

DOUBLE DYNAMITE

By CHARLES SMITH

Tom Parden Uncovers All the Angles in a Death Triangle!

DEEP shadows filled the quiet, deserted streets of the upstate town of Hadley. Patrolman Tom Parden stifled a yawn. He was resigned to another dull night on his beat.

Suddenly the silence blew apart to the sharp roar of a gun. The sound appeared to come from a small apartment building fifty yards down the street.

Parden's slate-gray eyes narrowed, his shoulders stiffening beneath his uniform coat. He whirled and raced down the street, drawing his revolver.

Bolting into the dimly lighted entrance, he crashed headlong into Clyde Lukes, a clerk in the local hardware store. Lukes staggered back a pace, his eyes wide with fright, as frantic words tumbled from his lips.

"Parden!" he gasped. "I was just going for you. Jim Jordan's been shot!"

Parden nodded tersely, swung Lukes back down the hall with him toward Jordan's apartment.

"I was reading when I heard the shot," explained Lukes hurriedly. "I rushed into Jordan's place, saw him lying on the bed with the window open."

They reached the apartment and flung open the door. A breeze was blowing the frail curtains. Jordan was sprawled on the bed half undressed with blood clotting his undershirt. Other tenants in the apartment house, attracted by the shot, were streaming into the hall.

"Maybe I'd better get Doc Frisby," said Lukes nervously.



Parden drew his revolver and jammed the barrel into Tallman's middle

Eyes riveted upon the injured man, Tom Parden nodded absently as Lukes wheeled and scurried out of the room. People were crowding inside now. A woman uttered a stifled scream.

Moving swiftly to the bed, Parden saw that Jordan had been shot through the heart at close range. He grasped the man's wrist. There was no pulse. Jordan was dead.

On the floor beneath the bed was the murder weapon. Parden took out a handkerchief and picked it up carefully.

"Say, that gun looks like the one owned by Clyde Lukes!" blurted a tall, red-headed man.

Parden whirled.

"Are you sure?" he demanded.

"Not positive," came the red-headed man's reply. "But it looks just like it."

Lukes showed it to me once or twice. He used to keep it under the counter in Slade's hardware store.

Later, after the crowd had been chased from the room and the local chief of police had conducted a brief examination, Parden got John Slade out of bed and forced him to open his hardware establishment.

A careful search of the compartments under the counter revealed no gun. As for Clyde Lukes, it was discovered he had not contacted Doc Frisby. Instead, he had vanished into thin air.

GRIMLY Patrolman Tom Parden realized he had been duped by the hardware clerk. Lukes had been making his escape out the front door of the apartment house when Parden had bumped into him. Lukes had employed the ruse of going for a doctor to make his getaway.

The fact that the clerk's apartment was directly opposite that of the murdered man's had made quite plausible the story that he had heard the shot and was investigating.

But why Lukes should kill Jim Jordan, a local taxi driver, Tom Parden could not understand. However, he meant to find out, because the chief of police had threatened him with a long suspension for letting Lukes get away.

Late the next afternoon, before he was scheduled to go on duty again, Parden entered Jordan's apartment and conducted a thorough search of the premises. The body had been removed, and Jordan's nearest relatives in Chicago had been notified.

Going through the bottom dresser drawer in the bedroom, Parden found a bank book from a local institution. He was amazed to find a deposit for five hundred dollars made two days previous.

Where would a local taxi driver get that much money in a lump sum? It was

something to think about, the patrolman decided.

A moment later he found a snapshot of a beautiful blond girl dressed in a shimmering black evening gown. On the back of the snapshot were two words written in ink in a fine hand.

"To Daddy," Parden read.

He scowled. As far as he knew Jordan had never married. Did this snapshot, therefore, mean he was secretly married, or had been married previously, and that this girl was his daughter? Or did it indicate a relationship of another sort?

Tom Parden had to laugh at that idea himself. On the face of it, it was ridiculous. About the only man in town who might be called a "sugar daddy" was the wealthy perfume manufacturer, Howard Ross, whose mansion overlooked the town of Hadley from a high, wooded knoll.

Parden recalled that since the death of Ross' first wife, the millionaire had been running around with some showgirls on his periodic visits to the city. In fact, Parden could remember one Broadway columnist who dished up a bit of scandal about Ross which also involved Charles Tallman, a noted artist and illustrator who rented a summer cottage in Hadley. The item had been blunt enough.

Is it true that Howard Ross, wealthy perfume magnate, may change his will now that lovely Barbara Benson, the showgirl Ross was planning to wed, is carrying a flaming torch for Ross' artist neighbor, Charles Tallman?

Rumor has it that Ross was leaving half his estate to Barbara, the rest going to charity. Barbara, you'd better reconsider.

Continuing his search for clues in Clyde Luke's apartment across the hall, Parden was about to give up in despair when he found a small paper-wrapped package thrust behind the molding of a clothes closet.

A startled exclamation burst from Tom Parden's throat when he found the package contained a snapshot of Lukes and a blonde girl. The girl was the same one who had appeared on the snapshot in Jordan's possession! Lukes and the blonde had their arms around each other, and the girl was looking up at him archly.

There was nothing written on the photograph. Parden asked himself just what the blonde meant to the two men. What relation was she to Lukes or Jordan, both of whom were old enough to be her father? Was she no relation and were both in love with her?

PARDEN'S mind was in a turmoil as he tried to figure out all the angles. And he was thrown into complete confusion when he saw that the other item in the package was a bank book. He was amazed to find Clyde Lukes' account amounted to almost five thousand dollars.

That was a lot of money for an ordinary hardware clerk. But what was more interesting was the fact that Lukes had made a withdrawal of five hundred dollars. And the date of that withdrawal was a day prior to Jim Jordan's deposit of a similar amount in his account!

Some cold and sure instinct warned the patrolman that this withdrawal and deposit were definitely linked with Lukes' killing of Jordan.

It was dark when Parden finally completed his search and reported for duty. He was entering the small police office, intending to put his findings before the chief, when the telephone jangled.

The office was empty. The chief had stepped out for a minute, probably. Parden picked up the phone, then gasped as Charles Tallman's voice came over the wire.

"Parden! I'm glad I caught you in. You've got to come out here right away!"

The artist's voice shook with emotion. "Howard Ross has been murdered!"

Parden didn't wait to hear any more. He dashed to the small police car parked outside, got in and drove the half mile to the Ross mansion. When he arrived he found Tallman and a platinum-haired girl waiting for him. Both seemed very much upset.

"All right," snapped Parden. "Where is he?"

"In the living room," Tallman said. He was a dark-haired, powerfully built man in a gray, double-breasted suit. "Ross had invited Miss Benson and myself, together with some other friends, to a party tonight.

"I guess we were the first to arrive. Ross usually dismisses the servants when he has a party. But when he didn't answer our ring, we found the door open and walked in."

The platinum blonde said nothing, but her blue eyes were wide with a strange, numbed fear. Something had clicked in Tom Parden's brain when Tallman introduced her as "Miss Benson." She must be the Barbara Benson with whom Ross had been in love. Ross certainly had a big heart, Parden decided, if he could invite both the girl and his strongest rival to the same party.

Now as they walked into the well-lighted study, Parden did not even look at Howard Ross' body slumped limply in the chair. He glanced instead at Barbara Benson while the blood began to pound in his head.

After a moment he looked away, and turned his attention to Ross, who had been shot through the temple from a distance. Death had been almost instantaneous, for not much blood had seeped out of the raw wound.

Judging Ross' position in the chair and the angle of the shot, the policeman decided the fatal shot had been fired

through an open window from the garden outside.

"You two stay here," Parden directed tersely. "I'm going to have a look around."

He strode into an adjoining room which he discovered was the study. He spent several minutes there behind closed doors, and when he emerged he had a folded paper in his inside coat pocket.

Ignoring Tallman and the girl, Parden went outside, moving around the house through the grounds, damp and soggy from recent rains. When he came back he was smiling.

Parden walked up to the artist. Suddenly he drew his revolver and jammed the barrel into Tallman's middle.

"Up with your hands!" he commanded.

TALLMAN scowled angrily.

"What is this?" he demanded. "You can't—"

"Why did you kill Howard Ross?"

Parden's question was flat and sharp. Watching both Tallman and the girl, he saw their features whiten and grow tense.

"Parden, you're crazy!" Tallman exclaimed. "I told you we found Ross like this—dead. We called you right away."

"Sure, you called me—as a clever cover-up for the killing," Parden snapped, backing toward the window but keeping his gun leveled. "You shot Ross. The killer stood outside this window to fire the shot.

"There's mud out there, and prints where the murderer stood. Tallman, you've got mud on your shoes. Offhand, without measuring the prints, I'd say they matched yours."

Tallman's face was a mask of mingled fear and rage.

"I got that mud from walking around my own cottage!" he declared.

"Tell him he lies, Miss Lukes," Parden snapped, his eyes flicking toward the girl.

Barbara Benson gave a nervous start,

her hand flying in horror to her mouth.

"No—no!" she stammered. "I'm not—"

"Yes, you're Clyde Lukes' daughter," Parden told her. "I wasn't sure, but you gave it away yourself. I found a snapshot of you and Lukes. Jordan had one of you, too, and it was marked 'to Daddy.'

"I guess that belonged to your dad. But Jordan got his hands on it, and was blackmailing your father. Even that platinum tint to your hair didn't quite fool me. Underneath it you're blonde."

Tallman was white with rage.

"Put that gun away!" he snarled. "What if she is Lukes' girl? That doesn't prove anything!"

Parden snorted cynically.

"No? Well, Lukes murdered Jordan. The murder weapon was registered in Lukes' name and had only his fingerprints on it. In my pocket I've got Ross' new will—in which he doesn't leave Barbara a cent, incidentally. It hasn't been witnessed yet so it isn't legal.

"You and the girl were going to get married, and you knew about Ross' old will, which left Barbara half his estate. You wanted to be sure to get the money—so you killed him. As for Jordan, he must have found out that Barbara was really Lukes' daughter. Jordan knew what you three were after, so he blackmailed Lukes in return for his silence.

"I remember now that Barbara was married to some other rich guy who died suddenly. She didn't get much out of him, though, because he had lost heavily in the stock market. She was really ready for the kill with Howard Ross, and she always managed to see her father was cut in on the gravy."

"That's right," said a sudden harsh voice behind Tom Parden. "You've got it all figured out so now you're going to die. Drop that gun!"

The policeman didn't have to turn

around to know that Clyde Lukes was at the window behind him. Lukes had been hiding out in the woods, no doubt, and had evidently returned to see if this second murder had gone off as planned.

Grimly Parden dropped his gun.

“Dad!” gasped the girl, her hard features softening.

Clyde Lukes, his seamed face twisted with brutality, stepped into the room and moved around a table opposite Parden. Tallman was reaching surreptitiously toward a shoulder holster for a gun.

LUKES’ weapon was pointed now at Parden’s chest. Without warning the patrolman ducked low, shoved his weight against the table and sent it upending the murderer. Lukes’ gun crashed and a bullet howled past Parden’s face. Then he was flinging himself on top of Lukes and wrestling for the weapon.

He got his hands on it as Tallman fired wildly. Rolling clear, Parden snapped a

shot at the artist. Tallman yelped in pain, dropped his automatic and collapsed.

Tom Parden got to his feet, gathered up his own gun and faced the two men and the girl.

“Hold still!” he snapped. “The first one that moves stops a bullet.”

He thrust one weapon into his pocket, picked up the telephone on an end-table nearby and got the chief of police on the wire.

“I’ve got the murderer of Howard Ross,” he said tersely.

“Ross murdered?” came the startled gasp. “How—when—what about Clyde Lukes?”

“He’s here, too,” replied Parden. “And his daughter, Barbara Benson. It’s a real murder party, Chief. But as far as I’m concerned, they’re just amateurs who played around with dynamite, and it went off. I’ll wait here for you.”