

THE GARDEN MURDER CASE

by S. S. VAN DINE

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CHAPTER XIV
—19—

I wandered into the den, the door of which was ajar, and walked aimlessly about the room, looking at the various pictures and etchings. Just then Vance entered. As he came in he threw the door open wider, half pocketing me in the corner behind it, where I was not immediately noticeable. I was about to speak to him, when Zalia Graem came in.

"Philo Vance." She called his name in a low, tremulous voice. He turned and looked at the girl with a quizzical frown.

"I've been waiting in the dining-room," she said. "I wanted to see you before you spoke to the others."

I realized immediately, from the tone of her voice, that my presence had not been noticed.

Vance continued to look squarely at the girl, but did not speak. She came very close to him now.

"Tell me why you have made me suffer so much," she said.

"I know I have hurt you," Vance returned. "But the circumstances made it imperative. Please believe that I understand more of this case than you imagine I do."

"I am not sure that I understand." The girl spoke hesitantly. "But I want you to know that I trust you." She looked up at him, and I could see that her eyes were glistening. Slowly she bowed her head. "I have never been interested in any man," she went on—and there was a quaver in her voice. "The men I have known have all made me unhappy and seemed always to lead me away from the things I longed for."

"You are the one man I have ever known whom I could—care for."

So suddenly had this startling confession come, that I did not have time to make my presence known, and after Miss Graem finished speaking I remained where I was, lest I cause her embarrassment.

Vance placed his hands on the girl's shoulders and held her away from him.

"My dear," he said, with a curiously suppressed quality in his voice, "I am the one man for whom you should not care." There was no mistaking the finality of his words.

Vance smiled wistfully at the girl. "Would you mind waiting in the drawing-room a little while? . . ."

She gave him a searching look and, without speaking, turned and went from the den.

Vance stood for some time gazing at the floor with a frown of indecision, as if loath to proceed with whatever plans he had formulated. I took this opportunity to come out from my corner, and just as I did so Floyd Garden appeared at the hall door.

"Oh, hello, Vance," he said. "I didn't know you had returned until Zalia just told me you were in here. Anything I can do for you?"

Vance swung around quickly. "I was just going to send for you. Everyone here?"

Garden nodded gravely. "Yes, and they're all frightened to death—all except Hammie. He takes the whole thing as a lark. I wish somebody had shot him instead of Woody."

"Will you send him in here," Vance asked. "I want to talk to him. I'll see the others presently."

Garden walked up the hall, and at that moment I heard Burke speaking to Markham at the front door. Markham immediately joined us in the den.

"Hope I haven't kept you waiting," he greeted Vance.

"No. Oh, no," Vance leaned against the desk. "Just in time."

Markham had barely seated himself when Hammie strutted into the den with a jovial air. Vance nodded to him brusquely.

"Mr. Hammie," he said, "we're wholly familiar with your philosophy of minding your own business and keeping silent in order to avoid all involvements. A defensible attitude—but not in the present circumstances. This is a criminal case, and in the interest of justice to everyone concerned, we must have the whole truth. Yesterday afternoon you were the only one in the drawing-room who had even a partial view down the hallway. And we must know everything you saw, no matter how trivial it may seem to you."

Hammie gave in. "First of all, then," said Vance, without relaxing his stern gaze, "when Miss Graem left the room, ostensibly to answer a telephone call, did you notice exactly where she went?"

"Not exactly," Hammie returned; "but she turned to the left, toward the den. You understand, of course, that it was impossible for me to see very far down the hall, even from where I sat."

"Quite," Vance nodded. "And when she came back to the drawing-room?"

"I saw her first opposite the den door. She went to the hall closet where the hats and wraps are kept, and then came back to stand in the archway until the race was over. After that I didn't notice her either coming or going."

"And what about Floyd Garden?" asked Vance. "You remember he followed Swift out of the room. Did you notice which way they went, or what they said?"

"As I remember, Floyd put his arm around Swift and led him into the dining-room. After a few moments they came out. Swift seemed to be pushing Floyd away from him, and then he disappeared down the hall toward the stairs. Floyd stood outside the dining-room door for several minutes, looking after his cousin, and then went down the hall after him; but he must have changed his mind, for he came back into the drawing-room in short order."

"And you saw no one else in the hall?"

"No. No one else."

"Very good," Vance took a deep inhalation on his cigarette. "And now let's go to the roof-garden, figuratively speaking. You were in the garden, waiting for a train, when the nurse was almost suffocated with bromin gas in the vault. The door into the passageway was open, and if you had been looking in the direction you could easily have seen who passed up and down the corridor." Vance looked at the man significantly. "And I have a feeling you were looking through that door, Mr. Hammie. Your reaction of astonishment when we came out on the roof was a bit overdone. And you couldn't have seen much of the city from where you had been standing, don't you know?"

Hammie cleared his throat and grinned.

"You have me there, Vance," he admitted with familiar good-humor. "Since I couldn't make my train, I thought I'd satisfy my curiosity and stick around for a while to see



She Gave Him a Searching Look.

what happened. I went out on the roof and stood where I could look through the door into the passageway—I wanted to see who was going to get hell next, and what would come of it all."

"Thanks for your honesty," Vance's face was coldly formal. "Please tell us now exactly what you saw through that doorway while you were waiting, as you've confessed, for something to happen."

Again Hammie cleared his throat. "Well, Vance, to tell you the truth, it wasn't very much. Just people coming and going. First I saw Garden go up the passageway toward the study; and almost immediately he went back downstairs. Then Zalia Graem passed the door on her way to the study. Five or ten minutes later the detective—Heath, I think his name is—went by the door, carrying a coat over his arm. A little later—two or three minutes, I should say—Zalia Graem and the nurse passed each other in the passageway, Zalia going toward the stairs, and the nurse toward the study. A couple of minutes after that Floyd Garden passed the door on his way to the study again."

"Just a minute," Vance interrupted. "You didn't see the nurse return downstairs after she passed Miss Graem in the passageway?" Hammie shook his head emphatically. "No. Absolutely not."

Vance took another deep puff on his cigarette. "One more thing, Mr. Hammie: while you were out there in the garden, did anyone come out on the roof from the terrace gate?"

"Absolutely not. I didn't see anybody at all on the roof."

"And when Garden had returned downstairs, what then?"

"I saw you come to the window and look out into the garden. I was afraid I might be seen, and the minute you turned away I went over to the far corner of the garden, by the gate. The next thing I knew, your gentlemen were coming out on the roof with the nurse."

Vance moved forward from the desk against which he had been resting. "Thank you, Mr. Hammie. You've told me exactly what I wanted to know. It may interest you to learn that the nurse informed us she was struck over the head in the passageway, on leaving the study, and forced into the vault which was full of bromin fumes."

Zalia Graem was the first to en-

ter the den. She glanced at Vance appealingly and seated herself without a word. She was followed by Miss Weatherby and Kroon, who sat down uneasily beside her on the davenport. Floyd Garden and his father came in together. Miss Beeton was just behind them and stopped hesitantly in the doorway, looking uncertainly at Vance.

"Did you want me too?" she asked diffidently.

"I think it might be best, Miss Beeton," said Vance. "We may need your help."

At that moment the front door bell rang, and Burke ushered Doctor Siefert into the den.

"I just got your message, Mr. Vance, and came right over." He looked about the room questioning-ly.

"I thought you might care to be present," Vance said, "in case we can reach some conclusion about the situation here. I know you are personally interested. Otherwise I wouldn't have telephoned you."

"I'm glad you did," said Siefert blandly, and walked across to a chair before the desk.

Vance lit a cigarette with slow deliberation, his eyes moving aimlessly about the room. There was a tension over the assembled group.

The taut silence was broken by Vance's voice. He spoke casually, but with a curious emphasis.

"I have asked you all to come here this afternoon in the hope that we could clear up the very tragic situation that exists."

He was interrupted by the startling sound of a shot ominously like that of the day before. Everyone in the room stood up quickly, aghast at the sudden detonation. Everyone except Vance. And before anyone could speak, his calm authoritative voice was saying:

"There is no need for alarm. Please sit down. I expressly arranged that shot for all of you to hear—it will have an important bearing on the case."

Burke appeared at the door. "Was that all right, Mr. Vance?"

"Quite all right," Vance told him. "The same revolver and blanks?"

"Sure. Just like you told me. And from where you said. Wasn't it like you wanted it?"

"Yes, precisely," nodded Vance. "Thanks, Burke."

The detective grinned broadly and moved away down the hall.

"That shot, I believe," resumed Vance, sweeping his eyes lazily over those present, "was similar to the one we heard yesterday afternoon—the one that summoned us to Swift's dead body. It may interest you to know that the shot just fired by Detective Burke was fired from the same revolver, with the same cartridges, that the murderer used yesterday—and from about the same spot."

"But this shot sounded as if it were fired down here somewhere," cut in Siefert.

"Exactly," said Vance with satisfaction. "It was fired from one of the windows on this floor."

"But I understand that the shot yesterday came from upstairs," Siefert looked perplexed.

"That was the general, but erroneous, assumption," explained Vance. "Actually it did not. Yesterday, because of the open roof door and the stairway, and the closed door of the room from which the shot was fired, and mainly because we were psychologically keyed to the idea of a shot from the roof, it gave us all the impression of coming from the garden."

Zalia Graem turned quickly to Vance.

"The shot yesterday didn't sound to me as if it came from the garden. When I came out of the den I wondered why you were all hurrying upstairs."

Vance returned her gaze squarely.

"No, it must have sounded much closer to you," he said. "But why didn't you mention that important fact yesterday when I talked with you about the crime?"

"I—don't know," the girl stammered. "When I saw Woody dead up there, I naturally thought I'd been mistaken."

"But you couldn't have been mistaken," returned Vance, half under his breath. "And after the revolver had been fired yesterday from a downstairs window, it was surreptitiously placed in the pocket of Miss Beeton's top-coat in the hall closet. Had it been fired from upstairs it could have been hidden to far better advantage somewhere on the roof or in the study."

He turned again to the girl. "By the by, Miss Graem, didn't you go to that closet after answering your telephone call here in the den?"

The girl gasped.

"How—how did you know?"

"You were seen there," explained Vance.

The girl turned back to Vance with flashing eyes.

"I'll tell you why I went to the hall closet. I went to get a handkerchief I had left in my handbag. Does that make me a murderer?"

"No. Oh, no," Vance shook his head and sighed. "Thank you for the explanation. . . . And will you be so good as to tell me exactly what you did last night when you answered Mrs. Garden's summons?"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Ask Me? Another

A Quiz With Answers Offering Information on Various Subjects

1. How often does the United States gain one in population?
2. Was Sir William Blackstone successful as a lawyer?
3. Do baseball or football players receive more injuries?
4. How fast must an object travel to escape from the gravitational attraction of the earth?
5. Does an elephant eat as much as a mouse in proportion to its size?
6. Was the United States Supreme court ever closed for a period more than one year?

Answers

1. There is one birth in the United States every 14 seconds, one death every 22 seconds, one immigrant every 15 minutes, and one emigrant every 14½ minutes, making a net gain in population of one person every 35 seconds.
2. Sir William Blackstone (1723-

- 1780) whose fame as England's greatest jurist is based on his "Commentaries," actually possessed only the vaguest possible grasp of the elementary conceptions of law and was considered a failure as a lawyer, jurist and parliamentarian, according to Collier's Weekly.
3. Baseball players receive more minor injuries, but fewer permanent injuries and fatalities.
4. It must have a speed of 6.95 miles per second.
5. If an elephant ate the same amount proportionally as a mouse it would consume 10 tons of food daily. Actually it eats only about 100 pounds.
6. Rushed through congress in 1801, a measure directing that the Supreme court should meet only once a year, on the second Monday of February, closed the court for 14 months, until February, 1803.

Household Questions

Use for Celery Leaves.—Celery leaves can be chopped fine and put into meat or salmon loaf or bread-crumbs stuffings for such meats as roast shoulder of lamb or poultry. They can also be dried and used like other herb seasonings.

Washing Handkerchiefs.—Discolored handkerchiefs will regain their whiteness if a few drops of peroxide of hydrogen are added to the last rinsing water.

Oilcloth for Shelves.—Oilcloth, if white, can be used to line the shelves and walls of dark cupboards. It will lighten them considerably. If placed on the last step of a dark cellar staircase, it will make the descent easier.

Removing Mildew Stains.—Moisten a little soft soap with the strained juice of a lemon. Spread this paste thickly over the stains. Put out to bleach, and afterwards wash in the usual way. WNU Service.

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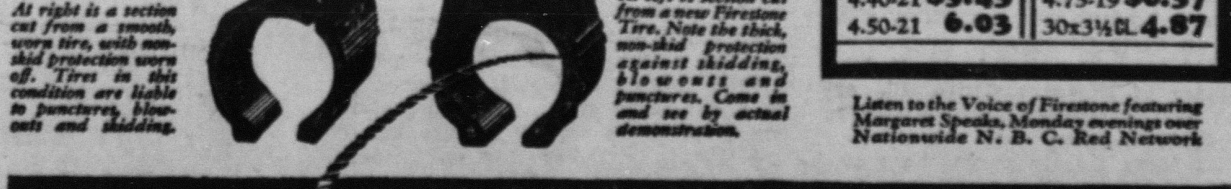
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