

# The VANITY CASE

by CAROLYN WELLS



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BEGIN HERE TODAY

In Harbor Gardens, Long Island, in an elaborate bungalow, lived Perry Heath and his wife.

At the time the story opens the Heaths were entertaining as house guests:

Lawrence Inman, a distant relative of Myra's and, aside from Perry, the only heir to her considerable fortune, and

Bunny Moore, young, vivacious, golden-haired, an old friend of Myra's.

Perry was an artist and candidate for presidency of the Country Club. His chief opponent was a man named Sam Anderson. Perry's wife was beautiful but cold and sarcastic. She never used cosmetics; her hatred of colors amounted to a passion. She collected rare old bottles and her latest was a whisky bottle which aroused her artistic husband to scorn.

Myra, provoked at a growing intimacy between Perry and Bunny, announces she has made her will in favor of Inman, cutting her husband off. She quarrels with Perry later and mysteriously alludes to his "secret."

That night Heath, stealing downstairs, discovers Inman in his wife's arms and orders him out of the house by morning.

The next morning Myra Heath's body is found in the studio. A candle is burning at her head and feet, she is made up with cosmetics and dressed in gay colors.

Herrieck, the butler, discovers near the body a card marked, "The Work of Perry Heath," and the doctor, when he comes, finds that the death blow was struck with Myra's cherished whisky bottle.

The coroner conducts an examination, and it develops that Perry Heath has disappeared during the night, in spite of the fact that windows and doors had been locked on the inside. W. Inman and Bunny Moore are questioned but both exhibit an unusual degree of nervousness.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY CHAPTER IX

The Harbor Country Club was over on the Park side, but its members, included many of the Gardens people as well.

A few of the less active spirits, hobnobbed on the porch and smoked, as they somewhat conservatively discussed the Heath tragedy.

Yet few of the exaggerated accounts could be much worse than the true statements of the awful occurrence:

"Where is Perry Heath?" was the question urged even more frequently than "Who killed Myra?" Arthur Black, one of the solid men of the club, declared that it was impossible that the murderer should be other than the husband.

"The Heaths were by no means turtle doves," was the way he put it. "And, even recognizing the rights of the dead to all nisi bonum, our Myra was a saint in looks only."

"She sure looked like one, though," said Wallace Forbes, an artist from the Gardens, whose bungalow-studio was not far from

the Heaths' own."

"Too pale and wan for my taste," remarked Sam Anderson, who was a true representative of the Park type. Smiling, bald-headed, and with a missing eye-tooth, he gave the impression of being more interested in women of the earth, earthy, than in the Myra Heath sort. But he was a prominent clubman, and was about to run for president.

"The disappearance of Heath clinches your election, Anderson," Black declared, but the other answered:

"I'm not keen to be elected. And, anyway, Heath will come back—he must. To my mind, his absence is no indication at all that he killed his wife. Why should he? Maybe, as you say, Black, the pair were not exactly lovey-dovey, but few married people are nowadays. Yet it doesn't lead to murder. You'll have to find a bigger motive than mere incompatibility before I'll believe that Heath killed his wife. What about that young chap, her cousin, or whatever he is?"

"Larry Inman?" said Forbes. "Yes, he's her cousin—a distant one, I think. But why should he murder her?"

"He's her heir," put in Black, who always knew all about everybody's business affairs, "there's the motive; but, on the other hand, I've heard he was in love with the pale goddess."

"Did you hear that when they found her dead, she was all rouged and made up—eyebrows penciled and all?"—this from Anderson, who was a bit of a gossip.

Yes, and beside that, there was a red sash tied around her," Black asserted. "And candles burning at her head and feet."

Al Cunningham, who has just then joined the group, said: "I'm going to the inquest this afternoon. Wonder if Heath will be back for it?"

"You speak as if he had just stepped out on an errand," Black objected. "Why, man, he is the criminal—the murderer—and he made his getaway. He'll never come back."

"Do you know Heath?" demanded Forbes of Anderson.

"Not intimately, at all, but I know him slightly. I've seen him here at the club occasionally I've never been to his house."

"Then you don't really know him. He's not a man of fierce passions or angry impulses. If he seemed trouble from Inman's attentions to Mrs. Heath, he wouldn't kill either of them, he'd put the young man out of his house and merely shake his finger at his wife. I live over there, you know, and I'm acquainted with the whole bunch. There's a baby down there, who's about as pert a little parcel as often comes. Name of Bunny, and I believe she's somewhat gone on Perry herself."

"Oh, well, then there's your motive," Cunningham cried. "Intense natured artist, tired of his marble Galatea of a wife, turns to baby doll for relief. Falls desperately in love with the kid, and decides that the line of least resistance is to put Friend Wife out of the way. Does so, and skips. He won't return—but the girl will

follow at the proper time."

"Maybe," said Black, "but I'm not going to the inquest. Sit all afternoon in a hot, stuffy place, only to have the thing adjourned, or, at most, to hear an open verdict."

"I'm not going, either," Anderson stated. "Oh, if I do, I'll just look in for a moment, and stick to the back of the room, so I can get out easily. Coroners are fearfully long-winded. And we'll get the whole proceedings from the papers. The New York papers will feature this, as it's really a bizarre case."

Meanwhile the Heath home was in a turmoil.

The police were in charge. Both Bunny and Larry, as well as the servants were forbidden to leave the place.

The body of Myra, still in its beautiful but strange condition, lay where it was found, and must remain there until viewed by the coroner's jury.

The studio was guarded by a policeman who sat just outside the closed door. The lounge was full of bustling people, who with more or less authority, fussed around inquisitively.

Mrs. Prentiss, presuming on her importance as the nearest neighbor, came over, with a face appropriately solemn, to offer help of any sort in her power.

Bunny refused to see her at first, but on a more insistent message the girl went reluctantly from her room downstairs to greet the caller.

Her blue eyes showed traces of tears, and her lips quivered as she came toward Mrs. Prentiss.

And for once, the girl failed to show an alert interest at the sight of a strange and good-looking young man.

For Todhunter Buck had accompanied his aunt, partly as escort, but more from a desire to see Bunny herself.

Nor was he disappointed. He told himself on the spot, that she was the loveliest girl he had ever seen and was the one girl in the world for him, and many such decisions and asseverations.

Bunny acknowledged his introduction with absent-minded politeness and asked them to come with her to a small morning room back of the dining room, where they could talk in more seclusion.

"Who is here? Who is looking after you?" demanded Mrs. Prentiss, with her usual brusqueness.

"Nobody, said Bunny, I am all

alone. I'd go home, but the police won't let me. I haven't sent word to my people about this yet—of course, they'll see it when it gets into the papers—but it's all so terrible—so awful—that I couldn't bring myself to write about it, and I just couldn't telephone."

"No, no, if course not, my dear. But you can't stay here alone—haven't you heard a word from Mr. Heath?"

"Not a word," Bunny's face turned rosy pink, but her voice was calm and steady. "I can't imagine where he went or what's keeping him away."

"Who is in charge here?" "That's what everybody asks. Why, nobody's in charge, exactly. Mr. Inman is, in some ways, and of course, the servants keep the house running just as usual. I see a few of Myra's friends, but not all of them—I just can't."

"Of course you can't," put in Toddy Buck, with real sympathy. "It oughtn't to be expected of you."

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"I can't," said Bunny, "I have to go to the inquest."

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and her nephew's heart leaped for joy.

"Oh, no, I can't do that," Bunny said. "The police won't let me leave this house; and when they do, I shall, of course, go straight home."

"And too, I think I must look over Myra's things a little. There's no one else to do it, and a woman ought to go over her desk—and and such things."

"Yes, yes—of course," Mrs. Prentiss spoke a little vaguely. "But my house is open to you, my dear, and I'm sure when you think it over, you will see it would be wise for you to come over there."

"I expect Mr. Heath home at any minute," Bunny said. "I shouldn't make any plans until he comes."

"But he may not come at all," Mrs. Prentiss began and stopped suddenly as she saw the grief and horror on Bunny's face.

And unable to bear up any longer, Bunny put her head down on the kind-hearted woman's shoulder, and cried softly.

(To Be Continued)

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