

THE PARROT—

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Dodson threatened to change his will, which put Magiligan in a cold sweat, for he had managed to work up a well-arranged set of gambling debts. All this just to get "Nertz" McGinne a job.

That worthy gentleman of the rod pushed his bulk through the mist that night until he came upon old man Dodson's villa on the outskirts of a distant suburb. There was not a house within two blocks of the place, and old Dodson's life was that of a hermit.

But it didn't take long after that. "Nertz" blew the smoke from his barrel, tucked away his instrument of death, and prepared for his departure for town, where he would arrange an air-tight alibi, just in case. As he started his car, which had been parked a block down the road, he turned back and gazed at the house. He could hear the old man's parrot screaming with the excitement. Stupid things, parrots. Stupid man, Dodson—not to suspect that something of this sort would be afoot after what had happened. In fact, the whole mess was so stupidly easy that "Nertz" had enjoyed himself tremendously. He rubbed his chin tenderly as he pressed the starter button. He had tripped over a footstool and nearly broken his leg from the fall on the slippery floor. Stupid thing to do. Even he, himself, was acting kind of stupid tonight. Old man Dodson lay in a pool of his own blood, back there in the lighted room of the house.

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"No sir, Dean, you'll never put the bee on that boy," predicted Inspector Dean's assistant, Moxey.

"Don' know, Moxey, don' know." The Inspector turned the footstool over with his toe. One leg was broken from it. He gazed at the French windows that led to the veranda. One of them was open. He looked at the glass door-knob intently.

"No fingerprints," he announced. "Some smart bebbe. Kind of clumsy, though. He, or she, knocked the leg off this footstool when he, or she, tripped over it. And yet the guy was darn dumb, at that. He could have potted the old geezer from the window there, but no, he had to amble in and scare the old bloke nearly to insanity. And fell all over himself at the same time. Now if he—"

But at this point an ungodly, piercing screech stabbed them both to silence. Moxey flinched. The Inspector stood stiff, mouth hung open. It was the parrot. Again and again it screeched, sending unearthly, shrill cries, repeating again and again.

"Stop that fool thing," cried Moxey, making for the bird.

"Leave him alone!" the Inspector ordered. The bird went on screaming his repetition of nerve-jangling screechings. Moxey, considerably upset, dug his nails into the heels of his hands. The Inspector listened to the bird as a music lover would hear his favorite sym-

phony. At length he put the cover over the cage.

"The old man's nearest heir, I guess. That Magiligan woman."

"Anybody notified her about her uncle's death yet?"

"Nope. They're waiting 'til morning to do it. Figure the shock'll come easier on a good breakfast."

So the Inspector moved to the telephone and called her up at the unusual hour of three in the morning. When he got her on the wire, he asked her, "Do you know much about the parrot your uncle keeps?"

Evidently the reply was in the affirmative, for he continued, "Now there's nothing to get worried about. I just would like to find out about him. I'm a parrot fancier, and thought I'd inquire about the chances of getting him. Sure is a fine bird—Sure, at this time of the morning. Hope you won't mind too much—How does the parrot talk?—Poor pronunciation, eh?—Not distinct—Otherwise a wonderful bird. Sure. Where'd your uncle get him?—Malay, huh?—Talks only the best language and knows part of Hamlet's soliloquy! Why that's extraordinary!—Taught by an English prof at Columbia. Guess his language must be pretty choice. That's fine. I hate those swearing parrots. I once had a cook who kept one and it broke me of the habit of swearing, it sounded so bad—Eats only when fed by Mr. Dodson. That's too bad. Wonder if I could feed him—Not much chance, eh? That's too bad. Sure would like to own him. Maybe I will someday. Good-bye."

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"You're crazy, Dean, to pick up a guy on absolutely no evidence. If the D. A. hears of this, he'll give you the works. You can't get away with it. It's rank injustice."

"Nertz's" mouthpiece was pleading away, storming sometimes and imploring others. To no avail. Dean showed him to the door and offered to throw him through it.

"I think you're pulling a bone," stated Moxey. "The mouthpiece's right. When "Nertz" is sprung, he'll raise a stink. Besides, what in the devil could he possibly have to do with it? He's just a little two-by-four cheap racket mug. He couldn't kill a man if he wanted to."

The boys were coming out of the dark room now, hauling the limp form of "Nertz" between them. In the right hand of Saul, the chief ragger, was a signed confession of the killing, and the signature was "Nertz's. Moxey gawped in confusion, and turned a pair of unbelieving eyes on the Inspector.

"You strong-armed him," he accused. "He couldn't have done it. Not him."

"My boy," said Dean, "the things that happen most in this game are the things that just couldn't happen. You're finding that out."

"But—but he's got an airtight alibi."

"Fixing an alibi in this town is like shining your

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