

Weird Tales

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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The PURPLE SEDAN

by LOIS LANE



"It was gruesomely familiar, with its blood-marked brow and disheveled gray hair."

"CAN I interest you?"

I was standing supposedly alone in the darkest corner of the big storage room, and the question startled me, yet so absurd was the idea it carried that I laughed.

"Hardly," I answered. "Merely another case of a cat and a king. Still, I'm interested, at that. Anyone but a dead person would be, in such a car."

The manager of the Hobson Motor Company, for such I recognized the speaker to be, shot me a searching look, bit his lip, and dropped his eyes hastily to a resplendent front hub. "It's a great machine," he remarked.

"Why, what's the matter with it?" The listlessness of his voice stirred my curiosity.

"Not a thing—not a thing in the

world!" But his assurance was not convincing.

"Comes at something like five thousand dollars, doesn't it?"

"And twelve hundred more, new."

"New? Isn't it new?"

The man shook his head and shifted his gaze to the fender. "Been out about three months, though it's only been run around five hundred miles."

"Somebody couldn't meet his payments?"

"No. Wanted a lighter car. Besides, the color is a little odd, too, you'll notice."

"A little," I agreed, amusedly. "At least it isn't every day that one sees a purple car with lilac upholstery. But then, a good finisher and upholsterer could remedy all that."

He caught at my remark. "Better let me sell it to you."

I laughed again. "I couldn't buy a set of tires for a car like that, to say nothing of the car itself."

"You wouldn't need to, for a long time. It carries two spares, you'll notice, and neither of them has ever been on. As to the price, we're prepared to make that right." He was eager now.

"You don't know how ridiculously right it would have to be to come within my reach," I told him and started to turn away.

He stopped me. "But you could at least make us an offer. What could you give?"

"My old bus the mechanic is working on out in the repair room," I answered, joking, of course.

"Oh, now! Surely you can do a little better than that. Make it a hundred besides."

"Can't do it."

"But your old car—why, we'd be practically making you a gift of the sedan."

"You would be, anyway, for that matter, but I simply can't afford the hundred."

"But listen, lady——" Suddenly he stopped, clenched his hands and endeavored to look off across the dim storeroom. Slowly and reluctantly, however, as if some unseen power were compelling him, he brought his head around, not to face me, but to stare into the lilac depths of the purple sedan. His eyes were bulging, his chin hanging down.

"Man!" I cried, seizing his arm and shaking him; "are you ill? Here, sit down on the running-board. Merciful heavens, you mustn't look like that!"

Whatever the spell that was upon him, my action seemed to restore his self-possession. He turned squarely about and addressed me in a voice but slightly shaken. "You can have the car on your own terms. Drive it out."

My eyes, in turn, must have bulged. "Say," I demanded, "what's the

matter here? Is this stolen property, or is the engine gone, or what?"

"We're guaranteeing both the title and the mechanical condition, if that means anything."

"But, man, what's the idea? You haven't even seen my car. It's four years old and looks every bit of it, and besides has all the internal ailments a car can possibly be heir to. Only a little while ago it had to be towed in, and right now the mechanic isn't sure it will ever run again."

"No matter about all that—that is, if you care to trade."

"Oh, I'll trade all right, only I'd like to know what is back of it all."

"Wouldn't it be enough to know that, should you be displeased with your bargain, you may have your old car back—and keep this one, too?"

I stared in astonishment. Finally I got hold of my voice. "I won't say it would be enough, still it would be a great deal."

"Then suppose we let it go at that."

TEN minutes later I had nosed the purple sedan out of its gloomy corner and headed it toward home. I live ten miles out, and since the afternoon was already well advanced and I proved to be rather awkward in handling a strange car, early dusk had fallen by the time I turned off the main highway and entered the strip of woods that gives privacy to my bit of property. The road here is a sand one, and the tracks deep enough to preclude all danger of a car's going astray; furthermore, there would still be considerable light once I had cleared the timber, consequently I did not turn on the lights as I slid into the deeper darkness.

It had been a warm day for February, even in Florida, and the evening that followed was delightfully balmy, but scarcely had I entered the woods before I drew my light coat closely about my throat against the sudden chill that seemed to envelop

the car. My action was futile, however, for the feeling of coldness continued. It crept up along my spine, concentrating with such intensity at the back of my neck that the hair there seemed to bristle, and I had the conviction that a pair of eyes were boring into it. In addition to this unpleasant sensation, or perhaps as a result of it, I was seized with an uncontrollable desire to look behind, and, regardless of my obligation to the car, I did.

I did not start at what I saw, nor cry out. Indeed I was powerless to do so, as one is in a dream. A woman was on the back seat, a gray, shadowy, disheveled woman, the signs of a terrible struggle fresh upon her—hatless, torn, and blood-marked underwings of tumbling gray hair. At a glance, and despite her battered and disarranged appearance, there was discernible about her, in the quiet elegance of her clothes and the simplicity of her bearing, a certain well-bred inconspicuousness that marked her as a member of a class rather than as an individual. Yet, definite as this impression was, her form and features, searched, had that vague indistinctness that ordinarily belongs to objects in a dream; that is, all except her eyes, which were bright and black and steady and burned into mine with a probing, searching fire.

How long the vision held me I do not know, but suddenly I became aware of light and warmth, and the car was emerging into the comparative brightness of my little home clearing.

IT WAS not until I was out of the purple sedan and inside my tiny cottage that I was able to think clearly once more. Then, strange to say, my first thoughts were of amusement rather than of fear or wonder. How my grandmother would have doted on my recent experience! How smoothly it would have fitted with her

well-worn repertoire of Old-World ghost stories and supernatural demonstrations! How joyously she would have seized upon it as a weapon with which to rout my youthful doubts; for despite her persistent teachings I had always been an obnoxiously practical and hard-headed youngster, refusing stubbornly to believe anything that I had no particular occasion to believe. But the curious part was that, now that I had that occasion, I still did not believe. Or did I have it? Were there such things as optical illusions, hallucinations, imaginary visions due to overwrought nerves? True, I am not a nervous person, but mightn't my recent transaction have excited me the least bit? Besides, there are likely to be shadows where there are woods, and maybe I had even dozed a little.

As for the manager's anxiety to dispose of the purple sedan, that was a different matter. That *was* hard to explain. Perhaps, though, if I looked into things a little I could see a reason for even that; therefore with all haste I delved into the small sheaf of papers I had acquired along with the car. There were but two of them of any value so far as my purpose was concerned, the original certificate of ownership and the transfer issued to the Hobson Motor Company. From these documents I was surprised to learn that the motor company had owned the machine almost exactly two months, the original purchaser barely one, his title dating from the fifth of December. I fell to studying the man's name. Drennan — Drennan — Jasper H. Drennan. Where had I heard that name before? Not among my flesh-and-blood acquaintances, I was sure, nor those I had come to know through the pages of fiction; yet the name so persisted in tantalizing me with its familiarity that I could not rest until I had made an effort toward solving the mystery of its appeal.

There was but one avenue of enquiry open to me; consequently I turned to it eagerly. From a closet I brought out stacks of old newspapers, saved against house-cleaning time, and these I searched far into the night for any mention of the disturbing name. Finally I found it and the reason for its strange familiarity. For nearly a week it had graced the front pages of most of the state's leading dailies in connection with one of those sensational disappearance cases with which the reading public has been deluged the last few years. I had merely read the headlines before, but now, fired by a sort of personal interest, I followed the affair through all the editions, hoping against hope that every next line would have something to say about a purple sedan. But in this I was disappointed, although I did gather up some interesting, if more or less indirect, information regarding the man to whom the sedan originally belonged.

According to the papers, Mrs. Felicia Washburn Drennan, wealthy Northern woman and owner of considerable property in and about the city of Miami, had disappeared from her berth on a north-bound train sometime during the night of December fifth, or the morning following. Early in the evening friends of the woman had called for her at her suburban home and driven her to the railroad station, where she had boarded a train for Sanford, a little town well up the state. There she was to meet her husband, Jasper H. Drennan, who was returning next day from a business trip to Jacksonville. Those who had accompanied the woman to the train saw her enter her Pullman, and the conductor later reported that a ticket corresponding to the number of the berth she was known to have had was extended to him through the curtains of the compartment, but there all trace of her had

ended. The porter had not been on hand when she had entered the coach, and she had at no time required his services; consequently the man had never seen her, and, since there had been passengers alighting at the different stations, could not say when or where she had left the train. When, however, he began to make up the berths beyond Sanford he was certain that the one bearing her number had been empty. When she did not meet her husband as planned, the latter, thinking she had missed her train, set himself to wait for her. She did not arrive on the next train, either, so that he became anxious and, late in the afternoon, telephoned their home. Learning from the servants of her departure the evening before, he immediately caught a train home, notified the police department and started an investigation. Days of exhaustive search followed, but at last even the official body was forced to admit failure, for neither clue nor motive could be found to throw any light on the woman's disappearance.

The Drennans, the papers explained, were newcomers in the South, having come from Ohio, where they had been recently married. Mrs. Drennan was formerly the widow of John H. Washburn, the soap manufacturer, and Drennan a clerk in the Washburn office. The former Mrs. Washburn, sole heir to her husband's large estate, had disposed of the soap factory and, after coming South, had invested heavily in grove and city property, over which she had established her new husband as manager. She had no other relatives anywhere and, so far as was known, no enemies. Moreover, according to her husband, there was no domestic trouble, and the servants bore him out in this.

It was not an especially interesting story, and by no means an enlightening one so far as my desires were concerned; consequently I was finally forced to go to bed in disappointment.

IF I HAD been pleased with my transaction the day before, I was even more so when I saw the machine by the light of the morning sun. Perhaps its color was a little more pronounced than I had thought in the mellowness of the waning light, but if it was, so was its unmarred newness, its gracefulness of line, its richness of equipment.

On close inspection, however, there were apparent two minor defects that I had not noticed before, though these were so slight as to be practically negligible. They were merely that the mate to the elaborately cut glass vase behind the driver's seat was missing and the upholstery back of the wheel was crushed and packed as if it had been pressed by wet garments and not brushed afterward. But I did not let these small matters worry me. Another vase could be found somewhere, and a good brush and the tea-kettle would take care of the upholstery whenever I had the time and the inclination to apply them. I must admit that at that particular moment it was the latter that was lacking. So eager was I to see the astonishment on the faces of my friends and neighbors when they saw my new car that I could not bear to lose any time in starting the show. I could steam upholstery while the community was recovering from its surprise.

Despite my impatience, it was some little time before I was ready to start on my tour of display. In the first place, I had some important letters to write, and in the second, I had to look the place half over for the papers belonging to the old car, for I had decided that after I had shown off before my acquaintances in the neighboring village I would go on to town and consummate my part of the trade by handing over the necessary documents. My numerous preparations completed, I finally backed the purple sedan into the road and headed for the village a mile

away. That is, it is a mile if one goes the direct way, but at the corner of my clearing an unpleasant memory of the night before assailed me, so that I turned aside on a more circuitous road, one that avoided the strip of woods that had been the scene of my unusual experience.

It was noontime as I drove into the little settlement, a brilliant Southern noon, with the air like balm and the entire population out enjoying it. Children played by the wayside, men loafed about the streets, women visited in dooryards, or called to one another across bits of lawn.

Suddenly, in the midst of all this light and life, I felt myself grow deathly cold, and sensed that I was no longer driving the car, but that it was taking its way along the busy street of its own volition. At almost the same moment some magnetic power drew my eyes to the reflector above the windshield. There, instead of a reverse picture of the road I had just traveled, I saw a pair of burning eyes and a blood-stained, hair-bedraggled brow. In another instant the car was turning out for the ice-truck, and the vision had vanished.

Having lost all zest for my errand to the village, I drove straight into town and to the office of the Hobson Motor Company. As the manager recognized me, a hard look came over his face.

"What have you come for?" he demanded somewhat belligerently.

"To give you these papers—and to ask some questions."

He dropped his head and waited.

"Who is she?"

He straightened at my words. "Then you have seen, too?"

"Yes, last night and again a few minutes ago. What does it mean?"

"God knows."

"Did the man who sold the car know?"

"He must have, or he wouldn't have been so anxious to get rid of it."

"Why not tell me about it?"

“There isn’t much to tell—and yet, a great deal. It was the sixth of December—I remember the date because of the unusually heavy rain-storm that swept over this section that afternoon. Along about ten o’clock at night, while the rain was still pouring, a man drove into the garage and wanted to leave his car for the night. Ordinarily I wouldn’t have been here at that hour, but we were putting on a new night man and I had stayed to help him get started. Usually, too, I don’t pay any attention to our storage patrons, since an assistant has them in charge, but on this occasion, watching to see that the helper performed his duties properly and, above all, that he insisted on the car’s being parked in a remote corner so as to leave as much space as possible for later machines, I couldn’t help noticing the stranger, first because of the magnificent car he was driving, and second, because of the extremely soaked condition of his clothes. How he could have gotten so wet in such a machine was entirely beyond my comprehension, especially since he did not look like the type of man who attends to his own tire trouble.

“All of this being none of my business, however, I soon forgot about it in the bustle of starting home. Indeed I doubt if I would ever have thought of the incident again if the assistant hadn’t come to me a week later and asked what he was to do about the purple sedan, since it hadn’t been called for yet and was more or less in the way. There wasn’t anything he could do about it, of course, and since the owner had looked amply able to pay as large a storage bill as he felt like running up, and the car was good for it anyway, I told the man we wouldn’t worry, but would just let the matter rest. We did, for an entire month; then to our surprise, we received a letter from the owner, saying he was dissatisfied with the car and wanted to trade it

—even—for one of our sport sixes, his only condition being that we were to deliver the latter. Our car stands at only sixteen hundred, fully equipped, so you can imagine we were completely knocked off the Christmas tree by his offer. It seemed too good to be safe, so we immediately started an investigation. To our surprise, everything proved to be perfectly regular; consequently we lost no time in closing the deal for fear the fellow would change his mind.

“The car being now our own I sent a man to polish it up, preparatory to placing it in the salesroom for display. I was present when he went to begin work. He had approached the machine with the intention of running it into a part of the room where the light was better. His hand on the door, he was about to pull it open when he suddenly sprang back with the most horrified exclamation I have ever heard a man utter. When I got to him his hands were over his face, and he was trembling like a leaf.

“‘What on earth is the matter?’ I asked, thinking he had suffered a stroke.

“‘A woman! A woman in there!’ he chattered.

“‘Nonsense, man!’ I began, and turned to prove the absurdity of his statement. Half-way in my gesture I stopped, frozen with horror and surprise. There on the velvet cushions sat a woman, so horribly battered and bloody that involuntarily I closed my eyes to shut out the sight. When I got control of myself and looked again I had serious doubts of my own sanity, for the car was absolutely empty.

“From that day we never touched the purple sedan again. My man left that night, and I got other help, but as often as I sent someone to move the car the woman offered her silent interference, so that I finally concluded the big machine was not to be tampered with. Twice I sent prospective customers to look at it—

men from out of town who I thought would not do us much damage by talking. One of them ran out of the place screaming, and both thereafter took their patronage elsewhere. I tell you, that accursed car has all but wrecked our business. During the last month we've had ten men in the storage room, and besides have lost two of our best salesmen and the book-keeper. A sinister influence is bound to spread, you know.

"I might as well admit right here that you looked like an answer to prayer to me yesterday when I saw you inspecting the purple sedan at close range without suffering any shock from it. Do you know, I would actually have paid you to take that magnificent elephant off our hands rather than let you go away without it!"

"Still you asked me a hundred hoot."

"Yes, the business instinct is strong in most of us. I thought for a moment, though, that I had spoiled everything. If I had I suppose it would have served me right; still, surely a poor man is excusable for trying to save something out of a cool sixteen hundred dollars."

"At the expense of innocence?"

The manager shook his head. "Evidently not."

I laughed mirthlessly. "I'm afraid that didn't have anything to do with it. You see, I really didn't have the hundred."

He stared at me blankly.

As I was rising to leave he made out to ask, "What are you going to do with the car?"

"The only thing there is to do," I told him, "keep it." Again he stared—stupidly.

I MUST confess that I was in no happy state of mind as I re-entered the purple sedan. Most of us, I suppose, have our responsibilities thrust upon us, and of course I had no right to expect to be an excep-

tion, but to be servant of a ghost! And I, of all people, who didn't believe in ghosts! Yet, didn't I? True, my mind, influenced by its own scientific training and the leadership of a scoffing world, laughed at the idea of supernatural things, but deep down in the innermost regions of my heart, hadn't I always known they existed? Why else that early absorption of even the smallest detail of my grandmother's spirit lore, that unconscious retentiveness that made every light and shadow of it stand out distinctly after all these years? And why else, also, my election to own a haunted car? Of what use would an unbeliever be to a spirit in distress? For that matter, under such circumstances, what use would a believer be, unless he was equipped with a deep insight into the ways of the supernatural? There was the rub—the reason why I, rather than someone else, must bear the weight of this unwelcome burden—the education my grandmother had instilled into me so many years ago. I, probably alone of all who had come in contact with the haunted car, knew that, once it has laid aside its physical form, only a soul in torment lingers upon this earthly sphere, and that its purpose in so doing is not to terrorize or appall its former kind, but to find one among them who will relieve it of its burden by performing the urgent task or mission that itself, in its unsubstantial state, is helpless to accomplish. Until it finds such a person and attains its desires, it may not take the rest for which it longs. To one who understands, it is an unthinkable thing to leave a soul in anguish without making the utmost effort to set it free.

As to the nature of the burden that was oppressing my ghostly suppliant I did not speculate. There was but one way I could learn that. I must ask, and ask properly. When I should ask must depend on the spirit itself, on the time of its next appear-

ance. If it should be that very afternoon, I must somehow steel myself to my duty, for there was nothing to be gained by delay.

But I was allowed to finish my 'drive' alone, though I derived very little comfort from the fact, for I knew that sooner or later the hour would come for my interview with the specter, and the physical part of me dreaded it—dreaded it more than I liked to admit; for day after day I gave myself a perfectly good reason for declining to drive the purple sedan, even though my cupboard was growing unpleasantly empty, and I knew that important mail was awaiting me at the post-office.

But the matter was not left to my own initiative. One night, an exact week after I had come into possession of the haunted car, I awoke from a deep sleep with the feeling that something unwonted was astir about the premises. I raised myself from my pillow and peered through the window into the dim night. At first nothing unusual rewarded my search, only the shadowy outline of the fence, the shrubs, and the few outbuildings. Then close in front of the garage doors something moved, something tall and draped and only distinguishable from the rest of the night by its increased shadowiness. Where the doors joined it paused and stood as if waiting.

A cold sweat enveloped my body, for I knew that the ordeal I had dreaded was at hand. I slipped out of bed, however, and in the darkness began to don my clothes. The luminous hands of the clock on the dresser pointed slightly past one.

Having arrayed myself the best I could for a journey concerning the nature and destination of which I had no idea, I stepped resolutely forth into the shadowy night. As I rounded the corner of the garage the dim form melted away into the shade of the shrubbery.

I HAD barely touched the gear lever when the big car began backing out of the garage, and a minute later we were upon the public road. Except that the car moved as if guided by magic, there was no further sign of my ghostly companion until we were well beyond the borders of my little clearing. Then I suddenly became aware of a familiar sensation at the back of my neck. No need to turn around now. In fact I had no inclination to do so, but looking straight ahead, asked in a voice that I myself barely recognized, "In the name of the Lord, what do you want?"

A sort of sigh went through the car, and a voice that had no earthly quality answered, "Peace."

"Can I help you to find it?"

"You alone can help me."

"How?"

"Cause my body to be taken from its unhallowed grave and buried in consecrated ground."

"How am I to do this?"

"Obey."

Already we were approaching the point where the woods road joins the main highway. Without any guidance on my part the big car swung to the left and shot like a bullet along the deserted thoroughfare.

It seemed but a moment from the time the village fell behind until the larger town appeared, and another until we reached the corner where a half-dozen trails converge. A white blur of signboards marked the place, but as we flashed past, one of them stood out distinctly. It pointed straight ahead and was marked "Miami".

On through the night we rushed, over roads I had never traveled, through towns I had never seen. Eventually a thick fog settled, but the car bore resolutely on, sweeping the mist-veiled road like the wind, threading with uncanny deftness the turns and curves that sprang out of the night to confound it. At last a

gradual thinning of the darkness proclaimed that morning was at hand, but the fog continued to hold it in leash. Town after town we passed without distinguishing more than occasional early-lit windows. Even the shoulders of the pavement were indiscernible through the mist.

Suddenly I felt a change in the behavior of the car. Its bumping and heaving warned me that something was wrong. I struggled to get control, but my arms, curled inertly around the wheel for so long, were slow about functioning, so that the machine had jumped and reeled quite a distance before I could bring it to a stop. When I did I discovered that we had left the pavement and were now on an old, unused road. The rich tangle of grass that carpeted it told me that we were in low country, probably near a swamp, so that I did not dare to turn the big machine for fear of what might be lurking just beyond the fog. Then I noticed that a golden glow had begun to brighten the mist and knew that the sun was struggling to burst through. While I watched, it gradually prevailed, dissolving the dense curtain, now here, now there, until it finally left disclosed a half-fallen trapper's cabin encircled at a little distance by huge magnolia trees and cypresses enrobed with Spanish moss.

It was a small neck of land on which I had stopped, so narrow at that particular spot that the stagnant swamp waters almost reached the wheels, but expanding just beyond into an area large enough for a car to turn upon, though with no great space to spare.

Revolted by my position, I shifted into low gear and began cautiously to circle the ancient shanty, keeping as close to it as I dared out of fear of the swamp on the right. Suddenly I discovered that I had hugged the cabin too closely, that I could not complete the turn without backing up. Going into reverse, I let the car back

an inch at a time. I had gone but a few feet when there was a sort of drop, and the car stopped. I leaned out to see what the trouble was and noticed that the left rear wheel had sunk rather deeply into the sod and in doing so had acted like a lever on a piece of board imbedded there. I tried to go ahead, but the machine refused to move. Then I climbed out and studied the situation. Perhaps if I could swing the board around in line with the wheel, I could make a track sufficiently firm to pull out on. With that idea in mind, I kicked the trash from the slightly elevated end, and, seizing it with both hands, gave it a sharp jerk. It let go with a snap, and uttering a scream of horror, I fell back against the car. There, in a cavity that the board had concealed, was visible the upper part of a human body, the face earth-strewn and discolored, but still gruesomely familiar with its blood-marked brow and disheveled gray hair.

Somehow I got the car free, somehow made my way over the bumpy, unused road to the main highway. The pavement lay straight as an arrow's path ahead, though just before me it made an abrupt turn to the left. Which way should I go? Ahead was the road I had come. Should I take that now? I tried to consider, but before I could arrive at any conclusion, something above the tree line over at the left attracted my attention. It was a slender white cross. I turned the car quickly in that direction, and a few minutes later entered a little town with a church close by the highway.

A priest, carrying a bag and an extra coat, was coming down the steps. I hailed him. "Come with me—quick!" I cried before the brakes had stopped screeching. "I have just found a dead body!"

The man hesitated. "Better get an officer. You see I'm——"

"No, you must come yourself—and call an officer also."

At that he turned and ran toward a near-by house. A few minutes later he climbed breathlessly in beside me, and we were leading a sizable procession back to the falling cabin.

MY COMPANION was the first to reach the open grave. One glance, and he turned a horror-stricken face to the rest of us.

"Merciful heaven!" he cried. "This is Mrs. Drennan!"

In the midst of the excitement that immediately burst forth someone suggested, "Better tell Drennan," and a man went to perform the doleful task.

While the others were milling about the crude grave, the churchman turned to me. "I'm glad," he said, "glad that you caught me when you did. The woman was one of my flock, and in another five minutes I should have been gone for a three months' absence. I had a very urgent telegram at one o'clock this morning."

By and by the messenger returned and the crowd made silent way for his companion.

I studied Drennan curiously in the brief moment of his approach. He was a youngish man, with more than an average share of good looks, stalwart of figure, and expensively arrayed. Distorted as his face was with emotion, it was difficult to read anything of the man's character there, but some of his minor traits were unmistakably recorded in the gorgeous coloring of his hose and tie.

Except for the heaving of his shoulders and an occasional dry sob, the man stood quietly looking into the grave until the priest took his arm and drew him gently away.

I spoke to the churchman. "We'll take him back with us," I suggested and fell in behind them.

Arrived at the purple sedan, the priest was on the point of ushering his companion inside, when, for the first time, the latter raised his head. He gave a sort of gasp, and his face, already pale, went blue-white. He

dropped his eyes quickly and made as if to turn round. I would have stopped him, but the sheriff, rushing up excitedly, interfered.

"Sorry, Drennan, but of course you ought to know. Here's the instrument that did the deed—a flower vase apparently. We found it buried with her."

"See if it matches the one in my car," I interposed quickly.

The officer stared at me a moment, then, reaching inside the sedan, secured my solitary vase. He held the two side by side while he studied them.

"A dead match!" he finally pronounced. Then sternly, to me, "What do you know about this?"

"Everything of importance, it seems."

"What, for instance?"

"Briefly, that some time during the afternoon of December sixth Jasper Drennan killed his wife with a flower vase, and not later than five o'clock of the same day buried her here behind the cabin."

"But that is impossible." In the dead silence that followed my statement only the priest found his voice.

"According to the newspapers, yes. But in reality Mr. Drennan met his wife at Sanford that morning three months ago just as they had planned; though, because of the earliness of the hour—the train reaches Sanford at five-thirty as I happen to know—and the woman's inconspicuous appearance, it is likely that no one noticed them, a probability that the man seized upon when he was later faced with the necessity of making explanations. Then, too, the woman's unobtrusiveness while traveling, a habit with which the husband was doubtless familiar, helped a great deal to lend plausibility to his story. As for the murder itself, it is not likely that the idea ever occurred to him until, in a burst of anger, the crime was committed—we have noticed that he doesn't have any great control over

his emotions. At least no premeditation is apparent relative to his wife's money; for as her manager and eventual heir he was already sitting pretty there. But be that as it may, the killing in all probability didn't take place until some time in the afternoon when the heavy downpour of rain made the road practically deserted, and it is reasonable to suppose that it occurred not far from this spot, for a murderer would hardly dare to carry his victim's body any great distance on a public highway in broad daylight, even in a rainstorm. And he must have made the burial in the rain, for he was wringing wet when he stored his car in a West Park garage at ten o'clock that night—you can see the prints of his wet clothes on the upholstery yet. As it takes at least six hours of the wildest kind of driving to cover the distance between here and West Park, his gruesome work must have been done by four o'clock, especially as he had to lose a little time when he stopped to telephone his pretended inquiry concerning his wife. That was 'late in the afternoon,' according to the papers, and it isn't likely he risked it before ridding himself of the body—"

"See here, woman, that is all guesswork. You can't charge a man with a crime on such grounds." It was the priest who cut in.

"Is the vase guesswork? It was missing from the car, it fits the woman's wounds, it was found buried with her—"

"But it's your car it belongs in. What has this man to do with your car?" the sheriff demanded.

"It was his car on the sixth of December, the day his wife disappeared. He bought it the day before in Jacksonville." I opened my bag and offered the documents in proof of my words. The sheriff stared at the uppermost paper; then he turned abruptly to Drennan. "How about it, Drennan?" he asked.

The man seemed remarkably calm now, but his voice was tense. "I did own the car on that date, but while I was waiting for my wife somebody drove it away."

"And you knew exactly where to find it a month later when you wanted to trade it for a light sport roadster. But never mind about that. We're all interested in another point. Would you mind telling us what the quarrel was about that caused you to kill your wife—and throw her body into the tonneau of the car? Could it by any chance have been that she objected to the color scheme of the purple sedan?"

The man's nerves suddenly let go. "You devil! You fiend!" he screamed, "She told you that!"

"No," I told him, "I merely deduced it from your clothes."

As the sheriff led his prisoner away, I turned to the shaken priest. "Father," I said, just to make sure, "I suppose you'll take charge of the body?"

He nodded sadly. "When the time comes."

"Thanks."

A feeling of peace descended upon me as I entered the purple sedan, and I have driven the car in peace ever since.

