



Tredler's eyes bulged as Markle tightened the noose

Murder Is For Keeps

By CLARK FROST

Sam Markle believes he has a smart plan for grabbing some stolen swag from a dead man, but he encounters a snag!

SAM MARKLE looked across the mountain cabin at Sam Tredler, seeing a small man, once dapper, but now shabby and uncertain. Whereas he, Markle, although no taller than his companion, possessed a solid, fleshy build and an assured, confident manner.

No, they were not much alike, Markle reflected. Not in actual life.

But in death—well, that would be different.

“Say, Tredler,” he said suddenly, his fingers twitching at either end of a rope which he had removed from a package on the cabin floor, “look here a minute.”

Tredler left his rude bench. “What is it?”

“Look there.”

Tredler bent in the direction his companion pointed. “I don’t see nothing—”

His words were choked off as the

rope in Sam Markle’s powerful hands leaped into a noose about his thin neck. Markle’s jaws tensed with the effort. Tredler’s eyes bulged with the terrific pressure of suffocation. There was a gurgle, a desperate clawing, a wild threshing.

Then Tredler was dead.

Sam Markle chuckled with satisfaction. From Tredler’s pocket he removed a crumpled sheet of paper. Then he tossed a spluttering match into some waste. And as the night wind whipped flames upward from his mountain cabin, Sam Markle vanished in the darkness, the first part of his plan concluded.

Three nights before, in a state of drunken boastfulness, Tredler had told Sam Markle of his part in an eastern jewel robbery. A robbery in which one cop was killed, another wounded, and Tredler’s sole partner, a man named Max Moore,

had escaped in an unknown direction with the plunder.

Moore had sent Tredler a letter afterward, explaining that he was going to lay low. He also had said an immensely valuable diamond, which they had stolen, was hidden in the bowl of his pipe.

It was this letter which Sam Markle took from his dead companion.

AND it was for this reason that Markle had lured Tredler to his mountain camp, and killed him. For the day following Tredler's drunken disclosure, Sam had noticed a brief news item under a Pittsburgh date-line, announcing the death of Max Moore at the hands of the police in that city, and further stating that since no trace of the missing diamond had been found, Moore's effects had been turned over to his daughter undisturbed.

It had just been a short item, that news story, but Sam Markle had seen it and Sam Tredler had not. And now with Tredler dead and his letter from Moore safely hidden away in the lining of Sam Markle's coat, Markle set out for Pittsburgh.

He arrived in the course of a gray, smoggy evening, and lost no time in seeking out Max Moore's erstwhile address, as given in the newspaper clipping.

The funeral was over. The police and the news gatherers were gone. But the daughter mentioned was present, a slim golden girl with a misty softness in her deep blue eyes which bespoke a sincere affection for her departed father.

"Come in, Mr. Markle," she said gently, when Sam had introduced himself. "I don't remember hearing Father speak of you. But then I knew few of his friends."

"We was good friends, all right," replied Sam, taking a seat at her invitation.

"We was such good friends that there was one thing your father always said."

"What was that, Mr. Markle?"

Sam Markle laughed. "Well, he said—he always said—that if he was to die first, I should right away get in touch with you and ask you for his pipe. He wanted me to have it."

The girl wrinkled her forehead. "But I don't remember seeing a pipe of Dad's anywhere. Of course, you can look if, you want to."

Sam Markle looked. He spent thirty minutes looking without the slightest success. "Say," he said finally, "how about the cops? Did they give you the stuff which he had in his coat when they—when he died?"

She lifted her golden head thoughtfully. Then a light broke in her misty blue eyes.

"Why, yes! There were some odds and ends. A pipe was among them. But I told the police that I didn't want it—"

"You did—"

"Yes. But you could still get it, Mr. Markle. At the police station."

Markle scowled. "Maybe you'd better go there for it. Not me."

"Oh! Return to the police station?" The girl's voice caught. "I couldn't do that."

"Why not?"

"But you don't realize how I feel, Mr. Markle. The way my father died—and all—"

"You aren't afraid, are you?"

She was silent, staring fixedly at the floor. Then her gaze lifted. "I won't ever forget how he died," she said stonily. "Shot down. In—in cold blood."

Markle grunted in approval. "Yeah, I don't blame you for hating them cops. But don't you see? The cops maybe wouldn't give me the pipe. You gotta get it

for me.”

Again she was silent. Then with determination, “But I won’t, Mr. Markle. A pipe’s not worth that much.”

“You’re wrong,” said Markle, his voice suddenly hard. “Look, your dad and me was pardners. We got a rock—a diamond, see?—and hid it in his pipe. I can fence that rock for two hundred bucks. I’ll split that with you, fifty-fifty. See?”

SHE stared wordlessly. At last she found her voice, and Markle noticed that for the first time her eyes narrowed a trifle.

“Two hundred dollars?” she repeated slowly. “But—but that doesn’t seem like much money for the kind of a—of a diamond you would take.”

Sam Markle’s lips thinned out. But he kept his voice even. “You gotta take a big loss with a fence. Two hundred is the most I can get. You want half?” She nodded. “Yes, I want it. But how do I know that you’ll pay me—after you get the pipe?”

The girl was beginning to get under Sam Markle’s skin. His face showed it, and his voice held an angry note. “You ought to trust me,” he growled accusingly. “Don’t forget that I trusted your old man to keep the diamond in the first place.”

“But I’m not even sure of that,” responded the girl softly. “I’m not even sure that you were his partner. Maybe you just happened to overhear about him, when he died.”

This was so near the truth that Markle was momentarily staggered. Then he regained his composure, and ripped away some of the lining of his coat.

“Okay,” he said in bitter tones. “I’ll prove it. Read this.” He handed her the letter which he had taken from Sam Tredler. “You know your old man’s writing. This proves we was together.”

The note read:

Sam. That cop you shot croaked. We’d better lay low. I’ll head north and contact you later. If anything happens to me, you’ll know I got the rock in my pipe.

Max.

The girl allowed the letter to flutter to the floor. Her face was pale. “Yes,” she said in a low voice. “Yes, I guess you’re telling the truth.”

“Sure,” agreed Markle heartily, and then he stopped.

As though by magic a man stepped from a fire-escape on the opposite side of the room. Two others, obviously detectives, appeared at the door.

Sam Markle backed from the girl, his features convulsed with rage.

“You!” he snarled. “You doin’ this, with your own father dead! By jinks!”

“Yeah,” broke in the detective, who stood with a pistol by the window. “Her father’s dead. He was a cop. He was killed by a rat. That rat was you. You shot him when you and Moore lifted old man Graydon’s diamond. That’s why” —his voice softened—“that’s why Miss Ames was anxious to play the part of Moore’s daughter—who never existed. To trap you—her father’s murderer.”

Markle’s lips worked frantically. “You’ve got nothing on me. I’m Sam Markle. I was never with Max Moore:”

“We don’t care what your name is. We got you.” The detective’s jaw was set in a grim line. “We never did learn the identity of Moore’s accomplice. That’s why we faked a newspaper write-up, pretended we hadn’t found the diamond. We found it, all right. What we wanted was you.”

“No!” Markle’s whole body shook.

“No, I’ve got an alibi. I can prove I wasn’t with Moore. I lied to this girl. When Moore and his pal lifted the rock, I was at a camp in—in Montana. Folks there will swear to it.”

Sam Markle stopped. An awful thought struck him. The cabin where he had been was now a heap of ashes. And the natives who knew him had probably

already buried a charred body as his own, for he had taken pains to see they knew that much.

“Yeah,” went on the detective, “we found the diamond, all right. Right in the pipe which you wanted. And that pipe’s gonna make you smoke—in the electric chair.”