

DEATH AT THE MANOR

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READ THIS FIRST:

Eliza Ritter, a beauty shop operator, taking the place of her friend, Kitty, for a week in the private salon of Mrs. Horace Witherspoon, Sr., is disturbed by queer things she finds and odd people she meets at the Manor, the luxurious Witherspoon home. She finds her employer is an eccentric old woman with a sadly misplaced vanity. She meets her grandmother, Daphne; her daughter-in-law, Della Craig, an actress, who is a house guest, and the various servants of the household. Eliza overhears a violent argument between Daphne and her mother, during which the girl criticizes her grandmother. After meeting some of the other house guests, Eliza gives a manure to old Mrs. Witherspoon's sister, who converses in riddles. While Mrs. Witherspoon, Sr., is under one of the four hair driers in the salon, Phil, Eliza's friend, drops in to see her and telephones from downstairs. Eliza goes down to see him.

(NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY)

CHAPTER TEN

"LORDY!" I shot up like a jack-in-the-box when the kitchen clock struck ten. "I've been sitting here half an hour! Mrs. Witherspoon will give me what for!"

"Oh, let the old gal sizzle!" Phil was unconcerned; it was not his job.

"I have to go," I insisted. "Maybe if you'd ask me, I could come into town tomorrow night."

He grinned. "O. K., I'll ask you. Run along to your rich old lady, sweet." And he leaned over and kissed the tip of my nose. "I'll give you a ring tomorrow."

"All right," I kissed him once for good measure and flew up the stairs.

"I'm awfully sorry to have kept you waiting," I began breathless apologies as I untied the hood of the drier and lifted it upward.

"I—" A shriek, long drawn-out like that of a locomotive whistle at a grade crossing split the air. It was myself screaming again and again as the limp, lifeless body of Mrs. Witherspoon fell face forward upon my breast!

For one agonizing second I stood frozen. The noise of the drier like a giant plane motor roared in my ears. Louder, louder, louder! A faint odor of bitter almond reached my nostrils. I sneezed, I swayed, I pitched downward to the floor.

When I opened my eyes I was lying on the black and silver divan in the salon lobby. Through a mist I saw the moving figures of a man and a woman. I tried to speak. Nausea overwhelmed me. I was going to be sick. Someone held a basin before me, and then someone wiped my face with a cold cloth.

Presently the mist cleared. Mrs. Greely, her face flushed, was bending over me.

"Better now?" Her voice came from an immeasurable distance.

"Better." The effort to speak sent a wave of pain through my head.

"You'll be all right soon."

"She did it! She did it!" A soft

and voice shrill and strained screamed the words. Eliza moved into focus. She loomed above me, tall and forbidding; she pointed an accusing finger in my direction.

"Eliza—please!" a man said tiredly, and I knew that Mr. Horace was in the room.

"I tell you she did it!" Eliza would not be hushed. "She stole the emeralds!"

"The emeralds?" repeated Mr. Horace stupidly. "What emeralds?"

"She knows!" The maid's face was livid with hatred. "She watched me put them on the table. She knows!"

"What is she saying?" Mr. Horace was utterly bewildered.

"Mrs. Witherspoon's jewels," I faltered. "They were on the table—"

"You stole them! After she was dead you stole them!" Eliza laughed hysterically. "You robbed the dead!"

"The dead?" I stared at her. "Mrs. Witherspoon is—she is dead?"

"Yes—yes, she is dead," Mr. Horace said dully. "Mother is dead."

He groped for a chair and sank heavily into it. His face was ashen; he looked ten years older than the little man who had come into the salon—was it only this evening—to ask his mother a question, a question which would remain unasked and unanswered!

"Poor mother!" His voice cracked slightly. "The excitement of the ball was too much for her."

"She died—in there?" I motioned to the anteroom. I saw that someone had drawn the silver curtains tightly together.

"In there," replied Mrs. Greely gravely, as one speaks of death.

"And I fainted?"

She nodded. "Eliza found you on the floor—the two of you."

"Thief!" shrieked Eliza, and burst into a paroxysm of weeping. I shuddered, seeing again that shapeless bundle in the bright-colored kimono as it had toppled toward me.

Eliza's awful weeping filled the room.

"When—when did she die?" My voice was a whisper.

"You don't know?" Mr. Horace regarded me curiously. "But you were there!"

I swallowed with an effort. "No," I said. "No. I was downstairs in the pantry."

"In the pantry?" I think he thought I had gone suddenly daft. "What were you doing in the pantry?"

"She was hiding the emeralds, that's what she was doing!" Eliza uncovered her swollen face.

"Mrs. Greely," he motioned to the housekeeper, "will you take Eliza to her room? She has gone to—" Mrs. Greely's face was white as she looked at the woman who had just died.

"And he rubbed his forehead, between his eyes as

though he, too, were in danger of sudden collapse.

"Very well, sir," Mrs. Greely placed her arms about the maid's shaking shoulders. "Come, Eliza!"

"And now, Miss Ritter," Mr. Horace continued when they had gone, "perhaps you had better explain." His voice trailed uncertainly. I felt a wave of pity for him. He was so obviously unfit to cope with the situation.

"Mr. Witherspoon!" I leaned toward him. "I didn't steal the emeralds. You must believe me!"

"The emeralds! Oh, yes! I had forgotten." He smiled wearily. "You must forgive me. My mother's death—"

"Of course—of course," I said softly. I was conscious of a feeling of mild surprise at the evidence of his deep grief. Mrs. Witherspoon, in my opinion, had not been one to inspire great love. Perhaps, I thought, perhaps he was remembering her as she must have been in her younger days; perhaps he had already forgotten the garrulous tyrant with whom I had had such brief and unpleasant contact.

Death, I was aware, drew a veil over life, softening its harshness and stern reality.

"She has been ill for many years," he said suddenly, as if thinking aloud. "Again and again I begged her to consult a physician, but she refused. She disliked speaking of illness; she wanted to remain forever young and strong. I—I tried to persuade her to postpone this affair tonight. She would not. And now she is dead. The excitement was too much for her worn heart."

"Yes," I nodded. "She looked badly."

The son sighed. "She had a full life, a very full life." He fixed his eyes blankly upon the ceiling.

"Mr. Witherspoon!" I hated to foist my own affairs upon the little man, but I had to get the business of the missing jewels settled.

"Yes, Miss Ritter?"

"I didn't touch the emeralds."

"Now, now," for the first time he looked directly into my eyes, "you must not worry," he said kindly. "No one accuses you."

"Eliza accuses me."

"Eliza is not herself. My mother's death has upset her. She was very fond of mother. I am sure that we will find the jewels. They may have been mislaid."

"Thank you," I was near to tears. "I really never had my hands on them. Eliza laid them on the table and they were there all the time I was shampooing Mrs. Witherspoon's hair and setting the wave. I remember how they sparkled in the light. But—I had a sudden inspiration—but I didn't see them when I came back upstairs. Perhaps I was too excited."

(To Be Continued)

Bulkeley Packs Up



Defeated Democrat Senator Robert Bulkeley, of Ohio, packs up papers in his Washington office. He was beaten by Robert Taft, Republican, who is being mentioned as a presidential possibility.

Bares Munitions Deal



Frederick Wingersky, Boston attorney and a vice president of McKesson & Robbins, told investigators in New York of huge \$50,000,000 gun-running scheme which "F. Donald Coster" allegedly attempted to engineer. He said 2,000,000 rifles were to be shipped to Spain through an English oil firm.

Best Dressed



Mme. Antenor Patino, wife of the Bolivian minister to London, is pictured above. She was named by Paris fashion moguls as the best-dressed woman of 1938. Last year's leader, the Duchess of Windsor, was second.

Off to See Kaiser



Dr. William C. Huebener, a Cincinnati, Ohio, heart specialist, is pictured as he sailed from New York to visit former Kaiser Wilhelm at Doorn, Netherlands. The physician refused to reveal the nature of his mission.

Christmas Brings Them Home



Mrs. Millard Tydings (left), wife of the U. S. senator from Maryland, arriving in New York from a European vacation with the senator, topped off her winter ensemble with a neat hat of ornithological theme. At right, Raymond Massey, who portrays Abraham Lincoln in a Broadway stage hit, greets his son, Guifrey, upon the boy's arrival on vacation from studies in England. (Central Press)

Mussolini Is Popular With the Girls



Opening a new distillery at Ciampino, near Rome, to increase Italy's wine production, Premier Benito Mussolini is greeted by cheering and clapping girls. (Central Press)

The President's Yuletide Plea for Peace



President Franklin D. Roosevelt is pictured as he pressed the button which illuminated the Christmas tree at the White House while his son James, and Mrs. Roosevelt looked on. Between James and the President's wife, in the background, is Harry L. Hopkins, new Secretary of Commerce. In his speech Roosevelt renewed pledges for "peace to all the world." (Central Press)

Where 7 Army Men Died in Air Blast



Here is part of the shattered wreckage of the giant twin-engine army transport-bomber which exploded in mid-air near Uniontown, Ala. All seven occupants of the plane, army men who were on a routine flight and looked forward to Yule celebrations with families and friends, were instantly killed. The cause of the explosion which shattered the plane has not yet been determined. (Central Press)

In Control Room of Giant Clipper



A view of the navigation and radio room of the 74-passenger clipper plane built for Pan-American Airways is shown above. The control room of the huge Boeing ship is as spacious as the bridge of an ocean liner. At the navigation table is Ed Yuravich, chief of foreign air carrier inspection. Talking between the first and second pilots' posts are Test Pilot E. T. Allen and J. E. Boudwin. At the radio desk is Earl Ferguson, and standing beside him is Capt. R. O. Sullivan, of Pan-American's Atlantic division. There will be six clipper ships like this for service above both oceans. (Central Press)