

# The PENTHOUSE MURDER

by Caleb Johnson

**EIGHTH INSTALMENT**  
**SYNOPSIS:** A card game is in session in Elmer Henderson's penthouse atop a New York skyscraper. The players are: Henderson, Police Inspector, Flaherty, Martin Frazier, Archie Doane, Max Michaelis and his friend, Williams, a stockbroker.

They are waiting for Stephen Fitzgerald. When he fails to appear, a telephone calls bring the information that he is out with a girl. Fitzgerald and Henderson are both romantically interested in Lydia Lane, the famous actress, but Archie Doane reveals that she is engaged to marry him. Doane leaves the party early when Fitzgerald fails to appear. A short time later he telephones Inspector Flaherty with the frantic news that he has found Fitzgerald and Miss Lane dead in Lydia Lane's penthouse apartment.

When Flaherty and the medical examiner reach the apartment, they find that Miss Lane is still alive. She is rushed to a hospital where blood transfusions and care promise to restore her. All circumstantial evidence points to Archie Doane as the murderer, especially when the murder gun is found carefully planted in the chimney clean-out in the basement.

"Tony," he went on, addressing Detective Martinelli, "go down and bring the janitor up here. He can

tell whether anyone went to the basement tonight unless he's in this himself. He might have a set of keys to every apartment in the house."

"But hardly either a motive for this shooting or the opportunity to purloin this pistol from the Highart Studios," remarked Michaelis. "And that suggests to me that we have been overlooking a possibility. Where is Miss Lane's maid? Who is she? Does she usually stay all night on Saturday night? When did she go out, if anybody knows? Where does she go when she goes out?"

"Worth looking into, Dan?"

"You bet that's worth looking into," replied the Inspector. "Archie, you must know something about her. What do you say?"

"She's a French girl named Adele—I don't remember her last name, if I ever heard it. She had been with Miss Lane for three or four years, I believe. She acts as her personal maid as well as looking after the apartment here."

"Accompanies her to the Highart Studios, does she?" asked Michaelis.

"Yes, nearly always. She serves as Miss Lane's dresser."

"She could have got possession of this revolver, would you say?"

"Yes, there is no doubt that she could. She is on friendly terms with everybody at the studio and has the run of the place."

"Has she been at the studio since you last saw this revolver—last Thursday, you said it was?"

"Yes, Miss Lane plays opposite me in the film we are now making, and we were working until Friday night. Adele was with her on Friday, I am sure."

"Was there any suggestion, at any time, of any animosity between Miss Lane and Adele?"

"No more than between Miss Lane and myself, so far as I know. The maid seemed devoted to her mistress."

"Is she temperamental—Adele, I mean? Quick tempered? Easily offended? The type that might do violent things under the stress of sudden rage?"

"You are asking for an opinion, Max," Inspector Flaherty interrupted. "Let him tell any facts that might have a bearing on your question."

"I yield to the police on a point of law," replied Michaelis, smiling. "What about it, Archie?"

"She threatened to shoot Fitz, once, if he didn't stop pestering her," replied Doane. "You know how he was—with women. He laughed it off, but he kept out of Adele's way after that."

"Did you see or hear that incident yourself?" asked the lawyer.

"No, but it was generally gossiped around the studio."

"I suggest again, Dan, that you ought to find this girl Adele," said Michaelis. "You can conceive, as well as I, a situation something like this:

"Miss Lane comes home—never mind the time when she comes in, now. Her maid is out for the evening, as usual on Saturdays. Fitzgerald calls. Miss Lane, in negligence—her outer garments on the chair where we found them, because she is not accustomed to hanging up her own things—admits him, thinking perhaps that it is Archie, or her maid coming back. He has learned of her promise to marry Doane and is furious."

"They quarrel violently. Adele who perhaps is really afraid of Fitz and may have taken the pistol from the property room at the studio for self-defense, comes in and misinterprets their altercations—or perhaps interprets correctly Fitz's intentions toward her mistress. She obtains the pistol from the place where she has concealed it, fires at Fitz and, missing him, wounds Miss Lane. Fitz rushes to take the gun from her

—he was no coward—and she shoots him through the heart as he overtakes her in the hall by the telephone stand.

"What would a servant naturally do then, in a panic? She would call for help, hide the pistol and vanish. Where would a servant naturally think of hiding a revolver? In the cellar. She had both keys to the apartment. She could slip down the cellar without being noticed."

"Archie," he went on suddenly turning to Doane, "are you sure it was Miss Lane's voice you heard over the telephone? It could not have been that of Adele, by any chance?"

"I was sure at the time," replied Doane slowly. "I hadn't thought of any other possibility. Now, on reflection, I am still sure. Adele's voice and Miss Lane's are in the same register, but there are overtones which make them distinctly different to one who knows them both. It was Lydia's voice."

"Sure of that?" persisted Michaelis. "Voices are distorted over the telephone unless they are strongly marked you know. How did the woman who called you address you? As 'Archie' or as Mr. Doane?"

"Neither," said Doane. "When I answer the phone I always say: 'Archie Doane speaking' so there was no need for anyone to ask who I was. It was Miss Lane's voice. I feel sure of that. Besides, Adele would not have used the same phraseology."

"She might have mimicked her mistress' voice, though. Had you thought of that? Do you know whether she had any talent in that direction?"

"She had been on the stage, I believe," said Doane. "I hadn't thought of that."

"What were the words—whichever called you—used? Tell us again won't you? You remember the exact language?"

"Yes, I remember it exactly. In my profession, you know, one has to cultivate a verbatim memory. The words were:

"Come quickly! Hurry! Something terrible has happened! Then there was a loud scream, and nothing more."

"Why do you say that Adele would not have used that phraseology?" asked Inspector Flaherty.

"Because the words were an exact quotation from Miss Lane's part in the talking picture we are making," was Doane's reply. "Adele might have heard them, but she would not use them as the first words to spring to her mind, under stress. It would be natural for Lydia to have done that, as that part of the picture was rehearsed many times. All actors fall into the habit of quoting from their parts in ordinary conversation; it's subconscious with them."

"Still, I see something in Max's idea," said the Inspector. "Has Tony come up with the janitor yet? Tony! Bring your man in here and take some instructions."

"I want you to go through everything in the maids' room, next to the kitchenette, and see if you can find any letters or anything which will give a clue to her relations or associates. Her name is Adele. Something—or other—French. She goes out every Saturday and stays all night. Perhaps she has a husband or a lover. Anyway, I want that girl found, get me? I want her in my office at—shall we say twelve hours from now, gentlemen, to meet in my office? Okay, Tony; two-thirty this afternoon at Center Street I shall be looking for you and Adele."

"Now let's see what the janitor says," he went on, as Martinelli left the room to begin his search for Adele.

The janitor turned out to be a self-possessed, middle-aged man whose bearing suggested honesty and intelligence. He saluted Inspector Flaherty and stood at "attention" as the latter addressed him.

"Did you ever see this gentleman before?" the Inspector asked, indicating Doane.

"Yes, I've seen him coming in and going out with Miss Lane on many occasions."

"Did you see him come in to the house tonight?"

"Yes, I was sweeping the sidewalk after the snow had stopped when the gentleman drove up in a taxi. He seemed in a great hurry. He pushed the bell button for one of the apartments—I suppose for Miss Lane's—several times, then tried the front door. I don't know whether Miss Lane had pressed the button in her apartment which releases the front door latch, or not. It wasn't necessary, as it happened, because I had come out without my keys and had set the night latch so that I could get in without trouble. The gentleman—Mr. Doane?—went in and I did not see him again."

"He did not go to the cellar at any time tonight?" asked the Inspector.

"Not unless he went there immediately on entering the house," was the reply. "I went in not more than a minute or two behind him, fastened the front door so that only persons with latchkeys could enter, and went down to the cellar to bank my fire. I sat there waiting to close the drafts until the officer you have stationed in front called for me. Nobody came into the cellar in that time, I am sure."

"H'm," said Inspector Flaherty. "You stand like a soldier. Were you ever in the Army?"

"No, but I was on the force, sir. Retired for disability ten years ago, and with my pension and the wages I get here I'm managing to send a boy through college. Name's Jenkins, sir."

"I'll take your statement as true, Jenkins," said the Inspector. "One thing more do you know the

girl who works for Miss Lane—Adele?"

"Adele Marceau? Very well, sir. She's a fine young woman. We get along very well together; she calls me 'Uncle.' You see I'm French on my mother's side and I've always had the language, so she likes to come down and talk to me. I hope she isn't mixed up in this terrible affair, sir? Is it true that Miss Lane will pull through?"

"It looks that way," the Inspector replied. "We don't know how deep your friend Adele may be in this, or whether she's in it at all. Has she been in your cellar this evening, by any chance?"

"Early in the evening, sir. She came to give me a French newspaper. About six o'clock that would be, or a little before. Miss Lane had just come in, she said, and was off for the night."

"Did she have anything else in her hand besides the newspaper?"

"Only a bag, such as ladies carry their lipsticks and such in."

"Was it possible that she had a revolver? You saw the one that was found in your chimney clean-out. Could she have put that there at that time—or at any time?" the Inspector demanded.

"It's possible, of course, but I should say unlikely, sir," replied Jenkins. "I was getting the ash cans up to the sidewalk on the hoist when she came down, and how long she had been there I couldn't say. She stopped only a moment after I saw her. Just gave me the paper, said she was off to her other job."

"Her other job, eh? What's that?"

"I forgot you didn't know sir. For that matter, even Miss Lane doesn't know. Adele was afraid she might not like her earning the extra money, so she let Miss Lane think she had a lover. But she works in a night club every Saturday night. It's their busy night, you know, and they put on extra attractions. She has a song and dance act, I believe—something quite Parisian, a la Montmartre, if you understand what that means."

"A bit off color, eh? Does she do this act under her real name?"

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