



## POISONED HEARTS

By TED COUGHLAN

*Captain Conway has a difficult mystery to solve when grim death strikes down Rex Harvey in an inexplicable manner!*

THAT night, the three of them stayed in Harvey's Restaurant, smoldering hatred between them as usual. Stout, red-faced Rex Harvey, the restaurant owner, middle-aged Bill Winston, a runt of a man, in "reclaimed" second-hand clothes, and Eileen Winston, his pretty, plump wife.

A slovenly bus boy threw an embittered glance at Harvey's two lingering companions, then viciously began sweeping the floor without taking the trouble to wet down the dust. Rex Harvey pushed back his coffee cup and got to his feet. He didn't bother to reprimand his employee. "It's time to close up," he said. "Would you like to go

somewhere else? I hate to go home. Doctor Whitehurst is sure to be there with my wife and my brother-in-law. Whitehurst will be sitting in my favorite chair drinking my liquor and making eyes at my wife. Let's hunt up another place."

Bill Winston's heavy eyebrows met over his sunken gray eyes. Harvey was always talking about his possessions like his liquor and that trick chair he boasted about eternally. Without making a gesture at paying the check he rose.

"It's too late," he grumbled. "We'd better go home."

"I'll walk along with you," Harvey

said.

His hand slipped under Eileen Winston's dimpled elbow, helping her to her feet. Her wide, fuchsia-red lips stretched in a grateful smile. When her husband's back was turned she patted Harvey's arm tenderly.

Harvey linked his arm through hers, and followed Bill to the door. His face was shining as usual, but there was a deep furrow in his forehead as he eyed Winston.

"Can he be fool enough not to know, or—" he wondered. He didn't want to finish the thought, even to himself. Perhaps Eileen, too, put up with him only because he was—a big extent—the couple's bread and butter.

Outside, in the cool December evening, he shrugged his thoughts aside, walking up palm-lined Sarasota Boulevard, watching the shadows thrown by the three-quarter moon dance in Eileen's glossy black hair. Bill walked alone in front of the pair, his eyes on the ground, paying no visible attention to them. Harvey, heavy, stocky, got out of breath quickly, for his legs were too short for his torso, and he had to quicken his pace to keep in step with the tall, Junoesque girl.

None of them spoke until they came to the small, unpainted shack in the back of a densely wooded lot where Bill and Eileen lived.

"Won't you come in for a while, Rex?" Eileen invited Harvey in her husky, stage-loud voice.

Harvey hesitated before he spoke. He didn't want to go home.

"It's late—too late," Bill said. "Besides, I want to get in a couple of hours work before I go to bed. Good night, Harvey. See you tomorrow." It was a curt dismissal. "Go home and squeeze a drink out of that trick chair of yours—the one that you showed me."

HARVEY obviously longed to stay longer. "When do you expect to open your bookstore, Bill? Anything I can do to help?"

"You've done too much already," Winston answered gruffly. "I'll be ready to open in a few days. Good night." He took Eileen by the arm and almost pushed her inside.

Left alone, Harvey slowly turned away and walked moodily toward the parking lot where he had left his car. He started it jerkily, and drove toward home, subconsciously using the longest route. He saw the lights still blazing in the living room of his pretentious pink stucco house. There were two cars in the shiny asphalt driveway, so he parked his at the curb. For a while he sat sulkily at the wheel, then got out and dragged himself wearily along the flag-stone path.

It was exactly midnight when he walked into the cathedral living room. His small, youngish blond wife and her brother, the hatchet-faced Major Alexander Bloodworth of the Army Medical Corps, were playing bridge with Doctor Samson Whitehurst.

Mrs. Harvey glanced at her husband. Her finely-plucked eyebrows rose questioningly.

"Where have you been?" she demanded. "You knew I was having guests." There was restrained anger in her low voice.

Harvey shrugged his stocky shoulders and passed his hand wearily over his tired eyes. "You didn't want me here. How are you?" His look and question took in both men.

"Just fine." Dr. Whitehurst's steady gray eyes bored into Harvey's. "Did you go to the hospital for that check-up?"

Harvey nodded, as he seated himself in his favorite chair.

"Yes. They say I'm sound. If I were ten years younger, I'd be A-one. Join me in a nightcap before I go to bed?"

The highballs were passed around. Harvey drained his in one gulp, laid his glass on the butterfly-inlaid tray, and turned toward the door.

“Good night.” His voice was impersonally polite.

Halfway up the circular staircase, he clutched at his throat. With a moan, he grabbed at the banister.

He swayed, fell over, rolled down the tiled stairs, and landed in a twisted heap in the narrow hallway.

Bloodworth was the first to reach him. He listened for Harvey’s heartbeat, felt Harvey’s pulse, and shook his own billiard-bald head. Then he turned solicitously to his sister.

“I’m sorry, Susan. It was his heart.”

Fearfully catching the significance of the word “was,” Susan Harvey bent over the body of her husband. Her greenish eyes stared at the floor, and her body went rigid. For a moment it looked as if she were about to collapse; then she recovered herself.

“Are you sure?” she asked. “It doesn’t seem possible—”

Again Bloodworth shook his head, this time with sad finality. Authoritatively he took her by the arm and led her to a living room couch. Returning to the hall, he turned to Dr. Whitehurst.

“Help me get him upstairs. Then I’ll call the funeral parlor and make arrangements.” His voice was cold, as if touched by the icy breath of the recent death.

“I don’t think we’d better move him.” Whitehurst looked from the twisted corpse to the telephone underneath the stairway. “He died so suddenly, it might be better to call the police first.”

“There’s no need for the police,” Bloodworth contradicted him almost savagely. “He died from heart failure. Why make things any worse for Susan? Gosh knows, she went through enough with him while he was alive, without trying to rake up a scandal, now that he’s gone.”

Whitehurst was still hesitant. “As a doctor, are you willing to sign the death

certificate, Major?”

“Of course, I am!” Bloodworth snapped,

“I—I’m not so sure, you should. You heard what he said about the examination he had this afternoon. If there was nothing wrong with his heart, this death seems strange.”

Bloodworth’s voice rose to an angry pitch. “Nonsense. Old Jurgens probably gave him one of his superficial goings over. Well, are you going to help me move him from here?”

“After I make a telephone call.” Whitehurst dialed a number.

“Dr. Jurgens? I’m sorry to disturb you at this time of the night, but—” He went on and told Jurgens what had happened, then added: “Did you examine his heart this afternoon?”

Getting the answer, he frowned and broke the connection.

ALMOST at once, he nervously dialed another number. His voice was determined, when he spoke.

“Police headquarters? May I speak to Captain Conway?” After a short wait, he spoke again. “Hello, Captain. This is Dr. Whitehurst. Please, come out to Seventeen Hundred Poinciana Avenue. Bring the medical examiner with you . . . Yes, sudden death. All right, I’ll see that nothing is disturbed until you get here.”

He hung up and explained to Bloodworth, who was staring at him angrily.

“I had to call him. Jurgens insists that he examined Rex Harvey thoroughly this afternoon, and positively states that there was nothing wrong with his heart. You’d better go in and prepare Susan for another shock. I’ll wait out here until the police arrive.”

When the door chimes rang, a few minutes later, Dr. Whitehurst admitted the bulky police captain, two uniformed officers, and Doctor McKenzie, the short, plump

medical examiner. Without waiting even to greet his colleague, the M.E. dropped to one knee by the body, opened his bag, and began his investigation.

Captain Conway shook hands with Whitehurst. His large brown eyes twinkled, and there was an upcurve to his lips as he glanced at the busy medical examiner.

"Tell me what happened, doctor."

Whitehurst told him the details from the time of Harvey's arrival home until his death.

"I may be out of order calling you," he added apologetically. "However, in view of what Dr. Jurgens said, I wanted to be on the safe side."

"I hope it's not murder, but you did the right thing in any case," Conway complimented him. "Who else was in the house when it happened?"

"His wife, brother, and myself. We were playing a last rubber of bridge when he came home."

"Where are the others?"

"In the living room. Do you have to question them?"

"Not unless it turns out to be suspicious."

Conway approached the still crouched figure of the medical examiner. "How does it look to you, Mac?"

"Murder." The medical examiner grunted the word without even looking up. "Give me time and I'll tell more about it; then maybe you can tell me who did it." He stood up and spoke to Dr. Whitehurst for the first time: "Hello, Doctor. You mean to tell me you didn't know what happened to him?"

"I didn't try to find out. Bloodworth seemed satisfied that it was heart failure. I only sent for you to salve my own conscience."

Dr. McKenzie looked up at the much taller Captain Conway. McKenzie's impish middle-aged face was creased with lines, his

manner that of a saucy bluejay. He practically strutted.

"He was poisoned," McKenzie announced. "Arsenic or aconite. Don't ask me which until I get a chance to look at his innards. Can I take him away?"

Conway shook his large blond head.

"Not until the boys take a couple of shots. Hang around, they'll be through in a hurry." He motioned to the uniformed policeman who held a camera, then beckoned to Whitehurst. "Let's go into the living room and see the others."

Whitehurst introduced Captain Conway to Mrs. Harvey and her brother. The Captain nodded acknowledgement. Then standing with his back to the door, he made an apology.

"I'm sorry to butt in on you at this time, but the Medical Examiner opines that Mr. Harvey was murdered. Tell me, Mrs. Harvey, was there anyone else in the house this evening?"

"Only the maid," Mrs. Harvey said falteringly. "She's probably gone to bed." The widow was sitting straight on the edge of the modern sofa. "I—I'm sure there must be a mistake, George."

"Now, Susan, control yourself," Dr. Bloodworth laid a soothing hand on her shaking shoulder, then turned to Conway.

"Must you question my sister now, Captain? It is clear that she has had enough shock for one night."

"I'm afraid I'll have to, but I'll be as easy with her as possible." Conway nodded sympathetically to the widow.

"At what time did your husband come home?"

"Midnight." Mrs. Harvey started crying loudly, apparently unable to control herself. Conway shrugged. No use questioning a woman in this condition. He looked at Whitehurst.

"You were here when he came in. Tell

me just what happened.”

Whitehurst sat down, sipped at a tall drink, and retold his story. The detective thoughtfully rubbed his chin stubble.

“Who mixed the drinks?”

“Mrs. Harvey poured them, I believe.”

CONWAY walked over to the table which held the now empty glasses.

“Which one did he drink from?”

“It’s hard to remember. But it was one of these, I think,” he pointed to the three tall glasses sitting on a damp tray. “I’m afraid you’ll have to examine them all.”

Bloodworth, who had succeeded in quieting Mrs. Harvey somewhat, broke into the conversation.

“This is a lot of nonsense, Captain. I’m sure the M.E. made too hasty a diagnosis. Rex did die from heart failure. The least you can do is make sure of the cause of death before subjecting us to this cross-examination.”

“I have no reason to doubt McKenzie,” Conway declared tentatively. “What I would like to know is—why are you so all fired anxious to stop an investigation? I think you’d better tell me what you know, and stop shielding the person you apparently think responsible for the death. It’ll be better in the long run.”

Bloodworth paled imperceptibly.

“You should know better than that, Captain!” he blustered. “In my position I couldn’t afford to shield a killer, even if I had any desire to. If, as you insist, it was murder, the mere fact that he died in the house doesn’t mean that one of us had anything to do with his death.”

Again Conway studied the face of the belligerent physician.

“If it was either aconite or arsenic as McKenzie thinks, then he must have taken it after he came home. These poisons kill quickly, as you ought to know. But, I want to be sure, so perhaps you know where he spent

the evening.”

Bloodworth looked at Mrs. Harvey. She nodded.

“I guess he was out with his friends, the Winstons,” he told the detective. “He spent most of his spare time in their company. They probably ended up as non-paying customers at Rex’s restaurant. They generally did that.”

Conway called in a uniformed policeman.

“Drive down to Harvey’s restaurant, and find out if the owner was in there between eleven and twelve, and with whom. If it was the Winstons, pick them both up and bring them out here.”

The policeman was leaving the room when Mrs. Harvey’s hysterical voice stopped him.

“Don’t you dare bring them here! I won’t have that woman in this house!”

Conway shrugged and changed his order. “Find out if they’re home and call me here.”

After the policeman left, Conway spoke to the photographer.

“Dust those glasses. See which has Harvey’s prints on it, and then send all three down to the lab. Tell them to give me a quick report on what’s-in them. There’s plenty left for an analysis.” He watched the man applying the powder to the glasses. The prints showed up clearly.

“How’m I gonna tell which are his?” the photographer asked. “We haven’t got a record of any of them, as far as I know.”

“You know where to get Harvey’s, don’t you?” Conway suggested grimly.

“Why don’t you get it off your chest, Major?” he asked Bloodworth. “It’s obvious you either killed Harvey yourself, or know who did.”

Bloodworth grew furious.

“You have no right to make such an accusation,” he shouted. Then his tone grew calmer. “Just because I wanted to spare my

sister from being grilled, is no reason for you to think that I know anything about his death. I still say he died from heart failure. The autopsy will bear me out.”

“Sure—heart failure,” Conway said sarcastically. “All people die from heart failure. But in this case, it was brought on by a too-big dose of some lethal drug. Well, have it your own way, but it’s only going to make things tougher for all of you—”

He broke off, and answered the ringing telephone.

“I’m leaving here for a while,” he informed nobody in particular. “See to it, that none of you leave the house until I get back. By that time we’ll know whether you or Doc McKenzie is right. I’m betting on McKenzie.”

Without a backward glance, he strode out of the room, stopping only long enough to say something to the patrolman at the door.

It was already dawn when Conway reached Winston’s cottage. He walked right in and introduced himself to Bill and Eileen Winston.

“Were you two out with Rex Harvey last night?”

BILL’S thick graying eyebrows drew together. “Sure, what of it?”

“What time did he leave you?”

“About a quarter to twelve, I guess. Why?”

Conway reprimanded him. “I’m asking the questions. Did you have supper together?”

Bill’s frown grew fiercer. “Sure. In his joint. Just before we came home.”

“What did he have to eat?” Conway asked.

“Just coffee, I think. Did he have anything else, Eileen?” He threw a quick glance at his wife’s strained face. She shook her head silently.

“Why?” she asked Conway. “What’s all this about? Has anything happened to Rex?” Her eyes widened in anxious

anticipation of his answer.

“He’s dead,” Conway finally told them. “Poisoned. I’ve got to know exactly how long it was between the time he drank that coffee and the time he arrived at his own home. Do either of you remember when it was you left the restaurant?”

Eileen’s eyes grew larger. Suddenly she started to cry. At first dry sobs racked her body. Soon, however, the dam of tears broke, and they streamed down her over-rouged cheeks. She let out one loud scream, and started moaning. Her husband grabbed her by the shoulder and shook her roughly.

“Oh, shut up!” His voice was curt. “Don’t make a fool of yourself. If he’s dead, he’s dead, and there’s nothing you can do about it.”

“Well, do you remember?” Conway asked. The question only started Eileen crying more loudly. The detective looked with irritated helplessness from the woman to her husband. “Can’t you stop her?” he asked.

“Sure.” Bill walked into the kitchen and came back with a glass of water. He flung it into his wife’s face, snarling at her. “Come on, cut out the nonsense! You don’t need to advertise the fact that you were in love with the—him,” He looked at Conway. “She’ll quit now. Sit down, sir.”

Both men sat down gingerly on rickety chairs, facing one another.

“It was exactly twenty-five minutes to twelve when we left his place,” Bill Winston said. “I remember, because the busboy almost swept us out in his rush to get through.”

Conway’s glance slowly covered the small, over-furnished room.

“What do you do for a living?”

“Write.” Bill Winston pointed to his chipped mahogany desk on which stood a battered typewriter and a box of cheap paper. “South American tripe mostly.”

“Does it pay well?”

“No. If it weren’t for her job, and—”

Bill stopped, shrugged his shoulders and went on. "You might as well hear it from me before some other people get a chance to give you too distorted a story." He paused to wet his lips with his tongue. "Rex Harvey practically supported us. I'm figuring on opening a bookstore in the next few days. He even financed that."

Conway's sleepy-looking eyes suddenly grew alert.

"I think I can guess the rest, then. You're just the type to do it. You were fed up with his generosity. The more he did for you, the more you hated him. Tonight you slipped a shot of aconite into his coffee. Isn't that the way it happened?"

Bill Winston didn't even look surprised. His full lips curled in the semblance of a smile, but his usually brusque voice was quiet as he answered the accusation.

"You've got me doped about right, Captain, but that's all. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I didn't kill him, much as I'd have been willing to. You know, if I slipped him that kind of a Mickey at eleven thirty-five, he'd never have gotten home alive, and I'm telling the truth about the time. You can check on it easily enough."

Captain Conway scrutinized the expression on the embittered man's face.

"I'm halfway inclined to believe you, but you'd better come along with me, anyway, both of you. Until I check with McKenzie, I'd rather keep both of you in sight."

"Okay by me," Bill grunted. "Put on your coat, Eileen, and let's get going."

THEY left the house, and the detective drove them to Harvey's home. When he parked in the now car-filled driveway, he spoke to them.

"I'd better not bring you in, yet. I've had enough crying women for one night." He pointed to a policeman at the door. "He'll see that you stay here."

Inside the house, Conway called the

M.E. to one side.

"Is it possible that Harvey swallowed that poison as much as half an hour before he died?" he asked.

McKenzie nodded his gray, bull-like head.

"Maybe. It all depends. If it was arsenic, sure. I'd hate to make a rash statement about aconite, but it would still be possible. The stuff acts faster with some folks than others. I can tell you for sure after the autopsy."

"Thanks. If the photographer is through, you can take the body away." He looked around the garishly furnished living room. Bloodworth and Whitehurst were still there, but Mrs. Harvey was gone. Anticipating his question, Bloodworth scowled belligerently.

"I gave her a sedative and sent her to bed."

Conway threw him a quick look.

"Well, what about those glasses?" he asked the photographer.

"His prints weren't there, and the lab says there's nothing more potent than Black Label in them."

Bloodworth smiled for the first time, with faint relief. "What did I tell you? It shows that your examiner is all wet."

Conway shook his head.

"If his prints weren't on any of those glasses, it just shows that he drank from another one. Have you tried to find it, Jack?"

The photographer frowned.

"Sure, but it ain't here."

Conway walked to the front door, and spoke to the policeman.

"Bring the Winstons in."

Bill and Eileen walked hesitantly into the living room. Without a word to anyone, Bill Winston looked around, picked out the most comfortable chair, and heavily slumped into it. His wife, still sobbing, stood uncertainly in the middle of the room. At a

gesture from Conway, she sat on the edge of a straight-back chair. Bill Winston lighted a cigarette, leaned back.

“Well, which one of them did it, Captain?” he asked. “They’re both as glad as I am to see him out of the way.”

Conway glared at him.

“What do you mean by that?” he demanded.

Bill shrugged.

“Bloodworth never approved of his sister marrying a man who ran a restaurant. Figured he wasn’t good enough for her. He’s been wanting her to divorce him ever since Harvey built this house and put it in her name. The good doctor had no love for him.” Bill nodded toward Doctor Whitehurst. “But Rex was a heavy contributor to Whitehurst’s pet charity clinic. Did the doctor tell you how much Rex willed him?”

“No, he didn’t,” Conway snapped. “If you know so much, you tell me.”

“I don’t know,” Bill said calmly. “I’m only figuring it out from the way Harvey spoke. Maybe he didn’t even leave a will.”

“Do either of you know if he did?” Conway asked, looking from Bloodworth to Whitehurst.

Whitehurst opened his mouth, but Bloodworth spoke first.

“Yes, he did leave a will.” Bloodworth glared at Bill. “For your information Harvey left everything he had to his wife.”

“Okay, so I’m wrong again.” Bill Winston smiled faintly. “How about a drink?”

His hand groped along the side of the chair in which he sat. He pressed a hidden button under the arm and the upholstered side of the chair opened, disclosing a small built-in tray. There was a tall glass on it. Bill picked it up and started for the whisky decanter.

“Hey, wait a minute” exclaimed Conway. “Give me that glass. If you want a drink, get another.”

BILL handed the glass to the detective. Conway took it gingerly and put it to his nostrils, then called the photographer again.

“This must be it, Jack,” Conway said. “Find out.”

While Jack was testing the glass for fingerprints, Conway faced the others in the room. He scowled as he glared at them all.

“One of you is holding something back,” he said, his gaze centering on Bloodworth. “I think it is you, Major. The way it looks to me, either you or Mrs. Harvey put that poison in Harvey’s glass—the glass you knew he would use when he sat in his favorite chair. I—”

“That’s a lie!” interrupted Major Bloodworth in sudden anger. “I didn’t do it, and neither did my sister!”

“Naturally you’d try to shield her if you knew she did it,” said Conway. “Or maybe you did it yourself and are trying to bluff your way out of it.” He frowned. “I’m getting Mrs. Harvey down here right now and we’re going to have this settled before I leave.”

“I—I want to go home,” Eileen Winston spoke nervously. Abruptly she stood up. “I can’t bear being here when she comes downstairs.”

“Sit down, please, Mrs. Winston,” Conway ordered quietly. “No one is leaving just yet.” He watched her as she sank back into her chair. “Neither you nor your husband are in the clear. It’s quite possible that one of you poisoned Harvey in the restaurant, and he managed to reach home before he died.”

“That’s impossible, Captain,” Bill said with conscious superiority. “If you knew as much about aconite as I do, you’d never make such a statement.”

“Is that so?” Conway glared at Bill Winston. “And where did you get so much information about it?”

“From studying the subject of poisons.”



“Oh, then maybe, knowing so much, you could have doctored the aconite a bit before giving it to Harvey to make sure he got home before it took effect.” Conway turned to the doctor. “Would you say that was possible, Doctor Whitehurst?”

The doctor walked the length of the room and back before he answered. He seemed to be fighting a battle with himself. His voice was low and intense when he spoke.

“I hate to say this, Captain,” he said. “It sounds too much like a direct accusation, but since it is bound to come out later anyway.” He hesitated and shrugged his shoulders. “I’ve had many discussions with Mr. Winston. For a layman, he is exceedingly well versed in toxicology. Frankly, I don’t know of any way to delay the action of aconite, but I wouldn’t be surprised if he did.”

“Well, what do you say to that, Winston?” Conway demanded.

Bill stood up, stretching his short, thin arms over his head. He yawned deliberately, more to annoy Conway than anything else.

“The first time I ever saw aconite was in Virginia,” he said. “It is known by the more common name of Wolf’s Bane down there. The American variety, which isn’t as potent as the Asiatic, grows to a height of three or four feet. It has bright green, petiolate leaves about two or three inches in length, and has pretty white flowers on a trailing stem. To the uninitiated, it looks somewhat like horseradish, but you’ll find a big difference if you happen to eat any of it.”

“What’s the idea of the botanical lecture?” Conway snapped in an irritated tone.

“It sort of ties up with this chair.” Bill pointed to the seat he had vacated. “Both the aconite and the chair came from the same place. You might call them gifts from a murderer!”

“Gifts!” exclaimed Major Bloodworth. “Good grief! Doctor Whitehurst gave Rex that chair!”

The doctor snarled and dashed for the door. Conway grabbed for Whitehurst and missed. Bill stuck out his foot as the doctor tried to rush by him. Whitehurst tripped and went down hard. Captain Conway got him before he could rise and snapped a pair of handcuffs on the doctor’s wrists.

SOME of Conway’s men appeared and took charge of the prisoner. The captain turned to Bill.

“Looks as if you found the killer, all right,” Conway said. “What’s the rest of it, Winston?”

“All I know is that Doctor Whitehurst gave that trick chair to Rex on his birthday,” Bill said. “It was at the doctor’s Virginia home I first made the acquaintance of American aconite. I just put two and two together and hoped for the best. With the aid of your fingerprints experts, your laboratory technicians, and your medical examiner you can probably learn how Harvey was given the poison—either from the hidden glass or perhaps from the chair itself.”

“Yes, but the motive?” demanded Conway slowly, and then his eyes gleamed. “Of course—they hated each other—that was it. The motive was so commonplace, I couldn’t see it.”

“I was beginning to wonder how long it would take you to see how they felt toward one another,” Bill said. “I’ll make a prediction right now. Doctor Whitehurst’s defense will be that he had been treating Harvey for acute coryza, which Rex never had, and the traces of aconite the M.E. finds in his innards came from the medicine used for that.”

“All right,” Conway said to the uniformed policemen who were holding Doctor Whitehurst. “Take him down to the station.”

Doctor Whitehurst was led away, his face as expressionless as a surgical mask. Eileen fumbled in her bag when she found

herself alone in the room with the three men. She drew out a crumpled letter and handed it to Conway.

“Read it,” she said.

Conway’s eyes traveled swiftly over the sheet.

He glanced up as he finished reading.

“This appears to be a very intimate love letter from Mrs. Harvey to Doctor Whitehurst,” he remarked. “Where and when did you get this?”

“When we were visiting them last summer,” Eileen answered. “I picked this up where the colored boy, who Mrs. Harvey and the doctor used as a messenger, dropped it. I kept it to salve my own conscience I told myself that I was not hurting her. Rex’s love for her was dead long ago—just as he is now. I didn’t know the doctor had killed him but I suspected he might have done it.” She looked pleadingly at her husband. “Oh, Bill, I’ve been such a fool!”

“The set-up tonight was too good for Whitehurst to pass up,” Conway said. “With any kind of a break for him, either you, Winston, Major Bloodworth, or Mrs. Harvey

could have been convicted of his crime. He was so sure of himself he insisted upon an investigation, figuring this attitude would naturally keep anybody from suspecting him.”

“It nearly did,” Bill said. “When I found it looked as if I was going to be one of the main suspects, I knew I had to work fast. I remember the way Rex was always boasting about the secret compartment in that trick chair. Then when I noticed the compartment wasn’t open I decided the police hadn’t looked there, so I pushed the button that opened it.”

“Good thing you did,” said Conway. “It solved the case.”

“Sure.” Bill Winston took his wife by the arm and possessively led her toward the door. “I’ve been pretty weak, but from now on I’m going to be a reformed character.” He looked hard at Eileen. “The next time I catch you making sheep eyes at another man I’m going to give you a good crack in the jaw. Remember that!”

“Yes, Bill.” There was a new note of respect in Eileen’s voice. “I’ll remember, darling.”