

Miss Dynamite

By Peter Dawson

Old man Vorhees was a collector of valuable items. But when he included a burlesque beauty among his purchases, he didn't know the sale would set off a load of T. N. T.



IF YOU talk to Sergeant Casey about the Vorhees case, you will see beads of perspiration prickle up on his forehead and a kind of panic grow in his mild blue eyes. Sergeant Casey is a devoutly religious man and maybe too much religion isn't such a good thing for a policeman to have.

Like when the Bible says, "Thou shalt not kill," or "Turn the other cheek." Sometimes, in the line of duty, a cop has to snap a slug into a vicious criminal; either that or pay his own personal respects to St. Peter.

So you can see, it was kind of tough for Sergeant Casey, him being a homicide dick, every time he sent somebody to the chair.

This Vorhees case was a pip. I know. I worked with Casey on the damn thing.

You see, Vorhees was a rich old duck who made the mistake of marrying a girl young enough to be his granddaughter. Her name was Maizie and he'd picked her out of the chorus line in a burlesque show. He was sixty-six and she was twenty-two, so you can imagine there was going to be some trouble.

She had red hair and green eyes and a figure that makes you inhale between clenched teeth the instant you lay eyes on her. She'd come from out West somewhere, left her family when the great

drought sanded their farm so they couldn't even grow a carrot. She knew what it was to go cold and hungry, and that had toughened her up a little.

Well, one night, after the show, it was raining, and she darted across the street, right in the path of a big lumbering limousine. It clipped her on the thigh, tossed her a couple of feet and went into a skid. Vorhees' chauffeur, a young guy named Donlon, slammed on the brakes and raced around to the front of the car.

He picked her up, stuffed her gently into the tonneau beside old man Vorhees, and started walloping that limousine down the street hell-bent for a hospital. Maizie wasn't hurt bad, and Vorhees didn't want any publicity. You know: *Chorus Girl Struck by Millionaire*. So he had Donlon drive the girl to his own home.

A fifty-dollar-a-visit doctor patched her up and she spent three days there. That was the beginning of a whirlwind courtship. Vorhees was a collector. He was nuts about Ming vases and jades and cut crystal—everything beautiful. And this Maizie was something to look at. She was a collector's item, all right.

He broke down the difference in their ages with fine dinners, a Mink coat, and a few assorted diamonds. He proposed and she snapped him up.

None of Vorhees' old friends cottoned to the idea of being entertained by a burlesque dancer and they shunned him. Vorhees was naturally a sour guy and that made him more sour.

However, it wasn't as tough on Maizie as you'd think. Because Vorhees had a nephew, a young chap by the name of Craig, who lived with him. About the only work this Craig had ever done was posing for some collar ads. You can imagine the setup.

IT TURNED out later that Maizie had asked for a divorce, but Vorhees wouldn't give it to her. Once he collected an item, nothing could part him from it. He just liked to own things. Anyway, Maizie started being seen around with Craig, openly, the big time spots, no underhand stuff, mind you. And Vorhees knew all about it. In fact, it came out at the trial that he'd even given Craig the money to take her out.

That's the way things stood when we got the call.

It came about two a.m. They routed Sergeant Casey out of bed and he picked me up with a prowler car. We got to the Vorhees house and found a nice mess—most of it around Craig's head. Somebody'd bashed it in.

Casey, thinking of the Ten Commandments, was deeply outraged. He briskly strode into the book-lined study, where Maizie and Vorhees were waiting, planted himself in front of the frightened girl, and started hammering questions at her.

"The butler tells me you went out together. Is that so?"

Her face was deathly white and she kept twisting a handkerchief into a little ball. Her voice was weak and barely audible. "Yes."

"Where did you go?" Casey barked.

"Dancing at the Rhumba Club, then to Tony Calvo's."

Casey stiffened. "Calvo's! The gambling joint."

At that, old man Vorhees came to.

"Gambling?" he cracked. "Did Craig lose any money?"

Maizie shook her head. "At first, but then later he won. Almost broke the bank. Tony was very angry."

Relief flooded Vorhees' face and he sank back into his chair. Casey eyed him curiously.

"Why were you so interested, Mr. Vorhees?"

The old man snapped his upper plate back into place with his tongue. "I gave Craig ten thousand dollars in cash this afternoon. He was supposed to pick up a jade elephant for me from a dealer who was holding it. I was out this evening and when I came home I couldn't find the thing. So I called the dealer and he told me that Craig hadn't shown up at all. I was afraid maybe he'd lost the money gambling. Ten thousand dollars is a considerable sum, you know."

"I suppose everybody at Calvo's knew about Craig's winning streak?"

She nodded. "There was a big crowd around the table."

"What car did you take?"

"The big one."

"Who drove it?"

Vorhees supplied the answer. "Donlon, the chauffeur, is the only one I permit to drive the limousine."

Casey nodded sagely. "And I suppose Craig boasted about his winnings in the car. Let's go over and have a look at the garage."

Well, we went over to the garage and, believe me, we found plenty. The monkey wrench with blood on it, the one that had caved Craig's skull, was under a pile of refuse. There had been some attempt to clean it, but pieces of tissue still adhered to its blunt edge.

And money, boy, we found plenty. Thirty-two thousand dollars in all. Some of it under the driver's seat in the

limousine, some of it taped underneath the chassis to the transmission, and a couple of grand under a pile of clothes in his trunk.

Donlon himself was sleeping like a baby. One of those big, raw-boned guys who sleep hard, eat hard, and play hard. We had to bat him around a little before he came out of it. He stood in front of us, sleepy-eyed, listening to Casey, then his face got red.

“Are you trying to say I killed Craig?” he asked.

“You called it, brother,” said Casey.

You see, he wanted a confession before we got to headquarters. A quick cleanup of a case like this would put him in line for a promotion. So he confronted Donlon with the evidence, the whole works—the monkey wrench, the money and probable fingerprints.

DONLON didn't say a word. He got dressed, his jaw muscles white and rigid. He walked out of the garage ahead of us, then spun suddenly and hit Casey a crack on the chin.

He got me next. I was so surprised I never even raised my dukes, but going down I hauled out my police positive. Donlon made a sweet target, scuttling toward the hedges, fast and low to the ground. But I never fired.

Casey's gun cracked out first and Donlon hit the grass and rolled over like a professional tumbler. He lay there, hugging his leg, yelling. Casey's bullet had caught him right behind the knee.

Well, he yanked Donlon down to headquarters and worked over him all night. I worked all night too. But not down at headquarters. I was shooting from a different angle.

First I had a long powwow with Maizie. Then I hopped down to Tony Calvo's, came back up to the garage,

worked around in the library for a while, and by early morning I had a pretty good idea of what had happened.

I sent for old man Vorhees. He came down and stood in front of me kneading his bony knuckles. “Well, Vorhees,” I asked him, “do you know how much money Casey found in the garage?”

Vorhees showed his false teeth. “Certainly. Thirty-two thousand doll—”

He clipped the word short and bit on his lips. His leathery face got a little pale. He wasn't sure how much of a mistake he'd made, but it was plenty. Because from there on it was duck soup.

I went to the second shelf of books, fourth row down, and removed two volumes. There was a wad of money there, about ten grand.

“Yep, Vorhees,” I said, “with the ten grand you gave Craig that made about forty-two grand. You didn't mind planting the money he'd won, but you were a little too greedy about your own dough. You had to keep it.

“And here is a bottle of Scotch I found in Donlon's room, the bottle from which you knew he always took a nightcap. It's one big Mickey Finn. I found a vial of chloral hydrate with your prints on it, hidden in your bureau. We also got your prints off the undercarriage of the limousine where you taped the money. Donlon made that break because he was scared and thought he'd never be able to beat the rap. You ought to be ashamed—”

The old man started to shake like he had palsy and I had to yell for some smelling salts. Yeah, he'd killed his nephew because he was so damn jealous he was eating his heart out. He was sure Craig had been cheating on him. That's why he'd given him the ten grand, so he could use it to frame Donlon with. That's the kind of guy he was.

Well, he was dumb and he had a dumb

lawyer, so he wouldn't confess and they had to give him the chair. I was there and I think he popped off before they even juiced him. But wait, that ain't all. What do you think?

The very next day, right after he was burned, Maizie ran off and married Donlon.

Can you beat it? She'd been nuts about the chauffeur all along and had only been

playing Craig to throw her husband off the scent.

Well, I got my promotion. Maizie got her husband's dough. Donlon got Maizie. And Casey—well, he didn't have to do penance for sending an innocent guy to the hot seat. So I guess everybody was happy all around—except maybe Vorhees.