

MURDER By An ARISTOCRAT

Mignon G. Eberhart

Evelyn or Janice had certainly been the last person to see Bayard alive. I could not believe that Janice with her loveliness and her youth and her charm had killed Bayard. And Evelyn would have had to have a very urgent motive for murdering him; it would have had to be a motive that even her gift for expediency and her extremely practical intelligence could discover no other possible way to satisfy. And while it's true that a woman like Janice, passionately and hopelessly in love, may be impelled to do extraordinary things—still I don't know that she need take to manslaughter as a relief for her feelings.

But there was the time and opportunity Janice had had—there was the egg basket and the revolver and that compromising episode in the kitchen the very next morning following the murder. There was no escaping the deduction that she'd known the revolver was in that basket and that she'd gone to the refrigerator either to be sure it was still undetected or to remove it to a safer place.

A dozen pictures of Janice returned to me: The frightened, beautiful girl in soft yellow chiffon, bravely holding her fright in leash and showing me into Bayard Thatcher's room; the slim child in green dimity working among the flowers, herself lovelier than any of them; the tortured woman with the spent white face leaving her love and her lover without surrender there at the foot of the stairs, with the still summer night and the moonlight and shadows and the scent of the roses outside. And there was her letter with its pride and pain and honesty. And there was the girl of the afternoon, happy and warm in spite of herself because Allen was there beside her, and holding that dark red rose to her cheek as if that were the one thing she might caress.

No, it couldn't be Janice. Yet Bayard Thatcher had certainly been murdered. I always came back to that.

Twilight was coming on when I went downstairs. That night dinner was a silent and a rather dreadful meal. Those desperate efforts to keep up appearances had flagged from very weariness with the long and trying day, and I daresay everyone dreaded tomorrow's ordeal. Tomorrow, when they would lay Bayard's body away with those other Thatchers, and would know, every one of them, that in their small circle was that one who had murdered him. No, it was no pleasant thing to anticipate, and there was no escaping it. There were, even, no more telegrams to be opened and read and discussed with a determined pretense of the ordinary and the commonplace. Flowers, however, had begun to come with the arrival of the evening train; they had been stored in tubs of cold water in the summer kitchen, but among them were lilies whose cloying fragrance had filled the house before the sheaf was removed, and which now clung to everything, a ghostly notice of the ordeal to come.

To my surprise Janice was white and tired and failed to catch the occasional effort Evelyn made to introduce some safe topic of conversation. The meal was half over before I discovered why; somehow, I had expected her to be greatly relieved from alarm and anxiety by the return of her letter and to show it in her face and bearing. But, possibly from not having had an overwhelming amount of experience in such matters, I am rather clumsy. I had not perceived that her distress and anxiety as to who

had read her letter would be greater than her relief at getting it into her own hands once again. After all, it might have been kinder to tell her.

After dinner we sat out on the porch in the quiet, deepening summer night. There was very little said. The greens of the lawn lost themselves in shadow; the cigarettes became small red spots of light; the street lights away down at the corner made the trees loom huge and black and far away, with leaves edged in light silver where the light touched them. The moon came up finally; the dusk was lost, and the shrubs and trees stood out black against the white lawn, and white strip of road. The moon, I thought idly, was at its full.

After a long time Evelyn murmured something about going home, and Adela stirred to say, out of the darkness beside me, that she'd like them to stay there again for the night. There was no appeal in her deliberate voice, but I felt she wanted Hilary and Evelyn near her. Evelyn agreed at once.

"Allen won't mind staying over at the house alone," she said. "But I'll want a few things from home. Allen, will you take the car over and ask Julia to pack my overnight bag. Tell her to put in that new white silk. The crepe with the long sleeves; she'll know the gown I mean. And the white hat that goes with it. And gloves. Tell her to fold the silk carefully, I don't want to have to press it. We'd better wear white tomorrow, Janice. Adela will wear black with her long crepe veil, but I think plain white summer dresses with white hats would be better for us to wear. People will like it. Do you mind, Allen?"

"I hope I get the right things," said Allen, rising from the step. Against the moonlit lawn his tall figure looked strong and full of life and vitality. His cigarette was a small red comet across the lawn, and he said:

"Better come along, Janice. The drive will do you good."

"Oh, no, no," said Janice. There was a hint of panic in her voice. Of what had she been thinking, I wondered, as she sat there so quiet in the shadow of the clematis vine and watched Allen in the moonlight, and felt the soft summer night and wanted, perhaps, the touch of his hands and his arms and his mouth. Poor Janice, who knew so well what love could do. But perhaps Allen suffered more when he thought of Dave. Dave! With some chagrin I reminded myself that my morals were tottering—morals which had served me well for longer than it's necessary to mention. There was Dave, too, to be pitied; Dave whose wife no longer loved him; Dave whose friend was treacherous. Dave, who, by all rights, ought to be pitied more than any of them. But for the life of me I could not feel particularly sorry for Dave; perhaps it was owing to his curious detachment; his enigmatic lack of interest in his lovely wife, his morose silences, his somber, withdrawn look.

Warily I found myself again in that hopeless circle of speculation and resolved to leave it at least for the night. But I was not permitted to do so; one of the strangest things about the Thatcher case was the inexorable destiny which dragged me into every phase of it.

Evelyn, too, may have caught some meaning in Janice's voice, for she rose.

"Perhaps I'd better go along after all," she said firmly. "We'll be awfully hurried tomorrow morning, and I'd better be sure I have everything.

I'll bring your things, too, Hilary. I think I know what you'll want."

The sound of the car shook the still night. Janice had shrunk back into the shadow of the vine. "Such a few moments," she had said, "out of all the years. All the rest such a dreadful waste."

Adela stood. "I'll say good night," she said. "As Evelyn says, we'll be hurried in the morning." She sighed. "I only hope no one says anything about our hurrying the funeral so. It doesn't seem fitting not to wait—but tomorrow's Sunday—perhaps they'll think—" She checked herself and said in a more collected way, "Will you come with me, please, Miss Keate? I am very tired."

I went with her, of course. She did look dreadfully weary. I was giving her a back massage when someone knocked at the door. At Adela's word Florrie entered.

"Well, Florrie, what is it?" asked Adela.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Miss Adela," and Florrie. "But I thought you might have some aspirin. I've got one of my bad headaches. And I don't want to be sick for tomorrow, ma'am. There'll be a lot to do."

"Why, certainly, Florrie. There ought to be some in the medicine chest, there in my bathroom. Go and look."

But there wasn't, it developed, and Adela sent Florrie to Janice's room.

"I'm sure she has some. Just look in the medicine chest in her dressing room. She always keeps it on hand for Mr. Dave's headaches."

Florrie went away. It was perhaps five minutes later that she returned. At first sight of her eyes, shining a little, and that odd look of malice in her usually stolid face, I straightened up and looked at the thing she held in her hands. It was a small white felt hat. Adela looked, too, and became an old, old woman before my very eyes.

"I thought I ought to bring this to you, ma'am," said Florrie, her voice shrill with a kind of ugly triumph. "I saw it accidentally. It was stuffed back of the radiator in Miss Janice's dressing room, ma'am. Right there below the medicine cabinet."

I have never before or since admired Adela as I did at that moment. She said: "Give it to me, Florrie. Miss Keate, haven't you some aspirin for her?"

I did have: A large boxful of tablets. A pasteboard box into which I had tumbled the tablets for convenience and which I had labeled. It was in my small instrument bag, and I got it at once and thrust box and all into Florrie's hand and told her not to take too many of them.

"You may go now, Florrie," said Adela. Her bluish lips looked stiff, and her eyes like ice. The girl went; she looked frightened.

Adela did not try to dissemble before me. I suppose she knew it was no use. I looked at the small hat.

It was the hat Janice had worn the previous afternoon; I knew it at once. And I remembered with frightful clarity that she had worn it when she entered the house alone, not more than 10 minutes before Bayard was found murdered. And that when, at the alarm, she had appeared in the library beside us all she had worn no hat.

But on the white brim of that small felt hat were four red-brown smudges. I have seen dried blood too often not to recognize it immediately.

Adela said stiffly:

"Take it, Nurse—"

And at that very instant there was a knock on the door, and without waiting for a reply it was pushed open.

Janice stood on the threshold.

Her dark eyes went to me and then to Adela and then fastened upon the hat. It was not nice to see the loveliness leave her face; to see it be-

come a stiff, strained white mask, hiding terror.

CHAPTER X

Many times during my stay in the Thatcher home I was astonished at the Thatcher capacity for utter silence. Utter and complete silence at times when an ordinary person would have burst into frenzied explanations. But I was never more taken aback by that baffling trait than when Janice merely looked at that bloodstained little hat, that dreadful witness against her, for a long moment, and then said:

"What are you doing with my hat?" Her voice was quite steady, but then I had seen something of her powers of self-control. And her face was still white and drained of life.

"Your — hat," said Adela with difficulty. It was not exactly a question or a statement; it was just the utterance of words in a curiously tentative way. She offered, I thought, a chance for Janice to deny the hat.

But Janice said, "Why, certainly. You know it's my hat. What are you doing with it?" "It was—found," said Adela. She looked shrunken and terribly old. "It was found and brought to me."

"Who found it?"

"Florrie."

"Oh," said Janice. "Oh, Florrie. Florrie seems to be taking quite an interest in my affairs lately. Well, if you are quite through with it, I'll take it."

She walked swiftly to the bed and picked up the hat. I noted that her slender fingers seemed to avoid touching the brim; that brim that showed where four fingers had touched it and had left so ugly a mark of their pressure. To complete my bewilderment she bent over Adela, kissed her cheek lightly, said, "Have a good night, darling. Don't worry about tomorrow," and turned away. At the door she remembered my presence and said over her shoulder, "Good night, Miss Keate."

She said it coolly, her dark eyes unfathomable, her slender figure erect, her chin up, and the tell-tale little hat crushed in her hand. Then she closed the door firmly behind her, and Adela sighed.

"You see, Miss Keate, we were wrong. We both leaped to an unjust and horrible conclusion. Or not so much a conclusion as a very dreadful suspicion. It only goes to show how one's nerves may trick one. We are both unstrung by the dreadful and shocking circumstances of Bayard's death. He was killed by a burglar, and we know it. And yet merely the sight of—the sight of—" She could not say the word and substituted, "merely the stain on Janice's hat made us both fear—" Deep waters here, Adela. And she realized it. For she checked her words to cough delicately, to hunt for a handkerchief, to ask me for a drink of water. And finally to resume:

"Absurd of us. When there are so many ways that could happen. Of course, I know my own family. I know none of them are capable of—that Janice is not—that she could not—" She stuck again. Poor Adela, she could not bring herself to voice her thought.

As for me, I should have been much happier if Janice had said something—anything—to explain that hat. Her silence was almost as damning as the bloody fingerprints; more so, in fact, for I felt if there'd been an innocent explanation she would have given it.

And the grim little incident brought rather forcibly to my mind the danger in which I stood. I, the stranger; I, the outsider. I said quietly: "By the way, Miss Thatcher, you won't need me past tomorrow. I can return to the hospital after the funeral."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Too Early, in Fact, From Le Mostifue. "You're always late. Why, you were late on our wedding day." "But not late enough."

breed, the mixed collie and water spaniel, had had a good time. The dog, property of Mrs. Millie E. Ridgway, is still living, but she is stone deaf. Judged on the usual basis that one year of a dog's life is equivalent to five years of a human's, Toodies is now 55 years old.

To His Credit.

From Toronto Telegram. "Look here, waiter. I've been waiting half an hour for that steak I ordered." "Yes, sir. I know, sir. Life would be worth living if everybody was as patient as you are."

SUMMING UP WISDOM
And he is oft the wisest man who is not wise at all.—Wordsworth.

STOP WITH SYMPATHY
Don't mingle your sympathy with advice.



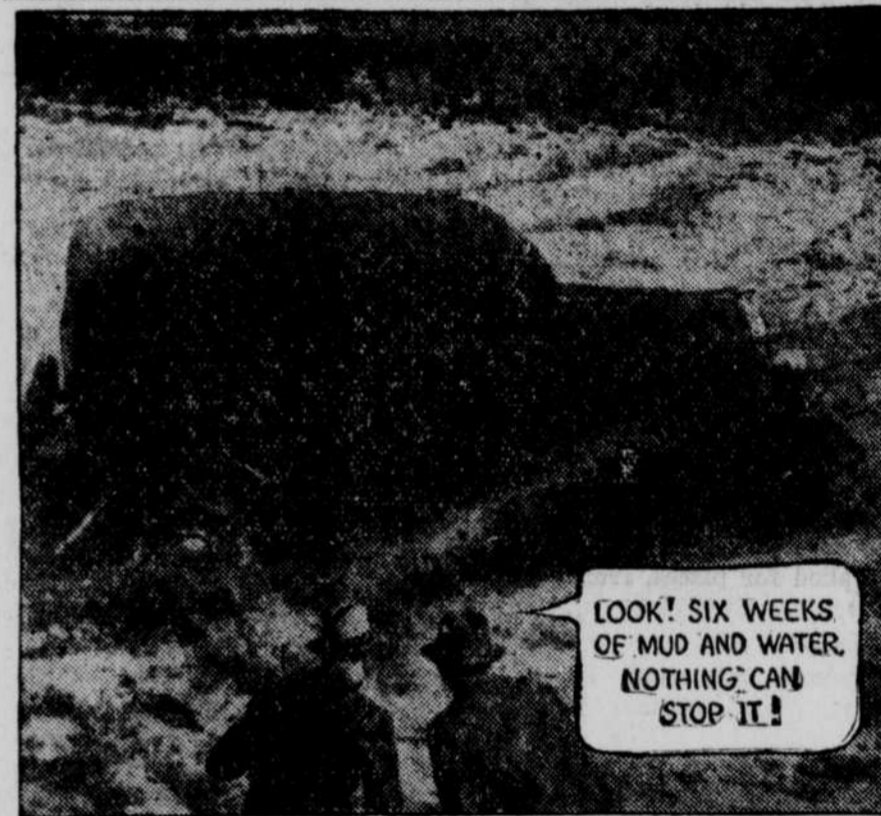
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Patron Shot at Waiter, Then Robbed Car Driver

Kansas City, (UP)—"Snappy service" was the motto of J. R. Brookshire, waiter in a downtown lunchroom here. So when a supposed customer entered a few nights ago, he snapped into action. Hastily he reached under the counter to fill a glass of water. Instantly the customer whipped out a pistol and fired. The bullet smashed into the wall not far from Brookshire's head as he

ducked. The customer fled, kidnaped a taxicab driver, and robbed him of \$4.75.

And Brookshire's movements, as he waited on his next customer were far from snappy.

Vice Consul Has Easiest Job in America, She Says

San Francisco (UP)—Senorita Teresita Arguello, 33, Vice Consul for Nicaragua, in San Francisco, thinks she has the easiest job in America. "All I have to do is attend

many parties," she explained. "Dr. Monteleague, the consul general, doesn't care for the many parties to which the consul is invited, so I go instead."

Her presence is always welcome to other consular representatives here because Senorita Arguello is tall, slim and beautiful. She is the only feminine consular official stationed here.

DOG'S LIFE—17 YEARS Knoxville, Tenn.—Toodies may have led a dog's life in her 17 years, but during that time, thought to be a record age for one of her