

KIDNAP MURDER

by S. S. Van Dine

TENTH INSTALLMENT

"But Fraim is a good boy at heart—please believe that. He merely lacks something—strength of body and spirit, perhaps."

"Quite. He's not well, Mrs. Falloway. He needs medical attention. Have you ever had a basal metabolism test made on him?"

The woman shook her head. "A blood sugar?" proceeded Vance.

"The truth is, Mr. Vance," the woman said, "he has never been examined." Then she asked quickly: "What do you think it is?"

"I wouldn't dare to venture an opinion, don't you know, an endocrine insufficiency somewhere—an inadequacy of some internal secretion, a definite and prolonged hormone disturbance. I think you should have your son checked up. It may be something that can be remedied."

He scribbled something on a page from a small note-book and, tearing it out, handed it to Mrs. Falloway.

"Here is the name and address of one of the country's greatest endocrinologists. Look him up, for your son's sake."

The woman took the slip of paper, folded it, and put it in one of the large pockets of her skirt. "And now," said Vance, "I think we'll return to the drawing room. And may you have a well-earned night's rest."

When we re-entered the drawing room we found the group just as we had left it.

"There are one or two matters—" drawled Vance and stopped abruptly. Then he said: "But I think Mrs. Kenting should be here with us for this discussion."

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"I think you're right, Mr. Vance," Kenting said, going toward the door. "I'll get Madeline myself."

He bustled from the room as he finished speaking, and we heard him going up the stairs. A few moments later we could hear his sharp, repeated knocking on a door. Then there was a long silence, and the sound of a door being opened hurriedly. Vance leaned forward in his chair and seemed to be waiting expectantly.

A few minutes later Kenting came rushing down the stairs. He stopped in the doorway, glaring at us with wide-open eyes.

"She's not there!" he exclaimed in an awed voice. He took a deep breath. "I knocked on her door several times, but I got no answer. I tried the door, but it was locked. So I went through Kaspar's room, into Madeline's. The lights are all on, but she isn't there..."

"The window—over the yard—is wide open, and—the ladder is standing against it!"

Quaggy's cigarette fell from his lips to the rug, where he stepped on it with automatic quickness, without even looking down.

"Good God, Kenyon!" he exclaimed, half under his breath. The man seemed deeply moved.

Fleel rose to his feet and, as he jerked down his waistcoat with both hands, appeared dazed and inarticulate. Even Fraim Falloway raised himself suddenly out of his stupor and glowering at Kenting, began babbling hysterically.

"The hell you say! The hell you say!" he cried out in a high-pitched voice. "That's some more of Kaspar's dirty work. He's playing a game to get money, I tell you. I don't believe he was kidnapped at all—"

"Pipe down, young fella," he ordered. "Makin' fool statements like that ain't gonna help anything."

Only Vance seemed unruffled and composed. Heath had gone to the telephone, and I could hear him, with one ear, as it were, calling the Homicide Bureau and giving officious instructions. Then he slammed down the receiver and stalked toward the stairs.

"I want to look at that room," he announced. "Two of the boys from the Bureau are coming up right away. This is a hell of a night..." His voice trailed off as he went up the steps two at a time. Vance and Markham and I had left the drawing-room and were immediately behind him.

Heath first tried the door-knob of Mrs. Kenting's room, but, as Kenting had informed us, the door was locked. He went up the hall to Kaspar Kenting's room. The door here was standing ajar and at the far end of the room we could see into Mrs. Kenting's brightly lighted boudoir. Stepping through the first chamber, we entered the lighted bedroom. As Kenting had said the window facing on the court was wide open. Cautiously avoiding any contact with the window-sill, Heath leaned out at the window, and then turned quickly back.

"The ladder's there, all right," he asserted.

Vance was apparently not listening. He had adjusted his monocle and was looking round the room without any apparent show of interest. Leisurely he walked to the dressing-table opposite the window and looked down at it for a moment. A round cut-glass powder jar stood uncovered at one side; the tinted glass top was resting on its side several inches away. A large powder puff lay on the floor.

Vance lifted up a small perfume atomizer which was resting perilously near the edge of the dressing table, and pressed the bulb slightly. He sniffed at the spray.

"Emerald," he murmured. "I'm sure this was not the lady's personal preference in perfumes. Blondes know better, don't you know. Emerald is suitable only for brunettes, especially those with olive complexions and abundant hair... Very interesting!"

Vance then went to the door and inspected it briefly.

"The night latch isn't on," he murmured, as if to himself. "And the turn-bolt hasn't been thrown. Door locked with a key. And no key in the keyhole."

"What are you getting at, Vance?" demanded Markham. "What if there is no key there? The door could have been locked and the key removed."

"Quite so—theoretically," returned Vance. "But when one locks oneself in a bedroom with a key, one usually leaves the key in the lock."

He went across the room and into the bathroom. This room too was brightly lit. He glanced at the long metal cord hanging from the electric fixture, and with his

hand tested the weight of the painted glass cylindrical ornament attached to the end of the chain. He released it and watched it swing back and forth. He looked into the tumbler which stood on the wide rim of the washbowl and, setting it down again, examined the washbowl itself, and around the edges. He then bent over the soap dish.

"What in the name of God—" Markham began irritably.

"Tut, tut, my dear fellow," Vance interrupted, turning to him with a contemplative look. "I was merely attemptin' to ascertain at just what time the lady departed. . . . I would surmise, don't you know, that it was round ten o'clock this evening."

"How do you figure that out?" Vance pointed with his cigarette to the pull-chain of the electric fixture overhead. It was still swinging back and forth like a pendulum.

"When I came into the bathroom," Vance explained, "yon polished brass chain was at rest—oh, quite—and I opined that its movement, with that heavy and abominable solid glass cylinder to control it, would discernibly continue, once it was pulled and released, for at least an hour. And it's just half-past eleven now. . . . Moreover, the glass here is quite dry, showing that it has not been used for an hour or two. Also, there's not a drop of water, either in the washbowl or on the edge; and a certain number of drops and a little dampness always remain after the washbowl has been used."

"And I cannot imagine Mrs. Kenting, with her habit of remaining up late, performing her nightly toilet as early as these matters would indicate. And yet the light was on in the bathroom, and there is a certain amount of evidence that she had been powdering her nose and spraying herself with perfume some time during the evening. Moreover my dear Markham there are indications of haste in the performance of these feminine rites, for she did not put the perfume atomizer back where it belongs, nor did she stop to retrieve the powder puff from where it had fallen on the floor."

"And all of these little details taken in connection with the open latch and the unthrown bolt and the missing key in the hall door, lead me—rather vaguely and shakily. I admit—to the theory that she had a rendezvous elsewhere, for which she was a wee bit late, at some time around the far-from-witching hour of ten o'clock."

"All right," Markham said. "But what follows from all that?" Without answering the question Vance turned to Heath.

"What time, Sergeant," he asked, "did you notify Fleel and Kenyon Kenting about the arrangements for tonight?"

"Oh—I should say—" Heath thought a moment. "Round six o'clock. Maybe a little after."

"And where did you find these gentlemen?" "Well, I called Fleel at his home and he wasn't there yet. But I left word for him and he called me back in a little while. But I didn't think to ask him where he was. And Kenting was here."

Vance again addressed Heath. "I'm afraid, Sergeant, your fingerprint men and your photographers and your busy boys from the Homicide Bureau are going to draw a blank here."

"I still want to know," persisted Markham, "what all this time-table hocus-pocus means."

"It means deviltry, Markham. It means something damnable. I don't like this case. I don't at all like it."

"But we can't just sit back," said Markham in a dispirited voice. "Isn't there some step you can suggest?"

"Well, yes. But it won't help much. I propose that first we ask one or two questions of the gentlemen downstairs. And then I propose that we go into the yard and take a look at the ladder."

"And after that I propose that we go home and bide our time."

When we reached the drawing room we found all four of its occupants anxious and alert.

"Have you learned anything?" asked Fraim Falloway, in a semi-hysterical falsetto.

"We're not through looking round yet," Vance returned placatingly. "We hope to know something definite very soon. Just now, however, I wish to ask each of you gentlemen a question."

Must Register For Last Quarter Pay

Raleigh, March 31.—Unemployed workers who have exhausted their benefits based on their work during the first three quarters of 1937 and who worked some in the last quarter of last year, should re-register for benefits at their local Employment office now so they can begin to get additional benefits based on work the fourth quarter, which are to be available after April 1, the Unemployment Compensation Commission announces.

Benefits for the first quarter of this year, January, February and March, had to be based on the earnings of workers in the first three quarters of last year, or up to September 30. On and after April 1, this year, the earnings in October, November and December, last year, can also be considered. Many workers had earnings in those last three months of last year, and had exhausted their wage credits or will soon exhaust those based on the first three quarters of last year. They still have to their credit any earnings in the last three months of 1937, and can get those benefits after April 1, if they are otherwise eligible.

In order to get these additional benefits, the unemployed worker should register again at the employment office, even though he had signed up the continued claims long enough to use up his benefit amounts. In such cases, the central office will figure the benefits again, including the fourth quarter earnings of last year.

If a worker has been employed some of last year and on through the first quarter of this year, then the earnings during the last quarter of last year will be included in figuring the benefits, in case he becomes employed after April 1.

The city of Greensboro has extended an invitation to the N. C. Unemployment Compensation Commission to move to that city, in which adequate quarters for the central office and rooming and boarding places for the workers are promised. The available quarters in Greensboro were inspected by Mrs. J. B. Spilman, member of the Commission, J. Benton Stacy, Director of Purchase and Contract, and P. K. Stone, a representative of the Social Security Board in Washington.

Raleigh asked additional time to try to provide adequate quarters and the commission decided to wait 30 days before making a final decision.

More lespedeza was seeded in Granville county this season than in any previous year, reports the county agent.

Most tongues are just a little lengthy.

he managed a condescending smile and replied:

"I have no favorite perfume—I know nothing about such things. It's true, I send bottles of perfume to my women clients at Christmas, instead of the conventional flower-baskets, but I always leave the selection to my secretary."

"Do you regard Mrs. Kenting as one of your women clients?" Vance continued.

"Naturally," answered the lawyer.

"By the by, Mr. Fleel, is your secretary blond or brunette?"

"I don't know. I suppose you'd call her a brunette."

"Many thanks," said Vance curtly.

"What is your favorite scent, Mr. Falloway?"

(Continued next week)

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