

CLUE IN CRIMSON

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A tiny spot of blood was the only positive clue to the identity of Clark Douglas' murderer— but Dr. Feather knew how to make that bloodspot talk!

THE big rambling bungalow of Clark Douglas—Willow Grove's fiery newspaper editor—stood bathed by the moonlight as Dr. Feather's limousine rolled swiftly up the tree-lined driveway.

“Park here, Kit,” Dr. Feather said.

A physician's coupe stood under the porte cochere, with a police car and two motorcycles beside it. Dr. Feather's eighteen-year-old daughter swung expertly to one side.

“Shall I come in, Father?”

“Why, of course, child... Oh, there's Sergeant Tripp now.” Dr. Feather hopped agilely from his car; he was a small man, bareheaded, dressed in a rusty black alpaca suit. The moonlight gleamed on his shaggy mane of iron-gray hair.

“Here we are, Sergeant,” he called. “Is he still alive?”

The big police sergeant met them at the doorway. “Just about, an' that's all; Doc Allen's with him now. He's still unconscious.” Tripp sighed. “Guess he'll die without tellin' us anything.”

“Dear me. That's too bad, Sergeant.”

The silent Kit joined them as they went inside, into the dim bungalow's long central hallway. It was about two a. m. now—a warm summer night. Less than an hour before, the somnolent telephone operator in Willow Grove's Central office had been startled by a call for help—a choking cry coming from the home of Clark Douglas here at the edge of town. There was a crash, then silence, and the line remained open.

The operator had notified Sergeant Tripp. “Everybody was asleep when we got here,” the sergeant was saying now to Dr. Feather. “I routed 'em out an' we found Clark Douglas lyin' on the floor of his study, where he had fallen with the telephone beside him. Stabbed, and pretty badly slashed. He's a big powerful man. Looks like the killer left him for dead. But he didn't die. He recovered enough to get to the telephone an' call for help. Then he dropped unconscious.”

“You said something about a window in the study being broken open,” Dr. Feather suggested.

“The screen is cut.”

“And you don't think it's an inside job, Sergeant?”

Tripp rubbed his bluish jowls. “Somebody climbed in that window an' attacked him. That's pretty obvious. An', my Gawd, with those editorials Douglas writes, there's a thousand people in this county would like to kill him.”

“I dare say, Sergeant. Who was in the house, family and servants?”

“They're all here now—you can look 'em over, Dr. Feather.”

“My goodness, yes, I certainly shall. Who are they?”

“Couple of maid servants. An' a butler. Fellow named Butterworth. One of those 'Yes, sir, thank yon, sir,' butlers with a fishy stare. Damned if I can make anything out of him.”

“And the family?” “Well, there's Douglas' wife. Handsome young woman. She's collapsed—Doc Allen's got her on his hands, too. An' there's a William Mallory, old friend of the family. Used to be in love with Mrs. Douglas—I got that out of one of the servants.”

“Don't theorize too much, Sergeant. Good gracious, in every family people have motives for murder. Anybody else?”

“One other. Young Creighton Forbes. He's Mrs. Douglas' brother. Out of a job, living off Douglas' hospitality. But hell, Douglas himself, he's been attacking the gambling and liquor people in this county so you'd wonder he wasn't murdered every week. Looks like some outside thug cut that screen an'—Oh, here's Mallory now. . . No change in him, Mr. Mallory?”

“No, I'm afraid not.”

WILLIAM MALLORY—this friend of the family, as Sergeant Tripp had characterized him—was a small man of thirty- odd, with sleek black hair, a pale, rather handsome face, solemn and grim now. He was clad in dressing gown and slippers.

“A physician?” Mallory said as the Sergeant introduced him to Dr. Feather. “Doctor Allen is—”

“My goodness no,” Dr. Feather disclaimed. “Just a Ph. D. My primary interest is .crime detection.”

“He's here to help me,” the sergeant said.

“Oh, I see.”

“But dear me,” Dr. Feather added, “with a man on the verge of death—I'll help him if I can, of course. I'd like to see Dr. Allen.”

“He's here,” Mallory started for the nearby doorway of a bedroom. But Dr. Feather's gaze was across the dim hall to where in a recess a tall young fellow in dressing gown and slippers was at a telephone. Silently, Dr. Feather stared. To anyone not knowing the famous criminologist intimately, he would have seemed a fussy little man, impractical, genial, anxious to please everyone. But his alert birdlike gaze was missing nothing of the scene around him. He waited until Mallory had gone into the bedroom; then he murmured:

“Who's that at the telephone, Sergeant?”

“Mrs. Douglas' brother—Creighton Forbes.” In a moment Forbes finished his call and came toward them. He was younger than Mallory, seemingly about twenty-five—a big blond fellow with his curly hair

rumpled and his somewhat weak-chinned face grave with anxiety. His dressing gown flapped at his bare ankles.

"I've been 'phoning for a nurse as Doctor Allen suggested," Creighton Forbes explained to the Sergeant. "He doesn't want an ambulance—not for now, anyway. Says he's afraid to move him."

There seemed no question but that Clark Douglas was dying. He lay with closed eyes, unconscious here on the bed to which they had carried him from the study where he had been working late into the night on an editorial.

From the bedroom doorway, with the alert-eyed silent Kit beside him, Dr. Feather stood gazing at the big inert form swathed in bandages. The face was livid; the bloodless lips were parted slightly with a faint gasping, rattling breath. At the mouth a bloody foam was gathered. In a corner of the room the dark-haired William Mallory and young Forbes had joined Mrs. Douglas, who lay enveloped in a negligee in a wicker chair—a blond woman twenty years younger than her husband. Quite evidently she was a very pretty woman; but she was disheveled now and her face, devoid of make-up, was splashed with tears. Beyond question she was on the verge of hysterical collapse.

Silently Dr. Feather turned away, motioning to the rotund little physician who was at the bedside, to come to the door.

"I'm Dr. Feather," he said softly. "I'm here to help Sergeant Tripp. But Dr. Allen, if I could be of any assistance to you—"

Allen glanced in at the prostrate woman and moved further from the doorway. "I guess it's only a matter of minutes," he said in an undertone. "A stab-wound in the back, and he's pretty horribly slashed. Most of the bleeding's internal now." Allen grimaced. "He's lost so much blood it wasn't hard to staunch the external wounds. It must have been a horribly ferocious attack."

"Dear me," Dr. Feather murmured. "And you don't think he'll recover consciousness? If he did, he might be able to tell us who did it."

ALLEN shook his head. "I'm afraid he's going to take what he knows with him."

"Now let me show you the study," Sergeant Tripp said impatiently. "That man's goin' to die—nothin' we can do about it. So this is a murder case, Dr. Feather. An' clues get cold—"

"So they do, Sergeant. Yes, they certainly do. Are there any clues?"

"That's the hell of it," Tripp admitted. "Somebody cut the window screen an' climbed in."

That's all the evidence there is, unless you can spot some. Now how can I go out an' round up a thousand influential people that Mr. Douglas made enemies of?"

"You can't. Obviously you can't, Sergeant." The study of Clark Douglas was down a long narrow hallway, in a separate wing fairly remote from the rest of the big bungalow. At the doorway, again Dr. Feather paused, silently regarding the mute scene of tragedy.

It was a big room, with windows on three sides. At a mahogany desk between two of the windows lay the unfinished editorial which Douglas had been writing—a few sheets of scrawled manuscript with a lead pencil beside them. The chair at the desk had been overturned. The rug there was scuffed. Another smaller chair nearby was lying on its back; ornaments on a side table were scattered to the floor. Further away, a taboret with a small chair before it, had evidently held the telephone. The taboret and chair were overturned now and the instrument lay on the floor between them.

The room gave every evidence of the grim desperate struggle Clark Douglas must have waged for his life against his ferocious assailant. And his blood from the horrible slashing made the side rug and a patch of the polished hardwood floor, the floor by the taboret and the telephone instrument itself, a strewn shambles of crimson.

"Dear me," Dr. Feather murmured. "It looks fearful, doesn't it, Sergeant? There must have been quite a bit of noise here, don't you think?"

"The door to the hall was closed," Tripp said. "If the people in the house were all asleep, they wouldn't hear it way off here. They didn't, matter of fact. The first they knew anything was wrong was me arrivin' an wakin' 'em up."

Little Dr. Feather nodded. "I agree with you on that, Sergeant. But the attacker would be afraid he was heard, just the same. Which undoubtedly is why he didn't stop to verify more thoroughly whether or not his victim was actually dead."

"Here's where he got in," Tripp led Dr. Feather to a window directly across the room from the desk. "With Mr. Douglas at that desk, his back would be toward this window, see?"

"Well, yes," Dr. Feather agreed. "Yes, I get that point. I certainly do, Sergeant."

Kit now was poking about the room, examining the widespread patches of crimson stain, stooping down silently peering, almost snuffing like a little hound on a trail.

"Didn't find any weapon," the Sergeant said. "He took it with him. Guess he went out the window, same way he came in. There's a stone walk through the garden just outside. He must have followed it out to the back road."

The blinds of all the windows in the study were fully drawn except this one, which was only half way down. The lower sash was up; and the big square opening was covered with a copper mesh screen. Two long slashes had been made in it—one vertical, one horizontal. They crossed at its center and the four triangles of mesh had been bent inward, making a hole fully large enough to admit a man.

"He stood on the walk out there, reached up an' cut this hole," Tripp was saying. "That was easy."

Dr. Feather didn't answer. With a magnifying glass and a tiny flashlight, he was examining the mesh of the cut screen. Then he straightened.

"My goodness, Sergeant, there's quite a bit wrong with these theories of yours. There certainly is. A man, outside, cutting this screen— well, the knife would bend all the tiny cut ends of the screening inward. But these little prongs are all bent outward. This screen was cut from inside the room, Sergeant. Just a plant to make you think that one of Mr. Douglas' reputed thousand enemies came from outside and attacked him."

THE Sergeant stared. "Good Lord, I never thought of that."

"The killer didn't either. And there's another thing—dear me, Mr. Douglas obviously wasn't asleep at that desk. He was writing. You can see where his pencil trailed off when he was attacked. Probably the first blow was that stab in the back. And he wasn't stone deaf, was he?"

"Well, no," the Sergeant admitted. "Not that I—"

"Then wouldn't he have heard that screen being cut, Sergeant? That's something else you and this excited assassin didn't seem to think of. It was pretty obvious from the beginning."

“Here's something queer,” Kit suddenly called. The girl was over near the desk, kneeling on the floor, gazing intently down. “Come look at this, Father.”

As Dr. Feather and the Sergeant turned toward her, from the open doorway of the study came another voice:

“Is there anything I could do to help you, sir?” A tall, dark, angular man stood in the doorway. He was holding a faded dressing gown awkwardly around him. It made him look grotesque; but his dignity rose above it so that he stood erect with his bare feet in worn Chinese sandals planted squarely under him.

“Who are you?” Dr. Feather demanded. .

“I'm Butterworth, sir. Jennings Butterworth.”

“The butler,” Sergeant Tripp murmured. “What do you want, Butterworth?”

“One of your men told me that Dr. Feather was here.” The butler's gaze went to the kneeling Kit, and then came up to Dr. Feather's face. “I thought you might want to question me, sir.”

“Eh? Oh, well not now, Butterworth,” Dr. Feather said. “We're busy here now.”

The butler bowed slightly. “Thank you, sir. What I meant, sir, I've been in service here with poor Mr. Douglas for nearly ten years. Whatever you wish to know about the family, sir—”

“Later,” Dr. Feather said. And Butterworth, trained to obey even the unspoken word, bowed with dignity and withdrew. Dr. Feather exchanged a glance with Kit; the frowning Sergeant slammed the study door.

“My goodness,” Dr. Feather commented, “if it does happen that we need family information, I imagine that butler can tell us plenty. What was it you found, Kit?”

“These blood stains, father. Look at that one. Doesn't it seem unusual?”

Dr. Feather knelt beside her. “Well, good gracious yes, it certainly does, Kit.”

“What's that mean?” Tripp demanded.

“This blood, Sergeant,” Dr. Feather explained. “Enough time has passed and it's drying—pretty thoroughly clotted. But here's some of it that's quite wet. Dear me, that certainly is queer, Kit.”

A patch of hardwood floor was before them. It was blood-stained—blood which by the passage of time had coagulated in contact with the air. But a little of the blood here, and also back nearer the desk, was wet, with less time having passed, seemingly, in which to clot it.

“Now what the devil,” the Sergeant muttered. “Does that mean that Mr. Douglas—”

LITTLE Dr. Feather was on his feet. His eyes were flashing. “Dear me, Sergeant,” he exclaimed, “that reminds me—here we are neglecting that dying man. I wonder if he's still alive.” He started for the study door.

“But listen,” the Sergeant protested. “Let's keep on with this, Dr. Feather. My God, what you've proved already—that faked cut screen— chances are we've got the killer right here in the house. Let's nab him—what you figure this wet an' dried blood means? If Mr. Douglas—”

“I was thinking, father,” Kit said quietly, “if you want me to do any routine lab work—”

"Of course I do, child. I believe a blood transfusion might be advisable, Kit. If Dr. Allen thinks he can stand it. If he hasn't died already".

"But listen," the Sergeant pleaded. "Can't we go on with this investigation?"

"My goodness, Sergeant, please don't annoy us now."

With Kit and the disappointed Sergeant following him, Dr. Feather hurried back into the main hallway. In the recess, William Mallory sat at the telephone, with Mrs. Douglas' brother— young Creighton Forbes—standing back against the wall. As Dr. Feather appeared, Mallory concluded his conversation and hung up; and he and Forbes came forward.

"I was 'phoning for an ambulance," Mallory said. "He's still alive. Doctor Allen thinks it might be advisable to try moving him."

"It would kill him," young Forbes exclaimed. "He's going to die—but if only he'd recover consciousness, just for a minute—" With the thought that Douglas might tell who had attacked him, young Forbes' big thick fingers clenched into fists.

"I'll speak to Allen," Dr. Feather said. "My goodness, if a transfusion would help him we must try it."

"Shall I get the things from the car, Father?"

Kit interjected.

"Yes, of course. Hurry, child."

The girl moved swiftly away. Dr. Feather went into the sick room. Mrs. Douglas had been taken to her own room now, with the servants attending her. On the bed Clark Douglas still lay unconscious, faintly breathing, with his face white as chalk and blood-foam on his lips which Allen occasionally wiped away. For a moment, Dr. Feather murmured vehemently with the physician, then he hurried back into the hall.

"A transfusion is possible," he said. "Dear me, yes, it certainly is. His heart seems to have strengthened a little. That's why Dr. Allen ordered the ambulance. If it should strengthen further, we need donors for the transfusion, gentlemen. Dr. Allen was worried—there would hardly be time to get professional donors."

"You mean, it might bring him to consciousness?" Sergeant Tripp demanded. "I never thought of that, Dr. Feather. I see what you're getting at."

"Or it might save him," Dr. Feather retorted. "That's the most important thing."

"Professional donors?" young Forbes murmured. "Why, that isn't necessary. I'll give my blood, of course."

"If it's the right type," Dr. Feather said. "My girl Kit can type you all. The type to match Mr. Douglas—you understand that, of course. You, too, Sergeant—you're young and strong. And where's that butler? Dear me, I forgot all about that butler. If this transfusion is possible, we'll do it right away—the hospital can send the necessary equipment."

HE HERDED them all into another room. From Dr. Feather's big limousine which in effect was a traveling laboratory, Kit came with sterile needles and glass slides. During the moment it took her to secure the blood samples of the possible donors, Dr. Feather hurried again into the sick room. His eyes were sparkling when he returned.

"His heart is holding out," he said. "It responded to the last stimulant pretty well. Allen agrees with me—if it seems that he can, stand the transfusion, we'll order the apparatus from the hospital and perform it right here. I'll see if we can round up a professional donor, just in case there's no one here of the right type. You've finished, Kit? Well, that's fine. Get a sample of Mr. Douglas' blood—then type them all up. Hurry, child."

"You think that he will live, sir?" Butterworth, the butler, said suddenly. "You think that this may bring him back to consciousness?"

"Well most certainly that's what we're all hoping," Dr. Feather said.

With a grinding of brakes, presently the ambulance arrived. Dr. Feather ordered it to wait; and he had telephoned again to the hospital. Two other resident doctors of the hospital staff were coming with the necessary equipment to give the transfusion here. Then suddenly Dr. Allen came from the sick room, with one of the white-robed hospital internes behind him. The rotund little physician was grave, solemn with disappointment.

"I'm really sorry, gentlemen," he said. "That strengthening of his heart—that sometimes occurs, you know, just before the end. But it did encourage us. I'm sorry, indeed, but it's too late for us to help him now. He's gone."

"Oh, dear me." There could be no question of the poignant regret on Dr. Feather's face and in his voice. "Oh, good gracious, that's too bad, Doctor Allen. I hoped we had a chance of saving him. I really did."

There was disappointment on the face of Sergeant Tripp also. "An' now be won't ever tell us anything of what happened," the Sergeant exclaimed. "Well, that's that. Please, Dr. Feather, you did your best for Mr. Douglas an' this is a murder case now. Can't we go ahead with—"

"My goodness, Sergeant, don't talk like that." Little Dr. Feather's voice suddenly hardened. "You want me to go ahead and catch the murderer for you? Why, that's just what I've been trying to do, right along. My girl Kit and I, we've used all the wits we've got. We certainly have. Haven't we, Kit?"

The girl had quietly joined them. "I have the analysis now, Father," she said. "It's as we thought."

"Oh well that's just fine, Kit."

The group of men numbly stared as Kit handed Dr. Feather her memorandum: the Sergeant, with the physician beside him; William Mallory, friend of the family, small, dark-haired, standing with his hands deep in the pockets of his dressing gown; and the big blond brother-in-law of the victim, young Creighton Forbes, with jaw dropped and his face flushed with excitement. And to one side, unobtrusively against the wall, Butterworth the butler stood grimly staring.

In the silence, Dr. Feather fumbled in the pocket of his faded black jacket and produced his spectacles, put them on and carefully read his daughter's notes. "Quite right, Kit," he said at last. Then with his spectacles back in his pocket, he turned to Dr. Allen.

"I believe this will interest you especially, doctor," he said. "This thing turned out to be a sort of medical problem, my goodness yes, it certainly did. You see, there in the study my girl Kit found that some of the blood on the floor was clotted, just as it should be. But some of it wasn't."

He paused, but no one spoke. Then he suddenly swung on young Creighton Forbes. "I forgot to mention," he went, on, "your blood is the right type, Forbes. It would have been you who gave that transfusion, if only Mr. Douglas had lived to take it."

Young Forbes gulped. "That's too bad," he murmured. "I mean, I would have been glad to be the donor, of course."

"Dr. Feather smiled faintly. "Yes, of course you would."

"And this—this other thing?" young Forbes stammered, "Blood there in the study that isn't clotted? What's that mean?"

"That of course, was queer," Dr. Feather said. "My girl Kit took a sample of the clotted blood. The normal blood, you might say. It came from Mr. Douglas. But the other blood came from the murderer! Kit analyzed it and found that it was very unusual blood indeed. Deficient in lime salts and calcium salt. And a deficiency in fibrin-ferment. My goodness, yes, a marked deficiency of all three elements which cause our blood to clot. So we know that this murderer is a haemophilic. That's why we wanted samples of everyone's blood. Just to identify the murderer!... Oh, dear me, stop him, Kit!"

THE pallid William Mallory's hand had suddenly come from his dressing gown pocket with a small revolver. For a second it looked as though wildly he might fire at the man nearest him and bolt for the hall doorway; then with a hysterical cry he turned the weapon toward his temple. But like a cat the alert little Kit was on him, seizing his wrist, expertly twisting his arm so that the weapon clattered away and he screamed with pain.

"Stand still," Kit panted. "You shouldn't try a foolish thing like that. . . . His right hand is bleeding, father. He must have bruised it in the attack on Mr. Douglas and made it bleed. He had it covered with collodion, powdered over, but I've opened it again now."

"So he did it?" young Forbes gasped. "You damned dirty murderer! I can tell you why he did it, Dr. Feather. He's so damned conceited he thinks he can marry my sister, now that she's a rich widow, just because she once thought she was in love with him. And he wanted Mr. Douglas to invest in a business he's trying to start. Mr. Douglas wouldn't. But my sister was in favor of it. So the damned dirty—"

"I heard him, sir, having pretty angry words with Mr. Douglas earlier this evening," the butler said from across the hall. "That is what I wanted to tell you, sir." Dr. Feather waved it away. "There he is, Sergeant. Have your men watch him pretty closely. I shouldn't be surprised if he tries suicide again. Haemophilics are often depressive."

Then when the hall had quieted and the hysterical Mallory had been led away, Dr. Feather faced the triumphant Sergeant Tripp. "It's a curious disease, that haemophilia, it certainly is, Sergeant. It's hereditary, but only the females can transmit it. And a female never gets it. Goodness, that's queer. She's immune to it, and she gives it only to her male offspring."

"I've heard of them," Sergeant Tripp said. "Bleeders."

"Quite so, Sergeant. An uncontrollable bleeding is often apt to follow wounds. The Spanish Royal Family—everybody has heard of them. And there are quite a lot of haemophilics here in America, more than you'd think. In Reading, Massachusetts there's a famous family of them. For two hundred years, down through seven generations, the males have been bleeders."

Little Dr. Feather was beaming as he lighted a big black cigar and offered one to Tripp. "I'm glad my girl Kit and I were able to help you, Sergeant," he added. "Good gracious yes, I certainly am."

THE END