



The killer aimed his gun at Mary and Heath

## THE D. A. DIES

By JOHN L. BENTON

***The Killer Had a Slick Murder Scheme—but He Missed a Bet When He Failed to Take a Girl's Keen Eyesight into Account!***

**D**ETECTIVE-SERGEANT BOB Heath, looking more like a prosperous young business executive than a detective, stood in the doorway of District Attorney Keene Adams' private office, staring at the slumped figure in the chair behind the ornate desk. Over the place was the hush of death. It was broken by the strained,

shocked voice of the pale but pretty blond girl who stood behind Heath—Mary Doyle, the D.A.'s secretary.

"Oh, poor Mr. Adams!" Mary said quaveringly. "And he must have been there like that all night! Even the cleaning woman had gone when I left, because we worked late, Bob. Mr. Adams was still talking to someone—a Mr. Madison—

when he told me I could go.”

Heath walked over to the desk and looked closely at the body of stout, middle-aged Keene Adams. But there was no doubt about it. The best district attorney the little city of Bankford had ever had was dead from a bullet in his heart.

“He was murdered all right!” Heath commented. “I’ll have Headquarters send out an order to have Madison picked up and brought in for questioning.”

“That might not be so simple.” Mary tried to speak courageously, but the horror that had been etched on her face when she had found the body, and somehow had managed to phone Heath, was still there. “Even I haven’t the faintest notion who the man is, or where he can be found. He was a stranger to me—never saw him before last night.”

“What did he look like?” Sergeant Heath s demanded. “Tell me all you can remember about him, Mary.”

“Well,” the girl told him, “all I noticed was that he was a gray-haired man in a dark suit, dark necktie and white shirt. He insisted on seeing Mr. Adams, as late as it was when he got here—said it was most important. Mr. Adams told me to show him in. They talked for a while with the door closed, then Mr. Adams opened it and told me I could go home.”

Bob Heath nodded. He realized that it was natural for Mary to have phoned him at once when she had received such a shock as opening a door and finding her boss murdered. She would do that—of course—instead of calling the police. That would be the first thought of a girl engaged to a detective-sergeant, at a time like that.

“You’re sure there was nothing special about this Madison, Mary?” Heath insisted. “No scars or disfigurement, or eccentricities in speech or actions?”

“Not that I remember.” Mary shook her head. “Maybe I’ll think of something—later. All I can think of now is why did he kill Mr. Adams!”

“I don’t know.” Heath shook his own head. “But I do know I’ve got to report this. You wait in the outer office, Mary.”

**A**S MARY backed away, Heath picked up the phone on the desk and called Headquarters. His attention was caught by the memo pad the District Attorney had been using. Adams had jotted down his appointments for the day he would not live to see, and at the bottom of the pad was scrawled:

Slick Weldon trial at 10 A.M.

Heath reported the murder to Chief John Parker who barked excitedly over the wire that he would be at the District Attorney’s office himself with some of his men as fast as he could get there. He ordered Heath to wait.

The detective-sergeant again glanced at the memo pad as he cradled the phone. The “Slick” Weldon who was to come to trial was believed to be the town’s head racketeer, and it was pretty certain that he and his men recently had been working the old protection game on Bankford store owners.

Then Joe Small, a tailor, had been found beaten to death in his shop, three days ago—which was Slick Weldon’s hard luck. For he had been seen coming out of the shop shortly after Small had been killed. He had been picked up promptly, charged with the murder, and the trial rushed.

The racketeer didn’t deny he had been to see Small, but insisted that he had found the tailor dead when he had entered the shop. Weldon had declared he certainly had not wanted to be mixed up with a

crime like that, so he had wasted no time in departing. But unfortunately he had been seen.

Weldon's trial was to have been started this morning, with Keene Adams prosecuting. Probably it would be delayed now, by the death of Adams. In a small city like Bankford the District Attorney had no assistants, which meant a new man would have to be appointed to the office.

"Maybe that's it," muttered Heath. "That mysterious Madison man must be in with Slick Weldon in some way, and killed the D.A. to delay the trial. But what good that will do Slick or his gang—remains to be seen."

When Heath stepped into the outer office, Mary Doyle was at her desk. She tried to smile at him, but it was a wan effort.

"The Chief is on his way here," Heath told her, and sighed. "Maybe it's just as well, Mary, that the D.A. was a widower without any living relatives. This would be a bad shock to anyone close to him."

"It's been shock enough to me," Mary said tremulously. "He was so nice, Bob!"

The office door was opened abruptly, and Heath spun around, with the idea that Chief Parker had been speedier than usual. But it was not the Chief who barged in. It was a slender, dark-haired young man wearing light-colored shell-rimmed glasses, a light blue business suit, white shirt and red tie.

"I'd like to see Mr. Adams," he said briskly. "I'm Fred Langford, attorney for the defense in the Weldon case."

"You could see him"—Heath's tone was dry—"but you wouldn't like it. Mr. Adams is dead—murdered."

"Murdered!" exclaimed Langford, horrified. "Who did it?"

"We're not sure yet," Heath said calmly. "I'm investigating." Detective-sergeant Heath studied the slender young

fellow. "I don't believe I've ever run across you before, Mr. Langford. You're new in town, aren't you?"

"Yes," Langford said impatiently. "I've been here only a few weeks . . . How was Mr. Adams killed?"

"Shot," Heath said laconically.

"But murder!" repeated the attorney. "It doesn't seem possible! You're sure it wasn't suicide?"

"No gun, no motive," Heath said shortly. He was not impressed with Attorney Fred Langford. The man was too curt and aggressive.

Chief Parker arrived at that moment, with two detectives and four uniformed officers. They made quite a parade into the office. The Chief looked pompous in his uniform. Heath had never seen him without it. He suspected that Parker slept in it, ready for emergencies. But the sergeant had to admit that though the gray-haired Chief had a face like a hound dog, he knew his business.

Parker stalked over and looked at the D. A.'s body.

"All right, Sergeant," he said then. "What happened? The coroner's on his way here."

Heath told the Chief what he had learned from Mary. He had reached the point of telling how Attorney Langford had just showed up to discuss the Weldon trial with the District Attorney, when he saw that Langford had quietly departed. It was of no consequence, however, and Chief Parker passed up Langford because the coroner had arrived. The medical officer examined the corpse, and reported death by means of a lethal weapon. He placed the time of murder as between six to eight hours before.

**M**ARY DOYLE was questioned, and told to go home, but she was so nervous and upset that Heath asked the

Chief's permission to drive her. The sergeant was sympathetic and gentle with the girl, but neither of them said much during their drive across town, and that little was casual and impersonal.

"I'm expecting you for dinner tonight, you know, Bob," Mary said when they reached her home. "You'll be here, won't you?"

"Of course." Heath smiled at her, then sobered. "Unless something about your boss' murder detains me. If it does, I'll phone you, darling."

He drove away, but he hadn't gone more than two blocks before he discovered he was being followed by another car—a gray coupe with two men in it. Just to make sure, Heath swung his sedan into a side street. The coupe followed.

Up ahead a truck pulled out from the curb and blocked Heath's car. And for that moment the coupe speeded up until it was alongside Heath's sedan, forcing him to swing in to the curb. The truck turned a corner and disappeared.

"Sergeant Heath?" demanded the hard-faced man who was driving. The detective recognized that driver—"Beef" Logan, one of Slick Weldon's gang. "We got a message for you!"

"What?" Heath demanded shortly. He was frowning heavily at a scraped fender the coupe had damaged. "Let's have it, Beef."

Logan blinked. Apparently he hadn't expected Heath to know him. But Heath knew both men, though he didn't bother to say so. He knew the other man's name was Bill Burke. And in Heath's estimation both Logan and Burke were a couple of cheap gunmen in the class.

"So you know us, hey?" said Logan. "Okay. So maybe you know somethin' else we've been hearin' you know—somethin' that'll clear Slick Weldon of killin' that tailor when the case comes up

in court this morning. We're just warnin' you—Slick better get off if you want to stay healthy."

"Okay." Heath shrugged. "Run along now, or you'll be blocking traffic."

The two men drove away without looking back. Heath grinned wryly. Bad boys, eh, with their threats. He rather wondered what it was they thought he knew. But their threats didn't interest him. Another thing he had just heard did. It looked as if Weldon's men didn't even know the District Attorney had been murdered.

Detective-sergeant Heath returned to the police station. He had not been there long when he received a phone call from Fred Langford. The attorney seemed excited.

"Sergeant Heath," he said hastily, "I've just learned something of tremendous importance—about that D.A. affair. I've got to see you at once—Miss Doyle, too. I can't have you come to my office, so can you meet me—" He hesitated as if thinking rapidly. "Say, the courtroom will be empty. Be sure to bring Miss Doyle!"

"We'll be there," said Heath.

He could not imagine what Mary could have to do with anything the lawyer had found out, but he supposed he might as well play along. He might find out something to work on anyway. Fred Langford represented Slick Weldon, and the Weldon gang was in the murder mess somehow.

So he had a little talk with the Chief, and half an hour later he and Mary Doyle arrived at the courthouse. With the Weldon trial postponed, as Heath had thought it would be, and no other courts in session, the courthouse was deserted.

Langford met them at the courthouse door. He wore no hat or topcoat, but was carrying a big law book under one arm.

“What’s on your mind, Langford?” Heath asked.

“Come into the courtroom,” Langford said mysteriously. “We can talk better there.” He was absent-mindedly tugging at an ear as he led the way.

Inside, he closed and locked the doors. Then he walked over to a table, placed the book on it near some others, and sat down.

“I didn’t have time to explain on the phone, Sergeant,” he said, “but before I tell you what I have learned, I want to try a little experiment that should prove its worth . . . Will you sit in the witness chair, Miss Doyle? It’s more comfortable than the hard benches.”

Heath’s face was expressionless as Mary seated herself. Langford glanced at her and smiled.

“This may all seem ridiculous to you—perhaps melodramatic,” he remarked. “But I know who killed Keene Adams—and I am anxious to see if you agree with me. It is possible that Miss Doyle will know, before I’m through.”

“Who was it?” Mary asked breathlessly.

“A man named John Madison,” Langford said flatly, again tugging at his ear—an unconscious gesture. “I can’t go into details now, about how I know, but I do! And the man was blackmailing the District Attorney—knew something in Adams’ past. Adams got tired of it. Last night he threatened to expose Madison, so—”

“So Madison killed him.” Heath’s tone was dry. “And I suppose you know because Madison told you.”

**S**UDDENLY Mary was on her feet.

“No!” she cried. “Oh, Bob, don’t you see? This Langford himself is Madison! He can’t fool me any more. I know him now! He was disguised when he came to the office last night, with that gray

wig and all—but I remember how the man who called himself Madison kept constantly tugging at his ear!” She pointed an accusing finger at Langford. “Just like you do!”

“I was afraid of that,” Langford sighed. “That’s why I thought I’d better talk to you alone. My experiment, you know.”

“How much did Weldon give you for killing Adams and delaying that trial?” demanded Heath, leaping forward. “Or did you kill that tailor, and when the D.A. found it out you had to kill him?”

“Adams did know too much,” Langford said coolly, opening the law book before him.

But both Mary Doyle and Heath saw the reason for that book on the instant. The pages had been cut out, and in the hole left an automatic rested! In one swift move Langford grabbed it and threw it up at Mary.

“Bob!” she screamed and sank back.

But Heath had answered her cry. Before Langford could shoot, the sergeant had snatched his .38 out and fired. The bullet got the lawyer in the shoulder. The automatic clattered to the floor.

Then out from the corridor leading to the Judge’s chambers stepped two men who could hardly have been expected to be there—Beef Logan and Bill Burke. They stopped short, glowering at Langford.

“The boss didn’t hire this lug to bump off the D.A.!” Logan growled. “None of us even knew he was dead till we seen it in the afternoon paper.”

“I found that out when you stopped me in my car,” snapped Heath. “You expected the trial to start this morning.”

Then there were more visitors. The courtroom doors were burst open and a crowd poured in. Chief Parker was at the head of the throng. Heath grinned at him.

“Glad to see you, Chief,” he said. “You’re just in time for the show-down. Remember I told you I had a hunch Langford might have murdered the D.A.? After he phoned me to meet him here? Well, he did—even if he did try to make Mary believe she had never seen him before when he barged into the D.A.’s office this morning. There wasn’t any other reason for him showing up there. The prosecutor and the lawyer for the defense don’t usually consult with each other on the morning a trial is to start. But Mr. Madison-Langford didn’t fool Mary—not any. She’s got good eyesight, Miss Doyle has.”

“Gosh!” said Beef Logan. “Why, you did clear the boss at that, Sergeant! Good

thing we trailed you and the dame here, wantin’ to get an earful. We did—plenty!”

“Stop this chatter!” wailed Langford. “I’ll admit everything! Just get me to a hospital. Can’t you see I’m dying?”

“We’ll take you all right,” Heath growled. “After you tell why you killed Joe Small, that tailor.”

“That’s a personal matter,” snapped Langford. “You don’t think I wanted a former cell-mate hanging around, do you?”

The courtroom was cleared, and Heath was left alone with Mary. It was his first chance in a long time to kiss her. He did.

“Dinner tonight will be fine, darling,” he whispered. “Case all cleared up and nothing to worry about.”