

# The GARDEN MURDER CASE

by S. S. VAN DINE

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## CHAPTER XIV—Continued

Zalia Graem glared defiantly at Vance.

"I asked Mrs. Garden what I could do for her, and she requested me to fill the water glass on the little table beside her bed. I went into the bathroom and filled it; then I arranged her pillows and asked her if there was anything else she wanted. She thanked me and shook her head; and I returned to the drawing-room."

"Thank you," murmured Vance, nodding to Miss Graem and turning to the nurse. "Miss Beeton," he asked, "when you returned last night, was the bedroom window which opens on the balcony bolted?"

The nurse seemed surprised at the question. But when she answered, it was in a calm, professional tone.

"I didn't notice. But I know it was bolted when I went out."

He turned leisurely to Floyd Garden. "I say, Garden when you left the drawing-room yesterday afternoon, to follow Swift on your errand of mercy, as it were, after he had given you his bet on Equanimity, where did you go with him?"

"I led him into the dining-room." The man was at once troubled and aggressive. "I argued with him for a while, and then he came out and went down the hall to the stairs. I watched him for a couple of minutes, wondering what else I might do about it, for, to tell you the truth, I didn't want him to listen in on the race upstairs. I was pretty damned sure Equanimity wouldn't win, and he didn't know I hadn't placed his bet. I was rather worried about what he might do. For a minute I thought of following him upstairs, but changed my mind."

Vance lowered his eyes to the desk and was silent for several moments, smoking meditatively.

"I'm frightfully sorry, and all that," he murmured at length, without looking up; "but the fact is, we don't seem to be getting any farther. There are plausible explanations for everything and everybody. Assuming—merely as a hypothesis—that anyone here could be guilty of the murder of Swift, of the apparent attempt to murder Miss Beeton, and of the possible murder of Mrs. Garden, there is nothing tangible to substantiate an individual accusation. The performance was too clever, too well conceived, and the innocent persons seem unconsciously and involuntarily to have formed a conspiracy to aid and abet the murderer."

Vance looked up and went on. "Moreover, nearly everyone has acted in a manner which conceivably would make him appear guilty. There have been an amazing number of accusations. Mr. Kroon was the first victim of one of those unsubstantiated accusations. Miss Graem has been pointed out to me as the culprit by several persons. Mrs. Garden last night directly accused her son. In fact, there has been a general tendency to involve various people in the criminal activities here. From the human and psychological point of view the issue has been both deliberately and unconsciously clouded, until the confusion was such that no clear-cut outline remained. And this created an atmosphere which perfectly suited the murderer's machinations, for it made detection extremely difficult and positive proof almost impossible. . . . And yet," Vance added, "some one in this room is guilty."

He rose dejectedly. I could not understand his manner: it was so unlike the man as I had always known him. All of his assurance seemed gone. Then he swung round quickly, and his eyes swept angrily about the room, resting for a brief moment on each one present.

"Furthermore," he said with a staccato stress on his words, "I know who the guilty person is!"

There was an uneasy stir in the room and a short tense silence which was broken by Doctor Siefert's cultured voice.

"If that is the case, Mr. Vance—and I do not doubt the sincerity of your statement—I think it your duty to name that person."

Vance regarded the doctor thoughtfully for several moments before answering. Then he said in a low voice: "I think you are right, sir." Again he paused and, lighting a fresh cigarette, moved restlessly up and down in front of the window.

"First, however," he said stopping suddenly, "there's something upstairs I wish to look at again—to make sure. You will all please remain here for a few minutes." And he moved swiftly toward the door. At the threshold he hesitated and turned to the nurse. "Please

come with me, Miss Beeton, I think you can help me."

The nurse rose and followed Vance into the hall. A moment later we could hear them mounting the stairs.

Fully five minutes passed, and then the tense silence of the room was split by a woman's frenzied and terrifying cry for help, from somewhere upstairs. As we reached the hallway the nurse came stumbling down the stairs, holding with both hands to the bronze railing. Her face was ghastly pale.

"Mr. Markham! Mr. Markham!" she called hysterically. "Oh, my God! The most terrible thing has happened!"

She had just reached the foot of the stairs when Markham came up to her. She stood clutching the railing for support.

"It's Mr. Vance!" she panted excitedly. "He's—gone!"

A chill of horror passed over me, and everyone in the hall seemed stunned.

In broken phrases, interspersed with gasping sobs, the nurse was explaining to Markham.

"He went over—Oh, God, it was terrible! He said he wanted to ask me something, and led me out into the garden. He began questioning me about Doctor Siefert, and Professor Garden, and Miss Graem. And while he talked he moved over to the parapet—you remember where he stood last night. He got up there again, and looked down. I was frightened—the way I was yesterday. And then—and then—while

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"I was inclined to suspect Miss Beeton almost from the first, for, although everyone here had, through some act, drawn suspicion upon himself, only the nurse had the time and the unhampered opportunity to commit the initial crime. She was entirely unobserved when she put her plan into execution; and so thoroughly familiar was she with every arrangement of the household, that she had no difficulty in timing her every step so as to insure this essential privacy.

"Subsequent events and circumstances added irresistibly to my suspicion of her. For instance, when Mr. Floyd Garden informed me where the key to the vault was kept, I sent her to see if it was in its place, without indicating to her where its place was, in order to ascertain if she knew where the key hung. Only someone who knew exactly how to get into the vault at a moment's notice could have been guilty of killing Swift.

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"No one can blame you," Vance said kindly. "She was one of the shrewdest women I have ever encountered. But the point of it all is, she did not want you—she wanted the Garden fortune as well. That's why, having learned that Swift would share in the inheritance, she decided to eliminate him and leave you the sole beneficiary. But this murder did not, by any means constitute the whole of her scheme."

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"Miss Beeton, I Think You Can Help Me."

I was talking to him—he bent over, and I could see—oh, God—he had lost his balance." She stared at Markham wild-eyed. "I reached toward him . . . and suddenly he wasn't there any more . . . He had gone over!"

Her eyes lifted suddenly over our heads and peered past us transfixed. A sudden change came over her. Her face seemed contorted into a hideous mask. Following her horrified gaze, we instinctively turned and glanced up the hallway toward the drawing-room . . .

There, near the archway, looking calmly toward us, was Vance.

"I told you last night, Miss Beeton," he was saying, his eyes resting sternly on the nurse, "that no gambler ever quits with his first winning bet, and that in the end he always loses." He came forward a few steps. "You won your first gamble, at long odds, when you murdered Swift. And your poisoning of Mrs. Garden with the barbital also proved a winning bet. But when you attempted to add me to your list of victims, because you suspected I knew too much—you lost. That race was fixed—you hadn't a chance."

The nurse, who had been staring at Vance as if petrified, suddenly relaxed her hold on the stair railing, and her hands went to her face in a gesture of hopelessness and despair.

"Yes!" she cried at Vance; "I tried to kill you. Why shouldn't I? You were about to take everything—everything—away from me."

She turned quickly and ran up the stairs. Almost simultaneously Vance dashed forward.

"Quick, quick!" he called out. "Stop her before she gets to the garden."

But before any of us realized the significance of his words, Vance was himself on the stairs. Heath and Smitkin were just behind him, and the rest of us, stupefied, followed. As I came out on the roof, I could see Miss Beeton running toward the far end of the garden, with Vance immediately behind her. Twilight had nearly passed, and a deep dusk had settled over the city. As the girl leaped up on the parapet at the same point where Vance had stood the night before, she was like a spectral silhouette against the faintly glowing sky. And then she disappeared down into the deep shadowy abyss, just before Vance could reach her.

## CHAPTER XV

A half hour later we were all seated in the den again. Heath and the detectives had gone out immediately after the final catastrophe to attend to the unpleasant details occasioned by Miss Beeton's suicide.

Vance was once more in the chair at the desk. The tragic termination of the case seemed to have saddened him. He smoked gloomily

for a few minutes. Then he spoke.

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By WILLIAM BRUCKART  
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Washington.—The government's silver policy again is attracting attention. Several things have caused it. First among these things is the matter of rising prices for foods and other necessities of life, but attention seems to have centered on the silver question again as a result of the Treasury's newly arranged agreement to trade some of its gold for some of the Chinese silver.

Probably the silver question is not as widely discussed as it might be because it is a complex subject and there are not too many people who understand it and its implications.

I cannot refrain at this time, however, from recalling that when the silver act of 1934 was passed, I wrote in these columns a prediction that the country sooner or later would regret that legislation. I repeat the statement now and I do not believe it will be long until the average citizen will recognize what the silver policy is doing to most of us. I mean by that, it will not be long until Mr. John Q. Public will understand that the silver policy has a lot to do with the high prices he is paying for his pound of bacon, his slice of beefsteak or a thousand and one items that he buys at the grocery store. He will feel it, too, when he seeks to buy a new suit of clothes or a new pair of shoes. There can be no argument about it: The affect of inflation brought about by a perfectly ridiculous silver policy is upon us.

Early in July, the Chinese minister of finance visited Washington and called