Week-end MURDER

By GABRIELLE E. FORBUSH

CHAPTER XXXI

WITH a stiff little bow Shaughnessey turned on his heel and went quickly through the screen door so quickly that the two behind him were left breathless.

Tom recovered first. Hastily he stepped to where the Irishman had been standing by the table.

"By heaven!" exclaimed Tom. "Yes—he could. The light's gone now but there was a little, outside at least. Come on, Binks. No—he's gone in. But look!"

In one long glass, flung back so that the last dying light struck full on its panes, Linda caught a faint reflection of a dark mass that was in the room and cutting through, behind it, a ribbon of pale glay that marksd the road, leading to another dark blur in the background.

"I could see him—just a blot of dark, moving—walking across the road and going into the garage. He was standing here, wasn't he?"

"Yes. With his back to the door. I thought—"

"You did the best you could, honey. Just a damned bad break. He saw me and there was light enough to see that I didn't go in the big double doors where the cars are. I should have, of course—fool that I am!—and up the stairs from inside. Instead, I dashed right in the central door and came out from there too. He knew I didn't go near the car but upstairs to his place. Oh, curse the luck! That's bad, Linda!"

"Yes. Did you—how did you leave it?"

"The shirt? Just as it was. I think. But, Linda—another queer thing! That wasn't any shirt of his. That was one of mine."

"Tom—are you sure?"

"Sure as you'd be of a dress of yours. That one with the fancy bosom."

"That waffle-front one?"

"Yep. Only been laundered once or twice."

"Now will you please explain that? Tom, have you any idea—?"

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She moved to touch his arm. The gesture was a consoling one but she needed the sense of support herself.

"I'm absolutely in the dark about it. Idiot—blockhead—fool that I am! Why did I have to pull such a boner?"

"Tom—we mustn't leave Mr. Statlander out there on the terrace alone. Can't we talk this over later? I want to tell you what he said—"

"Suppose he bolts!"

"Mr. Satlander?"

"Shaughnessey, of course!"

"Oh! My mind's on the other one. You ought to go talk to him. I'll run up and see Rosie—you said she was crying—"

"Bawling, pood kid. Didn't notice me or was too upset to try to hide it. Linda, her room faces the garage. Watch his light."

At the last step, she came to a decision. It might be foolish—and worse—but it was action and that seemed called for. Cheered by her resolution, she knocked briskly at Rosie's door and called.

"Rosie—it's Mrs. Averill. Might I come in a moment?"

There was a subdued fultter and a tearful voice answered something she did not get, but she heard a creak of bedsprings and the sound of someone moving. Then the door opened and Linda acted upon her instant impulse of sympathy.

"Rosie, dear child—whatever's the matter? Let me come in. There! Sit down and tell me all about it!"

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It was hard for Rosie to get started. Never fluent, she seemed baffled completely. Finally, in a sudden burst of relieved confession, the story came blurting out. Stripped of its incoherence and repetitions, it was brief enough. She had launched upon a guilty yet delicious flirtation with Shaughnessey. The breakfast tray of the first morning had proved its beginning. Later, vastly flattered that he preferred her to the "quality," Rosie had agreed to meet him on the pine path the night of the dance. ("But I wasn't there over-long, Mrs. Averill," Rosie vowed and Linda believed her. "Annie'd he' knowed if I'd stayed out for into the night.") At last, fearing Annie's reproofs for herself and possible trouble for him, Rosie had sent him back to the club grounds. That is, he had started back to the house. He could, Linda perceived, have tarried there longer alone or briefly joined the dance, and, finding someone more willing for a prolonged solitary flirtation, returned to the shelter of the trees. As Rosie went on with her story, Linda inclined to the latter idea. For breakfast the next morning Shaughnessey had come to the kitchen door with a bundle and a petition. He had spilled liquor on the front of his evening shirt, torn it slightly and smeared grass stains into the cuff.

"'Tis poor he is, for all the grand looks of him," said Rosie naively, "and proud that ye should not know he has but the wan shirt. Sure, 'tis the Irish know htd to be poor with illigance, an' glad I was to do him the service without anywan bein' the wiser for it. But," and again her voice was choked, "'tis the devvil's own luck, beggin 'yer pardon ma'am, seems to haunt the affair. First, I tried some of the clanin' fluid yersilf was liquor. But whin it hit the grass tablecloth an' fine it worrked fur the liquor. But whit it hit the grass stains a terrible color it turned thim intirely! Worst yet, whin I come to slap it with a hot iron, whose paces of cloth came away under me hand."

Conflicting emotions chased through Linda's mind but her face showed only sympathetic attention.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "That was a mess! But it wasn't your fault, Rosie!"

"Oh, bot—'twas mine that I made matters worse, ma'am. I was franticlike, you see, an' how was I to know he'd stay quietly in the house this avenin' an' not need the dress clothes, at all, at all?" She hesitated, then plunged. "'Tis a thief I am, ma'am—me as ye've always threated so fair!"

"Mr. Averill's shirt?" asked Linda calmly. Rosie turned, eyes round with astonishment, and spoke in an awed whisper.

"Himsilf has missed it already?"

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Rosie's eyes were grateful. "That's what I thought, ma'am. But 'twas wrong of me to do it without his knowin'!"

Linda patted the roughened hand.

"There, Rosie! It's over and no harm done. Now I've an idea that will make everything all right. I'll tell Mr. Shaughnessey I happened to find you working on the shirt and told you to try the cleaning fluid. As it was spoiled when you did what I suggested, it would be up to me to make up the loss to him and I hold you to send one of Mr. Averill's till I could get another."

Rosie shook her head.

"I swore to tell no-wan of it," she said. "And this afternoon he knew it was clane an' ready for the ironin'. I must tell him mesilf," she sigred dejectedly.

Linda suppressed a smile. Poor, honest, friendly Rosie, so easily wheedled (and doubtless forgotten) by her far more skillful countryman! Though she could not help feeling more lenient toward Shaughnessey, she knew he had shamelessly made use of Rosie's good nature. Suddenly she stood up. A light in the upper floor of the garage had gone out.

"Rosie, you and Annie had planned to go to the movies tonight, hadn't you?" she asked. Rosie nodded and then shook her head, indicating thus that she had been but wasn't. "Oh, yes, you are!" Linda understood the pantomime perfectly. "Dr. Boyle isn't coming so you needn't stay home for him and you both need a little change to take your minds off the excitement of today. Was the Freemans' chauffeur going to take you over to l'ort?"

Rosie nodded. The tears magnically stopped but she paused like a child midway between grief and pleasure.

"Well, then—tell Annie to telephone him while you wash your face a..d brush your hair. And trust me to fix this up somehow."

The look the big, raw-boned young girl turned up to her was frankly adoring. Linda never skimped praise for fear of "spoiling" the girls but when she gave it she meant every word, and they knew it.

"The saints bless you, ma'am," replied Rosie fervently.

(To Be Continued)

If the Venus flytrap plant of Carolina has been induced to shut on something it doesn't want, it opens again quickly, and when it has been cheated two or three times in succession, the plant ceases for a time to respond.

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