

MURDER By An ARISTOCRAT

Mignon G. Eberhart

But Bayard had not been found there on the rug in the study with the receiver off the hook of the telephone and the instrument perhaps near his hand. He had been found in the library, sprawled hideously on the floor. Janice had moved him, Janice, her slender muscles pulling with all their strength, her white hands reddened by their grisly task, had pulled that shattered body across the library floor. And Evelyn had seen Bayard dead in the study. And, if my surmise was correct, Hilary, too, had been in Dave's study while Bayard lay dead on the rug. Any of them might have picked up that telephone and replaced it.

And the train of supposition which I had built from that tiny wad of paper might be entirely wrong.

I sighed wearily and took the paper in my fingers and looked at it again and at that very instant heard a rustle back of me.

I find I cannot adequately describe my feelings as I sat there in that small study, my back to the dark door of the cavernous library, and realized that someone stood in that doorway watching me. Had been watching me perhaps while I fitted that damning piece of paper into the telephone slot. Two men had already come to their deaths in that small room. One death had been a murder. The other death had been so nearly induced by that sad and tragic train of circumstances that in its fundamentals it was murder, too.

Deaths go in threes. Deaths go in threes. It is an old superstition and an unreasonable one. But it has more than a little element of truth in it. I have seen it happen more times in my nursing career than I cared, at that moment, to recall.

Who stood there behind me? I could not turn. I could not breathe.

Was it Adela, Hilary, Evelyn, Janice? Might it be, even, Allen? Or Emmeline?

It was strange that, though I felt no fear of any one of those people, at the same time I felt a very definite and terrifying fear of whoever it was in the doorway. I suppose that paralyzing feeling of terror was owing to some sixth sense; some deeply primitive warning of danger.

Then there was another sound of motion. And a voice said:

"Don't move. I'll shoot." It was Hilary's voice. But a Hilary I had not known before.

Perhaps it is unnecessary to state that I did not move. Indeed, I sat so still that the very beating of my heart seemed for the moment suspended. And it is as well that I did so. For Hilary advanced from behind me and stepped just in the circle of light cast by the green-shaded desk lamp, and I saw that he held a revolver in his hand. And his hand was not very steady. And the revolver was aimed directly at me.

His hair was disheveled, his eyes red and bloodshot, his face pale and puffy, and he wore a dark dressing gown. I never knew how long he had watched me, nor how he had happened to follow me to the study. His voice, too, was unnatural; husky and threatening.

"What are you doing here, when the whole household is asleep?"

I did not like the way his nervous hands caressed the revolver.

"Nothing," I said. "Nothing."

"Answer me! You had some purpose here."

The bit of folded paper rolled from my numb fingers, and his quick eyes caught it. I decided rapidly on a half truth.

"I found that piece of folded paper here on the rug just after Bayard's death," I said rather weakly. "I came to try to discover whether or not it was a clue to the murderer."

His eyes wavered. I felt sure he had not seen the paper before and had no idea as to its possible significance.

"And what did you discover?" he asked in an unpleasant way.

"Nothing." And as I thought he looked faintly undecided as to whether or not to believe me, I added nervously, "Don't you want to put the revolver down? Is it Dave's gun?"

He glanced then at the revolver, as if he had forgotten he was holding it, and back at me.

"I don't believe you," he said. "But if you'll keep quiet I won't shoot."

As a matter of fact, I am inclined to think I was rather nearer an abrupt and complete end than is exactly pleasant to recall, much less experience, during those few moments while Hilary's unsteady fingers touched that revolver. He did not, I am sure, think that it would better conditions to dispose of me in such a manner; he couldn't have meant cold-bloodedly to shoot; but he was in a frame of mind not to know exactly what he was doing. Perhaps my rather obvious and certainly acute discomfort recalled him to himself. He put down the revolver, looked at it rather strangely, said in an absent way, "Yes, it's Dave's gun. It's the only one in the house," and then went on with an abrupt change of tone:

"Look here, Miss Keate. I don't know what you know of this affair of Bayard's murder, or what you don't know. But I'm going to put my cards flat on the table, face up. I'm not by any means a rich man. But I'll give you \$10,000 in cash to leave this house tomorrow morning and forget you've ever been here."

Afterward I was glad the interruption came before I could find my voice. Otherwise I would have said far too much, and the revolver was still conveniently near Hilary's right hand. It was Evelyn who interrupted: She must have heard the whole thing. She said crisply:

"Hilary, you are a fool. Go away. Take that revolver with you." And when he'd gone—and somehow it was not an ignominious departure; there were threat and menace in the solid lines of his shoulders and his thick red neck—she said to me, "Miss Keate, if you have any kind and generous womanly instincts you will forget this—this extraordinary scene." And then she too was gone, and I could hear her firm footsteps crossing the library.

Well, somehow I reached my own room. Somehow I spent the night, imagining every whisper of sound I heard was Hilary trying to get into my room, with Dave's revolver, which Adela must have given into his keeping, in his unsteady pink hand. It seemed to me that Evelyn was asking rather too much of womanly instincts.

After a night of restless dreams and wakeful hours I resolved to see the druggist in the morning and get his impression of Adela's telephone conversation with Bayard. But if it was, as I thought it might well be, a fiction on Adela's part, then Hilary could not have killed Bayard.

When morning came, how-

ever, I did not immediately have an opportunity to leave the house, and it soon developed there was to be no need for the druggist's testimony. Shortly after breakfast Adela summoned us into the library again. She had had only the night to survey the situation, and that had been spent for the most part in drugged slumber. But like any keen-sighted general, she knew what her next move would be; she knew that in trying to extricate Dave she had placed her other brother under suspicion.

We were all there except Dr. Bouigny; all of us tired and hollow-eyed and ill at ease. I think we all knew something was coming. Her first words, however, were such as to shock us into strained attention. For she said calmly:

"The Thatchers appear to have taken to lies. Evelyn did not tell the truth when she said she found Bayard alive. Hilary did not tell the truth when he said he found Bayard alive. And I did not tell the truth." She faltered a little there but resumed, her blue eyes daring us to doubt, her face gray and stern. "I lied when I said I talked to Bayard over the telephone. I did not. He was dead before I left the house."

Hilary was the only one who dared speak. He started forward with a smothered exclamation. Adela silenced him with an imperious motion of her wide white hand.

"Wait, Hilary. Let me tell it. I came downstairs and found Bayard dead in the study. I was afraid Dave would be blamed for shooting him. We all knew Dave had made one attempt upon his life. I was frightened. I knew I must hurry and plan something to draw any possible suspicion from Dave. I thought if I telephoned from town and seemed to talk to Bayard from a place where people could hear me, that might make it appear that Bayard had actually been shot after the time I telephoned, which would be, of course, after the members of the family were out of the house. I even—"

she faltered briefly here again, smoothing the white ruffle on one wrist and looking at it with unseeing eyes—"I even arranged the telephone so it would ring with the receiver actually off the hook—" I suppose I made some gesture there, for Evelyn glanced sharply at me and then back to Adela—"and placed the receiver near Bayard's—Bayard's hand as if he had been using it. I hoped it would look as if he'd been killed after I talked to him and this after everyone who might be thought to be concerned in his death was away from the house."

She stopped, looked at us coldly, and finished: "I went to the drug store and telephoned. I let it ring just once, and at the beginning of another peal I broke the connection. No one could see my left arm, but I leaned against the telephone and talked so Mr. Lelly could hear me. Then I thanked him and went to the Aid Society."

There was a complete silence. Then Hilary said jerkily:

"Adela, you are trying to shield me. I was going to stick to what I'd said in the first place. But it's true. Bayard was dead when I came."

I leaned forward. "Where was the gun?" I asked.

Adela looked at me in a perplexed way.

"I don't know," she said slowly. "I don't remember the gun."

I turned to Hilary. "When you entered the study and found Bayard dead, did you see the revolver? What did you do with it?"

"I didn't have it. I didn't see it. There was no gun." He had answered quickly with an air of defense as if I had accused him of something.

He turned to Evelyn. "There was no gun, was there, Evelyn?"

"No," she said at once and very decisively. "I'm sure there was no revolver there. I feel sure Dave's gun was not—" Perhaps the look on my face stopped her.

Janice had hidden the gun in the egg basket. She had had the egg basket over her arm while she had her last brief words with Bayard. She had told us she hid the revolver on her return to the house late in the afternoon. That she had found Bayard dead then and had hidden Dave's revolver in the basket and carried it to the kitchen in order to protect Dave.

But only a few moments after Janice had left the house with the presumably empty baskets, Adela had found Bayard. Had found Bayard dead. And she had seen no revolver.

Hilary had seen no revolver. Evelyn had seen no revolver. And it had been found late that night in the egg basket.

Too late I saw how dreadfully my injudicious questions had involved Janice. Hilary saw, too, and Allen.

"I refuse to permit Janice to be questioned until she has seen a lawyer," said Allen. He was standing at the side of Janice's chair. He put his firm brown hand on her arm. "Been advised by someone, I mean," added Allen, "who is not a member of this family."

CHAPTER XVIII

It took Hilary an incredulous moment or two to comprehend the full enormity of Allen's suggestion. It was rather alarming to watch his face grow slowly purple with rage. But instead of venting it on Allen, as one might justly have expected, he whirled to me, pointing a forefinger that was literally trembling with anger.

"This is your doing, Nurse," he all but shouted. "If it wasn't for you we wouldn't have got into this damn fix."

"Hilary—" warned Evelyn. He gave his wife a look of fury, but stopped, and Janice said rather sadly:

"But I don't need a lawyer, Allen. I'm perfectly willing to tell the whole truth about the thing. I have already told the truth. I told Miss Keate last night."

"I'm not sure," said Adela slowly, "that any of you have been telling the truth. But I didn't mean—I didn't realize—I had no intention of bringing suspicion upon Janice. Janice had nothing to do with Bayard's death. That is not to be thought of."

"Look here," said Allen. "That's what's the trouble. That's why we are so frightfully entangled. We've all been trying to shield each other. Or rather to shield Dave. Suppose Dave did kill Bayard. He's gone now, and the truth can't hurt him. Why don't we all tell exactly the truth about Bayard's death? If we prove that Dave killed him, it can't hurt—"

"No, no!" cried Janice. "I don't want to know. I don't want you to prove that Dave killed him."

"You are all determined that it was Dave," said Adela coldly. "Why not Allen? Or Hilary? Or any of you, as well as Dave?"

Hilary had barely subsided, and the mention of his name as a possible suspect was like a match to gunpowder.

"I'm not afraid of the truth," he cried. "I've admitted that I found Bayard dead. You all probably know why I said he was alive when I saw him last. It was because I knew people might blame me for his death. Might say I killed him. I thought Dave had killed him, and I still think so. I think Dave's death is an admission that he killed Bayard."

"Dave was not a suicide," said Adela. "I will not let you say that."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

from his home and returned in a most unexpected manner.

A tramp entered the cafe downtown where Grissom works, offering to trade a set of spoons for a meal.

The manager made the trade, brought the spoons to the kitchen and opened the packet.

"I know those spoons," Grissom announced. "I ate with them for seven years."

An accurate division of Lake Erie by Prof. C. E. Sherman of Ohio State University, gives Ohio 3,540 square miles of that body of water.



ALL FOR NOTHING

She watched the door of her new establishment open to admit her first client. Business had started! A good impression must be created upon him!

Hurriedly she grasped the telephone receiver and became engaged in an animated conversation. Then, an appointment having been arranged, she replaced the receiver, and, beaming on her customer asked: "What can I do for you, sir?"

A moment's pause, and then: "If you please, ma'am, I've come to connect the telephone!"—London Tit-Bits.

Theological Mainspring

Two ministers were driving in a cab to the station, and were in some anxiety lest they should miss their train. One of them pulled out his watch and discovered it had stopped.

"How annoying!" he exclaimed. "And I always put such faith in that watch!"

"In a case like this," answered the other, "good works would evidently have answered the purpose better."—Christian Advocate.

Sizing Them Up

The Coach—Yes, sir, our track team is the bone and sinew of the college.

The Professor—Not so very sinewy, but there's enough bone in their heads to make the classification appropriate.—Brooklyn Eagle.

Of Course, Its Dead

She—The hair dresser says there is no life in my hair.

He—That's not strange considering how often it's dyed.—Cincinnati Enquirer.

Pass the Ear-Muffs

Headline: "Husband Leaves in Midst of Wife's Bridge Party; Disappears."

Just a fugitive from the chin gang.—Atlantic Journal.

Just the Eye

Girl—I have broken my glasses. Will I have to be examined all over again?

Optician—No, only your eyes.—Everybody's Weekly.



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FRANKLY SPEAKING

The shop assistant wrapped up the customer's parcel and deftly handed it to him.

"There you are, sir," he said, "and if the goods are not just to your liking we will cheerfully refund the cash."

Farmer Giles sniffed. "Don't tell me such a yarn, young man," he replied.

"Eh? What?" exclaimed the assistant, momentarily taken off his guard.

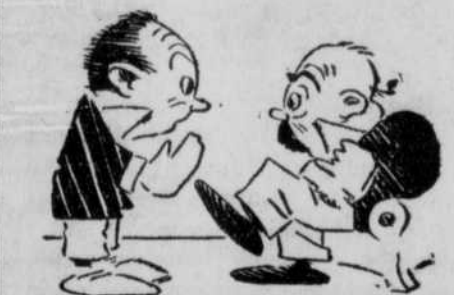
"Ye might g'ive me my money back," said the farmer, "but 'tain't human nature to be cheerful about it.—London Answers.

Signs of Busydays

The busy housewife was making a hurried trip downtown and at the last minute decided to sew a rip in her dress.

On the car she noticed several youngsters looking at her and laughing, and on looking down she found that she had her hands folded nicely in her lap and on one finger was her thumb.

MAKING IT ALL RIGHT



"The deuce you did, well of all the—"

"Oh, it's all right, I told him to send the bill to me."

The Old Coat

Mazie—I'm afraid I'm not going to like my new job.

Mabel—Why, not, dearie? Mazie—The boss told me he didn't mind my being pretty, but he wouldn't stand for me looking into my mirror to see if my nose needed powdering, when I should be looking into the dictionary to see how words should be spelled.

Tinting the Bald Spot

"My dear, why has your husband been sitting on the beach in the brooding sun bareheaded?"

"I've just bought a new gown and John's bald spot clashes dreadfully."

Unnecessary

Prof.—Why don't you take notes in my course?

Dumb #36—Please sir, my father took this course and I have his notes.

Boy Scout Manual

Next Braille Book

Washington—(UP)—Mrs. Norman B. Morrell, Knoxville, Tenn., Red Cross worker who is famous for the many Braille system books she has prepared, has announced that her next project will be making a Boy Scout manual in the blind reading system. It was learned at Red Cross headquarters here.

Mrs. Morrell started her work with Braille books several years ago when she lost her own sight.

Among the books she supervised since that time have been all types, from text books to Carl Akeley's "Africa."

Republican Centenarian Gives Roosevelt Praise

Aberdeen, Wash.—(UP)—Although a teetotaler and a lifelong Republican, Samuel Benn, founder of Aberdeen, celebrated his 101st birthday recently by praising President Roosevelt and the repeal movement.

"Roosevelt is the man of the

hour and will pull the nation out of the depression. The present depression is the worst I have seen in my 101 years," he said.

Speaking of the succession of states favoring repeal of the 18th Amendment, he said he was "glad the nation is getting over its foolishness."

Stolen Spoons Were Returned in Odd Manner

Elk City, Okla.—(UP)—Joe Grissom's spoons were stolen