

Lena Hates Men

by MARGOT NEVILLE

Clarice Dodd, wealthy middle-aged widow who lives in Sydney, Australia, keeps her house filled with gay, indolent young people. Her nephew and niece, Felix and Joyce Burke, live with her. Eileen Foster and Denise Deschamps are house guests. Frequent visitors include Bill and Brenda Wheatley, brother and sister, and Michael Rawson, who is attracted to Joyce. Denise has designs on Felix and is jealous when he becomes engaged to Eileen. A sweet girl quite different from the rest of the pleasure-loving crowd. Then, one night, Clarice dies from an overdose of sleeping tablets known as secondals. When her eccentric maid, Lena, insists that she had only one tablet in her possession that night, Inspector Grogan of the police investigates. He learns that Felix recently obtained 18 tablets of secondal from Clarice, but Felix claims he gave them to a friend, Bob Coates. This appears to be confirmed when the inspector recovers 18 tablets from Coates. Then, Denise forces Felix to break his engagement to Eileen by threatening to give the police damaging evidence against Joyce, who has suffered a collapse. However, Denise herself is under suspicion and is closely questioned by Grogan.

CHAPTER XXV
GROGAN'S questioning of Denise was interrupted by Sergeant Manning, who came to tell him that he was wanted on the phone. He went downstairs to the phone and held a brief conversation.

As he finished he saw Felix coming down the stairs. He met him at the bottom.

"Well, Mr. Burke, how about it?" he said grimly. "This morning, I got hold of those tablets you gave to Bob Coates. I turned them over to my chemist to be analyzed. He's just phoned me." He paused. "He's not secondal at all. They are A.P.C. tablets."

For the next hour, Felix was shut up in the morning room with Grogan. Meanwhile the inspector had sent Manning over to Macleay Street to question Coates again.

When Felix finally emerged from the room, he was looking savage. He watched Grogan leave the house and stride off down the drive. Manning was just coming in the gate. The two detectives stood there talking for a minute. Then Grogan went on his way, while Manning came on into the grounds.

Felix went out to the side veranda. Every one there was except Joyce, who was still upstairs in bed. Besides Eileen and Denise, there were Bill, Brenda, Michael and Max Hurst. Even Dr. Nugent was there. He had come to see Joyce again.

They all knew that Felix had been shut up with Grogan. Every face turned toward him as he appeared.

"Well," said Hurst, "what's the latest?"

"The latest is that those tablets I gave to Bob Coates have been analyzed and found to be A.P.C.—not secondal." Felix gave a short bitter laugh. "In other words, I kept the secondal I got from Clarice and later killed her with it."

There was a stunned silence. Then, Hurst burst out: "Boosh! Obviously, Coates made a mistake and gave Grogan the wrong stuff."

"Unfortunately, the A.P.C. tablets were in the envelope on which Clarice wrote 'Sleeping tablets' when she gave me the secondal."

"That's no proof."

"No—but it's a nice little detail that a jury would appreciate."

No one said anything to this. Then, Eileen asked, "Where is Grogan now?"

"He has left for the moment," Felix told her. "But he'll probably be back soon—with a warrant."

Bill jumped up and clapped him on the back. "Don't be a fool! He can't arrest you on such slim evidence as that."

"Of course not!" Brenda babbled. "Don't be so silly, Felix. Come on down to the tennis court and knock a few balls about before dinner. It will help you forget all this awful business. Come on, Bill—and you too, Denise."

Denise rose and took Felix's arm. "Yes—let's get our racquets."

She drew him into the house, while Brenda and Bill set out toward the court.

A few minutes later, Hurst departed, going across the garden toward his house. Then, Dr. Nugent said and better be getting upstairs to see Joyce.

Michael followed the doctor along the veranda. "Will you ask her if I can see her?"

"Better wait until tomorrow," said Nugent.

Michael came back to where Eileen was sitting and threw himself into a chair. He pulled a notebook from his pocket.

"I'll write her a note, anyhow," he said.

PRESENTLY, Eileen left him and went into the house. In the front hall, she found Felix and Denise talking to Lena, who was holding her cat, Sooty, in her arms.

"I'm leaving tomorrow," "I'm leaving tomorrow," Felix said wearily. "What's wrong now?"

"I don't like the way things are here—I don't like it at all. Some one tried to get into my room this afternoon. I was sitting there and I saw the door start to open. Then it shut all of a sudden when I said, 'Who's there?'"

Eileen was watching her closely, wondering whether she was telling the truth or was just acting crazy. "Sooty knows there is something wrong," Lena continued. "Look what she's doing all the time—putting her paw behind her ear and listening."

Denise made an impatient gesture. "Nonsense! She's got a grass seed or something in her ear. Take her to the vet."

"How can I take her to the vet with dinner time coming and Nora shouting at me to do this and do that?"

"Here—give her to me," Denise took the cat out of Lena's arms. "I'll take her for you. Get a basket for her with a lid."

Lena dove into a closet under the stairs and brought out a fishing basket. Denise dropped Sooty into it and bore her off.

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