

Avenging Parrot

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By Anne Austin, author of
"The Black Pigeon," "Rival Wives," etc.

CHAPTER XLIII

Bonnie Dundee's sudden exit from Lieutenant Strawn's office on the heels of his promise to produce the "bad penny" by Monday night was due not so much to a boyish love of a dramatic exit as to an almost panicky desire to evade questioning by his astute chief.

For Strawn would inevitably have demanded: "If you believe Dan Griffin is a boarder at the Rhodes House, who else could he be but Henry Dowd? He is the only member of the household who has given a false name and false address. Better let me put him on the grill. I'll soon find out if he's Dan Griffin!"

And Dundee did not want Strawn or anyone else to "grill" Henry Dowd just yet. For he sincerely believed that such tactics would get them nowhere, at least for a long and tedious time. For if Henry Dowd was indeed Dan Griffin, murderer of three women, he was a consummate clever villain. For five years Dan Griffin had lived under some alias or other, in perhaps a score of cities. And if Henry Dowd was Griffin, he had undoubtedly covered his tracks well, had built up a story of his "past" which would necessitate endless police investigations before its falsity could be proved, and his real identity pinned upon him. Not tamely would a man who had the brains and cold-blooded courage to kill three women confess that he was not only a bank phony, but a murderer.

Moreover, Dan Griffin, whoever he was, had been amply assured by the newspapers, both in Hamilton and New York, that he had not left a single clue upon the actual scene of any of his three crimes. With this assurance, Henry Dowd, if he was really Dan Griffin, could simply deny all knowledge of the three crimes, as before the coroner's jury and upon first being questioned, he had denied all knowledge of or complicity in the Hogarth and Barker murders. As for his alias, if it was challenged, he could stick to his story or present the police with an intricate new one which would keep them busy for days or weeks before they could prove its falsity.

And even if its falsity was proved, where would the police be then? In five years Dan Griffin had had ample opportunity to change his appearance and personality so that an identification by a Belton acquaintance would be practically an impossibility. But granted that Henry Dowd could be proved to be Dan Griffin, just how near a conviction would the police be then? The district attorney could prove opportunity

and motive, but of actual evidence connecting Henry Dowd with the crime, there was none. The fact that Dowd had left New York the very evening of the day that Sally Graves or Griffin had been murdered would be strong circumstantial evidence, but it alone could not secure a conviction of murder against him.

As for the two murders at the Rhodes House, a clever defense attorney could convince any jury that, no matter if Dan Griffin was an inmate of the house when the two crimes were committed, others besides Griffin had both motive and opportunity to kill Mrs. Hogarth—the motive being greed.

No, his case was not complete by any means, would not be complete by any means if he proved that Henry Dowd was Dan Griffin, Dundee told himself ruefully, as he took his seat at the dinner table. But he liked a hard job.

He was late. The soup plates had been removed and Tilda, red-eyed and nervous, was serving the well-filled plates of roast and vegetables. The dining room was crowded with "mealers"—many of them the unseasoned-seekers who had filled to overflowing the inquest room at the morgue. These transients shuddered delightfully over their dining in actually coming to the "Murder Mansion" for a meal, exchanged theories in thrilled whispers, and quite openly studied the group of regular boarders with speculative eyes.

But upon that large table in the center of the room a blight had fallen. Mrs. Rhodes had considerably re-arranged the chairs and removed one so that the horror of gazing upon Cora Barker's empty chair was spared the remaining boarders. There was almost no conversation. On every face were the marks of strain and terror. As clearly as if it were spoken aloud a dread question made itself heard above the faint tinkle of silver and glass and china—"Who next?"

Dundee, taking his place with only a nod to his fellow guests, knew that that table would have been deserted that evening if Lieutenant Strawn had not brutally commanded them to remain as guests of the house, on pain of arrest as material witnesses if they dared flee to less sinister quarters.

"Have you heard the news, Mr. Dundee?" Lawrence Sharp broke the heavy silence at last.

"No. I hope it's good news this time," Dundee answered quietly. "Poor Cora's mother arrived from Quincy, Illinois, just before dinner," Mr. Sharp answered.

pleased in spite of his depression at having news to impart. "She's having a tray in her room, poor old soul. . . Cora's room, that is. She asked to be permitted to stay there until her train leaves after midnight. Getting Cora's things together, I understand."

"Are the police permitting her to remove Cora's belongings?" Dundee asked, innocently.

"I believe so. Mrs. Rhodes has just telephoned police headquarters and Lieutenant Strawn is coming over shortly to be here while she packs. But I understand that nothing has been found in the poor girl's room to aid the police in any way. It was the sad privilege of the wife and me to have a short talk with Mrs. Barker, and to tell her how much all of us had loved her daughter."

"I wish I hadn't come back last night," Mrs. Sharp broke in tearfully. "I wish I'd stayed out the week with Larry. He wanted me to."

"I presume Mrs. Barker will take Cora home with her—for burial!" Dundee asked with a fleeting glance of sympathy for Bert Magnus, who was not eating, but whose eyes had not left his untouched food since Dundee had entered the room.

"On the one o'clock train," Mr. Sharp replied heavily. "Will you pass me the catsup, please, Mr. Dundee? . . . Not that I have the slightest appetite, but we must all try to keep up our strength."

As Henry Dowd complied silently with the request, Dundee studied him covertly but keenly. With Lieutenant Strawn's meager description of the Dan Griffin of five years ago in mind, the young detective noted and catalogued every feature and characteristic of the man seated opposite him.

"I finally doped it out that Dan Griffin must have been so ordinary-looking a young man that his face made no deep impression on anyone," Strawn had said. And that characterization could aptly be applied to Henry Dowd. If before this moment—Dundee had been called upon to describe Henry Dowd for a police dossier, he would have been hard put to it to achieve even a fair degree of accuracy. For Dowd was one of those faces you simply cannot vividly recall to mind.

"What color are his eyes, anyway?" Dundee puzzled. "I would have sworn they were blue-gray, and now, in this light, and behind those glasses of his, they look gray-green. Hair—thin, light brown mixed with gray. Forehead very high, but that may be because he's growing bald. Age? Say 34 to 38, and I'd defy anyone to hit it closer than that. Griffin would be about 35, so that checks. A gold eye-tooth on the right side, but that dental job could have been done any time during the last five years, as a tiny item toward creating a subtle disguise. . . . But I'll be eternally confounded if Henry Dowd or whoever he is looks subtle!"

No, there was nothing in Henry Dowd's face or manner to suggest cleverness or subtlety. The described him were "meek" and only two words which adequately "diffident." But of Dan Griffin his acquaintances in Belton had said, "You'd never have guessed to look at him that he'd rob a bank."

Mentally, Dundee ticked off the other items of Strawn's description of Dan Griffin: "Neither tall nor short—between five feet seven and five feet ten. Average weight, inclined to be slender rather than heavy. Regular features—nothing odd about them;

neither handsome nor homely." So far so good! The meek little man across the table fitted those qualifications exactly.

"But Dan Griffin did not wear glasses," he reminded himself. "Glasses are, however, the first thought of the amateur criminal trying to disguise himself. Effective, too, for glasses have been known not only to change the facial appearance of a man, but his personality as well. But if Henry Dowd is Dan Griffin, he was clever enough not to adopt any of the other obvious methods of disguising his looks—dyeing his hair or wearing a wig, growing a beard, affecting a limp, scarring his cheek. For two years Dan Griffin has known that there are no records of his fingerprints in existence. Trust him to know that the Belton police station, with all its records, burned to the ground! But there is a sample of your handwriting in my pocket, Mr. Daniel Thomas Griffin, and I rather think my next step is to obtain a specimen of the real handwriting of Mr. Henry Dowd, with that clumsy 'printing' with which he signed the register."

The young detective was jerked out of his reverie by a soft, hesitant voice at his elbow. Possibly Mrs. Rhodes had guessed that Bonnie Dundee would appreciate the honor, but at any rate his chair was now on Norma Paige's left. On her right sat Walter Styles—of course!

"Are you going to Mrs. Hogarth's funeral tomorrow, Mr. Dundee?" Norma asked. "Mrs. Rhodes thought tomorrow was the best day, since it is the Fourth, and none of us will be working."

Dundee hesitated. He had forgotten that the next day would be a holiday and that his operations as a detective would be hampered by the presence of the boarders. But if they were all going to the funeral—

"I'm afraid not, Miss Paige," he answered regretfully. "But as I told you, I'm trying to do some work in my room, and having lost today on account of the inquests, I think I'd better buckle down to it tomorrow, even if it is a holiday."

"Everyone in the house is going except you," Norma answered with faint reproach. "Even Mr. Dowd and Mr. Magnus, who never met her. . . I've been taking up a little collection for flowers, but of course since you hardly knew Mrs. Hogarth—"

"Please let me have the pleasure," Bonnie interrupted hastily, and slipped a five dollar bill along the edge of the table. "I've been wondering about the funeral. Since Mrs. Hogarth robbed of all her money—"

"Mrs. Rhodes' church volunteered today to pay the funeral expenses," the girl whispered, tears springing into her dark eyes. "Mrs. Rhodes was going to pay everything herself, but her pastor said it wasn't fair—Oh!" she broke off, with a little cry of pain and grief. "It's horrible to think of poor Mrs. Hogarth having to be buried on charity, when she was so proud, and counted so on helping others with her money when she died—"

Dundee wanted to tell her then of the \$2000 life insurance which Mrs. Hogarth had died without knowing she had a claim to. But no one, not even Norma Paige, must know yet that there had been a daughter who was murdered. Later, when the three murder mystery had been solved, and Norma had come into her small inheritance under the terms of Mrs. Hogarth's will, the girl could reimburse the church for the old lady's funeral expenses.

But tomorrow, while the others were paying tribute to the dead woman, Dundee would be serving her in another way. For he still believed that the key to both the Hogarth and the Barker murders was concealed in the Rhodes House.

(To Be Continued)

CHANGE MANAGER

SPokane, Wash., Dec. 13, (A P)—The resignation of T. J. Humbird of Sand Point, Idaho, as president of the Weyerhaeuser Sales company, distributors for lumber mills in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Minnesota, was announced here. Frederick L. Weyerhaeuser of Minneapolis, grandson of the founder of the company, will succeed Humbird.

NOTICE

To The Public

Friends and Citizens Of Klamath and Vicinity.

We wish to thank you for your wonderful response to our appeal through the medium of the Klamath Newspapers in the matter of closing out the Brownsville Woolen Mills Store at 5th and Main Sts. The business transacted on Thursday was the largest in history, notwithstanding that we were handicapped for space and an adequate staff of salespeople. Again we thank you and wish to state that we have secured additional help sufficient to give 100% service Saturday. Kindly turn to page 11 of this paper today and read our further announcement.

Signed,
BROWNVILLE WOOLEN MILLS STORE.

Corrections To Errorgrams

(1) Belgian is spelled incorrectly. (2) The rabbit has no ears. (3) A claw is missing from each foot on the chicken

in the foreground. (4) A strap is missing from the woman's apron. (5) The scrambled word is yourself.

When the sewing machine for shoes was first introduced, one man could do as much as 60 had done before by hand.

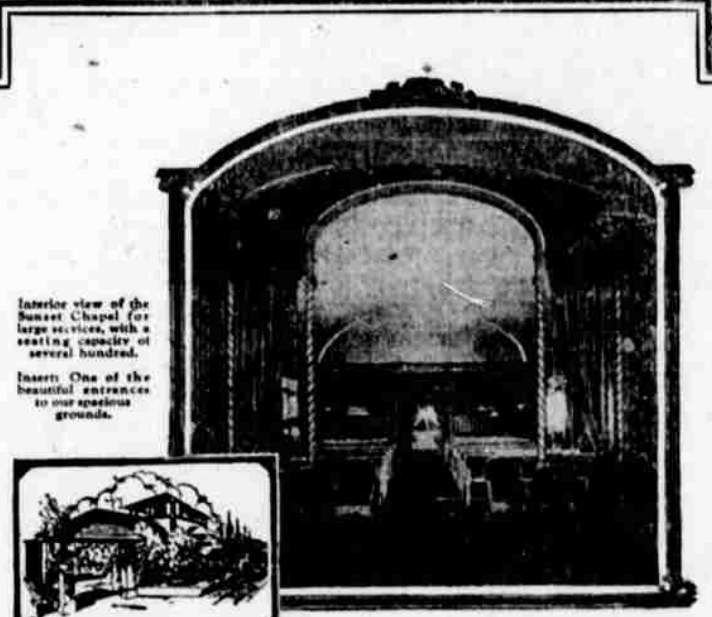
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