

# The Kennel Murder Case

By S. S. VAN DINE

CHAPTER XVII

When Liang had gone out, Vance sent Gamble for Hilda Lake. As soon as she entered the library, Vance informed her that Wrede was dead.

She looked at him a moment, lifted her eyebrows, shrugged slightly, and said: "It is no great loss to the world."

"Furthermore, Vance went on, 'I believe that Mr. Wrede murdered your uncle and attempted the life of Mr. Grassi.'

"I would not be in the least surprised," the young woman commented coolly. "I have suspected all along that he murdered Uncle Archer—but I could not quite see how he accomplished it. Have you learned his modus operandi?"

Vance shook his head.

"No, Miss Lake," he admitted. "That's a part of the problem still to be solved."

"But why," she asked, "should he kill Uncle Brisbane? Uncle Brisbane was his ally."

"That's another phase of the problem that must be worked out. There was an error—a miscalculation—somewhere."

"I can understand," Hilda Lake remarked, "why he should attempt Mr. Grassi's life. Mr. Wrede was intensely jealous of Mr. Grassi."

"All clever, scheming men with a sense of their own inferiority," said Vance, "are inclined toward intense jealousy. . . . But there's a particular thought that has entered my mind this evening, and I shall ask you about it. Tell me, Miss Lake, what reason would Brisbane have had for killing Archer?"

Vance's question amazed me, and when I glanced at Markham and Heath, I saw that they, too, were startled. But Hilda Lake accepted it as if it had been the most casual and unimportant of questions.

"Oh, various reasons," she answered calmly. "There was a deep antagonism between the two. Uncle Brisbane had many ideas and many ambitions, but he was always handicapped by the fact that Uncle Archer controlled all the money. There was, therefore, the money motive. Again, Uncle Brisbane did not feel that Uncle Archer had treated me fairly, and he was quite anxious for me to marry Mr. Wrede. Uncle Archer, as you know, was violently opposed to the marriage."

"And you, Miss Lake?"

"Oh," she returned offhandedly. "I thought the marriage might be rather a good thing. Mr. Wrede was a comforting kind of soul who wouldn't have bothered me in the slightest—and I was tremendously desirous of escaping from this queer household. I knew all his faults, but as long as they didn't interfere with me."

"Perhaps," suggested Vance, "the arrival of Mr. Grassi changed your mind a bit."

For the first time during my acquaintance with Hilda Lake, I noticed a soft, feminine expression come into her eyes. She glanced down as if embarrassed.

"Perhaps, as you say," she replied in a low voice, "the arrival of Mr. Grassi changed my mind."

Vance stood up.

"I hope, Miss Lake," he said, "that you will both be very happy."

We dined at Vance's apartment that night. Both Vance and Markham

tired to her cabin and lay down. Several hours later she was found dead. Luccheni had actually stabbed her without her being aware of it, and she had died hours later of an internal hemorrhage. This crime was the final misfortune which came to the Austrian emperor, and all Europe was aroused to a state of intense indignation."

Vance closed the book and threw it to one side.

"Now do you see what I mean, Markham?" he asked. "A dead person often does strange things without knowing he is dead. Do you recall what Doctor Doremus said: 'An internal hemorrhage! That's the whole story—that's the key to everything. That's how Archer could have been killed in the library and still have walked upstairs.'"

Markham stood up and walked back and forth across the room.

"Good G—d!" His words were scarcely audible. "So that's the explanation! No wonder we couldn't understand the things that happened there that night. Unbelievable!"

Vance had sunk back into his chair, relaxed. He took a deep inspiration, like a man who had suddenly found a friendly settlement in the midst of a hostile jungle.

"Really, Markham," he said with a slight upward glance, taking out his cigarette case. "I'll never forgive you for this—never! It was you who guessed the solution. And I knew it all the time, but I couldn't correlate my knowledge."

Markham came to a sudden halt.

"What do you mean by saying that I guessed the solution?"

"Didn't you say," asked Vance mildly, "that the only way one could explain the circumstances was by the assumption that a dead man walked upstairs?"

No, Markham, I am sure I shall never forgive you."

Markham sat down and muttered a disgusted oath. He smoked a while in silence.

"The internal hemorrhage explains many things," he admitted finally. "But I still don't understand Brisbane's death, and the bolted door."

"And yet, d'ye see," returned Vance, "it all fits in perfectly, now that we have the key."

He lay back in his chair and stretched his legs. He took several puffs on his cigarette and half closed his eyes.

"I think, Markham, I can reconstruct the amazing and contradictory occurrences that took place in the Coe domicile last Wednesday night. . . . I doubt if Wrede actually planned to murder Archer. . . . The idea had no doubt been in his mind for a long time, for he had obviously taken the precaution of securing a duplicate key to the spring lock on the rear door. But I have a feeling that he wished only to argue various matters out with Archer last Wednesday night before actually resorting to murder. It's obvious that he called on Archer that night and tried to convince him that he would be the perfect mate for Hilda Lake. Archer disagreed—and disagreed violently.

That was no doubt the argument that Liang overheard. I imagine that the debate reached the point where blows were struck. The poker was quite handy, don't y' know, and Wrede, with his tremendous sense of personal inferiority, would naturally reach for some outside agent to help him over the top. He snatched the poker and struck Archer over the head. Archer fell forward against the table upsetting it and fracturing his rib. Wrede was in a quandary. But again his sense of inferiority invaded him. He looked round the room quickly, saw the dagger in the cabinet, took it out and, as Archer lay on the floor, drove it into his back. . . . The deed was done. He had vindicated himself in a physical way, and had removed all obstacles from his path. He believed he was alone in the house with Archer; but still there was the question of a suspect. Into his shrewd brain flashed the thought of Liang, whom he had always suspected of being more than a servant. He figured that if he left the Chinese dagger where it would be found in the library, Liang would be the logical suspect. He threw the dagger into the Ting yao vase. But he threw it in too hard. It broke the vase—and again Wrede was in a quandary. He picked up the dagger and placed it in the other vase on the table. Then he gathered up the fragments of the Ting yao, carried them through the kitchen and placed them in the garbage pail on the rear porch. The poker he had thrown back on the hearth. And he left the house through the rear entrance, passed behind the hedge in the vacant lot, unlatched the gate at the rear of his apartment house, and went to his rooms.

"So far, so good," said Markham. "But what of Brisbane?"

"Brisbane? Ah, yes. He was an unexpected element. But Wrede knew nothing about it. . . . As I see it, Markham, Brisbane had planned to get rid of Archer that same night. His trip to Chicago was merely a blind. With his knowledge of criminology and his shrewd technical brain he had worked out a perfectly logical means of doing away with his brother and having the crime appear a suicide. Naturally he chose Wednesday night when he knew Archer would be alone in the house. He established his alibi by having Gamble make reservations on the 8-15 train to Chicago. His plan was to go back to the house and take a later train. It was an excellent idea, and it was almost detection proof. And he did come back to the house, Markham, with the definite intention of killing Archer."

"Still, I don't see."

"Oh, it's all quite simple," Vance went on. "But before Brisbane returned that night, strange and uncanny things happened. The plot became cluttered with complications, and Brisbane, instead of creating a perfect crime, walked into a plot more diabolical than the one he himself had conceived."

Vance moved in his chair.

"This is what had happened in the meantime: Archer, recovering from

ed to the windows and pulled down the shades. That act took practically all of his remaining vitality. He started to get his bedroom slippers, but the black mist of death was drifting in upon him. He thought it fatigue—the result, perhaps, of the blow Wrede had struck him over the head. He sat down in his easy chair. But he never got up, Markham. He never changed his shoes. As he sat there the final inevitable fog stifled him! . . ."

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