

# "The VANITY CASE"

A Tale of Mystery and Love

By CAROLYN WELLS

**BEGIN HERE TODAY**

MRS. PRENTISS sees lights mysteriously appearing and disappearing next door in the next morning. Some believe that the lights are the spirit of her husband, PERRY. Others think they are the spirit of her husband, PERRY. Others think they are the spirit of her husband, PERRY.

Mrs. Prentiss is a woman of many talents. She is a collector of rare and valuable objects. She has a collection of rare and valuable objects. She has a collection of rare and valuable objects.

The peculiar thing about Mrs. Prentiss's disappearance is the fact that all her windows and doors had been locked on the inside the night before she was found. The fact that she was found in the morning, with her windows and doors locked on the inside, is a mystery.

At the County Club the murder is discussed. The Club is a place where many people go to relax and have fun. It is a place where many people go to relax and have fun.

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## NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

### CHAPTER XIX

The three callers were Mrs. Prentiss and her nephew, Todhunter Buck, and with them was a young man, a stranger to Mrs. Prentiss, but an acquaintance of Inman, Alexander Cunningham.

"I'm out to find Perry Heath," Cunningham said, after they were all seated. "I'm sure you understand, Mr. Inman, the interest and anxiety felt by the Country Club members, and as they can't do much as a body, they've asked me to institute a search for Heath, and, also, to do what I can toward unraveling the mystery of Mrs. Heath's tragic death."

"Detective work?" asked Larry, in a noncommittal voice.

"Yes, but not professional. Some men like Arthur Black, Sam Anderson, and others of that crowd, have, in a way, engaged me to do this, and I'm mighty glad to try. We are assuming that as the nearest kin of Mrs. Heath, you will sanction any and every effort to solve the mystery of the case."

"Well, I'm not sure about that," Inman said, slowly. "I want to know who killed my cousin, of course, but your blanket proposition as to 'any and every effort' seems to me a bit—unlimited."

"You want to limit it?" asked Cunningham, his cool gray eyes fixed on Larry's face.

The latter looked up, quickly.

"Perhaps not limit it,—but, rather, assist in its direction."

"Oh, that's all right, we're glad of any assistance. Now, while I'm not a professional detective, I am acting under authority. I am indorsed by the club, and so I trust I'm not exceeding my rights in asking for the freedom of the house for purposes of investigation."

"You mean unquestioned access to all rooms?" Inman started him.

"I mean just that," and Cunningham stared back. "I can imagine no possible objection. The examination of Mrs. Heath's room is of utmost importance, and I'm sure Miss Moore would say no word against my entering her room."

"Indeed I would!" and Bunney drew herself up angrily. "Why should you go into my room, Mr. Cunningham?"

"It is an established custom, Miss Moore, to inspect carefully and with an eye to helpful evidence, all parts of the house and grounds in which a crime has been committed. I am sorry to say the police in this case have been lax in this respect. But I am told it is due to the absence of Mr. Heath. That, however, is really an additional reason for haste and care in the matter of search for Mr. Heath's disappearance. It is a puzzle in itself, and it is highly probable that the two mysteries are interdependent."

"Now, Mr. Cunningham," Mrs. Prentiss broke in, "you're wasting good time, thrashing out foolish questions. Of course, Mr. Inman wants you to have full swing here, and likewise, of course, Miss Moore wants you to make a full search. She's new to this business and doesn't understand. So you go right ahead, full steam, and I'll bet a couple of you, you'll find some clue that nobody else has noticed. You go into that studio there—that's where the awful thing happened—and you see what you can see."

Cunningham disappeared into the studio, with young Buck following, like a shadow at his heels.

"All rubbed down and polished up!" cried Cunningham, disgustedly, as he saw the spick and span room.

"I did think they'd have the place guarded from that sort of thing."

"What are you out for, anyway?" asked Toddy, who was eagerly waiting to see the detective work.

"Oh, just hints—but who could give any hints here? Toddy! Weapon removed—even the broken bits of glass swept up! No chance for footprints on this thick carpet. No finger prints on these carefully dusted knick-knacks and doo-dads. Even Heath's smoking materials are all put away as neatly as a lady's work basket!"

"But what good would finger prints do you? If they were there, the family party, they would mean nothing. And if strange ones, how would you know whose?"

"Point pretty well taken. And, I'm not really keen for finger prints. I just want something—something indicative or suggestive. Well, here are some letters here, a money lot."

"Heath isn't. He loves things orderly. His wife did, too. Look at all this glass of hers, ranged in rows in these glass cabinets. Not a piece

set awry, and all shining and speckless."

"Yes, and there's a row of old bottles like the one she was killed with."

Toddy spoke in an awe-stricken tone. This business seemed a bit gruesome to him, though he was deeply interested.

"Now, maybe, Mr. Cunningham," he went on, "maybe the murderer, whoever he was, touched up the lady's face with these paints, instead of regular cosmetics."

"It might be possible. I can't visualize that scene, Buck. If Heath killed his wife, I can understand his painting her face, for he was always at her to do it himself, and, too, he was an artist and forever dabbling with brushes. But I don't think he killed her. For there's no way he could get out. Whereas, if he went away, before she was killed, then clearly some one in the house is the criminal, and tried to turn suspicion to Heath by setting up the card and all that."

"Who, for choice?"

"Well, Inman in a good guess. He had motive, opportunity, and time. And he's clever enough to arrange matters to make it seem the work of Heath. I mean the cosmetics and all, as well as the card. And he's an artist, so if the facial applications were from Heath's water-color box, why, Inman could do that all right, too."

"And you think Heath really couldn't get away?"

"After committing the crime? See these windows. Small diamond panes, narrow sashes, strong inside locks—"

"But you've only the servants' word that these were all found locked this morning, as well as the rest of the house."

"Yes, and it mostly rests on Herrick's word. But why shouldn't he lie about it? Nobody suspects him; he was devoted to Mrs. Heath, and Perry, too. And he could never have put on that make-up so artistically,—so perfectly. No, it was the work of an artist,—or, a woman."

"The maid?" queried Buck. "For of course, you can't mean Miss Moore?"

"I mean anybody and nobody. There is no one above suspicion, I'm merely inquiring about everybody. Well, I'm going upstairs. Bedrooms often tell tales that living rooms know nothing of."

Cunningham went upstairs, and at his nod of invitation, Toddy Buck followed.

"I don't get it," Cunningham mused, as they entered Heath's bedroom. "Both Inman and the little princess seem all upset at my investigations. Are they shielding Perry? Or anybody else? For you know if this thing is the work of an outsider, those two must have let the outsider in and let him out again, and also they must have let Heath out."

"Unless he went off naturally, and unquestioned, before the tragedy occurred," Toddy said.

"Yes, that's true talk. Now you see, Buck, we must get in our minds a picture of this room of Perry Heath's. Look at this place, now. Can't you read Heath all over it? See the chiffonier,—all the brushes and toilet implements laid in a straight orderly row."

"That's the housemaid's work."

"I know it, but Perry kept them so. You can somehow see that. Look in his dresser drawer. I'll bet his socks and handkerchiefs are in neat piles." He opened one after another, and the clothing was as tidy as he had expected it to be.

"And here's an easy chair, drawn up to the window, with a smoking stand beside it, and a paper rack near by. He is a bit of a Sybarite, is Perry, and yet a tidy sort, too. The two traits don't often go together."

"Well, what you've found out about his neatness and his love of ease doesn't get you along very far in solving the mystery, does it?"

"Don't be impatient, son. All in good time. Now, I have this room photographed on my mind in detail; come on, we'll tackle Mrs. Heath's room."

"Oh, I don't like to," and Buck drew back with a natural instinct against invading the sanctity of the dead woman's apartments.

"All right, you stay out, or go back downstairs."

But Toddy was naturally inquisitive, and, too, he was bound to be in on this detective business, so he followed the older man across the room.

## CHAPTER XX

The bedroom was beautiful, done up in pale gray and silver, quite in keeping with the exquisite taste and love of simplicity that had characterized Myra Heath in life.

Carter sat by a window, doing a bit of mending, and she looked up inquiringly as the two came in.

"Where is Mrs. Heath's vanity case?" Cunningham asked, without preliminaries.

"She has several," the maid returned.

"Get them all out," was the order, and from some cupboard and drawers, Carter produced three, all beautiful and costly, and all in such a state of newness that it was plain to be seen they had never been used.

Scanning the three, carefully, and noting their newness, Cunningham said, looking about, "Where is the one she used? These have never been even opened."

"Mrs. Heath never used a vanity box," Carter told him. "She had this powder-puff box, here on the dresser, but she never used rouge or lip salve."

"Ah, yes, I see. Go and bring me one from Miss Moore's room. The one she habitually uses."

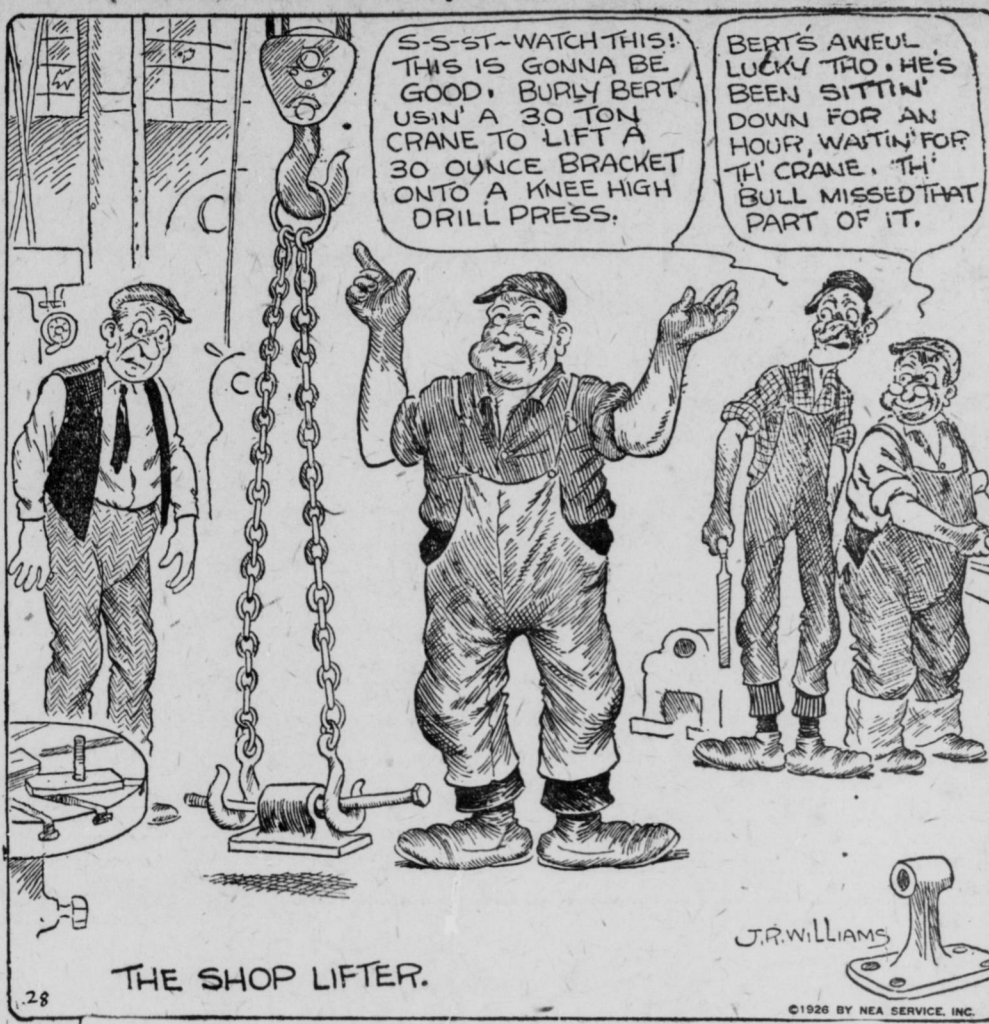
Carter hesitated a moment, and then catching the austere glance of the man's eye, she went on the errand, and returned with an elaborate gold affair, that had many dangling chains and accessories attached to the main box.

"This is the one Miss Moore uses," Cunningham asked.

"It is the only one I have seen her use since she has been here," Carter returned.

"I'll keep it," Cunningham said, when Cunningham and Toddy

## OUT OUR WAY—By WILLIAMS



## SALESMAN \$AM—By SWAN



## BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES—By MARTIN



## FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS—By BLOSSER



Buck came downstairs, they learned that Bunney had concluded to go home with Mrs. Prentiss and stay for a time. The combined persuasions of that insistent lady and Larry Inman had resulted in Bunney's acquiescence, and she was about to go for a suitcase and some necessary belongings.

"I needn't take much," she said, pausing at the foot of the stairs, "for I can run back and forth for whatever I need."

She ran along up, and Cunningham, after a few words of farewell, took his departure, and she was left alone.

A few moments later, Bunney came down from upstairs, followed by Carter, with a small suitcase.

"I'm ready," she said, slowly, to Mrs. Prentiss, "but I can't find my vanity box. It's the queerest thing—I had it in my room just before dinner. I usually have it about with me, but—I left it upstairs, and now I can't find it."

Toddy Buck hesitated. He knew Cunningham had taken it away, but he was uncertain whether to tell that or not. He concluded to keep silent on the matter, for he had told with his detective work, and he felt he was not at liberty to divulge the detective's secrets.

Bunney said no more about it, though it was plain to be seen it worried her.

With a quietness unusual for her, she said good night to Inman and went with Mrs. Prentiss across the lawn to the house next door.

It was also unusual for Bunney to pay so little attention to a presentable and attractive young man, as she showed toward Todhunter Buck.

But Bunney was not herself. Small wonder, considering the shock she had sustained.

Once in Mrs. Prentiss' cheery old-fashioned living room, Bunney stood irresolutely, by a table and faced the other two.

Her big blue eyes were appealing. She looked baby-like and helpless.

But Bunney Moore was not helpless. If she looked so, it was nature's fault, not her own.

A more wise, canny, sophisticated little piece than Bunney could scarcely be imagined.

But she was troubled. And, if truth were known, she had reason to be.

"Mr. Buck," she said, speaking almost for the first time directly to Toddy, "I know perfectly well, you and Mr. Cunningham are shadowing me. I think that is the term the detectives use."

"You would do just the opposite! Yes, of course I know that! Bunney's eyes blazed now, and her voice quivered. The poor child was all wrought up, her nerves were on edge and she felt she must take it out of somebody.

But she looked so lovely, so like a bruised blossom or a broken butter-

fly that Toddy Buck forgot all about Cunningham and detective work, and wanted only to enlist in the service of Bunney Moore for the rest of his mortal career.

"Now, you just wait!" he exclaimed eagerly, "I'm for you—all for you! And I'll put all my cards on the table. At Cunningham did take your vanity case, or whatever you call it. And I'm expecting you to tell me why he took it, and why you care so much that he did take it."

"Buck looked at her straightforwardly, and to his delight, Bunney returned the glance with equal calmness."

But Mrs. Prentiss, as she herself would have expressed it, could see through a ladder with a hole in it, and she realized that Miss Bunney, whether naive or sly, could wind Mr. Todhunter Buck round her adorable pink little finger, and that she was quite ready to proceed with and enjoy the process.

Also, Mr. Prentiss had the same what unusual quality of a fine sense of relative values. And she sized up accurately and truly, Bunney's sudden little spurt of defiance and she knew that there was something back of it, more than a missing vanity case. She knew that Bunney had blurted it out, or would tell some egregious lies.

And good Mrs. Prentiss wanted to save the pretty child from either contingency.

So she said, quite casually, "You clear out, Tod. Go to bed, or go down town to the movies, or do whatever you like. Miss Moore and I are quite ready to excuse you. Toddy, catching the gleam of his aunt's commanding eye, immediately said his simple good nights and left the room."

"Now, my dear child," Mrs. Prentiss said, after a moment of tactful silence, "you may go right to bed, or—if you choose, you may talk things over a bit first."

Bunney looked at her with the glance of a wise owl might give a country sparrow, and said, courteously: "Please, Mrs. Prentiss, I think I'll go to my room. You are so good to me—and I do appreciate it—but it has been a hard day, and—oh, I'm sure you understand! I want to be alone!"

"Of course, you do, you poor dear. Now, you come right along with me."

And for the next half hour, Mrs. Prentiss was more like a matron of an orphan asylum or head nurse in a charity ward than anything else.

And little Bunney, exhausted by the unaccustomed strain on her nerves and emotions, tucked herself between the nice percale sheets, and, after her kind hostess had departed, thought things over.

Meanwhile, though Toddy Buck had fallen under the spell of Bunney's charm, he had not entirely taken leave of his sense, and he went out for a walk, thoughtfully turning his steps toward the funeral parlors,

where now reposed all that was mortal of lovely Myra Heath. Buck was a methodical sort. He arranged his emotions and predilections in order, as another man might his business affairs.

Toddy saw at once—he was nobody's fool—that he was either in love or about to fall in it, with Bunney Moore.

He knew, too, that Detective Mott, as well as the amateur Cunningham, strongly believed that the exquisite child knew more than she had told about the fearful tragedy at the Heath bungalow.

This, to Buck's mind, did not make the girl any less desirable or attractive as an innamorata.

That was one strong differentiation between Mrs. Prentiss and her nephew, Mrs. Prentiss, with her almost uncanny intuition, knew things, Toddy Buck, in his blundering, but pig-headed way, believed things, and—had to find out.

So, to the rooms of the Cooperative Casket Company he went, feeling sure that beyond the great palms and Oriental vases of their entrance, he would find the man he was looking for.

Nor was he disappointed. In a

private room, of which there were several, he found casketed Al Cunningham and Detective Mott in earnest consultation.

(To Be Continued.)

## Asthma Disappeared, Had It 15 Years

Mrs. Woodward, 65 Years Old, Says Cough, Wheezing and Asthma Gone

Elderly people who suffer with asthma and bronchial coughs will find particular interest in a letter written by Mrs. Elizabeth Woodward, 65 years old, who lives at 3460 West Michigan St., Indianapolis. She writes:

"I had asthma in severe form for 15 years. I coughed hard, wheezed, and was very short of breath, and in addition my stomach caused me a lot of trouble. For one year I had been unable to do any work, not even to wash the dishes. On Feb. 7, 1925, I started taking Nacor. The wheezing and cough have left entirely, and I do not have the slightest sign of asthma now. My stomach condition has improved. I am feeling fine, able to wash and iron and do the housework, and am gaining steadily in every way."

If you suffer from asthma, bronchitis or severe chronic cough, you should read the vital information about this disease, in a booklet which will be sent free by Nacor Medicine Co., 413 State Life Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind. They will also send you the letters of people whose trouble disappeared years ago and never returned. No matter how serious your case seems, call or write for this free information. It has led thousands back to health and strength.—Advertisement.

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