

MURDER IS FORGETFUL

CHAPTER II
SYNOPSIS: — Johnny Saxon, private investigator, maintained offices in New York City with his uncle, Moe Martin, literary agent. They had not been doing too well when Johnny received an assignment from the wealthy Hardware Smith, to watch their daughter, Irene Smith. Irene's husband had been murdered and since Irene had suffered from amnesia, they wanted her under constant guard. When Johnny and Moe arrived at the Smith estate they were met by a beautiful red-headed girl and her Great Dane.

"I heard you were coming," the girl said. Johnny thought her eyes were about the nicest green he had ever seen. She held out her hand. "I'm Kay," she offered. "Kay Smith. My mother is Irene Smith."

"Oh," said Johnny. Her fingers were cool. Then he said. "This is my associate, Mr. Martin."

The girl looked back at Johnny Saxon. "You came here about mother," she said. "Well, there are some things I ought to tell

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you."

Johnny's level eyes flickered slightly. "If you mean about her suffering from amnesia, I already understand—"

"It's more than that," Kay said. "She's had a terrific shock, and so we have to be very careful. My goodness, she now thinks she is an actress. You'll think she acts oddly, but please try to remember that she recalls nothing at all since that night two weeks ago..." Her voice faltered and her gaze dropped.

"You mean," Johnny asked gently, "about... your father?"

Kay nodded. "Have you heard?"

"Only a part of it," said Johnny. "If it's all right, I'd like to hear the whole story."

The girl said, "Mother and father were driving back from New York that night." Her voice was low. "What exactly happened, no one knows. Father was found the next morning, shot, on a lonely side road near Little Neck. The police found the car in the same vicinity. It had gone off the road and was a total wreck."

Johnny said, "You mean, he was shot and then the car went off the road?"

"They don't know. That's it. The doctors think that mother must have been in the car though, when it crashed. Some sort of injury hurt her head. It explains loss of memory." She paused, and Johnny thought she did not seem like a very young girl then, but more like someone who had grown up overnight. "We didn't locate mother until two days ago," she went on.

"She remembers nothing at all," said Kay. Her voice was trembling a little. "How she got there, where she's been all this time since the accident, what she's done... no one knows. The doctors say she might snap out of it suddenly, and then again it might be months. She merely considers us friends who have asked her out here. She does not even remember father."

Johnny touched the girl's slim arm. He said quietly, "I'll do all I can to help. The way I under-

stand it, they figure that if your mother regains her memory she'll be able to say who killed your father. That is, if it was anyone she knew."

"Yes," said the girl. "Helping mother to remember is part of it. But that isn't the only reason we need you. Uncle Thomas also employed you because of the notes."

Johnny frowned. "Notes?"

"Like this one," said Kay, taking something from the pocket of her beach robe. Unfolding it carefully, she handed it to Johnny Saxon. "It came in the mail the day before yesterday, and was addressed to mother."

Johnny read the words that were typed on the single sheet of white paper. They said:

You are not Irene Smith. Don't try to remember who you are. If you do, there might be another accident.

There was no signature.

"Any idea what it means?" Johnny asked.

"That's just it!" said the girl. "We haven't the slightest idea." Kay's eyes swept to Johnny Saxon's, and she added tensely, "Her life's in danger. That's why we need someone like you. We understand you used to be a fiction writer. Well, mother was working on a novel. And so we figure that if you keep reminding her about writing—talking shop, as it were—keep bringing up little details that will make mother remember her book, it might help to restore her memory. But the book has disappeared!"

They were interrupted by someone coming from the direction of the terrace.

She was tall, and moved with a deliberate grace that reminded him of an actress coming on to a stage. As she came closer, Johnny saw that the woman had fair and sensitive features, and that her hair was auburn-red. He knew immediately that she was Irene Smith.

She walked right past her daughter as though the girl were a total stranger. Her gaze was intent upon Johnny Saxon, and now she was approaching him with outstretched hands.

"Darling!" she said softly. "I thought I'd never find you!"

Johnny Saxon felt the woman's cool, firm fingers upon his own. Her eyes could have been beautifully disturbing except for the slight expression of vacance that was now in their depths.

He said, "Hello."

Irene said, "You've been away so long, Barton." Her eyes shone. "I must talk to you. Alone!"

Johnny saw the expression on young Kay's face. There was a manner about her that told Johnny not to be surprised by any of her mother's actions.

"Come," suggested Irene, putting her arm through his. She nodded toward several chairs near the swimming pool. "These people annoy me."

There were white metal chairs close to the pool's edge, and they sat there. Irene Smith drew her chair close to his, reaching out to clasp his hands.

"Why didn't you tell me you were going away, Bart?" Her gray eyes seemed to scold him.

"Well..."

"I had arranged to have dinner for you that evening, remember? And then, suddenly you had gone away. I felt terrible, Barton."

"So did I," Johnny hedged. He paused and wondered who Barton was and what approach he should take.

"Is there something wrong, darling?" Her eyes watched the calm surface of the nearby water. "You haven't called me Marie once since you've returned."

He said, "No, there's not a thing wrong. I've missed you too."

"Hummm." Her eyes were closed.

"I said..." He paused. Johnny suddenly thought it was too bad she had been in an accident. He imagined she'd had a very brilliant mind.

The nurse said, "She gets these drowsy spells often. They come over her suddenly."

Johnny stood up. The woman in the stiff white uniform had approached so quietly across the lawn that he had not heard her. "Who is Bart?" he asked.

The nurse shook her head. "She has never used the name before." Karen struck Johnny Saxon as being cool and efficient and reserved. Her hair and eyes were very dark, and there was enough coloring to her face to offer a nice contrast.

"If you don't mind..." Karen moved toward Irene Smith's chair. "I'll take her to her room," she said.

"She seems to tire very easily. It's time for her nap."

Johnny started toward the house. He opened one of two screen doors decorated with expensive bronze hardware and stepped inside the house. He found himself in a spacious hallway which ended at a wide flight of stairs.

Johnny moved to the first doorway on his right and saw a long, book-lined library. He turned around as he heard rapid steps hurrying through the hall.

A thin, little man went scurrying down the length of the hall. He walked with the quick, energetic steps of a woman, and Johnny caught a glimpse of a shock of white hair.

The man bent down and fitted a key into the lock of one door. He tried several keys; apparently he had a fistful. He went to work with determination, fitting first one key and then another into the door lock.

The huge Great Dane appeared in one of the archways across the hall, stretched himself lazily, then trotted over to investigate what the little gray-haired man was doing.

The man said, "Go away, Michael." His voice was inclined to be shrill and sharp. He certainly was no youngster.

The little, old guy was still trying keys in the lock. He kept muttering to himself. Johnny saw that his pockets were pulled out of shape by the weight of the keys.

"Maybe the door's open," suggested Johnny.

The man straightened. "How's that?" asked the oldster, squinting out of small bright blue eyes.

"I said, maybe the door's already open." Stepping forward, he started to reach for the door-knob.

"Of course it's open!" snapped the man, reaching out and opening the door ahead of Johnny.

Johnny's dark brows arched above his eyes. He said, "My name is Saxon. I'm..."

"Your partner's upstairs," said the old man. Then he turned and hurried down the service hallway that was beyond the door.

"The devil," murmured Johnny.

Later, Johnny found himself in a room floored with pale green tile. Plants and flowers grew everywhere. Somewhere water trickled over stones. It was a nice pleasant sound.

Kay was lying on a wicker lounge, her head buried in her arms. Her tanned legs were straight and slim.

Johnny sat down and lit a cigarette. "It was tough about your father," he said. "I can understand how you feel."

Kay murmured her thanks. "It wasn't father." The remark surprised him. You know what I mean. Mother doesn't remember us. She thinks she knows you. Yet she recalls nothing. Nothing at all!" Her lip trembled slightly. She had a nicely formed, determined mouth.

Johnny reached out and pulled a chromium ash tray toward

him. "I understand your mother was examined by one of the best doctors in New York. What did the doctor think about her case?"

He added, "It really is loss of memory?"

"Oh, yes!" There was some slight concussion, too, but the specialist said it was nothing serious.

They even took X-rays. All they can surmise is that mother must have driven the car off the road, crashed and was knocked unconscious for some time."

"Then the accident wasn't discovered right away?"

"No."

"So your father wasn't found in the car at all?"

She shook her head. "He was discovered some distance back down the highway... Which proves that someone must have ordered mother to drive on alone."

(To be continued)

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Topia News

Mr. Edison Fields, of State College, spent the week end with his mother, Mrs. Paul Fields.

Those visiting Mrs. Belle Blevins, Saturday night were Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Jenkins, of Portsmouth, Ohio; Mr. and Mrs. R. C. Sturgill, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Sturgill, of Forest Hill, Md.; Mr. and Mrs. T. E. Pugh and son, Fred, of Sparta; also Mrs. Effie Fields and children, Grace, Beulah, Edison and Ray.

Mrs. Eugene Black visited her sister, Miss Ollie Caudill, Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Sturgill, Piney Creek, visited Mr. and Mrs. Oscar E. Moxley, Sunday.

Mr. Ray Fields returned home from Maryland, Saturday, where he has been employed for a few weeks.

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