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Murder Could Not Kill

By Gregory Baxter

"See here," he continued confidentially, "I've given myself a everlasting headache tryin' to reconstruct what I've been doin' this last day or two, and I just can't get nowhere on the problem. I'm plumb lickered. Say, hasn't nobody around here gotten any sort of a wet drink?"

Brett staggered to a chair and sat down. "I figure I'm all stung to a whisper," he muttered, and, sagging heavily, seemed ready to fall asleep.

"May I suggest you give him a pink air?" the inspector asked. "Lessing. I can't imagine what he's been up to, but he seems pretty well all in. He's dazed, as it is, but not too stupid. With another spot we might be able to revive him for a minute or two. I'd like to keep him talking. He'll be less guarded now than later."

"As you wish," Lessing acquiesced, and went out. He came back almost at once, accompanied by the butler. Simmons lifted the decanter of brandy and waited with it poised.

The inspector shook the seated man's shoulder vigorously.

"Here's your drink," he said. With an effort Brett roused himself. "Gee, this nose-paint looks pretty good." His hand trembling, he almost snatched the decanter and himself poured out a generous measure, then waved away Simmons and his tray and soda-siphon. "Nix on the water pitcher."

He lifted the glass and in one deep draught drank the neat brandy it contained.

"Gee, that sure has saved my life and clarified the hobbled brains some," he declared more briskly, as, after sitting for a moment with closed eyes, he stood up. "Now, professor, we come back to where we got sawed off. It's my friend Sherwood Dexter I got to see. An' nothing short of dynamite is goin' to head me off."

"You come from the States, don't you?" the inspector asked.

"Sure do. Ain't I told you already?"

"You have come over here on business, I suppose?"

"Business? Ain't got none, though I've been every blame' thing in this world barrin' a choirboy."

"You carry a gun since you came over?"

"Why, yes. I got to admit it. I'll allow I feel a whole lot more comfortable toting a gun. They make 'em nice an' handy now—not like when we'd carry around a pesky great forty-five. But—"

"Have you got it now?"

Brett stared sharply. His whole countenance changed as involuntarily he moved his hand shakily to his jacket pocket. He stared hard at his questioner. "No, I ain't got it. First thing I noticed when I came to. Some guy's been dealin' me cards from the bottom of the deck. That comes o' hittin' the liquor too plenty. Guess I'll catch a cold now goin' around without it. But what's your concern with this-all?" he continued, again in aggressive vein.

"Come over here."

The inspector guided him by the arm across the room to within a few feet of the table on which the pistol lay.

"Is that yours?" he asked. "Recognise it?"

"Holy smoke! Sure, it's mine! But who's fixed this on the barrel—this silencer? Where'd you find it?" He stretched out a confident hand to lift the weapon, but the detective pulled his arm aside and drew him away from the table.

"It was found," he said sternly, "on the floor inside Mr. Dexter's car—less than an hour ago."

There seemed to penetrate into Brett's bemused mind a vague uneasiness. His aggressive mood developed.

"See here! What's back of all this? Where's Dexter? That's what I want to know."

Instead of replying, the detective turned him around, pushed him forward to the couch at the distant end of the room and, stooping down, pulled back the velvet covering from the dead man and the lighter cloth from the now livid face.

Brett stared aghast. "Great heavens!" he said, and stood blinking. Then, after a long pause: "Well, well, Sherwood. To think you passed out with your boots on, after all. I wonder who else you crossed?"

Feter Lessing and Inspector West exchanged glances.

Rufus Brett turned aside from the body and pulled himself erect. Something of the haze that obscured his brain seemed to have been cleared away by the sudden shock. "Do you, guys mean that?"

"You'd better not say any more," interrupted the inspector, who had unostentatiously moved between Brett and the door. "I have to warn you—"

At that the other appeared to realize what was in store for him. The old hard-bitten pioneer came to life. Quicker than would have been deemed possible for a man of his years so befuddled as he had been, Brett leaped forward and, as he moved, struck with the effortless skill of long practice he had stooped and smashed his left full drive into the detective's stomach. Utterly unprepared, with a grunt

Ellen's Diary

Continued from page 2

course or to plumb the depths.

But Jamie is not one to loiter at the like too long. At milking-time, he helps with the calves' pails, and often in company with the other lad, a willing and sympathetic and faithful attendant, he carries cow's milk to the pet lamb. "There now!" the younger fellow came away from a telephone conversation with his mother, on a recent evening in dismay, "I forgot to tell her about the pet lamb—that we feed him now with a bottle!" And when allowed to return to it, he finally turned away beaming. "Mother never saw it," he explained, "and I just had to tell her!" On occasion a parade that would willingly enter—two boys, a dog, and a lambkin that is "wooly" halts at the door.

"Gran'daddy said", volunteered Jamie one day, "that a pet lamb's one awful nuisance about a place, if they're not kept penned up. I don't think so, do you? They're such nice playful little animals, and kind, aren't they? Didn't your boys often have them?" We nodded, remembering. It is so easy to bring back to mind scenes from our younger days, pictures that are being lived again by these children at present in our care.

In this week of pleasant weather the farmers were taken up with their marketing problems. Finished hogs were sent outwards, loads of feed brought in. Seed potatoes too were gotten off by huge truck "just in the nick of time" before roads were closed to heavy hauling—away to plant some far acreage, or maybe to feed a hungry world. Not that there likely would be much last to so modest an offering, but as Aunt Kitty Mahoney used to whisper with complacency when she dropped her broad copper on the collection plate of a Sunday—and with truth, "it all helps!" Also in the cycle of farming, new litters of piglets arrived and a pedigreed fowl with a throaty gobble was added to the women's flocks at Alderlea, though not without masculine advice on the subject, which was contrary to the enterprise. We searched in vain for a duck egg to prove that this is Spring, and learned that the domestic geese in the neighborhood had that very morning deposited their magic eggs in a downy March nest.

And in Jamie's words: "What will it be like?" in April, here so quickly on March's heels. C. H. Towne's sings of it thus in "An April Song."

"Now once more the crocus flames, The tulip lifts its cup; And over every green morass, Beyond the utmost lengths of grass, Earth drinks the wonder up.

There is a glory in the world; The morning is like wine, And pale ascension lilies lean Like gods who late in heaven have been, Half flowerlike, half divine.

O sweet revival of the grass! O sweeter songs that rise, When jocund April leads her train Through the gold sunlight and the rain, And earth is paradise."

Until Monday — Diary—Good-night . . .

the inspector slumped heavily to the floor, nearly knocking over Robin Foster as he dropped. The seated sergeant was instantly on his feet, but he had to clear the desk before him. For the moment he was completely checked.

Brett, now at the door, snatched up a heavy chair and faced about as the two other men started to advance on him.

"I'll brain the first that comes for me!" he shouted, swinging the chair threateningly.

To be continued

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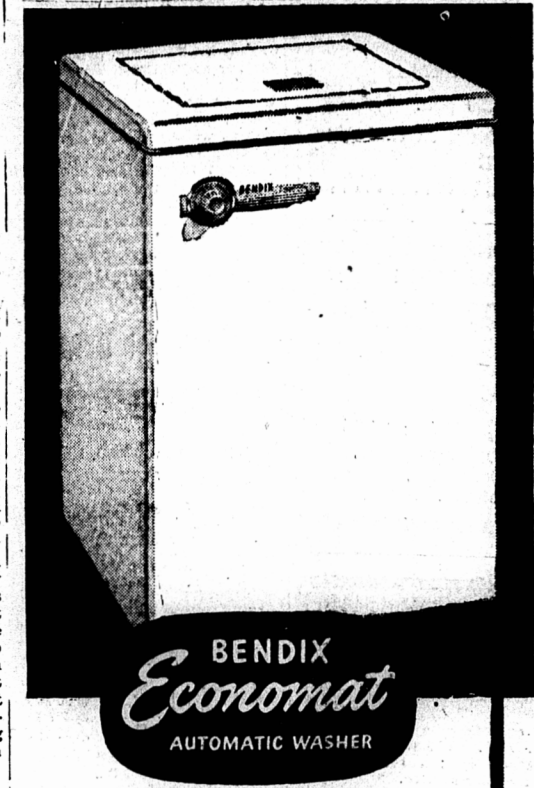
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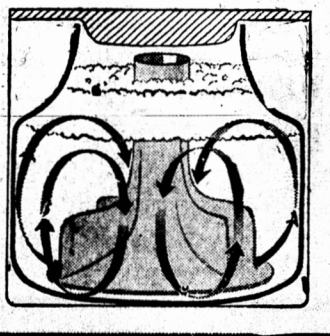
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