



Alibi—With Sound

By ROBERT WALLACE

House dick Arty Boyle knows his rackets—noisy or otherwise!

AT THE Hotel Lanceford it is one of those Saturday nights that turn a house detective's hair gray. First a dame in Six-twenty gets screaming drunk and starts throwing stuff out the window—and she doesn't bother to open the window. So I have to go up and quiet her down. Then a man and his wife start a fight in Eight-sixteen. It is Marty Boyle's job to take care of that, too—and that's my name and I'm the house detective.

The man is shouting a lot of words that my grandfather would never admit he knew, the wife is yelling right back at him

when I knock on the door of Eight-sixteen. They are making so much noise that they don't even hear me, so I really pound the panel.

"Cease, desist, shut up!" I called. "It is the caribinare." Me and my education!

The silence is like that when you switch off a radio. The door opens and a little bald-headed guy peers out at me. Behind him stands a stout dame who is head and shoulders taller than her noisy husband.

"Go away," the little man says. "We haven't got your canary."

“Never mind giving me the bird,” I say. “I’m the house detective, and you’ll have to quiet down.”

“Sock him in the nose, Eddie,” says the human model for a transport.

I’m about average size, but I’m tough. They don’t hire you as a house detective on one of those hotels around Times Square, like the Lanceford, because of your youth and beauty. If the little man socks me he will be sorry.

“It is all right, mister,” says the little man. “Sorry, if we disturbed anyone.”

“Sock him in the nose, Eddie,” says the dame with a one-track mind.

I glanced into the room. There is a half-empty pitcher of beer standing on a table and two empty glasses beside it. It strikes me that getting as stewed as these two apparently are on that little to drink takes talent, a weak constitution, or something.

“Be quiet, Martha,” says the little man.

The dame sinks into a chair and sits there like a pouting Buddha, only she is fully dressed. So fully that I wonder if Omar, the tent maker, turns out her apparel. The husband is wearing a white linen suit, a green shirt and a pink bow tie. For a couple staying in a hotel room on a hot July night they sure are all dressed up.

“See that it doesn’t happen again,” I tell them in my politest tone. “Any more noise from you two and you go out of this joint on your ear.”

WITH that I close the door from the outside and go down to the lobby. Harry Lang, the night clerk, is behind the desk, talking to John Fairfield, the assistant manager.

“Everything all right, Arty?” Fairfield asks. He’s a tall, dark-haired man who always wears double-breasted suits and a simper for the guests. “What was wrong in Eight-sixteen?”

“A lovers’ quarrel between a rowboat and a battleship,” I says, then I look at Lang. “What’s the name of that couple, Harry?”

“Mr. and Mrs. Edward Brown from Chicago,” answers the night clerk. “And if you get them started they will talk your ear off.”

“Nice unusual name,” I says. “Smith is good, too.”

When I see Jimmy Drake, one of the bellboys, hurrying toward the desk I have a feeling that trouble is coming. Drake has been a bellhop too many years to move fast unless there is something wrong.

“The guy in Eight-twenty,” Jimmy says as he reaches us, and for a bellboy he is almost excited. “He’s up there lying on the floor—dead.”

“Which is all I need to make it a perfect evening—in spades,” I says, and then I look resignedly at the night clerk. “Who has Eight-twenty, Harry?”

“Craig Homer,” says Lang. “You know him, Arty. He always stays here when he is in town. He’s a diamond buyer for some firm out West.”

“Now tell me he was murdered for the crown jewels and I’ll upchuck,” I says, glancing at the bellboy. “How do you know Homer is dead, Jimmy?”

“I felt for his pulse, and there wasn’t any,” Jimmy says. “Whoever stuck the knife in that guy’s back wasn’t fooling.”

“Knife in his back,” I says. “Then it is murder. I’m going upstairs. Fairfield, you better call the boys from Homicide.”

“Phone the police, Lang,” says the assistant manager. “Ask them to try and arrive quietly—the publicity you know. Bad for the hotel. I’m going up with Boyle.”

“Come along, Jimmy,” I tell the bellboy. “You might remember something you overlooked.”

Fairfield, Drake and yours truly go up to the eighth floor in the elevator. The door to Eight-twenty is standing half open when we reach it—which don't strike me as too bright upon Jimmy Drake's part. There are quite a few people in the rooms on the eighth floor, and hotel guests love to see how the other half of the corridor lives.

As we reach Eight-twenty doors start opening up and down the hall and three or four guys who have been waiting for things to start happening step out of their rooms.

"If we had known you were coming, we'd have held a wake," I says, giving the innocent bystanders a frosty glance. I noticed my loud-mouthed pal, Mr. Edward Brown, is not among those present, and across the hall Eight-sixteen holds a lot of silence behind a closed door.

"Keep these lugs back," I say as I step into the room. "Jimmy, you and Fairfield keep them out of here."

The assistant manager and the bellboy stand at the open door holding the onlookers back as I examine the corpse. Craig Homer is lying face downward on the floor. He is fully dressed except for his coat and there is a lot of blood on the back of his white shirt from the knife wound that killed him, but the knife is missing.

"Say, the knife ain't there," says Jimmy Drake. "And it was sticking in him when I first seen him a little while ago."

I pick up Homer's coat and drape it over the body. From here on this murder is the police's baby and they can take care of it.

"Stick around, folks," I says to the men outside. "We'll have the police question you as soon as they arrive."

Apparently the bunch of eager beavers don't care for that idea. They retire to their rooms post-haste, leaving the hall deserted. I sigh and close the door of

Eight-twenty from the inside, and then look at Jimmy and Fairfield. They don't seem any happier than I am at the moment.

"Homer told me early this evening that he was carrying fifty thousand dollars in uncut diamonds in his brief case," Fairfield says. "I suggested he had better put them in the hotel safe, but he just laughed at me."

"He ain't laughing now," Jimmy Drake says. "Wonder what happened to the knife. It was a fancy-looking thing with a white handle."

HOMER'S brief case is lying on top of the bureau. I examine it and find some business letters and papers in it—but no diamonds.

The Homicide Squad arrives, so does a detective from our precinct, a man from the D. A.'s office, and the whole works. I take the captain in charge aside and talk fast.

"You might have something there, Boyle," he says. "Let's investigate."

We go across the hall and I knock on the door of Eight-sixteen. Edward Brown opens the door and then Captain Carson and I step right into the room. The stout dame is sitting in a chair and she glares at us.

"Sock 'em in the jaw, Eddie," she says. "Throw 'em out of here."

I looked at the pitcher of dark beer. It is still standing on the table, half-empty.

"Your wife is a rotten actress, Brown," I says. I pick up the pitcher and hold it to the nearest light. There were a lot of what looked like little gray stones in the bottom of that pitcher, but I knew they were the unset diamonds that had cost Craig Homer his life. "And your alibi was too noisy."

The captain is nosing around the room and he finds a traveling desk set, all made of ivory with a paper knife that has an ivory handle. For that sort of a knife it has

a sharp steel blade with a couple of drops of blood on it—that the Browns overlooked.

“A test will show this is Craig Homer’s blood,” says Captain Carson, and then he looks at me. “You were smart in suspecting these two, Boyle. How did you happen to do it?”

“They were making too much noise for a couple who had only had half a pitcher of beer to drink,” I says. “That worried me right from the start when I first came to this room to make them quiet down. And the dame would have to be awfully stewed

to keep insisting that her husband hit me like she did.”

“You and your bright ideas,” says Brown, glaring at the big dame. “Insisting that we stage a family row so we would have an alibi for about the time of the crime.”

“Yeah,” I says. “And if you had just kept quiet, no one would even have suspected you.” I grin at him. “Sock her in the jaw, Eddie.”

And you know what—he does just that!