

THE KIDNAP MURDER Case
 by S. S. Van Dine
 A PHILO VANCE STORY
 AUTOCASTER

SEVENTH INSTALLMENT

SYNOPSIS—During the night Kasper Kenting was kidnaped. Philo Vance, with District Attorney Markham go to the Kenting home there to meet Sergeant Heath of the Homicide Bureau. Kenyon Kenting and Mrs. Kenting, the brother and wife of the kidnaped man. Present also is Eldridge Fleel, the Kenting family attorney. Mrs. Kenting tells of finding the kidnap note and of over-hearing a rough looking man threaten her husband about a week previously.

The first evidence casts some doubt as to the genuineness of the crime. Vance examines Weemes, the Kenting butler.

Further search shows that Kasper probably did not go down the ladder found outside the house. Vance re-examines Kenyon Kenting.

"We want to see Mr. Quaggy," Heath's manner was as intimidating as it was curt.

"I don't think Mr. Quaggy—" she began in a tremulous voice.

"Never mind what you think, Aunt Jemima," Heath cut her short. "Is your boss here, or isn't he?" He flashed his badge. "We're from the police."

"Yes, sir; yes, sir. He's here." The woman was completely cowed by this time. "He's in the sittin' room, over yonder."

The sergeant brushed past her to the archway at the end of the foyer, toward which she waved her arm. Markham, Vance and I followed him.

As we entered, a haggard, dispirited-looking man of about forty rose from a low lounging chair in one corner of the room. He seemed both surprised and resentful at our intrusion. He was unmistakably the gambler type—that is, the type one sees habitually at gaming houses and the race track.

Forgive our unceremonious entry. You are Mr. Porter Quaggy, I believe?"

"What if I am? I don't understand why you—"

"You will in a moment, sir," Vance broke in ingratiatingly. And he introduced himself, as well as Markham and Heath and me. "We have just come from the Kentings' down the street," he went on. "A calamity took place there early this morning, and we understand from Mrs. Kasper Kenting that Mr. Kenting was with you last night."

Quaggy's eyes narrowed to mere slits.

"Has anything happened to Kasper?"

"We'll get to that later," Vance replied. "Tell me, what time did you and Mr. Kenting get home last night?"

"Who said I was with him when he came home?"

"Mrs. Kenting informed us that you and her husband went together to the opening of a casino in Jersey last night, and that Mr. Kenting returned somewhere around three o'clock in the morning."

"Even if it is true, what of it?"

"Nothing, really nothing of any importance," Vance murmured. "Just lookin' for information. I note you're still bedecked in your evenin' togs, and your pumps are a bit muddy. It hasn't rained since yesterday, don't y'know. Offhand, I'd say you'd been sittin' up all night."

"Isn't that my privilege?"

"Did you go to the Kenting house with Mr. Kenting?" asked Vance.

"No; our cab came down Central Park West, and I got out here. I wish now I hid gone with him. He asked me to—said he was worried as the devil about something, and wanted to put me up for the night. I thought he was stewed, and didn't pay any attention to him. But after he had gone on, I got to thinking about what he'd said—he's always getting into trouble of one kind or another—and I walked down there about an hour later. But everything seemed all right. There was a light in Kasper's room, and I merely figured he hadn't gone to bed yet. So I did you, by any chance step into the side yard."

"Just inside the gate."

"Did you see a ladder anywhere in the court?"

"A ladder? No, there was no ladder."

"Did you remain there for long, Mr. Quaggy?"

"No, I came back here and had a drink."

"But you didn't go to bed, I notice."

"It's every man's privilege to sit up if he wants to, isn't it?" Quaggy asked coldly. "The truth is, I began to worry about Kasper."

"Was it only Mr. Kasper Kenting that you were thinking about?" Vance inquired with a shrewd, fixed look. "I understand you're a close friend of the family and are very highly regarded by Mrs. Kenting."

"Glad to know it," muttered the man, meeting Vance's gaze squarely. "Madelaide is a very fine woman, and I should hate to see anything happen to her."

"Thanks awfully for the information," murmured Vance. "I think I see your point of view perfectly. Well, your premonitions were quite accurate. Something did happen to the young gentlemen, and Mrs. Kenting is frightfully distressed."

"Is he all right?" asked Quaggy quickly.

"We're not sure yet. The fact is, Mr. Quaggy, your companion of yesterday has disappeared—superficial indications pointin' to abduction."

"The hell you say!"

"Oh, yes—quite," Vance said.

"When did this happen?"

"Oh, early this morning some time," Vance informed him. "That's why we're here. Thought maybe you could give us an idea or two."

Quaggy finished the remainder of his glass of whiskey.

"Sorry, I can't help you," Quaggy said. "I've told you everything I know."

Vance was at the archway now, and I was just behind him. Markham and Heath had already preceded us from the room. Vance paused for a moment and looked down at a small conventional desk which stood near the entrance.

Quickly he adjusted his monocle and scrutinized the desk. On it lay a crumpled piece of tissue paper in the center of which reposed two perfectly matched dark stones, with a remarkable play of color in them—a pair of black opals!

"When we were back in the car and headed downtown, Vance said:

"By the by, Markham, there were two rather amazin' black opals on the desk in Quaggy's apartment. Noticed them as I was going out."

"You think they came from the Kenting collection?"

"It's possible," Vance nodded slowly. "The collection was quite deficient in black opals when I gazed upon it. The few remainin' specimens were quite inferior."

The next morning, shortly before ten o'clock, Markham telephoned Vance at his apartment, and I answered.

"Tell Vance," came the District Attorney's peremptory voice, "I think he'd better come down to my office at once. Fleel is here, and I'll keep him engaged till Vance gets here."

We arrived at Markham's office a half-hour later.

After casual greetings Markham announced:

"The instructions promised in the ransom note have been received. A note came in Mr. Fleel's mail this morning, and he brought it directly to me."

He picked up the small sheet of paper before him and held it out to Vance. It was a piece of ruled note paper, folded twice. The quality was of a very cheap, coarse nature. The writing on it was in pencil, in an obviously disguised handwriting.

"I say, let's see the envelope," Vance requested.

The postmark showed that the note had passed through the postoffice the previous afternoon at five o'clock from the Westchester Station.

"And where might the Westchester Station be?" asked Vance.

"I had it looked up as soon as Mr. Fleel showed me the note," replied Markham. "It's in the upper Bronx."

"As a matter of fact, it's in the toughest district in New York in

which to trace any one by a postmark."

Vance adjusted his monocle and read the pencil-scrawled communication carefully. It ran:

Sir: I no you and family have money and unless 50 thousand \$ is placed in hole of oke tree 200 foot west of Southeast corner of old residence in central park thursday at Kasper Kenton. This is final. If you tell police deal is off and we will no it. We are watching every move you make.

The ominous message was signed with interlocking squares made with brush strokes.

"No more original than the first communication," commented Vance dryly. "And it strikes me, off-hand, that the person who worded this threatening epistle is not as un-schooled as he would have us believe."

He looked up at the lawyer, who was watching him intently.

"Just what are your ideas on the situation, Mr. Fleel?"

"Personally," the man said, "I am willing to leave the whole matter to Mr. Markham here, and his advisors. I—I don't know exactly what to say—I'd rather not offer any suggestions. The ransom demands can't possibly be met out of the estate, as what funds were entrusted to me are largely in long-term bonds. However, I feel sure that Mr. Kenyon Kenting will be able to get the necessary amount together and take care of the situation—if that is his wish."

"Does he know of this note?"

"Not yet," Fleel said, "unless he, too, received a copy. I brought this one immediately to Mr. Markham. But my opinion is that Kenyon should know about it, and it was my intention to go to the Kenting house from here and inform Kenyon of this new development. I'll do nothing, however, without the consent of Mr. Markham."

"Mr. Fleel," Markham said slowly, "I think you should go to Kenyon Kenting at once, and tell him the exact circumstances."

"I'm glad you feel that way, Mr. Markham," the lawyer said.

"I quite agree with you both," murmured Vance. "Only, I would ask you, Mr. Fleel, to remain at the Kenting house until Mr. Markham and I arrive there. We will be joining you very soon."

"I'll wait," mumbled Fleel as he passed through the swinging leather door out to the reception room.

"Well, Vance, what do you think?" Markham asked.

"So many things," Vance told him, "that I couldn't begin to enumerate them. All probably frivolous and worthless."

"Well, to be more specific, what do you think of that note you have there?"

"Quite authentic—oh, quite," Vance returned without hesitation. "Haasty business is afoot. A bit too precipitate for my liking, however. But there's no overlooking the earnestness of the request."

"The instructions seem somewhat vague."

"No. Oh, no, Markham. On the contrary. Quite explicit. I know the tree well. Romantic lovers leave billets-doux there. No difficulties in that quarter. Quiet spot. However, it could be adequately covered by police. I wonder..."

"This situation upsets me," Markham rumbled at length. "The newspapers were full of it this morning, as you may have noticed."

"I must get some action. This new note changes the whole complexion of things."

"Tut, tut," Vance's admonition was almost frivolous. "Really, y'know, it changes nothing. It was precisely what I was waitin' for."

"Well," snapper Markham, "now that you have it, what do you intend to do?"

"Why, I intend to go to the Purple House," Vance said calmly. "I'm not psychic, but something tells me we shall find a hand pointin' to our future activities when we arrive there."

"Well, if that's your idea," remarked Markham, "why didn't you go with Fleel?"

"Merely wished to give him sufficient time to break the news to the others and to discuss the matter

with brother Kenyon. Nothing like letting every one know the details of the case. We'll get forrader that way."

At the Kenting residence we found Kenyon Kenting, Fleel, young Falloway and Porter Quaggy assembled in the drawing room.

"Did you bring the note with you gentlemen?" Kenyon asked immediately, with frightened eagerness. "Fleel told me just what's in it, but I'd like to see the message itself."

Vance nodded and took the note from his pocket, placing it on the small desk near him.

Kenting, without a word, took the folded piece of paper from its envelope and read it carefully.

"What do you think should be done about it?" Markham asked him. "Personally, I'm not inclined to have you meet that demand just yet."

Kenting shook his head in perturbed silence. At last he said:

"I'd always feel guilty and selfish if I did anything else. If I didn't comply with this request and anything should really happen to Kasper—"

"But I've no idea exactly how I'm going to raise that much money—and at such a short notice. It'll pretty well break me, even if I can manage to get it together."

"I can help contribute to the fund," offered Quaggy, in a hard tone.

"And I'd like to do something, too," put in Fleel, "but, as you know, my personal funds are pretty well depleted at this time. As a trustee of the Kenting estate I couldn't use that money for such a purpose without a court order. And I couldn't get one in such a limited time."

Fraim Falloway stood back against the wall, listening intently.

"Why don't you let it go?" he suggested, with malicious querulousness. "Kasper's not worth that much money to any one, if you ask me. And how do you know you're going to save his life, anyway?"

"Shut up, Fraim!" snapped Kenting.

Young Falloway shrugged indifferently.

"I say, Mr. Fleel," put in Vance, "just what would be the financial standing of Mrs. Kenting in the hypothetical case that Kasper Kenting should die? Would she benefit by his demise—that is, to whom would

ADMINISTRATRIX NOTICE

Having qualified as the administratrix of the estate of William T. Baird, late of the county of Watauga, state of North Carolina, this is to notify all persons having claims against the estate of the said deceased, to present them to me for payment within twelve months of the date of this notice or the same will be plead in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to the estate are asked to make immediate payment.

This Feb. 12, 1938.
 MRS. W. T. BAIRD, Administratrix,
 Estate of William T. Baird, Dec'd.
 2-17-6p.

NOTICE OF SALE OF LAND

Under and by virtue of the power of sale contained in a certain deed of trust executed on the 25th day of May, 1933, by Jennie Mast to John E. Brown, trustee, said deed of trust being recorded in the office of the register of deeds for Watauga county in Book 15, at page 225, which deed of trust was to secure the payment of a certain note, and default thereof, the undersigned trustee will offer for sale at public auction to the highest bidder for cash on the 4th day of April, 1938, at 10 o'clock a. m., at the courthouse door in Boone, North Carolina, the following described land, to-wit:

Beginning on a stake in the road at Campbell's gate and runs north 34 degrees west crossing the creek, 32 poles to a stake; thence north 29 degrees east 25 1/2 poles to a hickory near the hollow and branch; thence north 7 degrees west crossing a branch 39 3/5 poles to a stake in the old line near the top of the ridge; thence west with the old line 49 poles to a white oak, the old corner, now gone; thence south with the old Council line 81 poles to a stake in the road on the south side of the creek; thence south 79 degrees east with the road 16 poles to a stake; thence south 59 degrees east with the road 11 3/5 poles to the beginning, containing 25 acres, except all the lands from 20 feet above the barn at the J. W. Ward line straight course to the old Council line back to the highway, including house and barn, and about five acres.

This February 22, 1938.
 JOHN E. BROWN,
 Trustee.
 2-27-5c

Kasper Kenting's share in the estate go?"
 (Continued Next Week)

Hundreds of pair of high grade Shoes being disposed of at the lowest prices in the history of local merchandising. Boone Bargain House.

NOTICE OF ADMINISTRATION

Having qualified as the administrator of the estate of Mrs. C. A. Ray, late of the county of Watauga, state of North Carolina, this is to notify all persons having claims against the said estate to present them to me for payment within twelve months of the date hereof, or this notice will be plead in bar of their recovery. All those indebted to the estate are requested to make immediate payment.
 This February 15, 1938.
 E. A. RUSSELL, Administrator,
 Estate Mrs. C. A. Ray, Deceased.
 2-17-6c

NOTICE OF TRUSTEE'S SALE

By virtue of the power of sale contained in a certain deed of trust, executed to the undersigned trustee on the first day of April, 1936, by John Johnson and wife, Cora Johnson, to secure the sum of \$220.00 to H. C. Green, said deed of trust being recorded in the office of the Register of Deeds for Watauga County in Book 26 at page 116, and default having been made in the payment of the moneys thereby secured as therein provided, I will, on Saturday, April 23, 1938, at 1 o'clock p. m., at the courthouse door of Watauga County, sell to the highest bidder, for cash, the following described real estate, to-wit:

Being in Watauga County, North Carolina, beginning on a rock near the mouth of hold house field branch on the north bank of Elk Creek, John Johnson and N. G. Wheeler's line to a locust, corner Sid and P. G. Carroll; thence north course with said Carroll line to a poplar tree; thence east to a whiteoak on top of the ridge, Couley Walters' corner; thence with Walters' line to a rock on south side of old field branch; thence with meanders of branch to the beginning, containing forty acres, more or less.
 This 21st day of March, 1938.
 N. G. WHEELER,
 Trustee.
 3-24-4tp

East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Motor Transportation Company.
 Buses leave Boone for Johnson City, Knoxville, Chattanooga, all Alabama and Western States points at 7:30 a. m.; 12:30 p. m.; and 9:05 p. m. Leave Boone for Lenoir, Hickory, Statesville, Salisbury, Charlotte, Asheville, Wilmington and all South Carolina, Georgia and Florida points at 8:26 a. m.; 1:10 p. m.; and 5:10 p. m.
 For further information call bus station—Phone 45.
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Quarter	Yearly	Benefit
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Ten to Twenty-nine Years.....	20	100.00
Thirty to Fifty Years.....	40	100.00
Fifty to Sixty-five Years.....	60	100.00

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