

# MURDER By An ARISTOCRAT

Mignon G. Eberhart

"Oh, yes. My wound. We must be careful of that. By the way, Miss—Keate, is it?—you might just glance about the room. If the revolver is anywhere, pick it up and put it away."

I did so willingly; I might even say with alacrity. Loaded revolvers lying casually about are apt to make me a little nervous. But though I looked all through the room and the adjoining bathroom, neither room yielded anything in the shape of a revolver. There were some bloodstained towels in the hamper, and some swabs of cotton and gauze stained with blood and mercurochrome in the waste basket, but no revolver. I even looked at his direction in the drawers of the great old fashioned bureau, which offered a faint smell of lavender, an abundance of well laundered shirts, at least 50 ties, and a square bottle marked Gordon's gin and wrapped carefully in some extremely nice white silk underclothes. But no revolver.

"H'm," murmured my patient, who had been watching me with a sort of eager look in his light eyes. "Now, I wonder—I wonder who took it."

"What in the world," I asked rather sharply, my curiosity overcoming my prudence, "what in the world were you doing, cleaning your revolver at 2 o'clock in the morning?"

"What's that?" he said quickly, and when I repeated it he laughed. It was not, however, a pleasant laugh.

"Cleaning my revolver. Is that what Adela said?"

"That's what Dr. Bouligny said."

"So that's it." He paused, looking fixedly at one of the tall pineapple bedposts. "So that's it. Oh, clever Adela. Well, if she says so she's probably right. But don't ask me why I was doing it. To my notion that's the last thing in the world to do at that hour. There are so many nicer ways to pass the night. And if you want to know," he added abruptly, "why I hid that bottle of gin, it's on account of Emmeline."

"Emmeline?" I said, bewildered.

"Emmeline. Emmeline of the well known gimlet eyes. Emmeline of the communicative tongue. Emmeline of the unbribable virtue. With two deaf ears she hears much better than most people with two good ears. Emmeline," he said cruelly, "is Adela's trusted maid. Adela thinks she rules the household, but it's really Emmeline. And as to the gin—Emmeline thinks it her duty whenever I'm here on a visit to see that I've not fallen into any bad ways, and that all the buttons are on my shirts and my socks neatly mended. But she is still maidenly and modest at 50-odd, and my underwear is immune."

"On a visit?" I thought you lived here."

"Not by a long shot," he said. There was an acrid undertone in his voice. "I'm a sort of cousin. What is known as a connection. A connection but still a Thatcher, which is why Adela took me on when I was left without resource at a tender age. She tried to bring me up along with her two brothers. It didn't go so well," he added in a musing way. "Dave and Hilary were even then particularly nasty little snobs, and I was never anything to—"

"You really must try to go to sleep," I interrupted hurriedly. At the moment I had no wish to be told the inner politics of the Thatcher family. Later I was to wish I had overcome my scruples and listened avidly to every word he might say in the hope of

discovering in retrospect some hint, some word, that would give us a clue to the dark mystery that was so soon to involve us.

This time he closed his eyes.

"My shoulder's beginning to throb. Can you shift the bandage a little? The adhesive pulls like hell!"

I bent over him, endeavoring to arrange the dressing less tightly. The wound was in his right shoulder, a flesh wound and not serious but apt to be painful. An odd place, I thought idly, accidentally to shoot one's self.

"Still," said my patient, his light eyes so close to mine faintly mocking, as if he'd read my thoughts, "still, it can be done. By holding the revolver with my left hand, pointing it at my right shoulder, and pulling the trigger. Always assuming it was loaded."

This time I definitely disliked his laugh.

"That's better, isn't it?" I said. "Now, do try to sleep."

I pulled the sheet straight, and as he closed his eyes again, sought my chair.

Probably we both dozed for some time, although I was not as comfortable as I had expected to be in the cushioned chaise longue, feeling, indeed, a little restless and uneasy and retaining an impression of not having closed an eye. But I roused at length to a sudden realization that the lawn was bright with sunshine, vividly green and cool-looking, the birds singing blithely; that the fragrance of coffee and broiling bacon was somewhere about, and that a car was racing furiously up the drive.

I got rather stiffly to my feet, straightened my cap, went to the long window, and stepped through it onto a sort of balcony, vine twined. Down below me ran a graveled drive coming in from the road straight past the house and probably to a garage which I couldn't see. The car, a long yellow roadster, had stopped with a swish of gravel directly under the balcony, and a man was getting out of it. Even allowing for the foreshortening of my view to him, I judged him to be considerably stouter than a man of his age—which was probably in the early forties—should be. I caught only a glimpse of a smooth pinkish face, rather pompous, and thin darkish hair, as he tossed his hat into the seat of the car and ran around the corner of the house.

"That," said my patient's voice back of me, "will be Hilary."

"I thought you were asleep," I said.

He frowned.

"Really, Miss Keate, I can't have this. You seem to have some complex about sleep. It's all you can talk of. Go quietly out into the hall and lean over the staircase and see if you can hear what Adela's telling him."

"Never mind. Never mind. I didn't think you would. All the same, I would like to know. But he'll be up in a moment. Miss Keate, you are about to meet Hilary Thatcher, an ornament to the banking profession, the family, and the county. A man of the bluest of blood and proud of it. In short, a small-town aristocrat, than which there is nothing more aristocratic. Nothing more assured. Nothing more blissfully contented. Nothing," he said, with a curious note of truth, "so effortlessly real. Well—" his voice lost its momentary sincerity—"I do hope you are sensible of the pleasure you are about to have and—Oh, hello there, Hilary!"

Hilary Thatcher stood in

the doorway. He was fleshy, as I had seen, pink, a bit pompous, and nearly bald. His face was freshly shaved, his tie gray-blue like his eyes, and he was too well groomed. There wasn't a thing awry about him, but something in his wary eyes and quick breathing made me feel that he was distinctly alarmed, really violently disturbed, and doing his best to conceal it. There was, however, so far as I could see, not one shade of affectionate concern in his expression.

"Adela tells me you've—had an accident," he said, closing the door. He had looked only at Bayard on the bed, and as I moved to pull down a window shade against the sun he turned with a little start to me. "Oh—is this the nurse? How do you do? Do you mind stepping out of the room for a moment, please?"

He spoke in a nice enough way, and I was about to comply with his request when my patient spoke sharply:

"Stay exactly where you are, Miss Keate."

"But I—"

"Stay here! Now, Hilary. Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks, I—can't stop. I just heard that you were—hurt. Adela phoned my wife. Evelyn—sent me right over. I—Adela says it isn't serious."

Curious that there should be such anxiety in his voice and yet no affection.

"No," said my patient. "It isn't serious. A little painful, but that's all. I shall be well again in a very few days. Odd how I get involved in accidents when I'm here. Do you remember the last time? I got a cramp while we were swimming out on Thatcher lake and couldn't—" he paused to shift the pillow under his head—"couldn't make you hear me call for help."

A bar of sunlight striking Hilary's face made it look paler. He said in a nonchalant way:

"You'll curtail your visits if this keeps up."

"It does begin to seem a sort of fatality," said Bayard. "But I won't stay away. No, I couldn't do that."

"Anything I can do for you?" asked Hilary.

"Nothing, thanks, Hilary. I'm doing very well. Nice of you to stop and inquire."

Hilary's plump pink hand with its wide seal ring closed rather tightly on the door-knob. He opened his mouth as if about to say something further, gave me an annoyed look, hesitated, said, "Well, so long," and left.

My patient laughed softly. His light eyes were narrow and fastened on the closed door with a look that was not friendly, not cozy.

"It's after 7 o'clock," I said, glancing at my watch. "Shall I have your Emmeline bring you up some coffee?"

"Not now. I believe I can sleep some more. You might give me a drink of water."

I brought the water and held his head so he could drink it.

"And, by the way, Miss Keate," he said, leaning back on the pillow with a sort of sigh, "don't let any of the family bring that revolver back into the room. You see," he added, closing his eyes, "the next time it might be a success. The shooting, I mean."

It took an appalled moment or two to discover my voice. "You don't mean someone—you don't think someone shot you—on purpose?"

"I know damn well somebody did," he said.

## CHAPTER II

And as I stood there agast, entirely unable to credit my own ears, he looked up and said:

"I wish you wouldn't talk so much. You won't let me sleep. Breakfast is at 8. You might go down, now. There's a key to the door. Lock it after you and keep the key to yourself. I don't wish to be—disturbed."

was about to be swept downstairs.

Wilson cut the tow rope and steered to the drowning man. He hauled Johnson into the motor boat. The hogs were left to their fate.

College Is Lauded  
Northfield, Minn.—(AP)—Efforts to create international amity were rewarded Saturday as an organization representing men and women of the allied forces in the World War presented Carleton college a medal. Louis A. Johnson of Clarkburg, W. Va., national American Legion commander and Gov. Floyd

"You can't possibly mean what you've just said!"

"Can't I? It's true."

"It can't be true! You are—it's that opiate Dr. Bouligny gave you. You're talking nonsense. Why, you are in the midst of your family. People who love you. People who—"

"As Hilary loves me?"

Well, it was true that Hilary didn't seem especially fond of my patient. But an ambitious and prosperous young banker, such as one felt Hilary to be, does not shoot a man simply because he has no love for him. Besides, there was Miss Adela Thatcher with her elegant voice and her lavender silks and her well bred face. And there was the air of the house; that indescribable quality of dignity and simplicity and honesty and—I hesitated and finally used Bayard's bitter word—of aristocracy. No, I could not reconcile Bayard's accusation with what I had seen of the Thatchers. I said:

"You don't know what you are saying."

"My dear nurse," said Bayard Thatcher, "I don't care whether you believe me or not. It doesn't matter in the least. Now, do go away and let me sleep."

"Who," I asked, "shot you?"

"I don't intend to tell you," he said, smiling again. "Run along and get your breakfast."

With which he closed his eyes firmly and disregarded a further question or two, and when I emerged from freshening myself up with the aid of the mirror in the bathroom, he was apparently sound asleep. I drew the shades farther down to keep the room cool, put a glass of fresh water on the table beside his bed, and tiptoed to the door. I remember the key in the lock caught my eye, and finally, feeling rather silly and ashamed, I locked the door behind me and put the key in my pocket.

I felt sillier when I glanced along that wide, pleasant hall with its windows opening upon a placid summer morning, its worn old rugs, its open doors which gave glimpses of airy bedrooms, fresh and lovely in their delicate chintzes and crisp curtains. Along the wall opposite was a mirror, beautifully polished, and here and there were bookshelves laden with worn books which I learned later were the overflow from the generous library downstairs. No, decidedly it was not the kind of place where the thing Bayard had suggested could possibly occur.

On the landing of the stairs I came upon a housemaid in fresh green chambray and snowy apron. She was on her knees polishing the steps and looked up to say a pleasant good morning. Apparently she knew of my presence and my mission, for she showed no trace of surprise and told me breakfast would be served in a quarter of an hour. She was a rather plain girl, solid and very neat: Exactly the housemaid one would expect Adela Thatcher to select. Her name was Florrie.

After a placid breakfast with Miss Adela and Janice—Adela looking a bit more austere in gold-rimmed eyeglasses and crisp white linen, and Janice unbelievably lovely above the pink roses she brought to the breakfast table—during which the conversation was politely and blandly held to gardens without a word of Bayard or revolvers or wounds or doctors, I returned to my patient's room.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## Great Dane Patrols Coast With Guards

Plymouth, Mass.—(UP)—"Rumpus," the huge Great Dane mascot of the Manomet Point coast guard station, never misses making at least two patrols nightly with surfmen.

The dog has been trained to carry messages to the station should mishap befall the patrol.

B. Olson of Minnesota were speakers. Johnson said Carleton was chosen as the "most outstanding institution in the United States in the small college group" in foreign relations work.

Johnson said he represented 8 million veterans of 10 nations, "who know first hand the frightful disasters caused by lack of understanding among nations."

Just Girls From Answers.  
Jill: I'm going to marry Jack.  
Ann: Well, when I refused him he said he didn't care what happened to him.

## WITTY KITTY

By NINA WILCOX PUTNAM



The girl-friend says that she knows a 200-pound woman who has taken up horseback riding to reduce, and the horse has lost ten pounds in less than a week.

(© Bell Syndicate.)—WNU Service.

## Man Power Displaces Machinery in Russia

Magnitogorsk, Soviet Russia's huge modern steel plant, is being erected by means of comparatively little construction equipment. Sheer brute force—the strength of thousands of peasant hands—takes the place of equipment—steam shovels, trench excavators, power derricks and motor trucks—which Soviet Russia cannot afford to buy abroad.

The same project could undoubtedly

edly be carried out in America with one-quarter or one-fifth the number of workers. American construction engineers, accustomed to working at home with the most modern labor-saving installations, are amazed that so much has been accomplished at Magnitogorsk without machinery.

Earth excavation by millions of cubic yards, concrete poured by hundreds of thousands of tons, building material and other supplies unloaded from endless miles of railroad cars—all this work done with little more than hand-made shovels and wheelbarrows.

A 35-ton steel girder was put into place wholly by hand power with the aid of elementary gin poles. Thus are the peasants of the steppes being transformed into the working legions needed to man the new industries.—Miles M. Sherover in Current History.

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## Rescue Nearly Cost Farmer His Life

Vincennes, Ind.—(UP)—Rescuing marooned swine from high water nearly cost Ralph Johnson, 33, Decker farmer his life. Johnson and Chick Willis were taking hogs from elevated spots in a flood along the White river. Their rescue fleet consisted of two john-boats towed by a motor boat. With 18 hogs aboard including a mother hog and her several young—all with their feet tied—

the rescuers started across the swollen river. Willis was manning the motor and Johnson rode one of the john-boats with the refugees.

In midstream, where the water was approximately 35 feet deep, a large hog loosed his feet. He immediately crowded to one side of the boat. The boat—unbalanced—upset.

This caused the middle boat in which Johnson was riding, to overturn. Johnson was dumped into the swift current. Heavy clothes handicapped him and he