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*It Was a Subtle Crime That Crawley Planned,
But Unexpected Was Its Result*

The Death Shower

By TOM FREEMAN

CRAWLEY knelt on the floor of his bathroom, in each hand a wire leading from the electric light socket over his head. He had spent a long time preparing for this moment, and there must be no slip now.

Tall, slim and dark, with a face like a saint's, which only his flaming eyes betrayed in the dull haze of the February dawn, he waited until the cascading shower in the room below should tell him that his victim, the man he hated as much as he loved that man's wife, should be in his control.

His ear pressed to the pipe, he heard the water splashing. The gay whistle that usually accompanied the running stream was absent, and for a moment Crawley wondered. Then he roused himself. He must act quickly.

He could hear the man below moving about under the shower.

Removing his head from danger, Crawley firmly wrapped the naked wires around the pipe. Quickly he pressed his ear to the floor. He heard a moan, followed by a duller noise, as if the bather, slipping on a cake of soap, had fallen into the tub. Then silence, except for the sound of steadily flowing water.

Crawley jerked the wire from the pipe and replaced the light bulb in its socket. Taking the cord into his living room, he restored it to the electric floor lamp from which he had removed it, and placidly sat down to wait.

It would not be long until Margaret Brinslow would note the tardiness of her husband and would go to call him. She would find the door locked, would

become alarmed at the water seeping under the door, and would call neighbors, who would break down the door.

Then Margaret would find the body; would grieve appropriately; and in due time she and Crawley would wed. It was a pleasant outlook, and Crawley smiled as he settled himself more comfortably.

CRAWLEY did not regard Brinslow's death as a crime. From childhood his only definition of crime had been "blunder", and he viewed as criminals only those who got caught.

He had fallen in love with Margaret Brinslow fourteen months before. Never had woman appealed to him as did she, and for the strangest reason in the world. She was a Puritan, from the sole of her highly arched foot to the top of her pretty little head.

She loved him—she had admitted as much at a moment of tense importuning; but she would not bend herself to his moral code. She refused to run away with him, although confessing that she did not love her husband. She asserted that it was her duty to stick by the man she had married.

She would not think of divorce. Only one thing could so separate them that she would marry Crawley, and that was her husband's death. She had caught the little gleam that flickered in Crawley's eyes at this, although he had long thought himself able to conceal his emotions.

"It would have to be natural death, too," she had added. "If you should kill him, I would hate you forever, and we could never be happy together, either here or hereafter."

Crawley's ideas of the hereafter being highly nebulous, he told himself what he did not tell her, that he must have her as soon as it could be arranged. He must not only outwit the police (dumb-bells in uniform, he

characterized them), but he must also outwit Margaret.

He knew Brinslow was in such good physical condition that his death in the natural course of events would be a matter of years, and Crawley was unwilling to wait so long. Besides, in the meantime Margaret would be growing old, and, to his mind, less attractive.

Consequently, much to the neglect of several of the other dubious enterprises in which he was engaged, Crawley had pondered over a method of slaying Brinslow so none would ever know except himself. With that in view, he had framed his plans, and, unknown to the Brinslows, had rented this apartment above theirs. He had been compelled to wait for several months before the rooms were vacant. He had been afraid to offer to buy out the former tenant's lease, for fear the offer would create curiosity.

If Margaret ever went back on him, he could tell her how her first husband met his death. He grinned as he thought of the shock that would convey to her Puritanical soul. How kind the gods were to men who only dared!

Crawley yielded himself to thoughts of the woman who would soon be his. At last he would be able to comb that tawny cascade of hair with his fingers; he would bruise her lips with his—her lips for which he thirsted greatly. He would be able to hold her close, and none could deny him. And all the time he would be able to smile in the back of his head, over the thing he knew that she would never know—so long as she was good to him.

The coroner would say that Brinslow had died from heart disease. Well, it would be that, except that the disease had been in Crawley's heart. But soon he hoped to mend it, for Margaret would be his.

He had waited more than a year for this day; it would not be hard to wait

a little longer. To wait until the body was found, until after the funeral, until after Margaret's period of mourning, and then—to marry her!

Picking up a copy of a magazine to while away the time that would pass before the body would be discovered, Crawley smiled again. He could flee, to return later, but there was no need. He wanted to hear Margaret weeping; to see if there would not be an undertone of relief in her outcries at her husband's death.

He read one brief story through, and yet there was no stir from below. Twenty minutes passed. Crawley became restless. After five more minutes he strode into the bathroom and placed his ear to the water pipe. The water was still running.

Misgiving struck him, then he knew himself for a fool. Evidently Margaret was sleeping late, as she usually did, and likely would not be stirring about for half an hour or so longer. Crawley went back to his living room and resumed his vigil.

This time he had not long to wait. In a few minutes he heard scurrying feet below. Someone was pounding violently on the door. Margaret, no doubt. Probably she was calling in a low voice to her husband. Perhaps she was hoping that something had occurred.

Someone else came along the hall and the pounding was redoubled. In two minutes there was a crash as the door fell in.

A woman's cry followed. Crawley grinned. At last Margaret was free. A clamor of voices filled the hallway, and there was the tramp of several feet.

He heard a man call out: "Into that room. I'll get a doctor!"

SUDDENLY Crawley became bold. He wanted to see the man whose life he had taken; to gloat over his deed, and, if possible, to steal a glance at Margaret. He knew she would be too

distracted to notice him, especially if he kept in the background. She was probably in her bedroom by this time, likely in a dead faint.

Putting on a big coat, the collar of which he pulled up around his face, and pulling his hat low over his eyes, Crawley started downstairs. He ran into a man in the hall. Crawley seized the stranger's arm.

"What's the noise about?" Crawley asked. "Is something wrong?"

The man's answer was to point down the hall. Crawley wheeled, planning to feign surprise when he saw Brinslow's body. In the darkened hall he could observe nothing but a shadowy form on a blanket. Simulating concern, he strode forward.

The body on the blanket was that of Margaret! The tawny hair he had so loved was wet and stringy, and the eyes were stiff in death.

The man was made of steel. He gave no sign that he had met the shock of his life, except for a dilation of his eyes that went unnoticed in the half-light.

"We found her in the bathtub," said the stranger, his voice low, as if not to awaken the dead woman. "Evidently she died of heart failure. That's strange, though, in one so young."

Crawley turned around. He wished the blithering idiot would go; that he could be left alone with Margaret.

There was a scurry at the door. Another man came bustling through the hall. He did not see the blanket and its burden.

"Where's Mrs. Brinslow?" he asked.

Crawley pointed to the body.

"Is she dead?"

He read the answer in Crawley's eyes.

"I'm almost glad!" the newcomer cried hoarsely. "I came to tell her that her husband was killed in an auto wreck this morning!"