

THE "CANARY" MURDER CASE

by S. S. VAN DINE AUTHOR OF
THE BESON MURDER CASE



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THE STORY THUS FAR
The jewel case had been battered with a poker. And this puzzles Vance when it is found near the strangled body of Markham. And when Dr. Mannix, Skeel's arrest, after Cleaver and Dr. Lindquist have been questioned, he believes Skeel was hiding in the clothes closet when the murder was committed, and that he, Mannix, by his belief in Skeel's guilt, ridiculous the man's theory. Mannix is brought in and questioned.

CHAPTER XXXII

MARKHAM ignored the question.

"Can you think of no one who might have borne Miss Odell a grudge, or had cause to fear her?"

Markham was volubly emphatic on the subject of his complete ignorance of any such person; and after a few more questions, which elicited only denials, Markham let him go.

"Not bad at all, Markham old thing—eh, what?"

Vance seemed pleased with the confession. "Wonder why he's so coy? Not a nice person, this Mannix. And he's so fearful lest he be informative. Again, I wonder why. He was so careful—oh, so careful."

"He was sufficiently careful, at any rate, not to tell us anything," declared Markham gloomily.

"I shouldn't say that, don't you know? Vance lay back and smoked placidly.

"A ray of light filtered through here and there. He denied he'd been blackmailed—which was obviously untrue—and tried to make us believe that he and the lovely Margaret cooed like turtle-doves at parting.

"Tosh! ... And then, that mention of Cleaver. That wasn't spontaneous—dear me, no. Brother Mannix and spontaneously are as the poles apart.

"He had a reason for bringing Cleaver in; and I fancy that if you knew what that reason was, you'd feel like flinging those roses riotously, and that sort of thing."

"Why Cleaver? That explanation was a bit weak. The orbits of these two paramours cross somewhere. On that point, at least, Mannix inadvertently enlightened us....

"Moreover, it's plain that he doesn't know our fashionable healer who the satyrs eat. But, on the other hand, he's aware of the existence of Mr. Skeel, and would rather like to deny the accusation....

"Plenty of information; but—my word!—what to do with it?"

"I give it up," acknowledged Markham hopelessly.

"I know: it's a sad, sad world," Vance commiserated him. "It's time for lunch, and a fillet of sole Marguery will cheer you no end."

Markham glanced at the clock, and permitted himself to be led to the Lawyers Club.

(Wednesday, Feb. 12, evening)

Vance and I did not return to the district attorney's office after lunch, for Markham had a busy afternoon before him, and nothing further was likely to transpire in connection with the Odell case until Sergeant Heath had completed his investigations of Cleaver and Dr. Lindquist.

Vance had seats for Giordano's "Mme. Sans-Gene," and 2 o'clock found us at the Metropolitan.

Though the performance was excellent, Vance was too distract to enjoy it; and it was significant that, after the opera, he directed the chauffeur to the Stuyvesant Club.

I knew he had a tea-appointment, and that he had planned to motor to Longue Vue for dinner; and the fact that he should have dismissed these social engagements from his

mind in order to be with Markham

showed how intensely the problem of the murder had absorbed his interest.

It was after 6 o'clock when Markham came in, looking harassed and tired.

No mention of the case was made

during dinner, with the exception of Markham's casual remark that Heath had turned in his reports on Cleaver and Dr. Lindquist and Mannix.

(It seemed that, immediately after

lunch, he had telephoned to the sergeant to add Mannix's name to

the two others as a subject for inquiry.)

It was not until we had retired to our favorite corner of the lounge room that the topic of the murder was brought up for discussion.

And that discussion, brief and one-sided, was the beginning of an entirely new line of investigation—a line which, in the end, led to the guilty person.

Markham sank wearily into his chair. He had begun to show the strain of the last two days of fruitless worry.

His eyes were a trifle heavy, and there was a grim tenacity in the lines of his mouth. Slowly and deliberately he lighted a cigar, and took several deep inhalations.

"Damn the newspapers!" he grumbled. "Why can't they let the district attorney's office handle its business in its own way? ... Have you seen the afternoon papers?"

They're still clamoring for the murderer. You'd think I had him up to my sleeve."

"You forget, my dear chap," grinned Vance, "that we are living under the benign and uplifting reign of Democrats, which confers upon every ignoramus the privilege of promiscuously criticizing his betters."

Markham snorted.

"I don't complain about criticism; it's the lurid imagination of these bright young reporters that galls me.

"They're trying to turn this sordid crime into a spectacular Borgia melodrama, with passion running rampant, and mysterious influences at work, and all the pomp and trap-

"You'd think even a schoolboy could see that it was only an ordinary robbery and murder of the kind that's taking place regularly throughout the country."

Vance paused in the act of lighting a cigarette, and his eyebrows lifted. Turning, he regarded Markham.

"I see! Still clinging to your weird theory that a brace of villains were present, hiding in separate closets, or something of the kind."

Markham made no attempt to temper his sarcasm. "A sapient idea

is in the week-end rates on the T. H. & E. Traction Company, effective Feb. 4, will provide for a fare and one-half for the round trip. Tickets will be good all day on Saturday or Sunday. Ask the Agent for further information.—Advertisement.

—so much more intelligent than Heath's!"

"I know it's weird. But it happens not to be any weirder than your theory of a lone vagabond."

"And for what reason, pray," persisted Markham, with considerable warmth, "do you consider the vagabond theory weird?"

"For the simple reason that it was not the crime of a professional thief at all, but the willfully deceptive act of a particularly clever man who doubtless spent weeks in its preparation."

Markham sank back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"Vance, you have contributed the one ray of sunshine to an otherwise gloomy and depressing case."

Vance bowed with mock humility.

"It gives me great pleasure," was his duclet rejoinder, "to be able to bring even a wisp of light into so clouded a mental atmosphere."

A brief silence followed. Then

Markham said:

"Is this fascinating and picturesque conclusion of yours regarding the highly intellectual character of the Odell woman's murderer based on your new and original psychological methods?"

There was no mistaking the tone had a curiously convincing

ridicule in his voice.

"I arrived at it," explained Vance sweetly, "by the same processes of logic I used in determining the guilt of Alvin Benson's murderer."

Markham smiled.

"Touché! ... Don't think I'm so ungrateful as to belittle the work you did in that case."

"But this time, I fear, you've permitted your theories to lead you hopelessly astray. The present case is what the police call an open-and-shut affair."

"Particularly shut," amended Vance dryly. "And both you and the police are in the distressin'

situation of waiting inactively for your suspected victim to give the game away."

"I'll admit the situation is not all one could desire," Markham spoke mordantly.

"But even so, I can't see that there's any opportunity in this affair for your reconnoiter psychological methods."

"The thing's too obvious—that's the trouble. What we need now is evidence, not theories."

"If it wasn't for the spacious and romantic imaginings of the newspaper men, public interest in the case would already have died out."

"Markham," said Vance quietly,

"that's what you really believe, then you may as well drop the case now; for you're foredoomed to failure."

"You think it's an obvious crime. But let me tell you, it's a subtle crime, if ever there was one. And it's as clever as it is subtle. No common criminal committed it—be fair to me. It was done by a man of very superior intellect and astoundin' ingenuity."

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