

JUSTICE IS BLIND



THE courtroom door swung back slowly and Clover Lane walked in, and down the aisle, looking like a medieval page, her head flung back, her fair hair sweeping her shoulders in a Garbo bob, and her blue eyes, pale as aquamarines, fastened on the judge. His glance swooped in her direction, cold with reproach for the interruption. Embarrassed, she slid hastily into the one vacant chair at the press table. Only that morning he had warned the reporters to curb their restless comings and goings. This was a murder trial, not a prize fight, but she had had to make a telephone call to her office.

Saint in stained glass, thought Justice John Bryant, less annoyed when he saw who it was. He had been vaguely troubled for days by her faintly angelic demeanor in the murk of the case he was hearing. But reporters were like that—either saints or devils. They seemed to him to be mostly devils.

He knew them well. His county, rich and dotted with big estates, had seen more than its share of front page murders, and he had listened to too many women deny that they had killed their husbands and lovers. By degrees he had met most of the stars of the New York papers. He liked some, tolerated others, and thought their trade a menace to jurisprudence.

The evidence in the case he was hearing was airtight—so much so that the prosecutor was getting casual. Always a mistake. Four of the jurors looked soft. He could read acquittal in their faces. There was no doubt in his mind that Letty Stoneham had shot her husband thru a window as he sat silhouetted against the shade, reading his evening paper.

Justice Bryant was 52—an ascetic slightly miscast on the bench. His gray eyes were level, cold, and incredibly bored as they watched the slow parade of witnesses going past. Obviously he had never let his own passions fly. He disliked disorder, frenzy, deceit, and sentimentalism, but the pattern of his working life was thick with all these offshoots of frayed humanity.

At home things were different. There the atmosphere was one of exquisite order, reason, and placid affection. He had been married for 25 years to a woman reserved and stable. His one child, Joan, had started on the same road—a bride last Easter, cool as the sheaf of lilies she held in

her arms—pale, blonde, and remote.

Clover Lane thought herself lucky to have landed on a New York paper at the age of 21. Her father, dead now, had been a famous foreign correspondent.

She had been at it for 10 months now and was still trying to master the technique of a profession that seemed to her unbearably complicated, altho her father had always said that it was simple arithmetic if one could read, write, and disbelieve in one's fellow men. She lacked the lion heart, or the common sense, or the brass, or whatever it was that made the good reporter.

Her City Editor Puts the Pressure On

"You can write, but you can't get news," Charlie Levitt, her city editor, had told her acidly a week ago. "You've got to toughen up and get what you go after. . . . I'm afraid you haven't got the old man's knack," he added brutally.

Clover lacked nothing, however, in the eyes of Hank Martin, sitting beside her at the press table now, looking bored and inattentive. Hank was a star of the first water. He worked on a rival paper to hers, and somehow he was making her newspaper days absorbing, with his gay good nature, his abhorrence of bunk, his fine sense of values where his work was concerned. He laughed a lot at Clover—sometimes so much that it hurt.

When it came to news he was ready enough to ditch her, for he was full of the fighting spirit and was both keen and acid at his work.

Matty Lennox came lumbering down the aisle toward Clover, trying to make his 200 pounds of flapping flesh look obscure in the courtroom. Matty was her photographer and cameras were forbidden when Justice Bryant sat on the bench. An attendant watched him suspiciously as he got close to Clover and whispered in her ear.

"Mr. Levitt wants you on the telephone, Miss Lane. We've got to duck."

Clover elbowed her way thru the crowd waiting at the courtroom door to get a glimpse of the woman charged with murder. She shut herself up in a telephone booth along the hall and listened anxiously to Mr. Levitt's voice snarling at her: "O, hello, there you are at last. I thought

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the line had gone dead. Is Justice Bryant still on the bench?"

"Yes."

"Good. We've just had a tip that a girl's been bumped off—on his estate, of all places. Standard News hasn't got it yet. Hop out there quick. It's 28 miles from where you are. I'll assign some one else to the Stoneham case. Now go to it, until I get one of the men out there."

Clover dived out of the booth and outraced Matty to his car. He always drove as if the devils were in pursuit, and before long they flashed thru the high stone gates that inclosed Justice Bryant's 300 acre estate.

The house glimmered thru the trees—an English effect, long and low, spacious and cool looking. In the distance a pond lay sapphire-blue in a stretch of grass, and near it stood a summer house, a rustic effect built of logs and half smothered in hollyhocks.

Standing at the door of the Bryant house, his brick-red face familiar by now to Clover, was Inspector Henry Gluck, who had put bracelets on the Stoneham woman and many another murderess in the county.

"And what are you doing here?" he demanded as Clover and Matty got out of the car.

"What would your guess be, Inspector?" Matty retorted. "We got a murder tip and it can't be any news to you."

"Was the Judge on the bench when you left?"

"Yes," said Clover. "He was."

"Couldn't have got the message, then," said Inspector Gluck reflectively.

"Who's dead?" demanded Matty.

"Name's Audrey Harrington. She lived on the next estate. She was found over there"—he pointed to the summer house—"shot thru the head. It looks as if she was sitting in a chair listening to the radio when her number was up. The gardener found her slumped on the floor. Yes, Matty, she was young, good looking, and what you would call a luscious brunette."

"Thanks," said Matty. "Any suspects?"

"Don't let your imagination run riot," warned Gluck. "Nobody said this was murder. All we know is that it was a shooting, and we haven't found the gun."

"I suppose she shot herself and then hid the gun," Matty suggested satirically.

Gluck turned aside impatiently. "Stranger things have happened," he said. "Now no more questions till the Judge shows up."

Ten minutes later he arrived. He passed Clover and Matty without a glance, his tall figure looking longer and leaner without the sheltering folds of his black silk robes. "Come with me, Gluck," he said briefly.

Clover and Matty Study Death Scene

Left to themselves, Clover and Matty crossed the lawn, studied the summer house from all angles, then stepped unmolested into a sunny room furnished with peasant rugs, pine benches, and a wicker chair with a linen cover that told the story. It was stained with blood and a detective mounted guard beside it. There were stains on the hardwood floor and on the gayly colored rug close to the chair.

Matty took shots to his heart's content. He had finished and was outdoors when Justice Bryant appeared with his wife and Inspector Gluck. Clover's glance went with swift curiosity to Mrs. Bryant, a slim figure in white, composed and surprisingly young looking. They went inside and closed the door.

Soon half a dozen cars drove up, unloading a swarm of their colleagues.

Hank strolled toward Clover, casual as usual, but she saw in his eye the flicker of interest that only a good story could arouse in him. "Swell yarn, this, Clover," he remarked with rare enthusiasm. "Something different. You pulled a fast one on us, didn't you?"

"The office had the tip. It wouldn't have been fair to tell you."

Hank doffed his hat ceremoniously. "It would not," he agreed.

When the Judge came out of the summer house and saw that the press had congregated in full strength, he invited them into the library of his home.

"I don't know how you fellows get

wind of things so fast," he remarked, "but since you're here, I'll give you an outline of what seems to have happened. It's still quite sketchy. You can pick up the rest from the police."

"Miss Harrington was a family friend of ours, went to school with my daughter, was in and out of the house at all hours. Her father is J. C. Harrington, stocks and bonds. Her mother is an invalid and, by the way, I would advise you not to go bothering her."

"Well, today she lunched here with my wife, as she often did. The other guest was Richard Bremner, an old friend of ours. When they were having coffee a telephone call came for Mr. Bremner which sent him hurrying into town."

"Half an hour later Miss Harrington left, telling my wife she would walk home thru the woods—a short cut which she often took. She left in good spirits. My wife saw her go thru the French doors to the lawn. Then she went upstairs for her usual afternoon nap, and that's the last we know."

"An hour later the gardener, hosing the flowers outside the summer house, noticed a trickle of blood running under the door. He stepped in and found Miss Harrington crumpled on the floor, dead, and the radio playing swing music." A spate of questions broke loose as the Judge finished speaking. He answered some, waved off others.

"Of course Bremner is being brought in for questioning," added Inspector Gluck, who had stood quietly in the background. "And the pond is being dragged on the chance of finding the gun."

The reporters scattered to telephones. Clover and Hank found a booth in a dreary vine trellised roadhouse a quarter of a mile away. Clover got Mr. Levitt on the wire.

"I'll send out two men at once," he told her. "Go over to the Harrington house and see what you can dig up there. Give everything you've got in the way of straight news to Duncan Beals, who'll be out there in a couple of hours. Do a feature on the women yourself. This story's too big for you to cover single-handed."

Clover hung up the receiver slowly, her exhilaration gone. Hank, whistling cheerfully as he rustled thru his notes, saw the clouds gather in the pellucid blue eyes. "Taking the

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