

The Kennel Murder Case

By S. S. VAN DINE

But here again we met with disappointment, for he was not able to identify the dog as having been entered in the show at which he judged. Things began to appear discouraging, and Vance was not in the best humor as we drove to the east side winter studio of Mrs. Marguerite Kirmse-Coe. But to no avail. Mrs. Cole was positive the dog had not been an entry under her judgeship.

It was past four in the afternoon when we arrived at Mr. William MacBain's Diehard kennels in Clover, N. J. Mr. MacBain showed an intense interest in the dog that Vance had brought to him, but was unable to identify her. Vance had drawn another blank in his investigation of the wounded dog's ownership.

He had succeeded in locating the New York office of Mr. Stinemetz, but, on phoning, learned that he was not in the city that day but could undoubtedly be found at his country home.

"This is almost our last chance," Vance observed dejectedly. "Unless the dog has been shown in New England or the South. But if that were the case, why is she here in New York now?"

He was downcast; I realized for the first time how much he had counted on this stray Scottish terrier to help him in the solution of the crime which was perplexing him. But it was just at the moment when things seemed darkest that a ray of light was introduced into the situation. It was Mr. Stinemetz, the last of the judges we consulted, who gave Vance the information he was seeking.

Vance showed him the little lost bitch and asked him if he had ever judged her. Mr. Stinemetz looked at her closely for a moment, took her in his arms and stood her on the show table in his main kennel.

"Yes," he said slowly, after a minute's inspection. "I not only judged her, but I put her up, three weeks ago at Englewood. She won the puppy bitch class, and I would have given her first instead of a second in the novice class if she had shown property. But as I remember, some young woman with little or no experience, brought her into the ring. Naturally, she could get no response from the dog. I tried to help her out, but it was hopeless; and I had to give the blue to a bitch that had the style and the ring manners, but who wasn't quite this one's equal in anatomy. . . . There was one slight fault in the mouth, however."

Mr. Stinemetz held back the dog's lips, exposing her teeth. "You see this upper incisor; it's out of place. But it's not a serious fault. There's many a champion with a much worse mouth."

Vance thanked him for his help and added: "Do you happen to know what bitch this is, or who owns her?" Mr. Stinemetz shook his head.

"No, I never saw her before—she must be a newcomer. I didn't see a catalogue of the show and there were no postmortems at the judge's table after the show."

Vance left Mr. Stinemetz's kennels in a much happier frame of mind. "Tomorrow," he said, as we drove home through the gathering dusk, "we will know the owner's name."

Immediately upon our arrival in New York, Vance telephoned to Markham at his home, and learned that there had been no developments in the case during the day. Grassi had returned to the Coe house at eleven o'clock that morning, evidently very little the worse for his experience of the nervous night. He had wished to go to a hotel, but Markham had prevailed upon him to remain at the Coe residence until some light had filtered into the case, and Grassi had reluctantly agreed to do so.

Wrede had remained indoors all day and had telephoned to Markham twice and offered to give whatever assistance he could.

Hilda Lake had gone out about ten o'clock in the morning, dressed in sports clothes. When Heath had asked her where she was going, she had told him nonchalantly that she was going to take a drive in the country.

The den window-sill had been gone over carefully for fingerprints, but without results. A general routine investigation had been put in operation by the sergeant, but, aside from this, nothing had been done.

"The case has me bogged," Markham complained at dinner that night. "I see no way out of the situation. Even if we knew who committed the crime, we couldn't show how they were accomplished—unless the guilty person himself chose to tell us. . . . And that attack on Grassi; instead of helping us, it has only put us deeper into the well. And there's nothing to take hold of. All the ordinary avenues of investigation are closed. Heaven knows there are enough people who might have done it—and there are enough motives for a dozen murders."

"Sad . . . sad," sighed Vance. "My heart bleeds for you, don't y' know. Still, there's some simple explanation. It's a deucedly complicated puzzle—a cryptogram with apparently meaningless words. But once we have the key letter, the rest of it will fall into place. And the key letter may be the Scottie. I'm hopin' for the best. You might confide in me the exact condition of the Coe domicile tonight."

"There's little to confide," Markham told him acerbiously. "Heath has done the usual things and gone home. However, he's left two men on guard, one in the street and one at the rear of the house. Grassi has remained in his room all day—Heath's last report to me was that the gentleman had gone to bed. The lock on his door, by the way, has been fixed; so he'll probably live the night through. Miss Lake came in just as the sergeant was going. . . . By the way, she took the news of Grassi's stabbing rather hard."

Vance looked up quickly. "I say, that's most interestin'." "The Chinaman did not leave the house," Markham continued, "and told Heath he preferred to remain until the guilty person had been brought to justice."

"I do hope he hasn't too long to wait," Vance sighed. "But it's just as well if Liang stays with us. I feel that he's going to be most helpful to us anon. . . . And you, Markham, old dear, what have you been doing? Milk investigations, I suppose, and committees of eminent citizens who wish to investigate the crime and interview with aldermen."

"That's about all," Markham confessed. "What would you have suggested?" "Really, Markham, I hadn't a suggestion today," Vance leaned back in his chair. "But tomorrow."

"You're so helpful and satisfying," Markham snapped.

CHAPTER X

At nine o'clock the following morning Vance called at the offices of the American Kennel Club, and explained to the secretary, Mr. Percy B. Rice, the nature of the information he sought. Mr. Rice introduced us to Mrs. Del Campo, the head of the show department. Mrs. Del Campo, when Mr. Rice explained to her what Vance wanted, found the marked Englewood catalogue. Turning to the Scottish terrier section, she ran her finger down the list of Puppy Bitch entries until she came to the winner of the class. The owner's name was given as Julius Higginbottom, and the name of the dog itself as Miss MacTavish. Then followed the A. K. C. Stud Book number and date of birth—November 20 of the preceding year. The sire of the bitch was given as Champion Greeny Autocrat, and the dam was Laurieston Lovelace. The breeder was Henry D. Bisby.

Vance made a note of these data, and expressed his admiration for the A. K. C. system.

When we arrived at the district attorney's office on the fourth floor of the Criminal Court building, Markham was in conference with Sergeant Heath. Swacker, the district attorney's secretary, ushered us immediately into Markham's private office.

"Things are moving," Vance sat down and took out his cigarette case. "I have just come from the American Kennel Club and have discovered a bit of most interestin' information. The wounded Scottie, Markham, belongs to none other than Julius Higginbottom."

"And who might he be, Vance? And why does the fact interest you?"

"I have met Higginbottom. He's a member of the Crest View Country Club, and he has a large country estate at Mount Vernon, where he spends his entire time living what he imagines to be the life of a country gentleman."

Heath sat forward in his chair. "It was the Crest View Country Club at Mount Vernon," he interrupted, "where Miss Lake and Grassi went to a dance Wednesday night."

"And that's not all, Sergeant," Vance sprawled luxuriously in his chair and took a deep inhalation. "Higginbottom knew Archer Coe pretty well. Several years ago Higginbottom inherited, from an aunt, a very fine collection of early Chinese paintings, many of which Coe bought from him at a preposterously low price. Higginbottom is something of a gay bird—the sporting type of man—and knew nothing of the value of the paintings. After he had sold them to Coe he learned from a dealer that they were very valuable, and

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there was consequent talk, in certain New York art circles, to the effect that Coe had put over a shrewd and somewhat unethical deal on Higginbottom. Higginbottom, as I know, took the matter up with Coe, but without success, and there has been a certain amount of bad blood between them ever since. Higginbottom was a major in the World War and is a bathed-in sort of a chap."

Markham beat a nervous tattoo on the desk. "Well, where does that get us?" he asked. "Are you implying that Higginbottom came down from Mount Vernon with his dog and murdered Coe?"

"Good Lord, no!" Vance made a slight gesture of annoyance. "I'm not implyin' anything. I am merely reportin' my findings. But I must confess that I find the relationship between the Scottie and Major Higginbottom and Archer Coe a bit satisfyin'." I am motoring immediately to Mount Vernon where I hope to have polite and serious—and, I trust, illuminatin'—intercourse with the major concerning Miss MacTavish. . . . Would you care to hear the result of my social endeavors?"

"I'll be here all afternoon," Markham answered glumly.

It was a pleasant drive to Mount Vernon, in the brisk October air. We had little difficulty in finding the Higginbottom estate, and we were lucky enough to find the major sitting on the big colonial front porch.

He welcomed Vance effusively and

NOTICE OF EXECUTOR'S SALE

By virtue of an execution issued to the undersigned Sheriff of Watauga County from the Superior Court of Watauga County, on the 25th day of February, 1935, in that certain action entitled "Watauga County Bank vs. D. H. Wright, Vergie Wright, and Boone Hardware Company, I will on Monday, April 1st, 1935, at 1:00 p. m., at the courthouse door of Watauga County, to satisfy said execution, sell to the highest bidder for cash all the right, title and interest that the Boone Hardware Company has in the following described lands, to wit:

- BEGINNING 100 feet east of Depot Street and 20 feet south of the line of John W. Hodges and M. P. Critcher, and runs eastwardly parallel between M. P. Critcher and John W. Hodges 40 feet to a stake; thence south parallel with Boldin grocery storehouse 80 feet to a stake; thence westwardly 40 feet to a stake in John W. Hodges' line 100 feet east of Depot Street, thence with John W. Hodges line eastwardly 60 feet to the beginning.

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invited us to sit down and have a highball.

"To what do I owe the honor of this call, sir?" He spoke with hospitable good nature. "I am really delighted. You should come oftener."

"I'd be charmed," Vance sat down beside a small glass table. "But today, Major, I'd see, I hopped out here on a little matter of business. . . . The truth is, I'm dashed interested in a Scottish bitch belonging to you—Miss MacTavish—who was shown at Englewood. . . ."

At the mention of the dog's name Higginbottom gave a loud cough, pushed his chair back with a scraping sound, and glanced over his shoulder to the open window leading into the house. The man seemed deeply perturbed, and his tone of voice and his manner, when he answered, struck me as most peculiar.

"Yes, yes, of course," he blustered, rising and walking toward the front steps. "I rarely go to dog shows any more. By the way, Mr. Vance, I want to show you my roses. . . ." And he walked down the stairs toward a small rose garden at the right.

Vance lifted his eyebrows in mild astonishment, and followed his host. When we were out of hearing of the house, the major placed his hand on Vance's shoulder and spoke confidentially:

"By gad, sir! I hope my wife didn't hear that question of yours. She's generally in the drawing room during the mornings, and the windows were open." He appeared troubled. "Yes, sir, it would be most annoying if she heard it. I didn't mean to be impolite, sir—no, sir, by gad—but you startled me for a moment. . . . A most trying and delicate situation." He put his head a little closer to Vance. "Where did you hear of that little

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bitch of mine?—were you at the Englewood show?—and why should you be interested?" He glanced again over his shoulder toward the porch. "George! I hope your question didn't reach my wife's ears."

Vance looked at the man quizzically.

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

POULTRY QUESTION

Aside from the brooder house what equipment is necessary for handling chicks in a brooder?

Answer: At the start each one hundred chicks should have access to a five-foot feed hopper, and two one-half-gallon waterers. Two mash hoppers four inches high, six inches wide, and five feet long should be provided for each 100 chicks after the third week. Be sure to allow plenty of floor space as overcrowding will increase any inherent disease and will also cause colds which may develop into serious trouble. At least one-half of floor space should be allowed for each chick.

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- The Farm Journal. 1 Yr.
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