

# MURDER By An ARISTOCRAT

Mignon G. Eberhart

The moonlight was so clear on us then that I could see her face quite definitely. Her lovely sad face, and her slender white arms, and the soft outlines of her frock. She was twisting a fold of the white silk nervously in her fingers, twisting and folding it tightly. I watched her idly for a moment. Then I jumped to my feet.

A new and amazing theory had flashed into my mind.

That piece of tightly folded paper that I had found on the Sarouk rug there in Dave's study — had I found there immediately after Bayard's death was discovered.

Could it possibly mean what I thought it might mean?

## CHAPTER XVII

Janice murmured something in surprise at my abrupt motion, and I suppose I replied. I don't know what I said, for I was only anxious to get to my room. I left her sitting there among the roses, with the moonlight soft on her beauty. As I reached the lawn I met Allen. He looked grave but very tall and cool and resourceful, and his eyes were shining.

As I emerged from the shadows of the shrubbery he said quickly and eagerly:

"Is it you?" — and in a different tone, "Oh, Miss Keate. I caught the flash of your white skirt there in the shadow. I thought—" he stopped abruptly, and I did something that, considering the circumstances, was in very bad taste. I said, "She's in the rose garden," and walked rapidly toward the house.

I had no romantic notion that Janice and Allen would fall promptly into each other's arms. Thoughts travel swiftly, and they could not have failed to realize what Dave's death meant to them. But Janice was a sensitive woman; she had temperament and pride. All Allen could do then was give her the comfort of his presence; talk to her of the things that must be done; love her and protect her and try to shield her.

In my unwontedly tender mood I found myself strolling with slower and slower steps across the moonlit lawn, thinking of the two in the rose garden and of the soft dusky shadows and of what they might be saying and feeling.

Once at the door, however, I walked hurriedly through the still, polished spaces of the hall, up the dim stairway with its gleaming handrail, and toward my own room. As I passed Adela's door it opened and Dr. Bouigny emerged.

"Ah, Miss Keate," he said. "We have finally got Miss Thatcher to sleep. I think she'll rest all night, but you'd better take your room next to hers here, in case she needs you during the night. I've left a sedative if she needs it. Florrie is quite recovered; I just went up to see her; she can be up and about her work tomorrow."

I assented and watched his thick figure move along the hall toward the stairway. He looked old and weary; his shoulders were stooped, and his body sagged, and he went slowly down the stairs.

I turned into my own room. Owing to the delay there had been about getting my supply of fresh uniforms the wrinkled and soiled uniforms I had worn had still not been sent down to be laundered. I hunted feverishly among them, diving into the pockets rapidly, and in only a moment or two found what I sought, the little tightly folded piece of paper I had picked up there in the study immediately after we had found

Bayard dead.

Adela had been telephoning, I remembered. And I remembered, too, how she had first asked me to telephone for the doctor and then had changed her mind suddenly and said, "No, I'll go." And I had followed her into the small room and had picked up almost at her feet that tiny folded paper.

There was one way to attempt a proof of the amazing explanation that had occurred to me.

I glanced at my watch. It was something after 11, and the house had been very silent when I came upstairs. In all probability I could do what I wished to do without being seen, and an inner voice cautioned me that it would not be well for me to be seen.

I waited for a long time. I heard Janice's light step go past my door. I thought I heard Evelyn's voice speaking to Hilary and his reply before another door closed with a decisiveness which led me to think that Evelyn's hand had propelled it. I waited until the moon was high and white and the whole house had sunk into complete stillness—as complete a silence as if there were not another living soul besides myself in its dark, wide old walls.

When I finally ventured from the comparative safety of my own room into the silent gleaming spaces of the hall, the rustle of my uniform sounded loud and sharp through the stillness. I felt uneasy, as if eyes were watching me from some place, and it was difficult to plunge into the dark stair well. And yet I was going on no errand of positive danger. I was not, I certainly hoped, going to telephone, in Dave's study.

The lower hall was as usual dimly lighted, but the drawing rooms, so peaceful by day, were by night great black caverns, and at the door of the library I hesitated. It was all so silent. So black. The room so large. And over there by the table we had found Bayard's body.

I sought for but did not find the button which would turn on the electric light. Finally, my eyes becoming more accustomed to the darkness, and finding that the reflected moonlight from the white lawn actually served faintly to dispel the blackness in the room, I gave up trying to find the light and groped my way across to the study door. The furniture along the way loomed up dimly black and solid, and I felt, absurdly perhaps, that almost any dreadful thing might be crouching behind the davenport or in the shadow of the great leather chairs, or even behind the carved oak screen at the fireplace. But I did reach the study door, opened it, and entered.

There I had no difficulty in discovering the light switch, although a moment of panic caught me and brought my heart pounding to my throat as I brushed against the foot of the couch where Dave's body had lain.

The desk light, shaded with green, sprang into view and lighted softly the small room. The telephone stood beside it on the desk.

I took a long breath. A moment more, and my errand would be accomplished, and I would be free to take to my heels if I wished and fly from those horror-laden shadows.

I took the tightly folded paper from my pocket and bent over the telephone.

After an absorbed moment or two I straightened up. I did not know whether I felt sad or triumphant. But I did

know the truth about the telephone.

The instrument was an old fashioned desk set, with a mouthpiece on a standard and a separate receiver which hangs on its hook when the telephone is not in use and which, on being lifted, automatically connects the telephone. That tightly folded wad of paper fitted exactly into the narrow slot along which the hook moves up and down.

I sank into a chair near the desk and sat there staring at the telephone. I inserted the paper above the hook and took down the receiver as if about to telephone, and there was, of course, no connection: I might dial as long as I liked and get no one.

I inserted the paper below the hook; the receiver might, in that case, be left on the hook, but, since it was an automatic telephone, anyone might call that number indefinitely and still get the busy signal.

But when I entered the study, following Adela, just after the discovery of Bayard's death, she had been using the telephone, and the wad of paper was at my feet. And I had heard from Janice and Evelyn no mention at all of the telephone; they had not said that Bayard had the telephone in his hand; had not, in the shock of discovery, appeared to have so much as looked at the telephone.

There was only one thing that was clear in my mind, but it was highly significant. And that was that Adela's telephone conversation with Bayard—which, in my mind, and I'm sure in others, had gone so far to establish a conviction that Bayard had been murdered after Adela and Janice had left the house—might possibly have been no conversation at all. I had heard the telephone ring, it is true, and I had so distinctly heard it break off in the middle of one of its peals that I was sure someone had answered it. But a child would have known that if the connection at the other telephone had been suddenly broken, the bell of this telephone would instantaneously stop ringing.

If that folded piece of paper meant what I thought it meant, Adela's story of the telephone conversation with Bayard after every one of the Thatchers was out of the house meant precisely nothing.

Or, rather, it meant that Bayard was dead before Adela left the house. Before Adela, clad in her dainty lavender frock with her eyeglasses dangling from their ribbon and her parasol carefully lifted to shield her from the sun, had walked composedly along the broad turf path on her way to the Benevolent Aid Society.

It was not possible. It was not, I repeated to myself, possible.

But if it were true we must reconstruct the whole story of the crime. In the first place, it automatically released Hilary from suspicion. But then, if Bayard was already dead when Adela left the house that afternoon and she had arranged that contrivance on the telephone—what did that mean? I leaned my head on my hand and stared at the rich tones of the small Sarouk rug. The rug which still bore, hidden in its thick nap and concealed by the small, tightly interwoven figures, the stain of Bayard's blood.

If Bayard was dead when Adela left the house that afternoon, the field of suspects was thereby still more limited. With my own eyes I had seen Allen and Dave leave the house. Bayard had sent me to the arbor. Only Janice and Adela were in the house with him. And Florrie.

Florrie. But Florrie had left the house before Janice came out of it with her baskets over her arms and her small white hat on her head, and from

Janice's story, as I had heard it that night, I had received a distinct impression that Janice had come directly from her brief and unpleasant interview with Bayard out of the house, into the garden to cut the flowers for Mrs. Steadway, and thence to the garage and away. If Janice had come directly from Bayard she had talked to him after Florrie had left the house.

There were still Higby and Emmeline; they were always to be included among that extremely short list of possible suspects, but in spite of Hilary's spirited and rather ingenuous defense of himself that very afternoon—a defense which, of course, was based upon the possible guilt of either Emmeline or Higby—I did not feel that either of the two was guilty. The small incident of the silver spoon on the floor of the library, upside down with a sticky little pool of purple jelly under it, went a long way in my mind toward proving Emmeline's innocence of the crime. It was too trivial a thing to have been deliberately evaded; if Emmeline had been set upon proving her innocence of Bayard's death she would have arrived at some far more ambitious a plan.

I was equally reluctant to suspect Higby; it was barely possible that he had arranged some highly unusual and ingenuous method by which to keep the lawnmower running while he crawled into the library windows, entered Dave's study, and shot Bayard with Dave's revolver—the only revolver in the house, hadn't Janice said? — but since the diamonds had not been stolen at all, what could have been Higby's purpose? With the memory of that monotonous whir of the lawnmower in my mind I did not think it a likely solution. Besides, the little I had seen of Higby did not lead me to believe that he could, by any stretch of the imagination, accomplish any undertaking which involved much use of brain cells.

But by excluding Florrie, Higby, and Emmeline, and granting which was only supposition, after all that the telephone incident was as I reasoned it to be, only Adela and Janice were left as possible suspects. And while I could readily have believed that Adela would undertake almost any subterfuge in order to turn suspicion from her family, or any task to protect and further their interests, still I could scarcely suspect her of out-and-out murder. And Janice, to me at least, was equally inculpable.

But what, exactly, had been done with that tightly folded piece of paper and why? The trick of breaking the connection from the other end could have been accomplished without plugging the slot of the telephone hook. Perhaps Adela had wanted to leave the telephone there, with the receiver off the hook as if Bayard was in the very act of telephoning when he was killed; yes, that might easily have been the way of it. If Bayard was actually dead before Adela left the house, and she knew it and wished it to look as though he'd been killed after every member of her family was safely out of the house, she might have done exactly that. Then her story of the telephone conversation (which, no doubt, she had taken care the druggist should hear) would be even more convincing if Bayard were found with the telephone as if he had been talking through it. It would be, in fact, all but conclusive as an alibi for her family.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

### LONGEST LESSON HELD

Austin, Tex. —(UP)—The session of the 43rd Texas Legislature, which adjourned last month, was the longest continuous session ever held by Texas lawmakers. It began on January 10 and continued 143 days. An 140-day session many years ago had been the longest.

reach 50 per cent when all returns are in.

### YOUNGEST COLLEGE HEAD

Oregon City, Ore. —(UP)—Youngest college president in the United States is Lucien Kock, 25, former Oregon City boy. He heads Commonwealth College, Menlo Park, where \$40 a quarter pays all expenses. Kock worked his way through the local high school as an employe of a printing shop. He later graduated from Commonwealth College, and was for a year an instructor at University of Wisconsin.

## Side Glances

By George Clark



"Great guns! Why did you buy that brand? We haven't any stock in that company."

### Park Foreman Tames

#### Wildcats as Pastime

Yosemite National Park, Cal.—(UP)—Peter Topp, foreman of the Yosemite fish hatchery, has a hobby.

As relaxation from his duties, overseeing the hatchery, he tames wildcats.

He has two of the animals trained to come when he calls them, stand on their hind legs, and eat bits of meat from his hands.

### Veterans Protest Pension

#### Paid Admiral Byrd

St. Louis —(UP)—St. Louis veterans who served with the Second Division during the World War passed a resolution calling upon President Roosevelt to make an

inquiry into the pension being paid Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd.

The resolution contends that "Admiral Byrd now is in receipt of \$4,600 a year pension for a certain disability due to peacetime service, and . . . even though he is supposed to be physically handicapped, he has since retirement been called back to active service on three different occasions during all of which periods he has shown no evidence of a physical disability. . . .

"Now, be it resolved, that we . . . respectfully request the President of the United States . . . that a thorough investigation be conducted of Admiral Byrd's physical condition . . .

Supplying London with gas calls for more than 6,400 miles of mains.

## Jigging on a Broken Leg

From the New York World-Telegram.

Jigging on a broken leg that hasn't healed is a foolish thing to do. There can be only one result—collapse.

That is why the giddy condition of industry and agriculture at the present moment is causing the administration to worry. Because these two are able to crawl out of bed after their long siege of sickness they think they are cured. The administration knows they aren't and won't be for a long time unless they take the medicine prescribed for them.

Automobile sales have increased 80 per cent and the automobile industry no longer sees why it should join others in the move for shorter working hours and higher wages. So it goes, most of the way down the line. The farmer with wheat at a dollar has forgotten what he knew two months ago—that controlled production is the only cure for his recurrent malady.

The new business boom was conceived in the human trait of thrift. The country saw that President Roosevelt could and would increase prices. Every one with an extra dollar in his pocket commenced buying the things he would need in the immediate future. Manufacturing plants have ordered materials for six months ahead. Stores have stocked their shelves.

But this is not prosperity. The 12,000,000 unemployed are not buying, nor are the men and women whose incomes have been deflated until they are barely large enough to cover necessities of life. For the new rush of orders has not meant a rush of employment. It has meant chiefly longer hours for those already employed.

A few weeks ago we all knew that it was necessary to increase the purchasing power of wage earners to achieve real prosperity. We knew that permanent economic recovery depended on jobs and adequate wages for every able-bodied person. We know it today, if we stop to think.

The president's industrial recovery program is just as sound as it was when an enthusiastic Congress approved it, with business men and labor leaders applauding. If every important industry had been ready with a short week minimum wage code as soon as the law was signed we would today be in the midst of a less spectacular but more dependable rise toward recovery.

As it is, the medicine has proved so powerful that it started working before it was applied, and a corrective is needed at once—such a one as is found in the temporary plan for an immediate 35-hour work week and \$14 minimum wage for industry proposed by the recovery administration.

A temporary universal wage-and-hour scale will put men and women back into the shops and mills without delay and will increase their wages to the point where they can buy the stocks on the store shelves, so that storekeepers may buy again, so that mills may keep on running, so that workers may keep on having jobs and decent wages.

It's hard to take medicine when you're feeling frisky, but it is harder to have to start the cure over again after a bad relapse.

### Air Ambulances Planned

#### For Distant Soviet Towns

Moscow —(UP)—Air ambulances and flying hospitals to serve distant corners of the vast Soviet land will be built by the commissariat of health, according to a recent announcement. . . . Eventually the fleet of airplanes for medical service may prove useful in war. Meanwhile it will bring quick relief to many places in the Union. . . . When necessary the air ambulances will be used to transport

patients to hospitals in the larger centers. The government has appropriated 4,000,000 rubles to begin the construction of the medical air fleet.

### 45-YEAR-OLD CAKE USED

Salt Lake City, Utah. —(UP)—R. H. Welch has a cake which has served as a continuous emblem of marriage for 45 years. It was first used at his wedding in Logan, Utah, 45 years ago. Recently, a piece of it was served at the wedding of his son, R. F. Welch, and the father still has it — awaiting additional weddings.

## STATE FAVORS HICKORY TREES

Harrisburg, Pa. —(UP)—The Pennsylvania department of forests and waters has called on farmers to restock their woodlots with hickory trees.

The department considers hickories among the most valued

American trees, particularly for use as fuel.

Pennsylvania forests have six of the 16 known species of the tree in North America.

For planting, the department recommended mixing the hickories with other forest trees, scattered singly or in groups in young forests or in openings among older timber, where there is little or no shade.

Since hickory trees are difficult to transplant, the department said it was preferable to plant the nu-

### Oregon Tax Delinquents

#### Placed at 44.73 Per Cent

Salem, Ore. —(UP)—Tax delinquency in the state of Oregon for the first half of 1933 has been placed at 44.73 per cent. The amount of taxes yet unpaid amounts to \$9,078,883.58. Delinquencies during 1933 were 38 per cent.

Three counties have not reported to the state tax commission as yet, but commission members estimate the state delinquency will