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Household Hints

Overcast seams of rayon, silk, or wool to keep them from raveling. They can be overcast together or each edge separately as preferred. Do not draw threads too tight.

—•—

New clotheslines are clumsy to put up. To make them more soft and durable, try first boiling the line for a few minutes in soapy water.

—•—

A strip of cloth or tape sewed just inside the edge takes the brunt of wear off trouser cuffs.

Murder in Plain Sight

by GERALD BROWN

W.N.U. FEATURES

Duke McCale, private detective, is investigating the murder of Curt Vallaincourt, who was about to marry Veronica Bigelow, heiress to thirty million dollars. McCale extracts some damaging admissions from Shari Lynn, singer and former wife of Vallaincourt. Later Victoria, Veronica's sister, calls at his office and asks his help in recovering some letters from Vallaincourt's apartment. McCale tells her that the letters are not in the apartment, but hints that Shari Lynn may have them. Because of circumstantial evidence, the police believe that Veronica is the murderer. McCale does not think so, but has not yet formed a conclusion. There are many contradictory clues.

CHAPTER XI

The telephone was ringing insistently. McCale rolled over, opened one eye, swore, and finally grabbed the extra pillow, bundling it under his head. He fumbled with the light, snapped it on, lifted the telephone off its cradle.

"McCale speaking," he growled.

"Rocky, boss."

"Where are you?"

"Corner of Aspinwall, opposite the Vallaincourt den. Didn't you tell me to keep a lookout?"

"Oh, yeah. All quiet?"

"All quiet now. Listen, boss, 'long about five this morning—"

"All right. What happened at five o'clock?"

Sleep still hugged him tightly and there was an unreasonable barb in his voice.

"Okay, okay. Around five, a girl showed up with a key to the Vallaincourt ron-day-voo."

"Who was it?"

"Hold on to your hat, now. It was Victoria Bigelow."

"Victoria Bigelow?" Surprise jerked him wide awake.

"Uh uh. She was after some letters of hers, she said."

"Well, well." Victoria had certainly had a busy night, he thought.

"The place was clean, like you said. No secret panels, either. I—that is—I finally helped her hunt for them."

"Go home and grab yourself some grub and shuteye," said McCale. "Get here about one o'clock. I'm going to be busy this morning."

At eight forty-five he called Ann Marriot on the telephone.

To her cool "hello," he said, "Good morning. This is your boss."

"Oh, good morning, dar—boss. Anything important? I'm on my way in about five minutes."

"No hurry. In fact, this is just to say you might shop for an hour if you want to and then do an errand for me. I want you to drop in on Shari Lynn. Suite 802."

". . . And pray what shall I use as an excuse for dropping in, as you say? Don't tell me you're sending me along to smooth the way for you—a more subtle approach, so to speak?"

"No—and that's comedy enough for now, my girl." He grew serious. "I saw her myself late last night, for that matter."

"You rat!"

"I'd like a line on how she is this morning. You know—sad, gay, expectant? Ask her for her autograph. Anything to get in. Talk about Vallaincourt if you can without being thrown out."

"That all?"

"Yes. Just a check-up to satisfy a point that's been nagging me. She's fairly transparent. It ought to be easy."

"Oh, yes, indeed. It sounds too, too easy. All right. I'll do my best. See you when?"

"About noon. Here. 'Bye, sweet."

He dressed leisurely and carefully. He felt like a twentieth century warrior going forth to civilized battle. He knew that to solve this problem, he had first to break down the buttresses of tradition that surrounded the Bigelows. He knew he was up against something that even the overestimated awe, or if you will, majesty, of the law could not upend. He had to break down that smug superiority which was so secure in the belief in its own intelligence that it made its own rules as it went along. He rather pitied them momentarily, and smiled wryly at the pure cynicism of his own thoughts.

Sybil Becomes Implicated

On impulse he dialed police headquarters and asked for Donlevy. After a slight delay, the curt, incisive voice of the lieutenant came through.

"Donlevy here."

"McCale, lieutenant."

"Oh—sure. Not out yet hunting the foul criminal?"

"On the way. I'd like to know what the Bigelow women were wearing when they came in yesterday—outside of the green thingamajig Veronica sported."

"Of course. Didn't I mention that?"

"No."

"Well, here it is. Victoria, an oiled-silk affair, yellow; Karen, a black velvet suit, black cape; Sybil, a light brown raincoat. That help?"

"Uh uh. It was Sybil, then, who walked away into the fog."

"You think so? She claims to have been at the drugstore."

"Not for my money."

"I kind of think not. That family! It's almost impossible to get them to admit anything. They're all protecting one another. What? I've had a devil of a time and got nothing so far."

"You'll get less, very likely, now they've had a chance to compare notes."

There was a pause. Then Donlevy said, almost cheerfully, "I guess Veronica's our girl."

"You really think so?"

"The Lynn woman's evidence will put the finish on it."

"Oh." McCale pondered over that for a moment, then decided to add, "I'd keep a sharp watch on the Lynn woman."

"Why?" Donlevy's interest was immediate.

"I would. That's all."

"Now, Duke, you must have a reason. Why be mysterious?"

"I'll drop in to see you later in the day. Okay?"

"By all means."

McCale dropped the receiver onto its cradle. An emotion of concern crowded his mind and he sighed a sigh of sheer desperation. His brain seemed dulled, inactive, depressed. There was something there, something that would make it clear. It was evading him. Until he could grasp it, he must blunder along, without help, without even the confidence of the ones he was trying to help. Damn the medieval reserve of such people, anyway.

"I want those letters. Do I get them?"

The police commissioner had come and asked a few pertinent questions, stayed barely an hour, and departed. At eight o'clock the district attorney had attempted to bully the police in charge as well as the suspects. He had left at eleven in a huff.

The body had been removed to the morgue and laboratory for fuller examination. Lieutenant Donlevy and his squad had finished with the preliminaries. The hungry press had been thrown a bone to nibble on. Men had been sent to Vallaincourt's apartment to look over papers and belongings for a possible clue. The orderly hubbub of official procedure was over, for a time at least. The night had been quiet—the quiet of nervous exhaustion perhaps, but quiet.

Then, at nine this morning, a plainclothes man had interrupted breakfast with an urgent request for Veronica. He was politely insistent that she must come at once to the office of Lieutenant Donlevy for further questioning. She was not to be alarmed. It was a matter of routine. But—

Miss Adelaide Agrees To McCale's Plan

The library was dim and still and only the sound of a piano being played in the drawing room upstairs came through the oppressing quiet as Adelaide Bigelow finished her recital of events, and looked at McCale sadly. McCale did not speak for a minute. The weight of his senses closed down on him like a stone. He wondered idly whether it was the gloom or the helplessness in the old lady's voice that caused this feeling of futility. He wondered why Karen Bigelow was playing the Liszt Preludes so passionately—those romantic things so richly interlaced with religious mysticism. A strange woman, Karen, but merely more obviously strange than the others. Only the woman before him, resigned, determined, with great courage, seemed to belong in that house. Her voice brought him awake again with a start.

"What are we going to do?" she asked.

"I think," he answered, "that I may be able to see a little further, get a little more than the police were able to. That is, if I can gain their confidence. If you will ask them to come in"—he rose as she got up, smiled and added—"one by one, if you please. It might be easier that way."

"To trap them, I suppose," she murmured, surprisingly.

"Why, of course." He bowed, the smile leaving his lips.

He felt the subtle antagonism leap between them. Then she came over to him, impulsively putting a thin patrician hand on his sleeve.

"Forgive me," she whispered. "It's only that I am so upset. I know how things must be from now on. I see a whole way of life disappearing before my eyes, an empire slipping away. I know—"

"That below the surface, things have not been what they seemed for a long, long time," he interjected, keeping the pity carefully from his tone of voice, for he knew that this she would not have.

"Yes—yes. You won't need me again?" She spoke as if that would be abhorrent to her.

"No. It is better that I do my—dirty work alone." He smiled once more, as he watched her leave the room.

He stood by the fireplace, staring moodily into the ashes of last night's fire, until he heard the door open and close behind him. When he turned, he saw Stephen Bigelow standing irresolute and nervous in the gray morning light.

It was clear, as he sat down in the chair opposite McCale, that he was completely shaken. Although it was no doubt partly hangover, McCale intuitively sensed that not a little of it was due to the fact that he was on his own. A complex lad, this one, he thought, riddled by complexes. He had seen enough of Stephen to know that in spite of his high-nosed arrogance, he was lost without the support of his wife and silly mother. He pondered as to which one of them had been clever enough to send him in first, so that either or both could expertly deny any break he might make.

In a business like way, McCale said, "I am willing to take the police report of your actions yesterday afternoon verbatim. However, I'm more interested in something that may not seem relevant to the murder. If you will only have confidence in me, I can assure you it will probably go no further. I ask it entirely in the hope of helping your foster sister, Veronica, out of a ticklish situation. I know, of course, that you are eager to be of any assistance possible to her."

"Oh, quite." The answer came readily enough. McCale studiously ignored the contemptuous curve of the lips that accompanied the remark.

"Very well, then. I'd like to know if you had known Curt Vallaincourt before he became engaged to Veronica. What you know of him. What you thought of him, to be exact. How, for instance, did it happen that he came so suddenly to this city to be taken up immediately by your family? I'd welcome anything you can tell me."

He saw relief come over Stephen's face, relief that the question was not the one he had feared. Stephen smiled—a thin-lipped, uneasy smile.

"I met him in Chicago," he said calmly, "about six years ago. Victoria was running around with him. I had gone there for a couple of months, just to renew a few old acquaintances."

"Anyone in particular?"

Stephen Tells of His Chicago Trip

"No." His hands shook a little as he fumbled for a cigarette and lighted it. "Just a couple of fellows I had known in the navy. At one time, you see, things were not very—well, pleasant at home. I ran away and joined up. I made a few friends while I was in the service. I corresponded with them from time to time after I got out. We are not a particularly happy group, McCale, en famille, so to speak. So when things got boring again, and—er—a little squawky, I decided to hop out to Chicago and visit a chap who had since married and done quite well for himself."

"Sort of run away again, is that it?" McCale's grin was sardonic. He thought—as you've run out on everything unpleasant since you were a kid, I can bet.

"Well, I suppose you could call it that."

"You took Victoria with you?"

"No, she came to fetch me back, as it were. All is forgiven, you know. That sort of thing. Victoria had met Curt in some of her wanderings. I had met Karen by then and didn't want to leave until there was an understanding of some sort between us. We stayed almost a year, until I married her. Vicky corresponded with Vallaincourt for a while after she came home. It was she who finally got him here. Ran into him by accident in New York or something, and she brought him along for a visit. He just stayed, that's all."

He settled back in the chair, a little less jangled, as if a job had been done and rather well done.

McCale settled back in his chair and looked at Stephen Bigelow with unconcealed disgust. Then he decided to try a shot in the dark and see what it would hit.

"Of course you know that Curt Vallaincourt was married at some time in his lively career."

"Oh, yes. He was," Stephen admitted, completely off guard.

"To Shari Lynn?"

"Sarah Linsky to you," Bigelow blurted, then bit his lip, realizing the trap.

"You knew her, too?"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Gems of Thought

THE inner side of every cloud is bright and shining, and so I turn my clouds about, and always wear them inside out—to see the lining.

Every man is at his best when he adds enthusiasm to whatever he honestly believes in.

No man is too big to be kind and courteous, but many men are too little.

We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing, while others judge us by what we have already done.—Longfellow.

Too low they build who build beneath the stars.