

# The WILL

*A Cold-Blooded Murder  
Perpetrated for  
Gain—and the  
Aftermath!*

By  
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IN the gloomy house on the hill, John Ames had waited two interminable years for his grandmother to die. The doctors had said so many times that she had no chance, that it was only a matter of days.

But it was like Victoria Ames to contradict them. She fought off death with the same grim tenacity that she fought life.

With growing impatience, John Ames had waited, kind and gentle with Vicki, wary of Willie Foster who also lived in the house. Willie was the son of Vicki's sister, long dead. He bothered John, not because he would come in for a share of the huge estate at Vicki's death, but because he was an idiot. Willie spoke with difficulty, moved slowly and awkwardly, and never seemed to understand.

Vicki Ames might have lingered for another year or two if she had not suddenly changed her will. John heard about it from her own lips one night as he read to her. She refused, however, to divulge just what the change was. Frightened, he went to see Lon Macaulay, her lawyer, the next day.

"No, John," said Macaulay, shaking his head. "I'm afraid I can't help you out. There's been a change, as she told you. And she was sane when she made it."

"But who gets the estate?" John begged him. "God knows, Macaulay, I've given up two years of my life to make her last days comfortable. I deserve something from it. And there's no telling what she's done in the condition she's in!"

Macaulay shrugged. "I wish I could help you, John. What you say is perfectly true, but as a lawyer, I can't tell you anything like that. It's confidential."

"You could give me a hint," said John. "Just to let me know where I stand."



*She was asleep in that strange coma that often claimed her*

"But I don't know where you or anyone else stands," said Macaulay, scowling. "That's the whole flaw. I can tell you this. Of anyone in the world, either you or Willie Foster stand to inherit the entire fortune. And perhaps it might be both of you."

"Do you mean," asked John with a budding sense of horror, "that Willie might inherit the whole thing?"

"Yes, he might. Or you might, for that matter. Or anyone. But you two have the best chance. I'll give you a hint, John. Stay close to her."

"But I've stayed close to her for two years!" said John.

Macaulay nodded. "Keep doing it. It's your best chance."

Sighing, John Ames left the lawyer's office, resigned to another long vigil by Vicki's side. But at the house, the sight of Willie Foster's vacant,

grinning face changed his mind. The idea of Willie falling heir to such an estate appalled him. The idiot wouldn't know what to do with the money after he had it—and John had planned for so many things.

THERE was one way of beating the will and solving the whole intricate mess. If Vicki were dead, the will would be probated. And if the fortune were left to Willie and *he* was to die—it was safe to hazard that it would come to John Ames. There was, of course, the possibility that the money would be left to him anyway; but at this point, John was taking no chances, despite any risks he might incur.

He left Willie downstairs and went up to see Vicki. She was asleep. He stared down at her for several minutes, conscious of bunched muscles in his cheeks, and a throbbing vein on his left temple which hurt.

Retiring to his room, he began to write a plan. It had to be a perfect plan. Everything depended upon its flawlessness. He worked on it steadily until late in the afternoon. Then, he laid aside his pencil and reread his efforts, aware of the complete conciseness of the thing.

At seven that evening, John Ames put his plan into operation. After a light supper, he selected an ice-pick from the drawer of kitchen utensils. He handed it to Willie Foster and said:

"This is getting dull. You'd better sharpen it tonight."

Willie took it, nodding and grinning.

Disturbed by that vague expression which always hovered over Willie's face, John Ames shuddered, put on his topcoat, although the night was warm, and went downtown.

At the local cinema house, he bought a ticket for the show, giving a word of greeting to the girl at the ticket office who recognized him. He went in and handed the ticket to the ticket-taker, a young fellow, who spoke nicely to him, inquired about Vicki's health, and then let him pass into the theater.

Inside, he removed his topcoat and bunched it into a ball which he hid beneath the low sofa in the men's smoking room. This done, John went out of the theater through one of the side doors, jamming a long pencil in at the base to keep the exit door from locking.

Nobody saw him on the way home. When he

reached the gloomy house on the hill, it was dark. He breathed more easily.

He entered the house through the rear door with his own keys, after putting on the pair of gloves he had carried with him. In the kitchen he opened the utensil drawer and took out the ice-pick which Willie had sharpened. Cold sweat drenched his body as he stealthily stole up the stairs. Willie was not in his room.

That didn't bother John. Willie never went out. He was in the house somewhere, and that was the only thing necessary.

In Vicki's room, he took hold of himself and strode to the side of her bed. She was asleep in that strange, heavy coma which often claimed her, but from which—he gritted his teeth—she always managed to awaken.

Gripping the ice-pick tightly, and steadying himself, he plunged it down into her left side. Vicki stiffened as he struck her, but made no sound. Her lips moved silently, her eyes remaining closed. She began to bleed copiously, spotting the white sheets. In a few seconds, she relaxed. He could see she was dead.

Her blood was all over the gloves which he wore. He removed them, took hold of her left arm where she wore a small wristwatch, and banged the arm against the backboard of the bed, splintering the crystal of the watch and stopping the hands at ten minutes of eight.

THIS done, he took the gloves and went to Willie's room. He wiped one glove over the knob of Willie's door, then went downstairs, out the back door, and headed towards town again, discarding the gloves in an ashcan along the route.

He reached the theater safely, pried the exit door open and slipped in. Retrieving his topcoat in the smoking room, he took a seat and thereafter sat through the entire show until he had seen it all.

When John Ames returned to the house again—after the cinema had finished and the ticket-taker had seen him leave—Lon Macaulay was there waiting for him. The rest of the house was deserted. Macaulay swiftly related what had happened.

"They took her body away," he said, "after they arrested Willie. His fingerprints were all over the ice-pick, and there was blood on his door."

John Ames looked horrified. "Who would have suspected," he said in a hollow voice, "that Willie would—"

"Now, listen, John," Macaulay said, pointing a finger, "you don't have to act with me. I know Willie Foster didn't kill his grandmother. On the contrary, I know *you* did. I see you've got an alibi that can't be broken—and how you managed it I don't know."

"You're mad!" John interrupted.

"Boloney!" said Macaulay. "Oh, I can't do anything to you, John. Your plan, whatever it was, has worked like a clock. You're in the clear. But, by God, you'll regret this! You have cut off your nose to spite your face!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," John said.

It rested that way, Macaulay saw to it that Willie had a speedy trial, and until the trial was over, he absolutely refused to read John Ames the terms of Vicki's will. During the trial, as the prosecuting attorney built up the case against Willie Foster, John gloated. The ring of evidence was too strong to be broken. Willie was doomed to hang. And through it all, the idiot grinned without understanding what it was he faced.

At the end of the trial, John became uneasy. Macaulay defended Willie and did not seem at all perturbed by the net of evidence. Just before the prosecuting attorney summed up the case for the jury, Macaulay introduced a surprise witness in the person of Dr. Cobb, the town medico who had attended Vicki Ames throughout her illness.

Dr. Cobb testified that from a quarter of eight to eight o'clock, he had talked with Willie Foster at the Ames house on the telephone!

John felt his world tumbling. That was why Willie had not been in sight. The telephone was in the front hall. John had ascended the stairs to kill Vicki in the rear of the house. And all during the crime, Willie had talked with Cobb. The broken wristwatch on Vicki's wrist set the time of the murder while Willie was on the phone.

It was a slim fact, but the jurymen knew and respected Dr. Cobb's word. And in twenty minutes after their charge, they returned a verdict of not guilty.

In his office later, Lon Macaulay smiled mysteriously at John Ames.

"You've failed," he said. "You've failed all around, John. And while they can never get you for murder, Vicki herself has punished you. Sit down."

John sat down with a sense of dread. Willie Foster was there, too, grinning stupidly at Macaulay and entirely unaware of what was going on. Macaulay went to his files and brought out Vicki's will. He broke the seals and opened it. He read aloud:

I, Victoria Ames, being of sound mind and body, do hereby bequeath my entire estate to either John Ames, or Willie Foster—whichever one who was present at my bedside at the moment of my death.

The blood drained from John Ames' face as Macaulay set the will on the desk.

"How about that, John? Would you claim the fortune? Were you with her when she died?"

"It—it would make me a murderer," John said, gasping.

"I told you that you had destroyed yourself," said Macaulay, drumming his fingers on the desk. "I am asking you an official question. Do you claim it? Were you with her?"

"No!" said John, rising. "But no one else can claim it either, Macaulay! At least I'll have the satisfaction of knowing that!"

Macaulay looked at him with pity.

"You are wrong there," he said softly. "Someone can claim it. I am going to see that he does claim it. Willie Foster will inherit Vicki's wealth."

"He can't!" John shrilled. "It would brand him a killer!"

MACAULY shrugged. "Outwardly, yes. But he can claim it, John. He can say he was with her at the moment of her death."

John Ames' face broke into a crafty smile. "Let him. They'll hang him if he does, the fool!"

"No, they won't," said Macaulay. "You see, John, in this country a man cannot be tried for the same crime twice. Willie has already been tried for her death. And he has been acquitted!"