

# The Garden Murder Case

by S. S. VAN DINE

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## CHAPTER X—Continued

"Not now, No," Vance returned. "A little bromin gas a few minutes ago; but the air will be clear in a little while. No casualties. Every one doing well. . . Did you want to see me?"

Garden looked round at the group on the roof with a puzzled air. "Awfully sorry to interrupt you, Vance; but the fact is, I came for the doctor." His eyes rested on Siefert, and he smiled dryly. "It's the usual thing, doc," he said. "The mater seems almost in a state of collapse—she assured me that she hadn't an ounce of strength left."

A worried look came into Siefert's eyes.

"I'll come at once, of course," he said. He looked at the nurse and then lifted his gaze to Vance. "Will you excuse me?"

Vance bowed. "Certainly, doctor. But I think Miss Beeton had better remain here in the air for a while longer."

Siefert left the roof reluctantly, with Garden following him.

Vance watched them until they turned through the door of the passageway; then he spoke to the nurse. "Please sit here a few minutes, Miss Beeton. I want to have a talk with you. But first I'd like a minute or two with Mr. Hammle."

The nurse nodded her assent and sat down a little wearily on the settee.

Vance beckoned curtly to Hammle. "Suppose we go inside for a moment."

Hammle rose with alacrity. "I was wondering how much longer you gentlemen were going to keep me here."

Vance led the way into the study, and Markham and I followed behind Hammle.

"What were you doing on the roof, Mr. Hammle?" asked Vance. "I told you some time ago, after our brief interview, that you might go."

Hammle fidgeted. He was patently apprehensive and wary.

"There's no crime in going out into the garden for a while—is there?" he asked with unimpressive truculence.

"None whatever," Vance returned casually. "I was wondering why you preferred the gardens to going home. Devilish things have been happening in the garden this afternoon."

"As I told you, I wish I had gone. How did I know—?"

"That's hardly the point, Mr. Hammle," Vance cut him short. "It doesn't answer my question."

"Well now, look here," Hammle explained fulsomely; "I had just missed a train to Long Island, and it was more than an hour until the next one. When I went out of here and started to go downstairs, I suddenly said to myself, 'It'll be pleasant waiting in the garden than in the Pennsylvania station.' So I went out on the roof and hung around. And here I am."

Vance regarded the man shrewdly and nodded his head.

"Yes, as you say. Here you are. More or less in evidence. By the by, Mr. Hammle, what did you see while you were waiting in the garden for the next train?"

"Not a thing—absolutely!" Hammle's tone was aggressive. "I walked along the boxwood hedges, smoking, and was leaning over the parapet by the gate, looking out at the city, when I heard you come out carrying the nurse."

Vance narrowed his eyes: it was obvious he was not satisfied with Hammle's explanation.

"And you saw no one else either in the garden or on the terrace?"

"Not a soul," the man assured him.

"And you heard nothing?"

"Not until you gentlemen came out."

Vance stood regarding Hammle for several moments. Then he turned and walked toward the garden window.

"That will be all for the moment," he said brusquely. "But we shall probably want to see you tomorrow."

"I'll be at home all day. Glad to be of any service." Hammle shot a covert look at Vance, made his adieux quickly, and went out down the passageway.

Vance returned at once to the garden. Miss Beeton drew herself up a little as he approached her. "Do you feel equal to a few questions?" he asked her.

"Oh, yes," she smiled with more assurance now, and rose.

As we crossed the garden to the balustrade, Miss Beeton took a deep breath and shuddered slightly.

"You'd better have your coat," Vance suggested. He returned to the study and brought it out to her. When he had helped her into it she turned suddenly and looked at him inquiringly.

"Why was my coat brought to the study?" she asked.

Vance's tone was reassuring. We really owe you an explanation. You see, two revolvers figured in Swift's death. One of them we all saw on the roof here—that was the one with which the chap was killed. But no one downstairs heard the shot because the poor fellow met his end in Professor Garden's storeroom vault."

"Ah! That was why you wanted

to know if the key was in its place."

The girl nodded.

"The shot we all heard," Vance went on, "was fired from another revolver after Swift's body had been carried from the vault and placed in the chair out here. We were naturally anxious to find that other weapon, and Sergeant Heath made a search for it. . ."

"But—but—my coat?" Her hand went out and she clutched at Vance's sleeve as a look of understanding came into her frightened eyes.

"Yes," Vance said, "the Sergeant found the revolver in the pocket of your top-coat. Someone had put it there as a temporary hiding-place."

She recoiled with a sudden intake of breath.

"How dreadful!" Her words were barely audible.

Vance put his hand on her shoulder.

"But it's too terrible! . . . And then this—this attempt on my life. I can't understand. I'm frightened."

"Come, come," Vance exhorted the girl. "It's over now, and we need your help."

She gazed directly into his eyes for several minutes. Then she gave him a faint smile of confidence.

"I'm very sorry," she said simply. "But this house—this family—they've been doing queer things to my nerves for the past month. I can't explain it, but there's something frightfully wrong here. . . I was in charge of an operating room in a Montreal hospital for six months, attending as many as six and eight operations a day; but that never affected me the way this household does. There, at least, I could see what was going on—I could help and know that I was



"Vance! Come Down From There!"

helping. But here everything goes on in dark corners, and nothing I do seems to be of any use. . . . But please don't think I am not ready to help—to do anything I can for you. You, too, always have to work in the dark, don't you?"

"Don't we all have to work in the dark?" Vance murmured, without taking his eyes from her. "Tell me who you think could have been guilty of the terrible things that have happened here."

All fear and doubt seemed to have left the girl. She moved toward the balustrade and stood looking over the river with an impressive calm and self-control.

## CHAPTER XI

"Woode Swift's death wasn't at all the sort of thing I would expect to happen here," the nurse said. "I wouldn't have been surprised at some act of impulsive violence, but this premeditated murder, so subtle and so carefully planned, seems alien to the atmosphere here. Besides, it isn't a loving family, except on the surface. Floyd Garden is saner than the others. His interests are narrow, to be sure, but on his own mental level. He's dependable, too, I think."

She paused and frowned.

"As for Mrs. Garden, I feel that by nature she is shallow and is deliberately creating for herself a deeper and more complex mode of life, which she doesn't in the least understand. That, of course, makes her unreasonable and dangerous. I have never had a more unreasonable patient. She has no consideration whatever for others."

"And Professor Garden?"

"He's a researcher and scientist, of course, and, therefore, not altogether human, in the conventional sense. I have thought sometimes that he isn't wholly rational."

"What is your impression of the guests who were present today?" Vance said.

"I don't feel competent to pass judgment on them," the girl replied seriously. "I can't entirely understand them. But each one strikes me as dangerous in his own way. They are all playing a game—and it seems to be a game without rules. To them the outcome justifies the methods they use."

"Yes, quite. You have clear vision," Vance scrutinized the girl beside him. "And you took up nursing because you are able to face the realities. You are not afraid of life—or death."

The girl looked embarrassed. "You're making too much of my profession. After all, I had to earn my living, and nursing appealed to me."

"Yes, of course. It would," Vance nodded. "But tell me, wouldn't you rather not have to work for your living?"

She looked up.

"Perhaps. But isn't it natural for every woman to prefer luxury and security to drudgery and uncertainty?"

"No doubt," said Vance. "And speaking of nursing, just what do you think of Mrs. Garden's condition?"

Miss Beeton hesitated before she answered.

"Really, I don't know what to say. I can't understand it. And I rather suspect that Doctor Siefert himself is puzzled by it. Mrs. Garden is obviously a sick woman. She shows many of the symptoms of that nervous, erratic temperament exhibited by people suffering from cancer. Though she's much better some days than others, I know that she suffers a great deal. Doctor Siefert tells me she is really a neurological case; but I get the feeling, at times, that it goes much deeper—that an obscure physiological condition is producing the neurological symptoms she shows."

"That's most interesting," Doctor Siefert mentioned something of the kind to me only a few days ago."

Vance moved nearer to the girl. "Would you mind telling me something of your contacts with the members of the household?"

"There's very little to tell. Professor Garden practically ignores me—half the time I doubt if he even knows I am there. Mrs. Garden alternates between periods of irritable admonition and intimate confidence. Floyd Garden has always been pleasant and considerate. I've rather liked him for his attitude."

"And what of Swift—did you see much of him?"

"The girl seemed reluctant to answer."

"The truth is, Mr. Swift asked me several times to go to dinner and the theater with him. I got the impression that he was one of those unhappy men who feel their inferiority and seek to bolster themselves up with the affections of women. I think that he was really concerned with Miss Graem, and merely turned to me through pique."

Vance smoked for a few moments in silence. Then he said:

"What of the big race today? Had there been much discussion about it?"

"Oh, yes. For over a week I've heard little else here. A curious tension has been growing in the house. I heard Mr. Swift remark to Floyd Garden one evening that the Rivermont Handicap was his one remaining hope, and that he thought Equanimity would win."

"Was it generally known to the other members of the afternoon gatherings how Swift felt about this race and Equanimity?"

"Yes, the matter was freely discussed for days."

"By the by," asked Vance, "how did you come to bet on Azure Star?"

"Frankly," the girl confessed shyly, "I've been mildly interested in the horse—betting parties here, though I've never had any desire to make a wager myself. But I overheard you tell Mr. Garden that you had picked Azure Star, and the name was so appealing that I asked Mr. Garden to place that bet for me. It was the first time I ever bet on a horse."

"And Azure Star came in," Vance sighed. "Too bad. Actually you bet against Equanimity, you know—he was the favorite. A big gamble. Most unfortunate that you won. Beginner's luck, d'ye see, is always fatal."

The girl's face became suddenly sombre, and she looked steadily at Vance for several moments before she spoke again.

"Do you really think it will prove fatal?"

"Yes, Oh, yes. Inevitable. You won't be able to resist making other wagers. One doesn't stop with the first bet if one wins. And, invariably, one loses in the end."

Again the girl gave Vance a long and troubled look; then her gaze drifted to the darkening sky overhead.

"But Azure Star is a beautiful name, isn't it?" She pointed upward. "There's one now."

We all looked up. High above we saw a single bright star shining with blue luminosity in the cloudless sky. After a moment Vance moved toward the parapet and looked out over the waters of the river to the purpling hills and the still glowing sunset colors in the west.

"No city in the world," Vance said, "is as beautiful as New York seen from a vantage point like this in the early twilight." (I wondered at his sudden change of mood.)

He stepped up on the parapet and looked down into the great abyss of deep shadows and flickering lights far below. A curious chill of fear ran over me—the sort of fear I have always felt when I have seen acrobatic performers perilously balanced high above a circus arena.

Miss Beeton was standing close to Markham, and she, too, must have experienced something of the sensation I felt, for I saw her face go suddenly pale. Her eyes were fixed on Vance with a look of apprehensive horror.

"Vance!" It was Markham's stern voice that broke the silence. "Come down from there!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## what Irvin S. Cobb thinks about:

The New NRA Bill. SANTA MONICA, CALIF. — They do say the new NRA bill, as drawn by the Gallagher and Shean of the administration, Messrs. Corcoran and Cohen, is more sweeping than was the original NRA.

Even Gen. Hugh Johnson, once as conversational as Mrs. Astor's parrot, but lately exiled amid the un congenial silences, crawls out from under a log in the woods with lichen in his hair, but the lower jaw still working smoothly in the socket, to tell how drastic a thing it is.

Critics assert this legislation will cover business like a wet blanket over a sick pup, and point out that the number of sick pups benefited by being tucked under wet blankets is quite small. However, these fussy persons belong to the opposition and don't count. Anyhow, they didn't count much at the last election except in Maine, Vermont and one backward precinct in the Ozark mountains.



Irvin S. Cobb

Friendly French Visitors. IT SEEMS we were cruelly wrong in ascribing mercenary motives to those French financiers who've been dropping in on us lately. They came only to establish more cordial relations. Of course, there's a new French bond issue to be floated, but these visits were purely friendly and altruistic.

Still and all, I can't help thinking of Mr. Pincus, who invaded the east side to invite his old neighbor, Mr. Ginsburg, whom he hadn't seen in years, to be a guest at Mrs. Pincus' birthday party.

He gave full directions for traveling uptown, then added:

"Were we lif now it's von of dose swell walk-up flats. So mit your right elbow you gif a little poosh on the thoid button in the doorjam downstairs and the lock goes glick-glick and in you come. You go up two floors und den, mit your other elbow, you gif one more little poosh on the foist door to the left und walk in—und vill mommer be surprised!"

"Vait," exclaimed Mr. Ginsburg. "I could get to that Bronx. I got brains, ain't it? But also I got fingers und thumbs. Vos is de posh-mit-elbows stuff?"

Murmured Mr. Pincus gently: "Surely you wouldn't come empty-handed!"

Visiting Ancient Ranchos. UNDER the guidance of Leo Carillo, that most native of all native sons, I've been visiting such of the ancient ranchos as remain practically what they were before the Gringos came to southern California. You almost expect to find Ramona weaving in a crumbly patio.

What's more, every one of these lovely places is lived on by one of Leo's cousins. He has more kinfolks than a microbe. They say the early Carillos were pure Spanish, but I insist there must have been a strong strain of Belgian hare in the stock. When it came to progeny, the strain was to the Pacific coast what the Potomac shad has been to the eastern seaboard. It's more than a family—it's a species.

And a mighty noble breed it is—producing even yet the fragrant essence of a time that elsewhere has vanished and a day when hospitality still ruled and a naturally kindly people had time to be mannerly and the instinct to be both simple and grandly courteous at once.

Privileges of Nazidom. THE German commoner may be shy on the food rations and have some awkward moments unless he conforms to the new Nazi religion. But he enjoys complete freedom of the press—or rather, complete freedom from the press. And lately another precious privilege has been accorded him.

He may fight duels. Heretofore, this inestimable boon was exclusively reserved for the highborn. But now he may go forth and carve and be carved until the field of honor looks like somebody had been cleaning fish.

This increase in his blessings makes me recall a tale that Charley Russell, the cowboy artist, used to tell:

"The boys were fixing to hang a horse thief," Charley said. "He only weighed about ninety pounds, but for his height he was the champion horse thief of Montana. The rope was swung from the roof of a barn. Then they balanced a long board out of the loft window, and the condemned was out at the far end of it, ready for the drop, when a stranger busted in.

"Everybody thought he craved to pray, but that unknown humanitarian had a better notion than that. In less'n a minute he came inching out on that plank and there wasn't a dry eye in the crowd as he edged up behind the poor trembling wretch and slipped an anvil in the seat of his pants."

IRVIN S. COBB.  
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COOL is the word for Carrie when she wears one of these smart new frocks by Sew-Your-Own. No matter whether she's three or thirty, a June bride or a proud mama, Carrie will find what she needs for summer comfort here.

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Tot's Tidbit. Only when we're very young are we privileged to wear dresses as cute as this one. The most unaccustomed seamstress can

make it with its half dozen pieces; the merest remnant will suffice for material. There is more than ordinary intrigue packed in the diminutive skirt that shows a couple of darling dimpled knees so lusciously sun tanned. Use it as a cool, cool top with panties as the ideal hot weather attire, or slip it on as an apron—either way it will be a fine little companion for mother's pet this summer.

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Send your order to The Sewing Circle Pattern Dept., 247 W. Forty-third street, New York, N. Y. Price of patterns, 15 cents (in coins) each.

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## Hot Weather is Here— Beware of Biliousness!

Have you ever noticed that in very hot weather your organs of digestion and elimination seem to become torpid or lazy? Your food sours, forms gas, causes belching, heartburn, and a feeling of restlessness and irritability. Perhaps you may have sick headache, nausea and dizziness or blind spells on suddenly rising. Your tongue may be coated, your complexion bilious and your bowel actions sluggish or insufficient.

These are some of the more common symptoms or warnings of biliousness or so-called "torpid liver," so prevalent in hot climates. Don't neglect them. Take Calotabs, the improved calomel compound tablets that give you the effects of calomel and salts, combined. You will be delighted with the prompt relief they afford. Trial package ten cents, family pkg. twenty-five cents. At drug stores. (Adv.)

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