

In the MURDERER'S BRAIN



By RAY KING

IN THE mid-forties of New York City, not far from Fifth Avenue, stands the huge building which houses the Scientific Crime Club.

The club's luxurious quarters are on the roof, far removed from the turmoil of busy city streets. There is a little garden of pebbled winding paths between flower beds and trellises, with a splashing fountain in its center.

One of the rooms has sliding walls and roof which in pleasant weather may be opened to the sky. And there are other rooms of luxurious leather lounging chairs, a little bar and restaurant with white-coated attendants.

Bridge and chess tables are here; a billiard room; a small bowling alley; a shooting gallery; a small gymnasium and pool.

Outwardly they are rooms for wealthy men at play.

But some of them are very strangely equipped.

One is crowded with expensive devices of modern science; an electrical laboratory; a room equipped for research chemistry and physics. And there is a room which would seem to be a theatrical storehouse—scenery, props of every imaginable kind, ranged in an orderly litter. They are the club's equipment when it is at work.

No one, visiting the club for the first time, would think of it as more than a playground.

But the lighting effects of its rooms can be made extraordinary, for they have wiring as intricate as any theatrical stage.

There are ingenious secret panels in

some of the walls; hidden traps in the floor and the roof—an amazing equipment which may not be used for a year but is always available for the scientific probing of the minds of suspected criminals who may be brought here.

The club members, largely, are wealthy professional men. Upon a warm summer night, a group of them were gathered in one of the lounging rooms.

Some club members were here by chance; others had been summoned as spectators and participants, in a case which just today had come before the club.

The services of the members—the resources of the club—have for years been at the disposal of the police, or any individual who cares to demand them.

The cases come at irregular intervals, generally from the police of New York City and its outlying districts—clueless affairs, usually, with definite suspects upon whom, by ordinary police methods, guilt would probably never be fastened.

The case, tonight, was typical. The Psychologist, lounging in his chair with his fellow members around him, was saying:

It's a pathetic affair, gentlemen. The girl—she was only sixteen—killed herself last evening. And perhaps almost simultaneously, her father was murdered."

"How do you know she killed herself?" the Banker demanded. "Why not a double murder?"

"The facts are against it," the Psychologist said. "The thing happened in Maple Grove—just about this time last evening. Peter Mackenzie and his daughter, Alice. They lived in a small but very respectable lodging house. He was a widower—a glass blower in the Torrence Glass Works out there. And the girl kept house for him."

"SHE took poison, I understand," the Doctor interjected.

"Why?" asked the Very Young Man eagerly. "Was she a pretty girl, Dr. Allaire?"

"They say she was," the Psychologist answered. "An old-fashioned sort of girl. Her father brought her here from Scotland, just after she was born. The father was a man of fifty. You know the type—industrious, thrifty, squarely solid both in physical build and in character. A plain man, of doggedly high principles. And he brought his daughter up in just that fashion. They say the girl was dutiful, gentle, sweet—"

"And she killed herself," the Very Young Man sighed. "I wish I had known her. Maybe then—"

"At nine o'clock last evening," the Psychologist went on, "Peter Mackenzie is known to have gone out and left his daughter at home. They were both agitated—the landlady heard their voices, but nothing that they said. At ten o'clock she went up to see Alice. The girl was lying on her bed, unconscious from an overdose of sedative. She never recovered consciousness; she died at dawn today. And last night—at nine-thirty while the girl was ending her life—less than two miles away her father was being murdered."

"And there is a clear connection?" the Lawyer asked.

"There is indeed." The grey-haired, distinguished-looking Psychologist sat up in his chair, smoothing a crumpled bit of paper in his hand. "Here is the note she left—pathetic, simple words. He read:

Father darling— He doesn't love me, so why bother? I hope you tell him so. But even as much as I love you, I cannot live without him. Oh please forgive me—

THERE was a brief silence, the men staring at the Psychologist put the smudged, tear-stained bit of paper back into his pocket. Then the Lawyer said:

"It seems obvious that her father went to meet the man she loved."

"Exactly," the Psychologist agreed. "That inference is plain. They met. And the unknown man killed Mackenzie—on a bridge high over the Central Railroad tracks in the outskirts of Maple Grove. We have a witness to it. The 9.28 train for New York had just left the Maple Grove station.

"It wasn't going very fast when it reached the bridge. The engineer plainly saw two men high up there—the silhouettes of them. He saw the murderer shoving Mackenzie—and saw Mackenzie come hurtling down—striking, not the track on which the train was advancing, but the one adjacent. The fall killed him. The murderer perhaps had intended to throw him in front of the train—"

"If the engineer saw the murderer, what did he look like?" the Lawyer demanded.

"Just a bareheaded silhouette. No details. The silhouette of a man peering down; then running away. Now gentlemen, you can see easily why Marberry, of Maple Grove, referred the case to us. This man whom the little Alice loved more than her father or her life—only she and her father knew his identity. And there you have the murder motive. This stern old Scotchman, meeting this man—"

"The murderer felt that he could control the girl?" the Astronomer suggested.

"Or perhaps he would have murdered her later," the Psychologist said. "Her suicide saved him the trouble. The case, gentlemen, by inference, is extraordinarily simple. But that, indeed, is exactly why the police are balked. There

are no tangible clues. Nothing but inference—an assumption of what happened and why it happened."

"Which wouldn't get very far before a jury," the Lawyer interjected. "Defense counsel would knock that sort of evidence into a cocked hat."

"Exactly," the Psychologist agreed. "We have the suspects—and nothing else. It wasn't hard, even in a few short hours today, for Marberry to locate the possible men for whom Alice Mackenzie could have had this attachment.

"There are only two. A young fellow named George Bolton who works in an office here in New York; and a rich widower of thirty—an ex-actor named Thomas Dale, who was fortunate in a mining speculation and now has retired from business. Both were seen frequently in the girl's company—old Mackenzie seemed to like them both."

"And where were they last evening?" the Lawyer demanded.

The Psychologist smiled wryly.

"Marberry has been grilling them all day. Young Bolton was in his Maple Grove boarding house room—on the ground floor so that he could easily have gone in and out the window without attracting attention. Thomas Dale was alone in his Maple Grove apartment, with a private entrance to the street so that no one but himself can say whether he was there all evening or not."

"And it's up to us to make the choice," the Very Young Man exclaimed. "But how in the devil—"

"I've sent for them," the Psychologist said. "They'll be here any minute. Now gentlemen, there is little for you to do—most of it negative. You may hear, for instance, a queer grinding, clicking noise. Ignore it! Pretend it does not exist. I want the murderer perhaps to

think he is imagining it.”

The Psychologist’s lean, sensitive face was grim now as he added:

“The guilt is in the brain of one of these two men. I’m going to drag it out—without him knowing it.”

A club attendant appeared at the door of the room. “George Bolton is here to see Dr. Allaire.”

“Send him in.” The Psychologist stood up. “The idea is, gentlemen,” he added hurriedly, “I’ve told both these suspects that a wealthy, eccentric criminologist is interested in the case—that he is convinced they are both innocent—has hired me scientifically to demonstrate it. Whether they believe that or not is immaterial. Neither dared refuse to come. So you gentlemen act with the assumption of sympathy. An experiment in applied psychology—to prove innocence, not guilt. And we will—”

GEORGE BOLTON entered the room and stood staring, surprised, confused by the number of men all of whom were gazing at him intently. He was a tall, blond, broad-shouldered, very handsome young fellow, dressed in a neat dark business suit.

“Dr.—Allaire?” he said hesitantly.

“I am Dr. Allaire,” the Psychologist said. He indicated a chair. “Sit down, please. Thank you for coming, Mr. Bolton.”

The young man smiled. “OK—how do you do? I thought I’d gotten into the wrong room.”

“These gentlemen are my fellow club members,” the Psychologist explained. “I need not introduce them by name. Gentlemen, this is Mr. Bolton. The police seem to think he might be guilty of the crime I’ve been describing to you.”

Young Bolton smiled nervously at the men as he sat down. “The police have

been pretty tough on me all day. What is it you want of me, Dr. Allaire? Lord knows I’ve already told—”

Again the attendant appeared. “Mr. Thomas Dale is here, Dr. Allaire.”

“Send him in, Arthur.”

At the name, young Bolton had leaped to his feet. “Dale? Why you didn’t tell me—what is this, some more inquisition?”

“No,” the Psychologist smiled. “Quite the reverse. Sit down, Mr. Bolton. The police told me that was one of your troubles—you’re too impetuous. If I can prove your innocence, you’ll be free of the police. Don’t you understand? As things are, they can’t prove a thing but they’ll hound you, trying and hoping—”

But the young man wasn’t listening. With flushed face, he stared at the door where now Thomas Dale stood calmly surveying the room.

“Dr. Allaire?”

“I am Dr. Allaire. Come in, Mr. Dale.”

The Psychologist introduced the club members. The second suspect was an extreme contrast to young Bolton—a man of thirty, short but powerfully built. His dark hair was thinning at the temples. His smooth-shaven face of rugged features, was somewhat pale. He had been an actor, and it showed now in the self-possession with which he acknowledged the introductions. And then his quiet gaze landed upon Bolton who was standing with clenched fists.

“How do you do, Bolton?” he said. “I didn’t know you had been invited here. Where do you want me to sit, Dr. Allaire?”

Certainly there was no love lost between the two men. The Psychologist placed them in small chairs, side by side. They were diagonally facing the intent group of club members, with the

Psychologist standing before them.

"I owe you both an explanation," he began quietly. "I have been commissioned to try and produce some evidence that will persuade the police to let you alone. My client is aware that there is no evidence against either of you—"

"Who is your client?" Bolton asked. "Is he here? No one is interested in me—"

"I am not at liberty to name him," the Psychologist said. "Perhaps it is myself? Why not? I am interested—well, to be frank, if not in you two, certainly in applied psychology."

He smiled at the two men, who now were staring at him with an almost breathless intentness. And it was obvious that both of them considered his words as a preface to some new questioning with the same purpose the police had had all day.

One was guilty? One innocent? No choice could be made from their outward aspect. Wholly different types, they had balked the police: young Bolton with an impetuous angry flush, or grim sullenness; and Thomas Dale with a seemingly quiet desire to give all the information he could, and an imperturbable self-possession.

"It is not my purpose to question you," the Psychologist went on. "A man—as the police have told you—was seen killing Peter Mackenzie. Unfortunately the witness cannot describe that man. It could have been either of you—or anyone of a thousand other men—"

"Which is very hard on us," Dale said.

"It is indeed. I quite agree with you. To come to the point—I have invited these gentlemen here as witnesses to an experiment in psychology— Wait a minute, Mr. Bolton—don't interrupt me, please. You are both innocent—you have told the police so. And both of you know by now, very well indeed, that there is not a

particle of evidence against either one of you—"

He paused, and then he abruptly added:

"You don't know, do you, anything of what happened between Mackenzie and his murderer on that bridge?"

"I do not," Bolton said.

"How could I?" Dale said.

"My idea is, to tell you what happened," the Psychologist continued. He smiled faintly. "Not that I know what happened, because I don't. But what I tell you, I want you to remember. Will you try?"

"I don't understand—" Dale began. Then both he and Bolton nodded dubiously. The watching men could not miss the fact that both were frightened. But still there could be no choice: a guilty man, afraid of exposure—but an innocent man would also be afraid that by some mischance he would be incriminated.

"Yes," they both said. And Dale added, "I'll try my best to do whatever you suggest."

"Thanks."

An abrupt tenseness seemed to come to the room as the Psychologist took a folded sheet of paper from his pocket, and adjusted his glasses.

"I have here some notes I made on what probably happened up there on the bridge. I am going to read them to you—I want you to listen carefully. The theory is—into your empty mind I am going to put these facts. They are quite simple. I want you to engrave them there in your brain."

HE stared at the flushed young Bolton and the pale Thomas Dale. Perhaps one of them now had a wild desire to withdraw, but if so, he did not dare show it.

"Are you ready?" the Psychologist added quietly.

Again they both nodded. Very

slowly, with careful but drab intonation which emphasized no word, the Psychologist read:

“The murderer led his victim onto the bridge. They talked in the moonlight about Alice. They were angry. The murderer said, ‘I never made love to her.’ Then they sat on the bench by the rail and the victim said, ‘But it is not like my child. You cannot make me believe it.’ The victim was toying with a blue cap in his hand. Then a moment later the murderer pushed him over the rail. He fell to the railroad track and lay crumpled between the gleaming rails with the moonlight bathing him.”

The room was heavily silent as the Psychologist paused. And looking up from his notes, he added:

“That’s clear, isn’t it? I want you to memorize it, not necessarily word for word, but the exact sense of it. I’ll read it again.”

Even more slowly, more drably than before, he repeated it. And then at once added:

“You, Jack Bruce—”

From across the room the Very Young Man looked startled.

“Yes, sir?”

“Just beyond that door—” the Psychologist gestured, “I put a small table with some articles on it. Bring it in, will you please? Carefully, Jack—”

The Very Young Man hastened to obey, and came back at once from the adjoining room dragging a small square table with a group of miscellaneous articles spread upon it.

“Here you are, Dr. Allaire.”

“Thanks, Jack.”

The Psychologist drew the table before young Bolton and Thomas Dale who stared at it silently. Without speaking, the Psychologist touched a switch. The

roomlights faded. Shadows enveloped all the intent men, and from the ceiling a narrow white beam of light came down to illumine the table with the objects lying there fully revealed in the white glare.

The Psychologist was in the shadow. Close at the edge of the circle of white illumination young Bolton and Dale sat staring, fascinated. There were perhaps twenty objects arranged on the table. They were all commonplace, seemingly without any relation to each other: Dr. Allaire’s personal card; an envelope and letterhead of the Scientific Crime Club; a man’s brown felt hat and gloves, a silver-headed cane; an old battered doll; a blue knitted little cape; a few coins—

From the shadows, the Psychologist said quietly: “My idea is to put into your mind a knowledge of these things, almost all of which are wholly unrelated to the crime.”

“That was Alice’s doll,” young Bolton said abruptly.

“Yes,” Dale agreed. “I’ve seen it. She said she had it most of her life—she treasured it.”

“I have no purpose of trying to find out which of them you recognize,” the Psychologist said. “That is—quite—”

He let his voice trail away; and in the silence of the shadowed room now, a very faint sound was audible. A low grinding, clinking sound. It was muffled—indescribably queer. It lasted no more than five seconds.

In the darkness someone shifted his feet as though startled. Dale and Bolton both murmured something, but the Psychologist’s voice had only stopped for those five seconds, and now he was talking again:

“The things on that table have no relation to each other—” He moved forward into the white glare and shoved the

table away. "Forget them. I want you only to remember what happened on the bridge between the victim and the murderer. I read it to you twice—"

FROM his pocket he took two pencils and two small pads of writing paper, and handed them to young Bolton and Dale.

"You can scribble in the darkness," he said. "And neither can see what the other is writing. Put your name at the top—and then write your memory of what I read you."

"Well—" Dale murmured.

"I may get it wrong," Bolton said.

"Do your best."

Neither of them wrote hastily. It was several minutes before they had finished.

"Here you are," Bolton said. Dale handed his silently.

The Psychologist took the two scrawled papers. In the silence of the shadowed room several of the men tensely shifted themselves in their chairs. Thomas Dale and young Bolton were dim blobs in the gloom. At the circle of white glare, beating down on the floor now where the table had been, the Psychologist stood in shadow.

FOR a moment he silently read what the two men had written.

"This is very interesting, gentlemen." There was just a hint of emotion vibrating in his voice. "A comparison of these two little essays with my original will interest you all very much indeed. To refresh your memories. I'll read you again my exact, original words which Mr. Bolton and Mr. Dale attempted to reproduce."

"I can't be sure—" Dale murmured out of the darkness.

"Don't interrupt me now, please," the Psychologist retorted sharply. He was holding his original paper into the light. "Here was what I asked them to reproduce:

"The murderer led his victim onto the bridge. They talked in the moonlight about Alice. They were angry. The murderer said: 'I never made love to her.' They then sat on the bench by the rail and the victim said, 'But it is not like my child. You cannot make me believe it.' The victim was toying with a blue cap in his hand. Then a moment later the murderer pushed him over the rail. He fell to the railroad track and lay crumpled between the gleaming rails with the moonlight bathing him."

"There is the original. Now here is what one of them wrote. Analyze it carefully gentlemen.

"The murderer took his victim to the bridge. They stood in the starlight and they talked angrily about Alice. The murderer said, 'I did not ever make love to her.' They were sitting by the rail and Mackenzie said. 'My child is not like that. I don't believe it.' He was toying with something blue in his hand. Then suddenly the murderer shoved him over the rail. He fell and lay crumpled on the gleaming railroad track bathed by the starlight'."

From the darkness of the intent room, as the Psychologist paused, came the Lawyer's voice.

"He seems to have made several errors, Dr. Allaire, but I don't exactly see what—"

"Let me analyze them for you. Please be quiet, you two—no apologies are necessary for your errors. This writer says starlight instead of moonlight. He says they were sitting by the rail. I mentioned that they sat on the bench by the rail. He says Mackenzie was toying with something blue in his hand. I said it was a blue cap, but he

evidently forgot that.”

The Psychologist was talking swiftly now. “So much for that one, gentlemen. Now I’ll read you the other.

“The murderer and his victim went out onto the bridge. It was moonlight and they talked about the girl and the murderer said, ‘But I did not ever make love to her.’ They were sitting on the box by the rail. Mackenzie was toying with a blue cape in his hand and the murderer said, ‘It is not my child—you cannot make, me believe it.’ Then the murderer pushed him through the rail and he fell to the track with the gleaming headlight bathing him’.”

A startled gasp had come from several of the men in the darkness. “Gentlemen,” the Psychologist added, “which is the guilty version?”

“That one!” Several of them chorused it.

“No question of it,” the Psychologist said crisply. “Lights, Marberry please.”

A glare of lights sprang in the room. Thomas Dale was sitting pale, intent, awestruck. Young George Bolton was on his feet, flushed, trembling, with a hand flung before his eyes in the glare.

“It’s a lie!” he cried. “I didn’t do it! I didn’t mean to write those things. I don’t know what possessed me—”

“The guilt in your brain possessed you,” the Psychologist said ironically. “There’s your man, Marberry.”

From the doorway the bulky uniformed police sergeant sprang forward, gripping the terrified Bolton.

“So they got you—an’ I couldn’t! Come on—out with it—you can’t lie out of this.”

“I can—I mean there isn’t anything to lie out of. You take your hands off me!”

“I found out more about him this afternoon,” the Sergeant said. “He’s been

making love to an heiress over in Pleasant Hills. I located her—dragged it out of her.”

“That’s a lie!” Bolton stood struggling in the Sergeant’s grip.

“Oh, is it?” Marberry said. “Well you’ll get a chance to tell her that before the D. A.”

Then Bolton suddenly broke, “All right, I did it. You let me alone, I tell you. Stop torturing me—all of you—let me alone. Gloria’s right—I am engaged to her—her father knows it—”

“And poor little Alice Mackenzie with her coming child, and her dogged, outraged father—they were the obstacles,” the Psychologist said. “A murder motive as old as history. And despicable beyond most murder motives. Take him away, Marberry.”

AND when the room had quieted, the Psychologist said:

“That was a very simple psychological test, gentlemen—and one that is almost infallible. A true and a false memory cannot be distinguished by the mind. Bolton undoubtedly knew he had a dangerous problem. Whatever guilty facts I had mentioned, he also must mention. To have ignored guilty facts would have been a confession that he recognized them as guilty.

“Dale had no guilty memories at all to confuse him. He had no problem except to try and remember what I had read. He said starlight—got it mixed with moonlight. It generally is mixed on a clear night. He forgot the blue cap—just remembered something blue. He forgot the bench on which they were sitting. That was reasonable. A bench is unusual on a bridge. As a matter of fact, there is no bench on that bridge.

“I wanted to make sure of refreshing the guilty memories in this

murderer's mind, and confusing those guilty memories with the memory of what I had read. You recall that faint, mysterious clanking sound a while ago, which we all ignored! It meant nothing to the innocent Thomas Dale.

"It was my simulation—in an adjoining room here—of the sound of the gears shifting the railroad semaphore signals which are on the bridge. We knew the murderer must have heard those gears shift as the train approached. They make quite a racket, and he and Mackenzie were sitting on the gear box.

"And the articles on that table," the Psychologist continued, "most of them were meaningless. To the innocent Dale, that little blue cape lying beside Alice's doll probably looked like a doll cape. But to the murderer it was a little garment for the coming baby. Mackenzie had it in his hand—they found it still clutched in his dead fingers. Evidently he had brought it to appeal to this seducer.

"Bolton recognized it on the table. And when I said blue cap—Mackenzie owned no blue cap—it was almost inevitable that Bolton should confuse the memories and think that I said blue cape. And he was the only one who knew of the coming child. The autopsy showed it, but the fact was never mentioned.

"He garbled my sentences on that point—got my words almost all correct—but out came his guilty knowledge of the child when I had said something wholly different! And Mackenzie was pushed through the rail, not over it! And in the deep railroad cut, the moonlight did not penetrate. Bolton—staring down at his victim—had an inescapable memory of the body, bathed not by moonlight, but by the headlight of the advancing train!

"Guilty memories, gentlemen, are the murderer's greatest danger. It's almost impossible for him to hide them—if you dig for them in scientific fashion."