

THE "CANARY" MURDER CASE
by S. S. VAN DINE AUTHOR OF
THE BENSON MURDER CASE

THE STORY THUS FAR

Steel's finer prints were found in the possession of the murdered Margaret Odell. It is proved later that Mannix, Cleaver and Lindquist had been lying about their whereabouts on the night of the murder. The truth comes out when the police find Miss Frisbee in an apartment adjoining the "Canary"; that Cleaver had been the man who had made the midnight call to Dr. Lindquist, knowing that Spotswood was calling on Margaret Odell, had planned in a jealous fit to kill him and had been waiting in the alley outside.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

As Lindquist talked he became more and more agitated. The nerves about his eyes had begun to twitch, and his shoulders jerked like those of a man attempting vainly to control a chill.

"Remember, sir, I was suffering agonies, and my hatred of Spotswood seemed to cloud my reason.

"Scarcely realizing what I was doing and yet operating under an irresistible determination, I put my automobile in my pocket and hurried out of the house.

"I thought Miss Odell and Spotswood would be returning from the theater soon, and I intended to force my way into the apartment and perform the act I had planned. . . . From across the street I saw them enter the house—it was about eleven then—but, when I came face to face with the actuality, I hesitated.

"I delayed my revenge; I—I played with the idea, getting a kind of insane satisfaction out of it—knowing they were now at my mercy. . . ."

His hands were shaking as with a coarse tremor; and the twitching about his eyes had increased.

"For half an hour I waited, gloating. Then, as I was about to go in and have it over with, a man named Cleaver came along and saw me. He stopped and spoke.

"I thought he might be going to call on Miss Odell, so I told him she already had a visitor. He then went on toward Broadway, and

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while I was waiting for him to turn the corner, Spotswood came out of the house and jumped into a taxi-cab that had just driven up.

"My plan had been thwarted—I had waited too long. Suddenly I seemed to awake as from some terrible nightmare. I was almost in a state of collapse, but I managed to get home. . . . That's what happened—help weak me God!"

He sank back weakly in his chair. The suppressed nervous excitement that had fired him while he spoke had died out, and he appeared listless and indifferent.

He sat several minutes breathing stertorously, and twice he passed his hand vaguely across his forehead.

He was in no condition to be questioned, and finally Markham sent for Tracy and gave orders that he was to be taken to his home.

"Temporary exhaustion from hysteria," commented Tracy indifferently. "All these paranoid lads are hyperneurotic. He'll be in a psychopathic ward in another year."

"That's as may be, Mr. Vance," said Heath, with an impatience that repudiated all enthusiasm for the subject of abnormal psychology. "What interests me just now is the way all these fellows stories hang together."

"Yes," nodded Markham. "There is undeniably a groundwork of truth in their statements."

"But please observe," Vance pointed out, "that their stories do not eliminate any one of them as a possible culprit."

"Their tales, as you say, synchronize perfectly; and yet, despite all that neat co-ordination, any one of the three could have got into the Odell apartment that night."

"For instance: Mannix could have entered from Apartment 2 before Cleaver came along and listened; and he could have seen Cleaver going away when he himself was leaving the Odell apartment.

"Cleaver could have spoken to the doctor at half past eleven, walked to the Ansonia, returned a little before twelve, gone into the lady's apartment, and come out just as Mannix opened Miss Frisbee's door.

"Again, the excitable doctor may have gone in after Spotswood came out at half past eleven, stayed twenty minutes or so, and departed before Cleaver returned from the Ansonia.

"No; the fact that their stories dovetail doesn't in the least tend to exculpate any one of them."

"And," supplemented Markham, "that cry of 'Oh, my God!' might have been made by either Mannix or Lindquist—provided Cleaver really heard it."

"He heard it unquestionably," said Vance. "Some one in the apartment was invoking the Devil around midnight. Cleaver hasn't sufficient sense of the dramatic to fabricate such a thrillin' tale."

"But if Cleaver actually heard that voice," protested Markham, "then he is automatically eliminated as a suspect."

"Not at all, old dear. He may have heard it after he had come out of the apartment, and realized then, for the first time, that some one had been hidden in the place during his visit."

"Your man in the clothes closet, I presume you mean."

"Yes, of course. . . . You know, Markham, it might have been the horrified Skeel, emerging from his hiding place upon a scene of tragic wreckage who let out that evocative invocation."

"Except," commented Markham, with sarcasm, "Skeel doesn't impress me as particularly religious."

"Oh, that," Vance shrugged. "A point in substantiation. Irreligious persons call on God much more than Christians. The only true and consistent theologians, don't you know, are the atheists."

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