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The STEP on the STAIRS

by ISABEL OSTRANDER

BEGIN HERE TODAY.

Detective Sergeant John Barry is spending the evening with his friend, Professor Semyonov, in the latter's rooms on the fifth floor of a New York apartment house. A revolver shot is heard from below and then hurrying footsteps on the stairs. They rush downstairs and in the studio apartment on the third floor discover the occupant, a beautiful woman, lying dead on the floor in front of an unfinished portrait. A bullet has just pierced her breast.

GO ON WITH THE STORY.

Sergeant Barry made no comment but gently dropping the limp, warm head back upon the rug he rose and started a swift, comprehensive search of the apartment. From just behind him over his shoulder a large reflector threw the powerful light whose refracted rays had penetrated even into the outer hall; back of the easel and at one side where the artist could obtain the best view of it stood a small, improvised model throne with three steps and a section of balustrade, and back of it again the drawn shades over a row of half-opened windows flapped in the little, hot breeze which had sprung up with the passing of the threatened storm.

A long table covered with scattered tubes of paint and brushes, a few plain chairs and many canvases of various sizes stacked against the walls completed the furnishings of the workmanlike studio, the ceiling of which was one huge skylight of glass, and the detective turned back into the luxurious living room, his hand mechanically searching for and finding the light switch in the wall.

Instantly the soft glow of many low, opal-tinted lamps sprang into being and revealed the sheer beauty of the arrangements of the room, but Sergeant Barry's eyes searched only for some sign of disorder that would indicate hurried flight, and finding none he opened the door at the back. It lead into a boudoir upholstered delicately in light blue and rose, and through that he passed into an ivory and gold bedroom and to the tiled, immaculate kitchenette beyond, but nowhere was there a sign of alien presence.

"The icebox contains only butter and cream, and that dress and hat upon the bed would indicate that Mrs. Vane had dined out," the professor observed.

"Vane? Miriam Vane?" Barry wheeled suddenly. "Is that who she is, the artist who has created such a stir with her new type of portraiture among the celebrities?"

"Yes. Her portraits are dangerously near caricatures, for some perverse impulse has seemed to guide her brush although so subtly that her clients themselves have rarely detected that sardonically revealing touch or two, but the critics have raved about her genius." The professor turned. "It is evident that we ette door leading into the outer hall is bolted from the inside; but someone is coming."

Someone had indeed arrived. They hastened back to the living room to find standing just within the doorway a young man in a dinner coat with wildly rumpled hair, and a policeman in uniform.

The latter advanced with aggressive authority which suffered a sudden change.

"What's been going on here? I heard a shot and I've been pounding below till this young gentleman here let me in! Oh, you're here, Sergeant Barry This is my regular beat, sir, and thinking there was something unusual—"

"There is, Boyle." Barry nodded grimly to the policeman. "In that studio yonder there's a woman lying shot through the heart!"

"A woman!" The young man in the dinner coat repeated with a gasp. "Not Miriam Vane! It's impossible!"

He rushed past the group to the studio doorway, clung there for a moment in wordless horror, then collapsed into the nearest chair, burying his face in his hands.

Boyle was instantly all business. After a quick examination of the body he turned to Barry.

"Would you mind telling me, Sergeant?" he began but the other interrupted him.

"Not in the least, although we know very little. I was here unofficially, visiting this old friend of mine, Mr. Semyonov, who lives on the fifth floor—two above this—when we haerd the shot and rushed down to investigate. There seems to be no one in the apartment directly above this one, and I took the responsibility of breaking in the door here because we could get no reply to repeated knocking and the light from the studio there streamed out under the sill into the outer hail. You can see how brilliant it is; it must be some special light for artists to paint by at night."

"I'll have to report this at once to the station." Boyle, who had been listening attentively, nodded and turned to the professor. "Have you anything, sir, to add to what Sergeant Barry has told me?"

Professor Semyonov pondered for a moment, and then said slowly:

"Only that when we heard the sound of the shot and opened my door. I fancied that I heard footsteps on the stairs below."

Barry, whose eyes had turned to that collapsed figure in the chair, thought that he saw a shudder sweep over it as though an unseen hand had shaken the inert form, but he said nothing as the policeman paused at the screened telephone on the table to inquire:

"Could you say, sir, whether those footsteps were going up or down?"

"Not definitely," the professor hesitated. "One would suppose naturally that they were descending to escape by way of the street and yet it seemed to me that they were one!"

He paused. Framed in the hall doorway there had appeared a tall, middle-aged man clad in a tattered dressing gown, with a lean, smooth-shaven, irascible face upon which astonishment struggled with resentment.

"What's been going on here, officer?" he demanded. "I'm Griswold, on the floor above. Who's been pounding on my door fit to wake the dead?"

II.

HERE'S been murder going on, sir!" Officer Boyle retorted grimly. "So it was pounding you heard?"

"That was I," Professor Semyonov remarked with dignity. "I stopped on the way down at this person's door but received no response."

"And your name's Griswold?" the policeman prevented an evidently heated rejoinder by his sharp question.

"Henry Griswold and I know nothing whatever about any murder" declared the newcomer. "I do not care to be embroiled in any such!—"

"You're here, and you'll stay, sir, till we hear from headquarters," Boyle replied significantly. "So you're on the fourth floor and this gentleman here on the fifth." He indicated the professor with marked

"YOU'LL STAY TILL WE HEAR FROM HEADQUARTERS," BOYLE REPLIED.

courtesy in deference to the sergeant, and then turned to the young man in the chair. "You have the apartment on the second floor, sir, just over the shop?"

The young man nodded without lifting his head and replied with muffled tones:

"Yes. My name is Gordon Ladd. I—I heard you making that racket, you know, and went down to the entrance and let you in."

"And that's all that lives in this house?" Boyle looked from one to another of them but his gaze finally fastened upon the professor and the latter replied:

"A lady lives on the top floor, the one above mine. I do not know her. Of the shop I can tell you nothing, but there is a janitor or superintendent who occupies the basement, although I have never found him there when he is wanted for sudden repairs or other emergencies. There are no other occupants of the building, to my knowledge."

"Thanks, sir." Boyle turned again to the telephone and the municipal machinery of investigation into the death of Miriam Vane was set in motion.

"Well," Boyle squared his shoulders with a satisfied air, "I'll get what dope I can. I'll ask you, sergeant, to see that these three gentlemen stay in this room. Don't let one of them put a finger on the corpse, either!"

He added the last in a hoarse whisper that must have been plainly audible to the entire group for even the young man in the chair, overcome with horror as he appeared, shuddered and as the policeman started up the stairway with a heavy tread he raised a haggard face.

"It can't be!" he muttered as if to himself. "Not Miriam! I must be going mad!"

"So it's Miriam Vane, the woman painter, that's been murdered, as that police officer said?" Griswold drew his dressing gown closer about his lean form. "I should like to know, sir, why you banged on my door and dragged me into it?"

He turned irascibly to the professor, who shook back his mane of bushy white hair and smiled with suave urbanity.

"My dear sir, the sound of the shot came from below my rooms somewhere and my friends and I could not tell whether it came from your apartment or this one."

"I can tell when I hear a fiddle playing at ungodly hours over my head whether it comes from above or the top floor!" the other retorted. "I move down here, away from my club and my office, and my bankers in order to get peace and quiet and I land in this sort of thing."

A scream, shrill but subdued by distance floated down to them at this juncture and the professor murmured in an aside to Harry:

"Evidently your excellent friend of the police has broken the news of the tragedy none too diplomatically to my neighbor in the skylight apartment!"

(Continued in Our Next Issue.)

(Copyright, 1922.)

TO CONSIDER DR. WEIR'S REQUEST FOR INCREASE

One of the first questions to be considered by the board of education at its next general session will be the increase in salary as requested by Dr. George S. Weir, public school attendance officer.

Although this matter was referred to No. 1 committee and the salary committee, it is reasoned that the members of the latter group have no actual influence in the matter. The salary committee, when inaugurated, was for the express purpose of considering the salaries of teachers only.

It is also understood that Dr. Weir has suggested that he be provided with an automobile to assist him in his work.

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G. T. R. TIMETABLE UNDERGOES CHANGE

Some changes have recently been made in the G. T. R. timetable. These changes become effective on January 22.

No. 5, from Niagara Falls, which arrives at London at 8:10 p.m., and leaves 8:20 p.m. daily for Chicago will be cancelled west of London and will wait for No. 15, which arrives in London 9:00 p.m. The two trains will be consolidated at London and will run as No. 15, from London to Chicago, leaving at 9:20 p.m.

Train No. 110, from Port Huron and Sarnia, which arrives at London 3:40 p.m. has been cancelled for the time being. The train which left for Toronto at 7:20 a.m. will now leave at 7:15 a.m. The Sarnia train, which arrived in London at 6:40 p.m. will arrive at 6:35 p.m.

The Bruce train, which left at 9:05 a.m. will leave at 9:00 a.m., and the train from the Bruce, which used to arrive at 6:15 will arrive at 6:20 p.m.

The National, that runs from Toronto to Winnipeg daily, has now been put on a tri-weekly basis, running Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

CANADIAN PACIFIC "VANCOUVER EXPRESS," WINNIPEG-CALGARY-VANCOUVER.

Passengers for Western Canada will find the "Vancouver Express" leaving Toronto 10 p.m. daily, a most convenient train, stopping at and connecting for all principal points.

Equipment consists of first-class coaches, up-to-date standard and tourist sleepers, compartment observation, dining and colonist cars.

The most beautiful scenery in Canada is along the line of the Canadian Pacific.

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Is your blood starving for want of iron? If you were to go without eating until you became weak, thin and emaciated, you could not do a more serious harm to yourself than when you let your blood literally starve for want of iron—iron that gives it strength and power to change food into living tissue.

Modern methods of cooking and the rapid pace at which people of this country live has made such an alarming increase in iron deficiency in the blood of American men and women that there is a surprisingly large number of people who lack iron in the blood, and who never suspect the cause of their weak, nervous, run-down state. Lack of sufficient iron in the blood has ruined many a man's nerves and utterly robbed him of that virile force and stamina which are so necessary to success and power in every walk of life.

The best thing for those who feel the need of a strength and blood-builder is to get a physician's prescription for organic iron—Nuxated Iron—or if you don't want to go to this trouble, then purchase only Nuxated Iron in its original package and see that this particular name (Nuxated Iron) appears on the package.

NUXATED IRON often increases the bodily and mental vigor of weak, tired, worn-out, nervous people in two weeks' time. It's like the iron in your blood and like the iron in spinach, lentils and apples. You can eat it if you wish. It will not blacken or injure the teeth nor disturb the stomach—It is entirely different from ordinary metallic iron which people usually take and which is made merely by the action of strong acids on small pieces of iron.

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WHEN COAL WAS SCARCE HOW MUCH DID YOU HAVE TO PAY?
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BIG SALE IN THE MEN'S STORE

Wonderful results on Saturday. Most folks know that a sale here means a real cut in price. Let your eyes be the judge.

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Heavy Fleece-Lined Shirts and Drawers 79c
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BLUE SERGE SUITS
19 only Blue Serge Suits, in mill finish and raglan serges, single-breasted models, well made and trimmed; sizes 35 to 39 only. Alterations extra on these **$19.00**

Men's Socks, in black and colors, some plain, some ribbed..3 prs. $1.00
Men's Heavy All-Wool English Worsted Socks, black only.....50c
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HALF PRICE SPECIALS
22 Boys' Suits, in grey tweed and worsted, average price $10.00. On sale $5.00
$35.00 Black Overcoats with marmot collars $17.40
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Arrow and other High-Class Fine Shirts, in many cloths and scores of patterns. Odd shirts of lines that sold at $2.00, $2.25, $2.50, $2.75 and $3.00; all sizes 14 to 17½ in the lot. Every garment is cut full and roomy. Some are slightly soiled.....$1.48

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$20.00 grades $14.00
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$40.00 grades $28.00
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$20.00 grades $14.00
$15.00 grades $10.50
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TWO BIG LOTS OF BOYS' BLOOMERS
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Girls' Navy Blue Serge Dresses, all-wool Botany serge, fronts embroidered in silk and trimmed with buttons, sizes 6 to 14 years. At $4.95

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Ladies' Gloves

Ladies' Maco Gloves, in grey and tan only, sizes 6 to 7½. Per pair.....$3.50

Silk Gauntlet Gloves, in grey, mode, dark brown and navy, sizes 6, 6½, 7, 7½. Per pair $1.95

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Black Cashmerette Hose, splendid quality, sizes 8½, 9, 9½. Per pair 39c
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Silk Boot Hose, lisle top, all sizes, in grey, navy, brown, smoke, cordovan, 59c pair, or three for.....$1.65

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Pillow Slips, heavy cotton, hemstitched, sizes 40, 42 and 44. January sale price, per pair 90c

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Crash Toweling, heavy round thread, colored border. Very special, per yard, 35c

Circular Pillow Cotton, good quality, in 40, 42 and 44 inches. Per yard.....45c

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Heavy English Bleached Cotton, 36 inches wide, strong, durable cloths, 20c, 25c, 30c

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