Thanks awfully—we're most grateful. And we shall not hold you prisoner any longer."

When she had gone Markham grinned sourly.

"The lady is well equipped with suspects. What do you make of this new accusation?"

Vance was frowning.

"Animosity shunted from Monsieur Kroon to La Graem. Yes, queer situation. Logically speaking, this new accusation is more reasonable than her first. It has its points . . . If only I could get that disconnected buzzer out of my mind. It must fit somewhere . . . And that second shot—the one we all heard."

Vance again moved to the buzzer and inspected it with care. "No indications of a mechanism."

"It could have been removed before the repair man arrived," theorized Markham without enthusiasm.

"Yes, another possibility. I had thought of that too. But the opportunity was lacking. I came in here immediately after I had found the johnnie shot . . ." He took the cigarette from his lips and straightened up. "By Jove! Someone might have slipped in here when we all dashed upstairs after the shot. Remote chance, though."

"Does the buzzer connect with any other room besides the den?" asked Markham.

Vance shook his head.

"No. That's the only connection."

"Didn't you say there was someone in the den at the time you heard this shot?"

Vance's gaze swept past Markham.

"Yes. Zalia Graem was there. Ostensibly telephoning." His voice, I thought, was a little bitter.

"We might get more information from the young woman herself," Markham put in sarcastically.

"Oh, yes. Quite. Obvious procedure. But I have a few queries to put to Garden first. Pavin' the

"Only that Miss Graem had a grudge of some kind against Swift and detested him thoroughly, and that, at the supposed time of his demise, Miss Graem was absent from the drawing-room. Doubts that she was in the den phoning all the time. Thinks she was up here, busily engaged in murder."

Garden drew rapidly on his pipe and seemed to be thinking.

"Do you yourself regard Miss Graem as capable of a cold-blooded, skillfully planned murder?"

Garden pursed his lips and frowned.

"Damn it, Vance! I can't answer that question. Frankly, I don't know who is and who isn't capable of murder. The younger set today are all bored to death, intolerant of every restraint, living beyond their means, digging up scandal, seeking sensations of every type. Zalia is little different from the rest, as far as I can see. She always seems to be stepping on the gas and exceeding the speed limits. How far she would actually go, I'm not prepared to say. Who is, for that matter? It may be merely a big circus parade with her, or it may be fundamental—a violent reaction from respectability."

"A vivid, though not a sweet, character sketch," murmured Vance. "One might say offhand that you are rather fond of her but don't approve."

Garden laughed awkwardly.

"I can't say that I dislike Zalia. Most men do like her—though I don't think any of them understand her. I know I don't. There's some impenetrable wall around her. She's either damned superficial or deep as hell—I can't make up my mind which. As to her status in this present situation . . . well, I don't know. It wouldn't surprise me in the least if Madge was right about her. Zalia has staggered me a couple of times—can't exactly explain it. You remember, when you asked me about father's revolver, I told you Zalia had discovered it in that desk and staged a scene with it in this very room. Well, Vance, my blood went cold at the time. There was something in the way she did it, and in the tone of her voice, that made me actually fear that she was fully capable of shooting up the party. I was relieved when she put the gun back and shut the drawer . . . All I can say," he added, "is that I don't wholly understand her."

"No. Of course not. No one can wholly understand another person. If anyone could he'd understand everything. Not a comfortin' thought . . . Thanks awfully for the recital of your fears and impressions. You'll look after matters downstairs for a while, won't you?"

Garden seemed to breathe more freely on being dismissed, and with a mumbled acquiescence, moved toward the door.

"Oh, by the by," Vance called after him. "One other little point I wish to ask you about."

Garden waited politely.

"Why," asked Vance, blowing a ribbon of smoke toward the ceiling, "didn't you place Swift's bet on Equanimity?"

CHAPTER IX



He Sank Limply Into a Chair.

The man gave a start, and his jaw dropped. He barely rescued his pipe from falling to the floor.

"You didn't place it, don't you know," Vance went on dulcetly. "Rather interesting" point, in view of the fact that your cousin was not destined to live long enough to collect the wager, even if Equanimity had won. And in the circumstances, had you placed it, you would now be saddled with a \$10,000 debt—since Swift is no longer able to settle."

"God Almighty, stop it, Vance!" Garden exploded. He sank limply into a chair. "How do you know I didn't place Woodie's bet?"

Vance regarded the man with searching eyes.

"No bookie would take a bet of that size five minutes before post time. He couldn't absorb it."

"But Hannix—"

"Don't make a Wall-Street financier of Hannix for my benefit," Vance admonished quietly. "And another thing: I happened to be sitting in a strategic position near your table when you pretended to place Swift's bet. You very deftly pulled the cord taut over the plunger of the telephone when you picked up the receiver. You were talking into a dead phone."

Garden capitulated.

"All right, Vance," he said. "I didn't place the bet. But if you think, for one moment, that I had any suspicion that Woody was going to be shot his afternoon, you're wrong."

"My dear fellow!" Vance sighed with annoyance. "I'm not thinkin'. Higher intelligence not at work at the moment. Mind a blank. Only tryin' to add up a few figures. Ten thousand dollars is a big item. It changes our total—oh, what? . . . But you haven't told me why you didn't place the bet."

Garden rose angrily.

"I didn't want him to lose the money," he asserted aggressively. "I knew what it would mean to him."

"Yes, yes. The Good Samaritan. Very touchin'. But suppose Equanimity had won, and your cousin had survived—what about the payoff?"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Contagious Smiles
The clouds can hide the sun, but all the clouds in the world can't hide a smile; nor can the doctors invent a medicine that will keep smiles from being contagious.

Ask Me Another

A General Quiz

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1. Where was the first session of the United States Supreme court held, and how many justices were present?
2. Are the authorized version and the King James Bible the same?
3. What animal is the fastest runner?
4. How big is the standard parachute?
5. When was the federal income tax first imposed?
6. What state has furnished more Presidents than any other?
7. How many counties in the state of Delaware?
8. How many kinds of time in use in the world?

Answers

1. The first session of the United States Supreme court was held in the Royal Exchange in New York, February 1, 1790, with three of the six justices present.
2. They are. The King James Bible became known as the authorized version, probably because it bore the line "appointed to be read in churches" on the title page.
3. The cheetah in short distance runs. It can run down a deer or antelope for a short distance.
4. The standard airplane parachute has a spread of 24 feet when open.
5. In the year 1916.
6. Virginia.
7. There are but three counties in the state of Delaware.
8. Sixty-three kinds of standard time are used in the world.

Keep a Secret

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