



THE GARDEN MURDER CASE

By S.S. VAN DINE

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CHAPTER XIII—Continued

"I'm plannin' to entice the murderer into making one more bet—a losing bet . . . Cheerio." And he was gone.

It was a little after half-past two when Vance returned to the apartment.

"Everything is in order," he announced as he came in. "There are no horses running today, of course, but nevertheless I'm looking forward to a big wager being laid this evening. If the bet isn't placed, we're in for it, Markham. Everyone will be present, however. The sergeant, with Garden's help, has got in touch with all those who were present yesterday, and they will foregather again in the Gardens' drawing-room at six o'clock . . . He glanced at his watch and, ringing for Currie, ordered our lunch.

"If we don't tarry too long at table," he said, "we'll be able to hear the second half of the Philharmonic programme. Melinoff is doing Grieg's piano concerto."

But Markham did not go with us to the concert. He pleaded an urgent political appointment at the Stuyvesant club, but promised to meet us at the Garden apartment at six o'clock.

Sergeant Heath was waiting for us when we reached the apartment. "Everything's set, sir," he said to Vance. "I got it here."

Vance smiled a little sadly. "Excellent, Sergeant. Come into the other room."

Heath picked up a small package wrapped in brown paper, which he had evidently brought with him, and followed Vance into the bedroom. Ten minutes later they both came back into the library.

"So long, Mr. Vance," Heath said, shaking hands. "Good luck to you." And he lumbered out.

We arrived at the Garden apartment a few minutes before six o'clock. Detectives Hennessey and Burke were in the front hall.

Vance nodded and started up the stairs. "Wait down here for me, Van," he said over his shoulder. "I'll be back immediately."

CHAPTER XIV

I wandered into the den, the door of which was ajar, and walked aimlessly about the room, looking at the various pictures and etchings. Just then Vance entered. As he came in he threw the door open wider, half pocketing me in the corner behind it, where I was not immediately noticeable. I was about to speak to him, when Zalia Graem came in.

"Philo Vance," she called his name in a low, tremulous voice. He turned and looked at the girl with a quizzical frown.

"I've been waiting in the dining-room," she said. "I wanted to see you before you spoke to the others."

I realized immediately, from the tone of her voice, that my presence had not been noticed.

Vance continued to look squarely at the girl, but did not speak. She came very close to him now.

"Tell me why you have made me suffer so much," she said. "I know I have hurt you," Vance returned. "But the circumstances made it imperative. Please believe that I understand more of this case than you imagine I do."

"I am not sure that I understand." The girl spoke hesitantly. "But I want you to know that I trust you." She looked up at him, and I could see that her eyes were glistening. Slowly she bowed her head. "I have never been interested in any man," she went on—and there was a quaver in her voice. "The men I have known have all made me unhappy and seemed always to lead me away from the things I longed for . . . She caught her breath. "You are the one man I have ever known whom I could—care for."

So suddenly had this startling confession come, that I did not have time to make my presence known, and after Miss Graem finished speaking I remained where I was, lest I cause her embarrassment.

Vance placed his hands on the girl's shoulders and held her away from him. "My dear," he said, with a curiously suppressed quality in his voice, "I am the one man for whom you should not care." There was no mistaking the finality of his words. Vance smiled wistfully at the girl. "Would you mind waiting in the drawing-room a little while?"

She gave him a searching look and, without speaking, turned and went from the den.

Vance stood for some time gazing at the floor with a frown of indecision, as if loath to proceed with whatever plans he had formulated.

I took this opportunity to come out from my corner, and just as I did so Floyd Garden appeared at the hall door.

"Oh, hello, Vance," he said. "I didn't know you had returned until Zalia just told me you were in here. Anything I can do for you?"

Vance swung around quickly. "I was just going to send for you. Everyone here?"

Garden nodded gravely. "Yes, and they're all frightened to death—except Hammle. He takes the whole thing as a lark. I wish somebody had shot him instead of Woody."

"Will you send him in here," Vance asked. "I want to talk to him. I'll see the others presently."

Garden walked up the hall, and at that moment I heard Burke speaking to Markham at the front door. Markham immediately joined us in the den.

"Hope I haven't kept you waiting," he greeted Vance.

"No, Oh, no," Vance leaned against the desk. "Just in time." Markham had barely seated himself when Hammle strutted into the den with a jovial air. Vance nodded to him brusquely.

"Mr. Hammle," he said, "we're wholly familiar with your philosophy of minding your own business and keeping silent in order to avoid all involvements. A defensible attitude—but not in the present circumstances. This is a criminal case, and in the interest of justice to everyone concerned, we must have the whole truth. Yesterday afternoon you were the only one in the drawing-room who had even a partial view down the hallway. And we must know everything you saw, no matter how trivial it may seem to you."

Hammle gave in. "First of all, then," said Vance, without relaxing his stern gaze, "when Miss Graem left the room, ostensibly to answer a telephone call, did you notice exactly where she went?"

"Not exactly," Hammle returned; "but she turned to the left, toward the den. You understand, of course, that it was impossible for me to see very far down the hall, even from where I sat."

"Quite," Vance nodded. "And when she came back to the drawing-room?"

"I saw her first opposite the den door. She went to the hall closet where the hats and wraps are kept, and then came back to stand in the archway until the race was over. After that I didn't notice her either coming or going."

"And what about Floyd Garden?" asked Vance. "You remember he followed Swift out of the room. Did you notice which way they went, or what they did?"

"As I remember, Floyd put his arm around Swift and led him into the dining-room. After a few moments they came out. Swift seemed to be pushing Floyd away from him, and then he disappeared down the hall toward the stairs. Floyd stood outside the dining-room door for several minutes, looking after his cousin, and then went down the hall after him; but he must have changed his mind, for he came back into the drawing-room in short order."

"And what about Floyd Garden?" asked Vance. "You remember he followed Swift out of the room. Did you notice which way they went, or what they did?"

"As I remember, Floyd put his arm around Swift and led him into the dining-room. After a few moments they came out. Swift seemed to be pushing Floyd away from him, and then he disappeared down the hall toward the stairs. Floyd stood outside the dining-room door for several minutes, looking after his cousin, and then went down the hall after him; but he must have changed his mind, for he came back into the drawing-room in short order."

"And you saw no one else in the hall?"

"No, no one else."

"Very good," Vance took a deep inhalation on his cigarette. "And now let's go to the roof-garden, figuratively speaking. You were in the garden, waiting for a train, when the nurse was almost suffocated with bromin gas in the vault. The door into the passageway was open, and if you had been looking in the direction you could easily have seen who passed up and down the corridor." Vance looked at the man significantly. "And I have a feeling you were looking through that door, Mr. Hammle. Your reaction of astonishment when we came out on the roof was a bit overdue. And you couldn't have seen much of the city from where you had been standing, don't you know?"

Hammle cleared his throat and grinned.

"You have me there, Vance," he admitted with familiar good-humor. "Since I couldn't make my train, I thought I'd satisfy my curiosity and stick around for a while to see what happened. I went out on the roof and stood where I could look through the door into the passageway—I wanted to see who was going and what he was doing."

"Thanks for your honesty," Vance's face was coldly formal. "Please tell us now exactly what you saw through that doorway while you were waiting, as you've confessed, for something to happen."

Again Hammle cleared his throat.

"Well, Vance, to tell you the truth, it wasn't very much. Just people coming and going. First I saw Garden go up the passageway toward the study; and almost immediately he went back downstairs. Then Zalia Graem passed the door on her way to the study. Five or ten minutes later the detective—Heath, I think his name is—went by the door, carrying a coat over his arm. A little later—two or three minutes, I should say—Zalia Graem and the nurse passed each other in the passageway, Zalia going toward the stairs, and the nurse toward the study. A couple of minutes after Floyd Garden passed the door on his way to the study again—"

"Just a minute," Vance interrupted. "You didn't see the nurse return downstairs after she passed Miss Graem in the passageway?"

Hammle shook his head emphatically. "No, absolutely not."

"One more thing, Mr. Hammle: while you were out there in the garden, did anyone come out on the roof from the terrace gate?"

"Absolutely not. I didn't see anybody at all on the roof."

"And when Garden had returned downstairs, what then?"

"I saw you come to the window and look out into the garden. I was afraid I might be seen, and the minute you turned away I went over to the far corner of the garden, by the gate. The next thing I knew, you gentlemen were coming out on the roof with the nurse."

"Thank you, Mr. Hammle. You've told me exactly what I wanted to know. It may interest you to learn that the nurse informed us she was struck over the head in



She Gave Him a Searching Look.

the passageway, on leaving the study, and forced into the vault which was full of bromin fumes."

Zalia Graem was the first to enter the den. She glanced at Vance appealingly and seated herself without a word. She was followed by Miss Weatherby and Kroon, who sat down uneasily beside her on the davenport. Floyd Garden and his father came in together. Miss Beeton was just behind them and stopped hesitantly in the doorway, looking uncertainly at Vance.

"Did you want me too?" she asked diffidently.

"I think it might be best, Miss Beeton," said Vance. "We may need your help."

At that moment the front door bell rang, and Burke ushered Doctor Siefert into the den.

"I just got your message, Mr. Vance, and came right over." He looked about the room questioning.

"I thought you might care to be present," Vance said, "in case we can reach some conclusion about the situation here. I know you are personally interested. Otherwise I wouldn't have telephoned you."

"I'm glad you did," said Siefert blandly, and walked across to a chair before the desk.

Vance lighted a cigarette with slow deliberation, his eyes moving aimlessly about the room. There was a tension over the assembled group.

The taut silence was broken by Vance's voice. He spoke casually, but with a curious emphasis.

"I have asked you all to come here this afternoon in the hope that we could clear up the very tragic situation that exists."

He was interrupted by the startling sound of a shot ominously like that of the day before. Everyone in the room stood up quickly, aghast at the sudden detonation. Everyone except Vance. And before anyone could speak, his calm authoritative voice was saying:

"There is no need for alarm. Please sit down. I expressly arranged that shot for all of you to hear—it will have an important bearing on the case . . ."

Burke appeared at the door. "Was that all right, Mr. Vance?"

"Quite all right," Vance told him. "The same revolver and blanks?"

"Sure. Just like you told me. And from where you said. Wasn't it like you wanted it?"

"Yes, precisely," nodded Vance. "Thanks, Burke."

The detective grinned broadly and moved away down the hall.

"That shot, I believe," resumed Vance, sweeping his eyes lazily over those present, "was similar to the one we heard yesterday afternoon—the one that summoned us to Swift's dead body. It may interest you to know that the shot just fired

by Detective Burke was fired from the same revolver, with the same cartridges, that the murderer used yesterday—and from about the same spot."

"But this shot sounded as if it were fired down here somewhere," cut in Siefert.

"Exactly," said Vance with satisfaction. "It was fired from one of the windows on this floor."

"But I understand that the shot yesterday came from upstairs," Siefert looked perplexed.

"That was the general, but erroneous, assumption," explained Vance. "Actually it did not. Yesterday, because of the open roof door and the stairway, and the closed door of the room from which the shot was fired, and mainly because we were psychologically keyed to the idea of a shot from the roof, it gave us all the impression of coming from the garden."

Zalia Graem turned quickly to Vance.

"The shot yesterday didn't sound to me as if it came from the garden. When I came out of the den I wondered why you were all hurrying upstairs."

Vance returned her gaze squarely.

"No, it must have sounded much closer to you," he said. "But why didn't you mention that important fact yesterday when I talked with you about the crime?"

"I—don't know," the girl stammered. "When I saw Woody dead up there, I naturally thought I'd been mistaken."

"But you couldn't have been mistaken," returned Vance, half under his breath. "And after the revolver had been fired yesterday from a downstairs window, it was surreptitiously placed in the pocket of Miss Beeton's top-coat in the hall closet. Had it been fired from upstairs it could have been hidden to far better advantage somewhere on the roof or in the study."

He turned again to the girl. "By the by, Miss Graem, didn't you go to that closet after answering your telephone call here in the den?"

The girl gasped.

"How—how did you know?"

"You were seen there," explained Vance.

The girl turned back to Vance with flashing eyes.

"I'll tell you why I went to the hall closet. I went to get a handkerchief I had left in my handbag. Does that make me a murderer?"

"No, Oh, no," Vance shook his head and sighed. "Thank you for the explanation . . . And will you be so good as to tell me exactly what you did last night when you answered Mrs. Garden's summons?"

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 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 seemed unconsciously and involuntarily to have formed a conspiracy to aid and abet the murderer."

Vance looked up and went on.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Clog Almanac

A clog almanac was a square piece of wood, brass or bone about eight inches long, which might be either hung in a room or fitted into a walking stick. It was a perpetual almanac, showing the Sundays and other fixed festivals. It was introduced into England by the Danes.

'Twas This Way

By LYLE SPENCER
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Little Church Around the Corner

NEW YORK'S "Little Church Around the Corner" is probably the world's most famous and romantic spot to be married in. And of all things, its popularity first started from a funeral!

This historic place of worship, whose real name is the Church of the Transfiguration, is a picturesque, rambling, brown structure on Twenty-ninth street near Fifth avenue. About 1870, the great actor, George Holland, died in New York. His sister wanted his funeral to be held at her own church—a then fashionable temple on aristocratic Fifth avenue.

The Joseph Jefferson, an old friend of the Holland family, called on the high-toned rector of the church to make arrangements for the funeral. But that reverend gentleman refused to hold services for what he termed a "common actor."

"There is," he said, "a little church around the corner where you might get it done."

"Then," said Mr. Jefferson solemnly, "God bless the little church around the corner!"

A few days later the service for the dead actor was held in the "little church," before a congregation that included many of the city's most prominent people. Attracted by the human interest angle, newspapers gave it headlines. Mark Twain wrote a touching piece about it. So what might have been a tragedy turned out to be a triumph.

From that memorable incident, the "Little Church Around the Corner" got its name. Many noted theatrical people joined its congregation, and all found a cordial, warm reception. Where they went, publicity followed. Many a theatrical wedding was performed before its altar. Somehow the congenial, friendly air of its atmosphere has been maintained down to this very day.

The First Love Letter

HUMAN nature seems to be the same at all times and in all places. Numerous clay tablets nearly 4,000 years old, which were recently dug up from the ruins of Babylon, show that the habits and problems of that ancient people were astonishingly like our own.

These tablets, written in cuneiform inscriptions, have been laboriously translated by scientists. One tells of the complaint of a young man about the bad food he receives in his boarding house and how he longs for the food he used to get at home. Another tablet is the plea of a mother for her wayward son to come home and be forgiven.

And most familiar of all is the tablet written by a young man who has gone to Babylon to make his fortune, who wants his sweetheart to join him there and become his wife. Here it is, the oldest love letter in the world:

"To Bibeya from Gimil Marduk—Nay Shamash and Marduk grant thee, for my sake, to live forever. I write this to inquire after thy health. Let me know how it goes with thee. I am now settled in Babylon, but I am in great anxiety because I have not seen thee. Send news when thou wilt come, that I may rejoice at it. Come in the month of Arakshamma (November-December). Mayest thou, for my sake, live forever."

America's First Presidents

ALTHOUGH George Washington was the father of our country, he was not, as is often mistakenly assumed, the first President of the United States. That honor goes to an obscure man most of us have never heard of—Thomas McKean.

Our present Constitution did not go into effect until March 4, 1789. Washington was the first President under its provisions, and served until his voluntary retirement in 1797. But before that time our country, such as it then was, had been held together by the Articles of Confederation.

On September 5, 1774, delegates from twelve states (Georgia was not represented at the first congress) met in Philadelphia and organized what has since been called the Continental congress. Its purpose was to organize the colonies into a federation for united action against their common enemy, England.

The Continental congress met irregularly until March 2, 1789. Its most important single act was drawing up and adopting, on July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence, written largely by Thomas Jefferson.

The delegate in charge at the meetings carried the title and signed papers as "The President of the United States." Thomas McKean was the first man to be elected to that post. Altogether, there were eight different men who held the office, in addition to John Hancock who was elected but declined to serve.

No Valentine

By MARIAN P. JOHNSON
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WNU Service.

"YOU will take the Valentine department, Miss King," said Mr. Lane importantly.

Maisie King emitted a sharp little gasp and opened her mouth to protest.

"At once, Miss King!" snapped Mr. Lane. "Follow me!"

Maisie followed.

A short time later she stood among the valentines and glared. It was bad enough, having her first serious quarrel with Jim just before Valentine's Day. But being yanked bodily from the frothy collars and cuffs she adored to be planted ruthlessly among the valentines was—well, it was just plain sickening, decided Maisie rebelliously.

She was deluged almost at once with customers.

"Something for mother," demanded a smooth masculine voice. And Maisie's heart did a neat flip-flop almost over the counter and back again. She gritted her teeth and shoved a valentine at him.

"How's that?" she inquired. Coolly, she hoped. And lifted her eyes to Jim's.

"O. K.," said Jim, grinning. "How're you feeling, honey?"

"Does it matter?" inquired Maisie icily. After all, this was the very last straw!

"Maybe not," remarked Jim, his mouth tightening into that straight grim line it had held so doggedly during last night's battle. "Well, if that's the way you feel, so long!"

Picking up his valentine he stalked away. Six feet of blue-eyed, brown-haired outraged manhood.

That night Jim took Lou Ryder to the movies. Maisie saw them and her eyes became bright and her anger grew. She suffered nightmares crowded with the faces of hearts surrounded by little flying cupid and bows and arrows of shining gold.

Going back to the valentines next morning was a hollow mockery. Especially since her small calendar reminded her it was February 14.

"After all, what's the difference?" she demanded. "It's just another day."

Sorting her stock she paused suddenly over a line of humorous cards. One of them pictured a girl with protruding front teeth lispng some sort of mushy sentiment. The girl looked amazingly like Lou Ryder.

That afternoon a voice broke suddenly through the others. "A Sweetheart Valentine, please."

Maisie jumped. Jim! She showed some valentines at him without looking up.

"Haven't you something a little nicer?" inquired Jim critically. "Something sort of special, you know."

With trembling fingers Maisie pulled out the very best in the store.

"That's better," decided Jim offering a bill.

Suddenly Maisie couldn't bear it. As she turned to wrap up the sickening thing her eyes rested momentarily on the card with the picture of Lou—well, it might as well be Lou Ryder. On a sudden wild impulse Maisie slapped Lou and her front teeth into the box, wrapped them up and shoved the mushy one under the counter.

"There!" she exclaimed, and handed the box to Jim.

Now she'd done it. Made him mad for ever and ever. It was all finished. Their love. The little home they'd planned. Maisie took long, deep breaths and didn't care. It served Jim right. Going out with Lou Ryder the very next night after—

On the way home she had time to realize what she'd done. Jim was going to be wild. She wouldn't be surprised a bit if he came right over and howled things at her. Well, decided Maisie grimly, stretching her aching feet, she'd hold right back. She'd tell him!

Oh, what was the use? Jim would just never speak to her again. The days stretched before her in one solid blank. No laughter. No joy. No Jim.

Reaching her rooming-house at last Maisie started to walk determinedly past the mail box. There wouldn't be anything in it. But out of the corner of her eye she saw a white edge protruding.

Maisie grabbed. She dashed into her room and riddled the flap of the envelope with a shaking forefinger.

"It can't be a bill," she muttered. "It isn't the first of the month."

It wasn't a bill. It was a valentine. "To Mother," it proclaimed in soft gilt letters amid flying doves and delicate sprays of flowers. Maisie's heart sank. "Mistake," she muttered, and turned it over.

On the back were scrawled these words: "I tried to buy a valentine but the one you gave me doesn't seem to fit. So I had to use this. I'll be over about seven. Thaw out, honey. I love you. Jim."

True Hospitality

A spinster encountering some boys in the old swimming-hole, minus everything but nature's garb, and was horrified.

"Isn't it against the law to bathe without suits on, little boys?"

"Yes'm," announced freckled Johnny, "but Jimmy's father is a policeman, so you can come on in."

A Touch of Spring Upon Your Linens

Could you ask for a daintier, more Springlike wreath? Here's a bit of embroidery that's unfailingly lovely, and always easy to do!—Pattern 5570, which will give an old or new bedspread a quick

