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By JONATHAN LATIMER

When his partner is killed trying to rescue a rich man's daughter from the meshes of a weird fanatical cult, private detective Karl Craven takes on the job—to find himself facing a relentless gang of killers who slay in the name of their prophet.

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To Scotland Yard, the murder of financier Robert Fenderson appears to have been accomplished by magic, but able Albert Campion proves that there is no such thing.

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THE UNSEEN DOOR

IT WAS London, it was hot and it was Sunday Afternoon. The billiard room in Prinny's Club, Pall Mall, which has often been likened to a mausoleum, had unexpectedly become one.

Superintendent Stanislaus Oates glanced down at the body again and swore softly to Mr. Albert Campion, the elegant amateur of criminal investigation who had just been admitted.

"I hate miracles!" he said.

Campion drew the sheet gently back from the terrible face.

"Our friend here could hardly have been taken by this one," he murmured, his pale eyes growing grim behind his horn-rimmed spectacles. "Strangled? Oh, yes, I see—from behind. Powerful fingers. Horrid. Who did it?"

"I know who ought to have

done it." Oates was savage. "I know who's been threatening to do it for months and yet he wasn't here. That's why I sent for you. You like this four-dimensional stuff. I don't. See anyone in the hall as you came up?"

"About forty police experts and two very shaken old gentlemen, both on the fragile side. Who are they? Witnesses?"

The superintendent sighed. "Listen," he commanded. "This club is partly closed for cleaning. The only two rooms unlocked are the vestibule downstairs and this billiard room up here. The only two people in the place are Bowser, the doorkeeper, and Chetty, the little lame billiard marker."

"The two I mentioned?"

"Yes. Bowser has been in the

vestibule all the time. He's a great character in clubland. Knows everybody and has a reputation for infallibility. You couldn't break him down in the witness box."

"I've heard of him. He gave me a particularly baleful stare as I came in."

"That's his way. Does it to everybody. He's become a bit affected as these old figureheads do in time. He's been a power here for forty years, remember. Surly old chap, but he never forgets a face."

"Beastly for him. And who's this?" Campion indicated the white mound at their feet. "Just a poor wretched member?"

Oates spoke dryly. "That is Robert Fenderson, the man who exposed William Merton."

Campion was silent. The story of the Merton crash, which had entailed the arrest of the flamboyant financier after a thousand small speculators had faced ruin, was still fresh in everyone's mind.

Merton had been taken to the cells shouting threats at judge, jury and witnesses alike, and photographs of his heavy jaw and sultry eyes had appeared in every newspaper.

"Merton broke jail last night."

"Did he, by Jove!" Campion's brows rose. "Was he a member here?"

"Until his arrest. Knows the place like his own house. More than that, someone sent Fenderson a phony message this morning telling him to meet the club secretary here this afternoon at three.

"The secretary is away this weekend and knows nothing about it. I tell you, Campion, it's an open and

shut case—only Merton hasn't been here unless he flew in by the windows."

Campion glanced at the casements bolted against the heat.

"He hardly flew out again."

"Exactly, and there's nowhere for him to be hidden. Bowser swears that he went all over the club after lunch and found it deserted. Since then he's been on the door all the time. During the afternoon only one member came in, and that was Fenderson.

"The only other living soul to cross the threshold was Chetty, who is far too frail to have strangled a cat, let alone a man with a neck like Fenderson's. Bowser has a perfect view from his box of the street door, the staircase and this door. He insists he has neither slept nor left his seat. He's unshakable."

"Has the unyielding Bowser a soft spot for Merton?"

Oates was nettled. "I thought of that at once, naturally," he said acidly. "But the evidence is all the other way. One could even suspect Bowser of having a grudge against the chap. Merton made a complaint about him just before the crash. It was a stupid, petty quarrel—something about who should say 'Good morning' first, member or club servant?"

"Merton is like that, very self-important and a born bully. Bowser is a graceless, taciturn old chap, but I swear he's speaking the truth. He hasn't seen Merton this afternoon."

Mr. Campion glanced round the spacious room, its walls lined with cue-racks and an occasional bookcase.

"All of which leaves us with the lame marker, I take it," he ventured.

"The perishing little fool!" the superintendent exploded. "He isn't helping. He's gone to pieces and is trying to say he hasn't been here this afternoon. He lives in the mews at the back of the building, and he's trying to say he played hookey after lunch today—says he thought no one would be in to play.

"Actually anyone can see what did happen. He dropped in, found Fenderson didn't want a game, and went out again very sensibly. Now he doesn't want to appear as the last man to see the poor chap alive. I've told him he's doing himself no good by lying. Hang it all, Bowser *saw* him."

"And so?"

"And so there must be another way into this room, but I'm damned if I see it." The superintendent stalked over to the windows again and Campion stood watching him.

"I'd like a word with Bowser," Campion ventured at last.

"Have it. Have it by all means." Oates was exasperated. "I've put him through it very thoroughly, though. You'll never shake him."

Campion said nothing, but waited until the doorkeeper came in a few moments later, stalking gravely behind the sergeant who had been sent for him.

He was a typical man of trust, a little shaky now and in his seventies, but still an imposing figure with a wooden expression on a proud old face, chiefly remarkable for its firm mouth and bristling white eyebrows. He glowered at Campion and did not speak, but at the first question a

faint smile softened his lips.

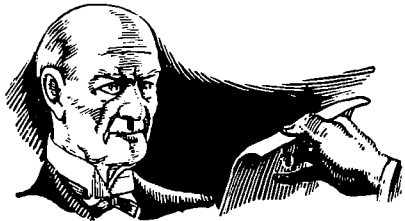
"How many times have I seen Chetty come into the club in my life, sir? Why, I shouldn't like to say—several thousand, must be."

"Has he always been lame?"

"Why, yes, sir. It's a deformity of the hip he's had all his life. He couldn't have done this, sir, any more than I could."

"I see." Campion went over to a bookcase at the far end of the long room and came back presently with something in his hand.

"Mr. Bowser, look at this," he said slowly. "I suggest to you that



it is a photograph of the man you really saw come in and go out of the club this afternoon when Mr. Fenderson was already here."

The old man's hand shook so violently that he could scarcely take the sheet, but he seized it at last and with an effort held it steady. He stared at it for a long time before returning it.

"No, sir," he said firmly. "That face is unknown to me. Chetty came in and went out. No one else, and that's the truth, sir."

"I believe you think it is, Bowser." Mr. Campion spoke gently and his lean face wore a curious expression in which pity predominated. "Here's your unseen door, Superintendent," he said softly.

Oates snatched the paper and turned it over. His eyes widened incredulously as he examined it.

"Good God—what's this?" he demanded. "It's a blank brown page. From the back of a book, wouldn't you say?"

Mr. Campion met his eyes, then smiled slowly.

"Bowser has just told us it's a face he doesn't know," he murmured. "You see, Oates, Bowser doesn't recognize faces, he recognizes voices. That's why he glares until people speak. Bowser didn't *see* Chetty this afternoon, he heard his very distinctive step—a step which Merton could imitate very easily.

"I fancy you'll find that, when there was that little unpleasantness earlier in the year, Merton guessed something which no one else in the club has known. When did it come on, Bowser?"

The old man stood trembling before them.

"I—I didn't want to have to leave the club, sir," he blurted out pathetically. "I knew everyone's voice. I

could still do my work. It's only got really bad in the last six months. My daughter comes and fetches me home at night. It *was* Chetty's step, sir, and I knew he could never have done it."

"Blind!" The word escaped the superintendent huskily. "Good Lord! Campion, how did you know?" There was a look of admiration in his eyes.

It was some time before Mr. Campion could be prevailed upon to tell him, and when he did he was suitably diffident.

"When I first passed through the hall, Bowser glared at me as I told you," he said. "But as I came upstairs I heard him say to a constable: 'Another detective, I suppose?'"

He paused, and his smile was engaging as he flicked an imaginary speck of dirt from an immaculate sleeve. Finally, he said with a slow and measured distinctness:

"I wondered then if there was something queer about his eyesight—no offense, of course, Oates old boy."

