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# SQUADROOM

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**FRANK KANE (Dead Drunk)** is licensed to practice law, the result of his young wife's insistence that he secure a law degree as a safeguard in the event that he failed to earn enough at his typewriter to support them. Kane hurried through a law course, passed his bar examination and then—having gotten *that* over with—promptly broke into radio and became one of the highest-paid writers in the business, doing scores of scripts for such shows as "Gangbusters," "The Shadow" and "Nick Carter." Later, he became even more successful as the writer of the Johnny Liddell mystery novels, which have sold millions of copies and been translated into a dozen languages.

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**IRVING SHULMAN (Because We're Friends)** began his career as a novelist with the publication of *The Amboy Dukes*, a harsh, compelling story of street gangs in Brooklyn. The book became a nationwide best seller and today is used in many colleges as a textbook and sociological classic. Since then, Shulman has written many other best sellers, including *Cry Tough!* and *The Big Brokers*. He lives in Hollywood and also writes screenplays; among his credits is *Rebel Without a Cause*, which starred the late James Dean.

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**FREDRIC BROWN (Before She Kills)** worked for the Pinkerton Detective Agency before he became disillusioned with the lack of glamour in real-life detective work. He turned to writing in the early 1940's and his first book, *The Fabulous Clipjoint*, which introduced Ed and Am Hunter, won the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar award. Brown is one of the world's best writers of suspense novels, the latest of which is *Knock Three-One-Two*.

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**STUART PALMER (Cure for a Headache)** is the creator of the famous spinster-schoolteacher-detective Hildegarde Withers. The attention he gained from the Withers books sent him West to write for the movies—often working on scripts with his good friend Craig Rice. Currently writing for TV in Hollywood and working on a novel, Palmer has also written a great deal in the field of nonfiction crime, and for many years has been a student of classic murder cases.

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# THE CRIME IS MURDER

## CURE FOR A HEADACHE STUART PALMER

THE BOTTLE OF BROMO-SELTZER arrived by mail on Christmas Eve, its package addressed in a rather flowery hand to Mr. Harry Cornish, Knickerbocker Athletic Club, Madison Avenue and 45th Street, New York City. A gift package, gift-wrapped—and the gift was death.

Harry Cornish was chief athletic director of the exclusive club, a red-haired, moderately pugnacious man in his early thirties. He seems to have been very popular with all—or almost all—its select membership of young men about town.

There was no return address on the parcel. Inside it was a Tiffany box—or at least a box with a Tiffany label—containing a little blue bottle of Bromo in an ornate, solid-silver holder. It was the sort of gift a woman might choose—a woman with a sense of humor. Harry Cornish received a bit of ribbing from the members about the gift, and his anonymous admirer; the implication was, of course, that he would be likely to need some sort of hangover remedy

after the imminent holiday festivities. But he professed to have no idea as to the identity of the mysterious donor, and on second thought, he retrieved the package wrapper from the wastebasket and put it into his desk, with some vague idea of finding who might have sent it. He also left the bottle and its silver container there, and went home as usual to the boardinghouse where he lived. This was a sedate brownstone at 61 West 86th Street, operated by the elderly Mrs. Katherine Adams, a distant relative of his. There he celebrated Christmas in his usual sedate fashion.

This was back in the so-called Gay Nineties, but Harry Cornish was no gay bachelor. He had been married briefly and divorced; his ex-wife had remarried happily and was living in Albany—and he was wary of women and wine. In the household was also Mrs. Adams' daughter Laura, separated from her husband, and an elderly lady known as Aunt Anna. It cannot have been a very exciting ménage—but he wasn't out for excitement.

On the day after Christmas, back at the Knickerbocker Athletic Club, there was in the locker room more friendly masculine badinage about Cornish and his Bromo. Mr. Henry King, a Wall Street broker of some standing, spoke up and said that he had a bit of a brannigan—or hang-over—and that he would like to try a dose. He took the sealed bottle of powder and went over to the water cooler. In the words of the late Edmund Pearson, who wrote one of his inimitable essays on the case: "If he had listened carefully, I think he would have heard the soft rustling of wings; it was a moment of intense activity for Mr. King's guardian angel" For the water cooler luckily happened to be empty. After a few harsh words about the laxity of the house committee, King returned the bottle to Cornish and forgot all about it.

A day or so later, Cornish took the anonymous Christmas present home to the boardinghouse and put it on his dresser. Here also, from the three ladies in the house, he received some "joshing" about his secret admirer. And then next morning, Mrs. Katherine Adams arose with a blinding headache. Her dear daughter Laura thought immediately of Cornish's Bromo-Seltzer and asked him to prepare a therapeutic dose for the old lady, which he did. To his lasting sorrow.

Mrs. Adams downed the draught with a wry face, complaining that it tasted "sort of bitter." Cornish himself took a sip, and said he didn't no-

tice anything out of the way. But in a matter of moments, the old lady collapsed in agony. Cornish rose from his chair to go to her aid, and found that his knees buckled under him. A doctor was hastily summoned, but the old lady was dead on arrival. Heart attack, said the medico.

When the undertaker had been sent for, and the other melancholy formalities attended to, the conscientious Mr. Cornish went down to his regular daily duties at the Knickerbocker. But he was in no shape for work; he was suffering excruciating abdominal pain and had to be hastily put to bed in one of the rooms for resident members. For some days he hovered on the brink betwixt life and death. Yet nobody at that moment seemed to see any possible connection between Mrs. Adams' fatal "heart attack" and the severe gastritis attack suffered the same morning by her lodger.

The first crack in the case appeared when an alert cub newspaperman from the *New York Journal*—a so-called "yellow sheet" of that year of 1898—saw the report slip hanging on a hook in the coroner's office in the Criminal Courts Building—and smelled a rat. Those were the halcyon days when the gentlemen of the fourth estate were allowed, or at least ventured to take, a great deal more latitude than reporters can today.

As a result of this reporter's brief story in the *Journal*, the police picked up the bottle of Bromo-Seltzer from the Adams boardinghouse. Upon analysis it was found to have been

spiked with cyanide of mercury, one of the deadliest of all poisons and one of the hardest to come by—at least for the average citizen.

So now it was clearly a matter for Homicide. Poor old Katherine Adams had no known enemies, in her house or without. But she had died, suddenly and horribly. The newspaper boys, especially those on the *Journal*, did a lot of the investigation for the police. It was fairly obvious, at least to one of them, that some murder plot had here misfired—that the poisoned Bromo had been aimed at Harry Cornish. Reporters from all the papers of the time bore down upon the Knickerbocker—and there they began to lift the lid of a veritable Pandora's Box.

One of their discoveries was that about nine months ago, Harry Cornish had had a disagreement with one of the leading members and directors of the Knickerbocker Club. This was a handsome young buck in his early thirties, by the resounding name of Roland Molineux, who threw his weight around at times but was still popular, if only for his athletic prowess. Roland was the son of General Edward L. Molineux, then one of Brooklyn's wealthiest and most respected citizens. The younger Molineux was a chemist, superintendent at the factory of Morris Herman, Inc., in Newark, manufacturers of paints and colors. He was also, at this time, a national champion amateur gymnast—among other things. Among *many* other things.

Our alert reporter, working in the true *Front Page* fashion, dug up some of the pertinent details of this old, almost forgotten disagreement between the powerful, spoiled young Molineux and Mr. Harry Cornish. The Knickerbocker Club had been planning an amateur athletic circus, and Molineux had loudly objected to having Cornish, as only a paid employee, taking any part. There had been words—and the record shows that Cornish, who had red hair and the temperament which traditionally goes with it, was driven so far as to call Roland "a vile name."

Certainly it was not tactful of Cornish to talk like that to one of the most influential members of the club he worked for. But Roland Molineux, instead of immediately resorting to fisticuffs to defend his honor, only set out to get Cornish fired from his job. "*He goes—or I go!*"

And as it happened, the directors of the club decided in favor of their faithful if hotheaded athletic director, so Mr. Roland Molineux departed in a high huff. He immediately joined a rival athletic club, and the incident was forgotten—by everybody but Roland Molineux, as the record shows later.

The inquisitive reporters also uncovered something else, which they brought to the attention of John D. Adams, secretary of the club, and of Andre Bustanoboy, its superintendent. This was the surprising fact that only last November, a prominent member, a Mr. H. C. Barnet, had died in his room there, after an ill-

ness diagnosed by the doctors as diphtheria. He had got up from his sickbed too soon, decided the medicos, and had had a cardiac attack. But there was some mention, by club employees, of Mr. Barnet having received a bottle of Kutnow Powders in the mail, a bottle in a Tiffany box containing an empty envelope meant for the donor's card, just as had Harry Cornish later. Barnet even had taken one or two of the powders, and had complained of their taste!

The reporters also found out that both Harry C. Barnet and Roland Molineux had for a fair period of time been courting the same lovely lady, a choir singer by the name of Blanche Cheseborough. Blanche seems to have divided her favors—which certainly were not inconsiderable—between her two swains. She couldn't make up her mind, at least not until Barnet succumbed to diphtheria.

Blanche Cheseborough, according to the newspaper pen sketches of the time, was an exceptionally lovely and well-formed young woman and one who was almost of Miss America caliber. She also happened to have one glass eye, the result of a childhood accident. Perhaps it is true that one obvious flaw enhances real beauty.

Anyway, Blanche married Roland Molineux, less than three weeks after Barnet's funeral at the Church of the Ascension, a ceremony which neither attended, though Blanche did remember to send flowers. Roland was later

to explain that while he and Barnet were the closest of friends, he didn't go to the funeral because "I wasn't invited."

The young couple plighted their troth in an ornate ceremony at the Church of the Heavenly Rest in Manhattan, and then moved to the Waldorf-Astoria, where they had a brief and obviously superfluous honeymoon. Then they moved to a rooming house operated by a Mrs. Bellinger. And the roof began to fall in.

All this time, Roland Molineux had kept a set of rooms at the Herman factory in Newark, where, remember, he was the boss. This suite was cared for by an extremely attractive girl of Italian-Spanish-Mexican extraction, named Mamie Melando. We cannot at this late date inquire into the depth and extent of the relationship between Roland and Miss Melando. However, it is part of the record that after his marriage to the fair Blanche, he *usually* resided with her at the Bellinger house, and commuted to Newark. He also had numerous other ports of call, being a devious young man. In fact, for months before he and Blanche "made it legal"—and solemnized their relationship in church—he had maintained a flat in New York City under the name Mr. Cheseborough. Roland Molineux was a man of many parts, and a man of many names not his own. Why he chose the names he did is primarily of interest to psychologists, some of whom have debated on the point. It is also of possible interest to any serious observer.

Molineux had his times when he was not Molineux, but somebody else. At least, in his own mind. He was Mr. Cheseborough, and so on and so forth—but at crucial times he was *never* Roland Molineux.

While the police of the City of New York were acting or thinking very slowly and carefully, the newspaper reporters kept busy. Finally, the *Journal* came out with a banner head: POLICE WANT ROLAND MOLINEUX. It was not *quite* the exact truth. But it served its point. That same day, the dapper young dandy, accompanied by his father, the General, and an influential family friend, did call upon Chief of Detectives McClusky, where they were received with kid-glove treatment and told that if and when the authorities wanted Roland, they knew where to find him.

Roland Molineux went home, and the heat seemed to be off. But the gentlemen of the press kept digging, and needling the authorities in every column. It was discovered that the bottle of Kutnow Powders, an effervescent laxative, had contained enough cyanide of mercury to kill a horse—or a whole stable of horses.

Chief McClusky then came up with a remarkable deduction. He had a small press conference and said, "The same mind sent both poisons!"

What good Chief McClusky wanted to say was that Harry C. Barnet had taken a draught from a bottle sent to him anonymously in the mail, and that Harry Cornish had narrowly escaped doing the same thing. One died, and one narrowly escaped death

only to have his landlady die in his stead.

There was no immediate action taken, however. Except by the busy reporters. They found out somehow that a mail-service box had been rented, over a year earlier, at a shop on Broadway under the name Harry Cornish. The renter was a well-dressed, handsome young man who did not in any way resemble the real Cornish. That led to the discovery of the fact that another handsome, well-dressed young man had rented another "convenience-address" box in another shop on West 47th, this time under the name H. C. Barnet.

Somebody who wished his mail to come to him anonymously had rented mailboxes under the names of two other people. It is perhaps significant that the renter of these boxes never thought of a "John Smith" or a "Joe Robinson" alias. It was then found that the proprietors of these convenience-address shops had done a bit of snooping, and that they had in their busy way come to note that all the correspondence of their mysterious, handsome young client had been with firms dealing in "lost manhood" pills—in other words, in remedies for impotence, real or imagined. Also, the description of the client fitted Roland Molineux so perfectly to a T, and the handwriting on the application forms fitted his hand so perfectly to the same T, that it looked to everyone as if the case was in the bag.

All this was proved, and effectively proved, later in court. Roland Mo-

lineux had once taken an apartment under the name of his then mistress, he had taken at least two mailboxes under the names of two acquaintances whom he considered to be enemies. He could, of course, at any time have bought his potency pills at the nearest drugstore, with no questions asked.

Why this man went into such devious ways is a question we can only ask. Why he spent so much time, and so much of his father's money, on the pills, when he was a champion athlete, with a mistress—later, for a short time, his wife—and at least one or two other ladies with whom he had an "understanding," is also, as the politicians say, a good question. Besides, it is in the record that at the age of fifteen, our hero had been named as correspondent in a divorce case!

There was finally an inquest into the death of Harry C. Barnet, after DA Asa Bird Gardiner and his assistant, Mr. Osbourne, got into action. Molineux testified, saying under oath that he had been Barnet's dear friend right up to the end; he had only refrained from visiting his sick pal because of a natural desire to avoid the danger of catching diphtheria. Since, as he well knew, the diphtheria was loaded in a little bottle of Kutnow Powders prepared by himself, we can perhaps understand his point of view.

The lovely Blanche Cheseborough Molineux, then only twenty-three, testified that she had never had any "improper" relations with Barnet. It was then her word against that of

numerous hotel clerks who swore in court—and who had no reason to lie—that she and Barnet had registered often as Mr. and Mrs. Barnet.

Blanche made a marked impression on the Coroner's Jury, and it looked well for our fair-haired boy. And then seven handwriting experts testified that Roland Molineux and nobody else had written the name and address on the two anonymous packages—one of which led to the demise of Mr. Barnet and one to the death of Mrs. Katherine Adams. At this point in the proceedings, Colonel Gardiner took over from his assistant, Mr. Osbourne, and summed up the evidence so strongly that the jury found against Roland Molineux on "both counts." Which may have made sense, but which was not according to law; this was supposed to have been an inquest into the death of H. C. Barnet and nothing else.

The bewildered but loyal General Molineux, a nice old gentleman for whom we can have only pity, went to vast lengths to put up bail for his son. Bail was, however, refused, and young Molineux spent that night not in the arms of his beautiful, one-eyed Blanche, but on a bare mattress in The Tombs.

Now everybody began to get into the act, as the old show-business saying goes. It was discovered by reporters and/or police detectives that there was a hallmark on the ornate silver holder which had enclosed the poisoned Bromo sent to Cornish. That hallmark was checked, and led to a wholesale jeweler in Newark,



and thence to a retail jeweler in the same city—just around the corner from where Roland worked.

The body of Harry Barnet was disinterred, and found—as nearly everybody expected by that time—to be loaded with cyanide of mercury. Katherine Adams' body was also dug up, and found riddled with the same poison. Cyanide of mercury has limited commercial uses, but it is used in the manufacture of Prussian blue, one of the paint colors prepared at the Herman factory, of which the dashing Roland was superintendent.

During this time, young Molineux languished in his jail cell—and languished well. He had his meals sent in from Delmonico's, his bedding also sent in daily and, no doubt, his copy of the *Police Gazette* every Tuesday.

He gave no interviews to the press; he seems to have just smiled and waited. It would seem to have been an open-and-shut case, but when it came before the grand jury, the jurors refused to find a true bill, on the somewhat quibbling grounds that the prisoner before the bar should not have been tried for two crimes at once.

Roland Molineux was released, but DA Asa Bird Gardiner was not through with him. Nor were the gentlemen of the press; there was a front-page story in the *New York Journal* every day for some months, and in the other papers almost as often.

Finally, in July of 1899, another grand jury did move to indict Roland Molineux, charging him with first-degree homicide. There is one thing

about "the simple way of poison"—once the facts are known, there is no chance of a plea to second-degree, or self-defense, or to anything other than the big one. To quote De Quincey: "Fie on these dealers in poison—can't they keep to the old honest way of cutting throats?"

For murder by poison is obviously premeditated murder.

The trial of Roland B. Molineux for the (accidental) murder of Katherine B. Adams began in November, 1899, with the defendant pleading, as expected, not guilty. Recorder Goff, a famous jurist of the time, was on the bench. Assistant DA Osbourne appeared for the People; Bartow Weeks and George Gordon Battle, a pair of famous and expensive criminal attorneys, for the defense. It was to be a long-drawn-out affair, to say the least.

To quote the late Mr. Pearson again: "It would be depressing to think that American criminal justice ever appeared more futile, or more wasteful of time and money, than in the proceedings of the next three years. The State of New York spent \$200,000 and General Molineux, who ruined himself financially in his son's defense, spent much more." I venture to say, a whole lot more.

And nobody profited except the New York newspapers, whose newsstand sales pyramided as the trial went on. Roland was composed and confident in court, with the fair Blanche Cheseborough Molineux beside him, and with his expensive at-

torneys. But the weight of the actual evidence was staggering. It was even proved that some pale-blue writing paper, with a crest of three silver crescents intertwined, sold only in Newark, had been seen by Mamie Melando in Molineux's desk. On this same paper somebody had ordered by mail a bottle of Kutnow Powders in the name of Harry Cornish, with the address of one of the "convenience" mailboxes. Twelve handwriting experts swore to that, and to the fact that certain other exhibits for the People were in Molineux's hand.

Roland never wavered. He smiled and smirked and was very confident at all times, making no answer to the increasingly pressing questions as to why he had used the names Mr. Cheseborough, and H. C. Barnet, and Harry Cornish in his activities.

The first trial dragged on for almost three months—then a record for the course. It even took twelve days to choose the jury and when the prosecution restated its case, the defense flabbergasted everybody by announcing that there would be "no further defense than that already offered by the People's witnesses"! It would seem here that poor old General Molineux got very little from his expensive legal lights, Mr. Bartow Weeks and Mr. George Gordon Battle, in spite of the thousands he had paid them.

Weeks stood up in court and decided to attack only Cornish, suggesting that the unhappy athletic director had for some mysterious reason of his own killed his landlady, and then

rigged a colossal frame-up on poor Molineux. Weeks said, "We stand here on our sworn statement"—there hadn't been any—"that we are innocent of anything connected with these cases. The prosecution failed to prove that the defendant was the writer of the address on the wrapper that covered the bottle of poison addressed to Cornish. It has failed to demonstrate any connection between the hired boxes and the sending of the poison packages."

Weeks wound up with a long plea to send this fine boy back to the arms of his loving wife, and to his venerable and respected father. Meanwhile, this fine boy sat by his beautiful, one-eyed wife and smiled. Things were still going his way.

Mr. Osbourne delivered the summing up for the People, pointing his thick thumb at Blanche Cheseborough Molineux and thundering, "*There sits the motive!*"

Which was a classic *non sequitur*. Molineux was on trial for the murder of Mrs. Katherine Adams—an accidental murder happening during an attempt on the life of Harry Cornish, via mail. It was something with which Blanche really had nothing to do at all. The prosecutors had got the Adams murder mixed up with the Barnet murder, not just in the summation but all through the trial. They were to regret it later.

After eight hours of deliberation, the jury returned with a verdict of guilty. Roland took it rather calmly, but his father, the General, collapsed. Blanche is said to have blanched.

Roland was hastily hauled off to Sing Sing, where he spent the next eighteen months in durance vile and in extensive literary endeavor, much after the pattern of the more recent Caryl Chessman, in another death house. Roland even managed to get published a small volume of sketches of prison life, entitled *The Room with the Little Door*. It is now out of print, but certain critics of the time compared it not unfavorably with the works of Ambrose Bierce.

In October, 1901, the New York Court of Appeals reversed the verdict against author Roland and ordered a new trial on the grounds that he had been unjustly tried for two murders at once. This is, of course, in strict accordance with the letter of our law. It is sometimes different in England; George Joseph Smith, the "Brides in the Bath" mass murderer, would never have got his just deserts if it had not been brought out at his trial that he had been repeating the same murder technique over and over again for years.

By the time of the second trial, poor old Katherine Adams was quite forgotten; so was Harry Barnet. One notices that victims in murder cases soon fade out of the picture, and that public sympathy is apt to go out to "that poor boy in the death house, fighting for his life." It is quite common nowadays for defense attorneys to object most strenuously to the prosecution's presentation of photos of the battered, bloody corpse, because it might inflame the jury.

This trial of our hero, Roland Molineux, was heard before Justice Lambert of Buffalo, and here a very different picture presented itself. The public was by now sick and tired of the case; the newspapers gave it little space. Mr. Osbourne was allowed much less leeway in introducing the handwriting evidence. Ex-Governor Black handled the defense with aggressive brilliance.

Roland put up a surprise alibi: at the time the poison package had been mailed to Cornish, he himself had been visiting out at Columbia University, and even had a full professor present to swear to it! There was also the Marvelous Female Witness, the surprising lady who comes into so many major murder trials. She swore on her sacred oath that she had been in the New York central post office on that fatal day, and that after *four years*, she could clearly recollect standing at the window and seeing a man—a man not answering to Molineux's description in any way—mailing a package. She had even been close enough to glimpse a few essential words of the address; she had seen the name Mr. Harry Cornish and the word Knickerbocker. Her memory certainly must have been phenomenal—and why she had kept silent for four years about all this is not a question for us to ask, except to ourselves.

It is a well-known fact, and a reflection on American justice and its legal lights, that no person of means has ever been executed for murder in this country. The poor,

the ignorant, who have no choice but to be defended by the public defender, usually get the works, period.

At any rate, in this second trial, Roland Molineux was freed. The jury was out only four minutes. He was returned with apologies to the arms of his beloved Blanche—who divorced him some months later and married her attorney. Then and there the lovely if one-eyed charmer disappears from the scene.

Molineux himself, no longer the playboy son of a wealthy father, no longer the superintendent of a chemical firm making Prussian blue, settled down most seriously to his literary work. He had published *Death Chamber Stories* and *Tales of the Tombs*, then essayed a serious romantic novel entitled *Vice Admiral of the Blue*, full of purplish prose about Lord Nelson and Lady Emma Hamilton, a copy of which I believe is still available in the New York Public Library. It did not make any best-seller lists, but Roland, as a famous author, suddenly did pop up in *Who's Who*, and with the help of a female amanuensis even wrote a play, *The Man Inside*, which was produced on Broadway by the late, great David Belasco. The play unfortunately had a very short run.

But our hero, Roland Molineux, never quite gave up. This young man, who had murdered once to gain a lady, and who had murdered months later in an abortive attempt on the life of a man who had called him "a vile name," soon married his fair literary aide and moved out to Long Island. This was in November of 1913. Evidently the long rest in the death house had restored him physically.

The end, however, was tragic and perhaps inevitable. One bright autumn morning in the fall of the year 1914, Molineux appeared on the streets of a suburban town clad in a straw hat and absolutely nothing else, running up and down the sidewalks and shouting that he was a wild she-wolf from Bitter Creek, and that it was his night to howl.

The men with the strait jacket came and took him away, and just three years later, in a padded cell in King's Park State Hospital, he passed on to his reward. He lies buried in a nearby cemetery, but it is reported that in the last forty years, nobody, except for your reporter, has taken the trouble to visit his grave.

*Requiescat in pace.* May his victims rest as well.