

By SAM MERWIN, JR.



The young scientist's fists beat a tattoo on the tall man's face

Amy Stops the Clock

The gargantuan Miss Brewster orders a four pound steak to fortify herself for a case with romantic overtones!

AMY Brewster eyed with distaste the half-dozen dishes from which she had breakfasted in solitary state in her suite at New York's Hotel Ritz. Growling inwardly at the emptiness of the cavern of her stomach, she made a mental vow to wring the neck of the Boston specialist who had frightened her into going on a diet as soon as she returned to her native city.

"Old fuddy-duddy!" she muttered, although the specialist in question was her

junior by a decade at least. "Just because he worries himself into chronic ulcers, he wants the rest of the world to live on milk toast."

In truth, a large fruit cocktail, an order of liver and bacon, three eggs and ham, buttered toast and a single order of hash-browned potatoes were scarcely enough to remind Amy's three hundred-odd pounds that they had partaken of any nourishment at all.

Reaching for the gin bottle and

pouring herself a full tumbler of her preferred beverage, she downed it like water, reflecting gloomily that even this never-failing cheer builder failed to have its usual bracing effect.

“Not even I can drink on an empty stomach,” she reflected as she picked up the morning paper for the second time.

Usually inspired to a half-dozen activities by this matutinal task, the wealthiest, most radical and sole perennial apple-cart-upsetter of ten generations of Boston Brewsters found herself unable to find interest in the news.

Not that there wasn't plenty of it. Had she not been devitalized by lack of nourishment, she might have acted on any of several financial openings to drive wedges into the harmony of Wall Street.

The Society page revealed that one of her Cousin Matilda's daughters had just eloped with a young man she knew to have been the family chauffeur. And a Page One story that achieved prominence even amid a welter of national and international squabbles, stated that inventor J. Bennett Eden had been found with a bullet through his heart on the costly carpet of his study just east of Central Park.

WHILE Amy had never met Eden, she had on one occasion taken advantage of a process of his to make long-lived safety razor blades out of the cheapest of steel. Purchasing the process from his disheartened backer, she had forced the major companies to pool and buy the process from her for suppression purposes at a colossal profit. She had even awarded the inventor a large cut.

Yet though murder was one of her hobbies, as the police of several cities learned to their combined horror and gratification, Amy could not get interested. This she blamed on her lack of nutriment,

although in every previous case in which she had successfully meddled, someone personally involved had appealed to her for help.

She was still unhappily wondering what to do about her indisposition when a knock sounded on the door of her suite. Thinking it to be the waiter, she growled a “come in” in the voice some wag had once likened to the late Sir W. S. Gilbert's “typical African swell, whose sigh was a hullaballo, his whisper a horrible yell.”

When no servitor appeared to remove the breakfast things, she looked up irritably, the full moon of her face bright with annoyance.

Standing in the doorway of the drawing room in which she sat were two of the most beautiful young people Amy had ever seen. And Amy, incredibly ugly herself and utterly without envy, had developed a vicarious delight in having decorative young folk around her, that had resulted in a true connoisseur's rating.

The girl, tall, slim but not too slim, possessed a rare, almost white skin underlaid with pearly vitality. She wore a smart black suit which was matched by her shoulder length shimmering hair. The delicately cut features of her face revealed pride, grief, fear and determination.

“Yes?” growled Army, looking at the man behind her.

He towered a full head over the girl, was dressed with exquisite care in a gray suit which could have come only from three Manhattan tailors. His cordovan shoes were obviously bench made, and the heavy gold watch chain across his flat waistcoat, bespoke a quasihumorous wish to indulge his own taste in fashion and the means to gratify it.

His face, below close-cut sandy-red hair, was ugly-handsome to the point of being distinguished and hinted at great charm when he smiled. He smiled now

and stepped forward as his companion hesitated.

"Please pardon us, Miss Brewster, for crashing in on you like this," he said in a deep, rather nasal voice that was somehow not unpleasant. "But I assure you the matter's importance seemed to us to justify it."

"Go on," growled Amy, increasingly less displeased with the intrusion. "You're in. Say your piece."

"I'm Anne Waring," the girl said, plucking up courage. "Bennett Eden's niece. He was—he was murdered last night. Maybe you've heard about it."

"Maybe," said Amy. She nodded toward the tall young man. "Who's your boy friend?"

"Oh—this is Jimmy Stearns," said the girl, turning slightly red and looking a trifle annoyed. "He—he came along with me."

"Honored," said Jimmy Stearns, bowing slightly. Amy acknowledged his greeting with a nod that made six chins of her habitual three. She had heard of Jimmy Stearns, a sort of latter-day dandy of the E. Berry Wall school.

"Okay," said Amy. "Why come to me?" Her words seemed to unlock a flood gate in the girl.

"Oh, we heard how you solved those insurance murders and the others," she said rapidly. "I know I have no right to call on you, but you see, it's about Cam Barden. He's going to be arrested because he won't tell on Yvonne and—"

"Hold everything," said Amy. "Sit down and let's get it straight. If there's anything I can do, I've got to have the facts. Now, begin at the beginning."

THE story was simple enough. Anne lived with her uncle and was, it seemed, sole heir to his very large fortune, save for the usual bequests to servants and

others. Outside of four servants, the only other resident was Cameron Barden, young scientist who assisted Bennett Eden in the laboratory he maintained in the basement.

At eleven o'clock on the previous evening, Barden, who had been working late, came upstairs, found his employer lying on the living room floor, shot dead. The gun had been lying perhaps a dozen feet away and there was no question of suicide. Or so he had said when he reported the crime to the police at eleven-three.

Anne herself had been out at a party, visiting the various night clubs. Jimmy Stearns had joined the group shortly after ten thirty, had escorted her back to the house when word reached them.

"Sounds like a good clean crime to me," rumbled Amy. "Where do I come into it?"

There was, it seemed, more to it than that. The servants had been out for the evening, having left shortly after dinner when their employer was still in good health. No one apparently had entered at any time close to eleven.

"What makes them so sure of the time of death?" Amy inquired, lighting one of her large black Havana cigars.

"Why, Uncle Ben's wrist watch was shattered when he fell," said the girl. "They found bits of broken crystal all around it. It read exactly ten fifty-nine."

"I see," said the fat woman, scowling. "So that puts this Barden right on the spot. What about motive?"

"They think they have that," said Anne. "Cam and Uncle Ben had been quarreling over something they'd dug up. The police have arrested Cam—and I know he didn't do it. The better men like each other, the more apt they are to fight. But Cam wouldn't have killed him."

She was silent, her full lips

compressed. Amy looked inquiringly at Jimmy Stearns, who sat quietly, fiddling with his heavy watch chain.

“What do you think about this young Barden?”

“Nice fellow, but not in my line,” was the reply. “Dead set on science—like Ben Eden. I’m inclined to agree with Anne about it. But the evidence—”

“Who’s this Yvonne you mentioned, Anne?” Amy asked.

“Why, she’s—” the girl began, then looked helplessly at her companion. Jimmy Stearns coughed, then spoke.

“Ben had been a widower for a long time,” he said. “Yvonne’s a good-hearted girl. Good looking too. According to Anne, he had a date to see her at the house last night.”

“Does she have a key?” said Amy sharply.

“I don’t know,” said Anne. “But she’s a—a gold digger, and she had her sails set for Uncle Ben.”

“Is that a motive for murder?” Amy asked.

“All I know is that Cam couldn’t have done it,” the girl almost wailed. “Won’t you help us find out who did?”

“I’ll try,” said Amy, refilling her glass from the gin bottle. Her visitors rightly took the move as a gesture of dismissal and made quick departures. Amy picked up the telephone shortly after they had left, got room service.

“Send up a four pound steak,” she commanded. “Good and rare. And a quadruple order of french fried potatoes.” She slammed down the phone, puffed happily at her cigar. This was no time for dieting.

Two hours later, Amy was in Police Headquarters, talking to stocky Detective Lieutenant Nick Correll, who was in charge of the case. Long-term acquaintance, business and personal, with

the Police Commissioner, had enabled her to swing the appointment. Amy was a law unto herself and had degrees from Harvard Law, Columbia Law and the Sorbonne to back herself with.

“It’s open-and-shut,” the harassed detective explained to the fat woman, who regarded him menacingly from across his desk through a blue cloud of cigar smoke. “The watch was busted when Eden was shot—at ten fifty-nine. The Barden apple was the only one in the house. He calls us a couple of minutes past eleven. And he’s got a motive.”

“Give on that motive stuff,” snapped Amy.

“He’d come up with a trick device that, he claims, will make an indelible pencil last practically forever,” the detective said. “As if we haven’t enough lifelong fountain pens already.”

“Hmmp,” said Amy. She puffed on her Havana for a long thirty seconds. Then, “I want to talk to him.”

“Only his lawyer can do that,” said Correll. “And we haven’t had him twenty-four hours yet.”

“Has he legal representation?” Amy asked.

“Not yet,” the detective replied smugly. Amy rose to her full five-feet-five and stabbed at him with the end of her lighted cigar.

“Well he has now,” she roared. “And if you don’t want everybody from the Commissioner on down climbing your frame you’ll let me see him right now!”

“But it’s open and shut,” the detective protested. “Two and two make—”

“Make any number you can think of,” snapped Amy. “Get busy and get me down there.”

SHE did it in a matter of minutes, and found herself sitting in a cheerless Headquarters room with a tousle-haired,

tired young man whose mouth drooped from the strain he had been under.

"I can't understand it," he said when he had finally realized that Amy was accepting him as a client without fee. "You'd think I'd have heard the shot. And I didn't hear a sign of anyone in the house when I came upstairs."

"Okay," said Amy, whose searching black eyes had satisfied her that he was telling the truth. The problem, if this young man were innocent, was a tough nut to crack and therefore worthy of her attention.

"I believe you, Cam," she went on. "But what about this invention the police have twisted into a motive?"

"They have it all backwards," Barden protested. "I got lucky last month and came up with a new treatment of pencil carbon which makes it indelible and would give the average lead pencil a life of about a year."

"Is it cheap?" Amy asked quietly.

"Why, yes—that's the trouble. Mr. Eden wanted to put it on the market and I didn't want him to. Think of the people it would put out of work!"

"Who owns the process?" Amy asked.

"I do," the young man said. "But I wouldn't have considered putting it out without sharing the rights with Mr. Eden. He befriended me when I came out of the Army and gave me a chance to work on my own with his equipment as well as help him with his own lab work. When he had me patent this thing of mine I let him handle the details as a routine matter."

"Okay, Cam," said Amy. "What about this Yvonne woman? Young Anne Waring seems pretty hot about her."

"Yvonne Duncan?" Barden grinned for the first time. "She's a bit theatrical, but I liked her. Heck, Mr. Eden had a right to some fun, I guess. Why?"

"Anne seems to think Eden had a date

with her last night. Know anything about it?"

"He might have," said Barden, rubbing a chin that needed a shave. "Come to think of it, he did say he'd be busy. I'd not have bothered him if I hadn't seen the study door open and the lights on. Gee, I'm tired."

"Take it easy," said Amy, rising and putting an amiably pudgy hand on his shoulder. "Incidentally, young Anne seems to think pretty highly of you."

"Of me?" He seemed honestly astonished. "But she doesn't even know I'm alive." His expression softened and Amy chuckled inwardly. An incurable spinster herself, she had a very pronounced Dan Cupid side to her make-up.

"Try her and find out," she said. "And one thing more—I'd like to handle this indelible pencil of yours in lieu of a fee. I'll see that no one loses a job over it."

"Okay," he said bitterly. "I guess I'll have to let you. I haven't anything else."

"That's what you think," said Amy as she left him.

Back in her suite at the Ritz, Amy sat down to drink gin and think it over, munching on a gargantuan bowl of peanuts as she did so. The case was puzzling all right. And if two and two made four this time, all of her heretofore impeccable judgment of character was at fault.

FINALLY she picked up the phone again and got busy. Yvonne Duncan, whom she found at home, had the husky, rather pleasant voice of a torch singer, which she readily admitted to being. She was regretful if not too broken up over the tragic demise of Bennett Eden.

"Sure I went over there last night," she said. "I was due to see Ben at ten-thirty, but I was late—which is a laugh. Usually

it was the other way around.”

“You mean Mr. Eden made it a habit of not being on time?” the fat woman wanted to know.

“He never knew what time it was,” Yvonne Duncan replied. “Imagine a rich old fellow like him—always calling up Meridian One-two one-two to get it.”

“Do tell,” said Amy, beginning to see a trace of daylight. “What happened when you went over there?”

“Well, I rang the bell and nobody answered,” Yvonne Duncan replied. “I got pretty peeved, especially after all the times he’s kept me waiting for him. So I scrambled.”

“Did you see anyone around that looked as if he might have come in or out?” Amy asked.

“A tall guy came down the steps as my cab pulled up in front of the joint. But I didn’t pay any attention. With his niece and all, lots of people came and went.”

“Thanks, Miss Duncan,” said Amy, glowing like an incandescent she-Buddha. “Would you care to come down here for a drink and go over this with me at five? I’m at the Ritz.”

“If it’s free loading, I’m your gal,” said Yvonne. Amy hung up, sat back and chuckled. So two and two had to make four, did they? Well, two pencils and two grosses of pencils didn’t make four. It was odd that she should be thinking of pencils.

Amy’s next call was to her broker’s. Issuing orders like a chicken colonel, she told him to get busy and dig out extensive stock holdings in major fountain pen and ink companies. After much moaning, groaning and gnashing of teeth, they agreed to get busy at once.

“I want a full report by five o’clock,” she stated with the assurance of a woman who could buy and sell her broker with only a little more strain on her resources than the average woman in search of

nylons or a roast.

Her next call was to Lieutenant Correll, who replied with dubious enthusiasm.

“Listen, Nick,” she said, indulging her usual habit of using the first names of all and sundry on short acquaintance. “What about the gun that killed Ben Eden? Has it been traced yet?”

“The D.A. will kill me if I tell you that,” was the detective’s unhappy response.

“He’ll get killed professionally and you along with him if you don’t,” snapped Amy. “I’ve tossed plenty of unhard-earned cash into this machine here in town. And if you give the right answers, I’ll toss the case in your lap.”

“I’ve got all the answers,” Correll snapped. “It’s open and shut, I tell you. Two and two—”

“Quiet!” roared the fat woman. “Have you traced that gun or haven’t you?”

“Okay.” The detective gave up. “A fellow bought it yesterday from a pawnbroker down on the Lower East Side.”

“Has he identified the purchaser?” Amy asked.

“He says it was a tall young guy,” said the detective defensively. “He says it could have been Barden.”

“Not good enough. Bring your pawnbroker up to the Ritz a few minutes before five and I’ll bet you the price of a steak dinner I’ll have a man he can identify. And better bring Barden along with you. You won’t want him back in the Tombs when I get through with him.”

It took considerable more doing, but once again the Brewster name, fame and fortune prevailed. It was as an afterthought that Amy asked him the name of Bennett Eden’s watchmaker and received information that the broken wristwatch had come from a small, costly and

exclusive Fifth Avenue firm. Chuckling, Amy hung up.

YVONNE DUNCAN, half hidden behind a silver fox jacket, arrived on the dot, living up to her self-avowed reputation for promptness. Amy greeted her cheerily and waved her toward a barette adorned with an interesting array of bottles and various mixings.

After a startled glance at Amy's three hundred pounds and her cigar, Yvonne, who was blonde, well-cushioned in the right places and probably in her late thirties, complied in haste. A latent friendliness about the companion of the slain inventor, a friendliness barely denied by the shrewdness of her artfully-lashed light blue eyes, appealed to the fat lady.

"Maybe," said Yvonne, seating herself, glass in hand, in an easy chair, "I shouldn't be doing this so soon after—well, so soon after Old Ben got killed. Don't think I wasn't fond of him. I was. But—" She shrugged her be-silver-foxed shoulders expressively.

"I've always thought grief a barbarian surrender to the emotions, myself," said the fat lady. It took Yvonne a good ten seconds to digest this, but when she had she nodded.

"You and me both," she said. Then, "If you'll pardon my curiosity, what in hades is this all about?"

"You'll find out soon enough," said Amy, and as a knock sounded on the door again bellowed a "come in."

This time Jimmy Stearns and Anne Waring entered. At sight of Yvonne, the inventor's niece stiffened, but Amy's hearty bellowed greetings forced her to overcome her reluctance to share a room, much less a drink, with the overstuffed blonde.

"Do I understand you to say you've solved Uncle Ben's murder?" the younger

girl asked eagerly as her escort poured her a scotch and soda.

"Yup," said Amy. "One more phone call and it's in the bag. I'll change brokers if they don't reach me soon."

"Good grief, was young Barden fooling around in the market?" Jimmy Stearns inquired, handing Anne her glass and looking at Amy incredulously.

"Pretty heavily in his own way," said Amy, pouring herself another glass of gin and puffing at her cigar.

"I don't believe it," said Anne promptly. "Cam may not have known I was alive, but I know him well enough to feel certain he simply couldn't gamble. His is the kind of scientific mind that has to know all the facts before it can make a move. I should know that."

"Anne!" said Stearns, looking concerned. "I had no idea you cared so much for him. I thought he—"

Whatever Stearns thought was never revealed, for just then the telephone rang. Amy picked it up, listened briefly, then growled, "And it's about time," into the mouthpiece. She listened some more, then roared a "thanks" and put the hand set back onto its stand.

"All wrapped up," she said, beaming seraphically.

"Did Cam—" Anne began, trembling with nervousness. Amy shook her head and emitted a growling laugh.

"No, Cam didn't," she replied. "Hey, Correll, bring in that sick poodle of yours. It's in the bag." The bedroom door opened and the detective entered, half-dragging a terrified, shabby little man through it after him. He took one look at Jimmy Stearns and pointed a quivering finger at him.

"That's him!" he cried in heavily accented tones. "That's the man who buy the gun. You no send me to prison for it, pleeze, Mister Detective."

"You're sure?" the detective asked.

The rest of them in the room sat like statues, including the newly accused.

"Sure I'm sure. I remember the red hair now under his hat. You no send me to prison, pleeze!"

"Tell him to go home and take a bath," said Amy. "I think that does it, all right."

The little pawnbroker was sent packing, and Lieutenant Correll, looking warily alert, stood over Jimmy Stearns.

"Okay," he said. "What about it?"

"Well, what about it?" Stearns countered. "Is the word of a seller of unlicensed weapons better than mine? Anybody could have bribed him to identify me." His gaze centered on Amy, whose habitual high color faded to an angry white.

"There's more to it than that," said the fat woman, her black eyes snapping with rage. "If Ben Eden had put young Barden's invention on the market as he planned to do, Stearns would have been wiped out. He's in over his head backing one of the new pen-and-pencil outfits. I'll have the figures here by messenger within half an hour."

FOR the first time, the man-about-town's composure broke. He moistened his lips with his tongue and sagged visibly. Then he braced himself and smiled indulgently.

"And what about the evidence of the wrist watch?" he asked quietly, lighting a cigarette.

"That's easy," said Amy with a wave of her cigar as Lieutenant Correll looked at her incredulously.

"It's what?" he countered.

"Easy," said Amy and spelled it out. "Most of us have foibles, and Bennett Eden was no exception. He hated to have things repaired and that included his watch. I found that out from his jeweler,

who's been after him to get it regulated for years."

"Why, that's so," said Anne Waring, looking surprised. "He had an awful time keeping it right."

"He didn't keep it right," said Amy. "Now, Yvonne, tell the lieutenant how he was never on time."

"Old Ben was always late for our dates," she said, ignoring the look the younger girl sent her way. "He was always calling up Meridian to get the right time. I even bought him a new watch, but he wouldn't wear it. Said he liked his old one and was used to it."

"You mean the watch was wrong when it was broken?" said Lieutenant Correll, openly startled.

"Of course," said Amy, looking at Stearns.

"Has any of you stopped to realize," Stearns said drily, "that if Bennett was always late for appointments it meant his watch was slow. While if he was killed before eleven last night, it would have registered much earlier."

"Naturally," said the fat woman, unruffled. "But I just consulted young Cam Barden on that. He stated something I already suspected. Like others whose watches run slow habitually, Ben Eden had the habit of setting it well ahead every evening so that it would be approximately on time when he woke up."

"Of course!" cried Anne. "I've been awfully dumb. I've known about that for years."

"What have you got to say about it now?" Amy asked Jimmy Stearns, who had grown pale himself during the latest revelations.

"Just this," said the man-about-town, his nerve breaking completely. Overturning his chair in his haste, he made a dash for the bedroom door.

He didn't make it. Cam Barden, no longer looking tired, appeared to block his passage. There was a succession of sounds as the young scientist's fists beat a tattoo on his face. Seconds later the right killer lay, moaning and bleeding, on the carpet.

A moment later Correll had got him to his feet, handcuffed him and led him from the suite with a caution that he'd be back for affidavits later. Anne, who had stood paralyzed during the affray, suddenly ran to Cam, who looked surprised to find himself holding his late employer's daughter in his arms.

"But you can't, Anne," he said before she pulled his head down and kissed him. "I haven't any dough. Heck, I haven't even got a job."

The rest was silence, save for Amy's chuckle as she recalled the razor blade deal she had made and thought of the deal she was about to make with the young man's invention. She turned to Yvonne, who was refilling her glass at the barette.

"Bring that bottle of gin over, will you dearie?" the fat woman asked. "This one seems to be dead."