

KIDNAP MURDER Case

by S. S. Van Dine

Fifteenth Installment

There was a brief respite of black silence, so poignant as to be almost palpable, and then came the crash of an upset chair and the dull heavy sound of a human body striking the floor. I was afraid to move. Heath's labored breathing made a welcome noise at my side.

Then I heard Vance's voice—the cynical nonchalant voice I knew so well.

The ray from Heath's pocket flash moved about the walls and ceiling, but I could see neither him nor Vance. Then the light came to a halt, and Heath's triumphant voice rang out.

"Here it is, sir,—a socket beside the window." And as he spoke a weak, yellowed bulb dimly lit up the room.

On the floor lay two motionless bodies.

"Pleasant evening, Sergeant," Vance spoke in his usual steady, whimsical voice. "My sincerest apologies, and all that." Then he caught sight of me, and his face sobered. "Are you all right, Van? he asked.

I assured him I had escaped the

NOTICE OF SALE
North Carolina, Wilkes County. Wilkes County vs. George Carlton and wife, Mrs. George Carlton. Under and by virtue of a judgment made and entered in the above-entitled cause in the Superior Court of Wilkes County, dated April 18, 1938, the undersigned Commissioner will, on the 18th day of May, 1938, at 12:00 o'clock noon, at the door of the Court-house in Wilkesboro, North Carolina, sell at public auction to the highest bidder for cash, subject to the confirmation of the Court, the property hereinafter described, located in Boomer Township, Wilkes County, and more particularly described as follows:

Being 12 acres, more or less, in Boomer Township, listed in the name of George Carlton in 1934, and being all the land owned in Boomer Township by George Carlton in 1934. For further description reference is made to book page in the Register of Deeds office for Wilkes County. Done this the 18th day of April, 1938.

W. H. McELWEE, Commissioner

NOTICE OF SALE
North Carolina, Wilkes County. Wilkes County vs. Mrs. Thomas Holcomb. Under and by virtue of a judgment made and entered in the above-entitled cause in the Superior Court of Wilkes County, dated April 18, 1938, the undersigned Commissioner will, on the 18th day of May, 1938, at 12:00 o'clock noon, at the door of the Court-house in Wilkesboro, North Carolina, sell at public auction to the highest bidder for cash, subject to the confirmation of the Court, the property hereinafter described, located in Traphill Township, Wilkes County, and more particularly described as follows:

Being 2 acres, more or less, in Traphill Township listed in the name of Mrs. Thomas Holcomb in 1934, and being all the land owned in Traphill Township by Mrs. Thomas Holcomb in 1934. For further description reference is made to book page in the Register of Deeds office of Wilkes County. Dated this the 18th day of April, 1938.

W. H. McELWEE, Commissioner

5-9-4tM

melee unscathed, and added that I had not used my automatic because I was afraid I might have hit him in the dark.

"I quite understand," he murmured and, nodding his head, he went quickly to the two prostrate bodies. After a momentary inspection, he stood up and said:

"Quite dead, Sergeant. Really, y' know, I seem to be a fairly accurate shot."

"I'll say!" breathed Heath with admiration. "I wasn't a hell of a lot of help, was I, Mr. Vance?" he added a bit shamefacedly.

"Really nothing for you to do, Sergeant."

The last word had been only half completed when there came two shots from the rear door. The slim, crouching figure of a man, somewhat scholarly looking and well dressed, had suddenly appeared there.

Vance had swung about simultaneously with his warning to Heath, and there were two more shots in rapid succession, this time from Vance's gun.

I saw the poised revolver of blue steel drop from the raised hand of the man at the rear door; he looked round him, dazed, and both his hands went to his abdomen. He remained upright a moment; then he doubled up and sank to the floor where he lay in an awkward crumpled heap.

Heath's revolver too dropped from his grip. He staggered backward a few feet and slid heavily into a chair.

"The baby winged me," Heath said with an effort. "My gun jammed."

He had barely finished speaking when he heard a repeated ringing near us.

"By Jove, a telephone!" commented Vance. "Now we'll have to find the instrument."

Heath straightened up.

"The thing's right here on the mantel," he said.

"You'd better let me answer it, Mr. Vance. You're too refined."

He picked up the receiver with his left hand.

"What'd you want?" he asked, in a gruff, officious tone. There was a short pause. "Oh, yeah? O.

NOTICE OF SALE
North Carolina, Wilkes County. Wilkes County vs. Elizabeth Parsons. Under and by virtue of a judgment made and entered in the above-entitled cause in the Superior Court of Wilkes County, dated April 18, 1938, the undersigned Commissioner will, on the 18th day of May, 1938, at 12:00 o'clock noon, at the courthouse in Wilkesboro, North Carolina, sell at public auction to the highest bidder for cash, subject to the confirmation of the Court, the property hereinafter described, located in Stanton Township, Wilkes County, and more particularly described as follows:

Being 60 acres, more or less, in Stanton Township, listed in the name of Elizabeth Parsons in 1934, and being all the land owned in Stanton Township by Elizabeth Parsons in 1934. For further description reference is made to book page in the Register of Deeds office of Wilkes County. Done this the 18th day of April, 1938.

W. H. McELWEE, Commissioner

5-9-4tM

K. go ahead." A longer pause followed, as Heath listened. "Don't know nothing about it," he shot back, in a heavy, resentful voice. Then he added: "You got the wrong number." And he slammed down the receiver.

"Who was it, do you know, Sergeant?" Vance spoke quietly as he lighted a cigarette.

Heath turned slowly and looked at Vance. His eyes were narrowed, and there was an expression of awe on his face as he answered.

"Sure I know," he said significantly. He shook his head as if he did not trust himself to speak. "There ain't no mistaking that voice."

"Well, who was it, Sergeant?"

"It was—" he began, and then he was suddenly aware of my presence in the room. "Mother of God!" he breathed. "I don't have to tell you Mr. Vance. You knew this morning."

Vance looked at the Sergeant a moment and shook his head.

"Y' know," he said, in a curiously repressed voice. "I was almost hoping I was wrong. I hate to think—" He came suddenly forward to Heath who had fallen back weakly against the mantel and was blindly reaching for the wall, in an effort to hold himself upright. Vance put his arm around Heath and led him to a chair.

"Here, Sergeant," he said in a kindly tone, handing him an etched silver flask, "take a drink of this—and don't be a sissy."

Heath inverted the flask to his lips. Then he handed it back to Vance. "That's potent juice," he said, standing up and pushing Vance away from him. "Let's get going."

"Right-o, Sergeant. We've only begun." As he spoke he walked toward the rear door and stepped over the dead man, into the next room. Heath and I were at his heels.

We were in a small box-like room, without windows. Opposite us, against the wall, stood a narrow army cot. Vance rushed forward and leaned over the cot. The motionless form of a woman lay stretched out on it. Despite her disheveled hair and her deathly pallor, I recognized Madeline Kenting. Strips of adhesive tape bound her lips together, and both her arms were tied securely with pieces of heavy clothes-line to the iron rods at either side of the cot.

Vance dexterously removed the

NOTICE OF SALE
North Carolina, Wilkes County. Wilkes County vs. Julius Hampton and wife, Mrs. Julius Hampton. Under and by virtue of a judgment made and entered in the above-entitled cause in the Superior Court of Wilkes County, dated May 2, 1938, the undersigned Commissioner will, on the 1st day of June, 1938, at 12:00 o'clock noon, at the door of the Wilkes County Courthouse, in Wilkesboro, North Carolina, sell at public auction to the highest bidder for cash, subject to the confirmation of the Court, the property hereinafter described, located as follows:

Being 9 acres, more or less, listed in the name of Julius Hampton in 1934, and being all the land owned in New Castle Township by Julius Hampton in 1934. This 30th day of April, 1938.

W. H. McELWEE, Commissioner

5-23-4t(M)

tape from her mouth, and the woman sucked in a deep breath, as if she had been partly suffocated.

Vance busied himself with the cruel cords binding her wrists. When he had released them he laid his ear against her heart for a moment, and poured a little of the cognac from his flask between her lips. She swallowed automatically and coughed. Then Vance lifted her in his arms and started from the room.

I preceded him as he carried his inert burden down the dingy stairway.

"We must get her to a hospital at once, Van," he said when we had reached the lower hallway.

The Chinaman still lay where we had left him, on the floor against the wall.

"Drag him up to that pipe in the corner, Mr. Van Dine," the Sergeant told me in a strained voice. "My arm is sorta numb."

I moved the limp form of the Chinaman until his head came in contact with the pipe; and Heath, with one hand, drew out a pair of handcuffs. Clamping one of the manacles on the unconscious man's right wrist, he pulled it around the pipe and with his foot manipulated the Chinaman's left arm upward till he could close the second iron around it.

Then we both went out into the murky night, Heath slamming the door behind him. Vance, with his burden, was perhaps a hundred yards ahead of us, and we came up with him just as he reached the car. He placed Mrs. Kenting on the rear seat of the tonneau and arranged the cushions under her head.

"I'm heading for the Doran Hospital, just this side of Bronx Park, Sergeant," Vance said, as we sped along. In about fifteen minutes, ignoring all traffic lights and driving at a rate far exceeding the city speed limit, we drew up in front of the hospital.

Vance jumped from the car, took Mrs. Kenting in his arms again, and carried her up the wide marble steps. He returned to the car in less than ten minutes.

"Everything's all right, Sergeant," he said as he approached the car. "The lady has regained consciousness. Fresh air did it."

Heath had stepped out of the car and was standing up on the sidewalk.

"So long, Mr. Vance," he said. "I'm getting in that taxi up ahead. I gotta get back to that damn house. I got work to do."

"Stay right here, Sergeant, and get that arm properly dressed, first."

He led Heath back, and accompanied him to the hospital steps. A few minutes later Vance came out alone.

"The noble Sergeant is all right, Van," he said, as he took his place at the wheel again. "He'll be out before long."

When we reached Vance's apartment Currie opened the door for us. There was relief written in every line of the old butler's face.

"Good heavens, Currie!" said Vance, as he stepped inside. "I told you, you might tuck yourself in at eleven o'clock if you hadn't heard from me."

"I'm sorry, sir," Currie said in a voice which, for all its formality, had an emotional tremor in it. "I—I couldn't go to bed, sir, until you returned. I'm very glad you have come home, sir."

"You're a sentimental old fossil, Currie," Vance complained, handing the butler his hat.

"Mr. Markham is waiting in the library," said Currie.

As we entered the library, we found Markham pacing up and down.

"Well, thank God!" he said. And, though he attempted to sound trivial, his relief was as evident as old Currie's had been.

"Greetings, old dear," said Vance. "Why this unexpected pleasure of your presence at such an hour?"

"I was merely interested, officially, in what you might have found on Lord Street," returned Markham.

"I'm frightfully sorry, Markham," he said, "but I fear I have

NOTICE OF SALE
North Carolina, Wilkes County. Wilkes County vs. James McGee and wife, Ella McGee, C. G. Glass, Trustee, Dave Mink, V. L. Parks. Under and by virtue of a judgment made and entered in the above-entitled cause in the Superior Court of Wilkes County, dated March 22, 1938, the undersigned Commissioner will, on the 28th day of May, 1938, at 12:00 o'clock noon, at the door of the Wilkes County Courthouse, in Wilkesboro, North Carolina, sell at public auction to the highest bidder for cash, subject to the confirmation of the Court, the property hereinafter described, located in Antioch Township, Wilkes County, and more particularly described as follows:

Being 5 acres, more or less, in Antioch Township, listed in the name of James McGee in 1934, and being all the land owned in Antioch Township by James McGee in 1934. For further description reference is made to descriptions found in book 138, page 810, in the Register of Deeds office of Wilkes County.

This 28th day of April, 1938.

W. H. McELWEE, Commissioner

5-23-4t(M)

made you a bit of trouble. The fact is," he added carelessly, "I killed three men."

"Are you serious?" blurted Markham.

"Oh, quite," answered Vance. "Do you think you can save me from the dire consequences?"

And then he told Markham in detail everything that had happened that night. But I thought he too greatly minimized his own part in the tragic drama. When he had finished his recital he asked somewhat coyly:

"Am I a doomed culprit, or were there what you would call extenuating circumstances?—I'm horribly weak on the intricacies of the law, don't y' know."

"Damn it! forget everything," said Markham. "If you're really worried, I'll get you a brass medal as big as Columbus Circle."

The front door-bell rang, and a minute later Heath entered the library. His ordinary ruddy face was a little pale and drawn, and his right arm was in a sling. He saluted Markham and turned sheepishly to Vance.

"Your old saw-bones at the

ADMINISTRATOR'S NOTICE
Having qualified as administrator of the estate of Sanford Lee Johnson, late of Wilkes County, State of North Carolina, this is to notify all persons having claims against said estate to present them to the undersigned on or before the 28th day of April, 1938, or this notice will be plead in bar of their recovery. All persons indebted to the said estate will make immediate payment.

This 28th day of April, 1938.

D. W. MARLOW, Administrator of the Estate of Sanford Lee Johnson, deceased, Gilreath, N. C.

A. H. CASEY, Attorney

6-6-6t(M)

Ads. get attention—and results!

hospital told me I had to go home," he complained. "And there's nothing in God's World the matter with me," he added indignantly. "Imagine him putting this arm in a sling—Hell! If my arm hadn't jammed—"

"See, that was a bad break," Sergeant nodded Markham.

Vance and Markham and Heath discussed the case from various angles for perhaps a half hour longer. Markham was getting impatient.

"I'm going home," he said finally, as he rose. "We'll get this thing straightened out in the morning."

"Is there anything you want me to do, Mr. Vance?" Heath's tone was respectful, but a little weary.

NOTICE OF SALE
North Carolina, Wilkes County. Wilkes County vs. W. Hill Parsons and wife, Mrs. W. Hill Parsons. Under and by virtue of a judgment made and entered in the above-entitled cause in the Superior Court of Wilkes County, dated April 18, 1938, the undersigned Commissioner will, on the 18th day of May, 1938, at 12:00 o'clock noon, at the door of the Court-house in Wilkesboro, North Carolina, sell at public auction to the highest bidder for cash, subject to the confirmation of the Court, the property hereinafter described, located in Boomer Township, Wilkes County, and more particularly described as follows:

Being 21 acres, more or less, listed in Boomer Township in the name of W. Hill Parsons in 1934, and being all the land owned in Boomer Township by W. Hill Parsons in 1934. For further description reference is made to book 154, page 232, in the Register of Deeds office of Wilkes County.

Done this the 18th day of April, 1938.

W. H. McELWEE, Commissioner

5-9-4tM

Vance looked at him with a misanthropic expression. (Continued next week)

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