

## DESKTOP MURDER

Jessica Fletcher made her way through the maze of police cars. She stopped to let an ambulance pass, then climbed the front steps of the house. The patrolman at the door stepped aside and smiled as Jessica entered to find a roomful of detectives.

"There are advantages to being something of a celebrity," thought Jessica. "You have a much better chance of getting into restaurants, theatres, and crime scenes!"

There was an awkward moment as the detectives stared at Jessica in surprise. Then a man with a Lieutenant's badge broke the silence.

"Jessica Fletcher!" he announced. "What brings you here?"

"This," answered Jessica, holding up a well-thumbed manuscript. "The final draft of 'Driving Ambition - Confessions of a Chauffeur' by Arnold Myers. As a favor to my publisher I've looked it over and made some comments on the text. I came here tonight to discuss it with the author. Is Mr. Myers at home?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Fletcher," said the Lieutenant. "He's... well..."

"Yes, I thought so," stated Jessica. "That ambulance I saw leaving was in no great hurry. And you needn't be coy with me about Myers' death, Lieutenant. I was not a friend of his, and judging from this manuscript, neither were many other people. He was a chauffeur and errand boy for some very unsavory characters. I wouldn't be surprised if he was murdered."

"Actually, Mrs. Fletcher, it looks like a suicide," said the Lieutenant. "We came to investigate when a neighbor spotted smoke and called 911. We found a dry tea kettle smoldering on the kitchen stove, and Myers sprawled over his desk, shot once in the head. There was a gun next to his hand and a note stuck to the desk that proves he was depressed."

"Not too depressed to make a cup of tea!" suggested Jessica. "I'd like to learn a little more if you don't mind, Lieutenant."

"Even though you're not officially involved in the investigation, Mrs. Fletcher, I suppose it couldn't hurt to let you see the room where the body was found. Come with me," directed the Lieutenant.

Jessica followed the detective upstairs to the desk where Myers had spent his last moments.

"Have you listened to the tape on the phone answering machine?" she asked.

"Not yet," replied the Lieutenant.

She poised her hand above the "play" button.

"May I?"

"Go ahead," nodded the Lieutenant. "The lab guys and the photographer have finished."

There were a few seconds of static. Then Jessica's voice came over the speaker.

"Mr. Myers, this is Jessica Fletcher. I'm headed over to your house now. It will take me about an hour or so. We'd better get most of the editing done tonight. The publisher asked me to let you know that he just moved the deadline up to February sixteenth. See you at six."

"Too bad," the Lieutenant said as he pointed to the desk. "The bullet that killed him also stopped

the clock at 4:30, so he never heard your message."

"Yes, it's too bad - too bad Myers was murdered!" Jessica stated calmly. "I know it isn't exactly according to Hoyle, but perhaps you would let me take part in the investigation. There are three people whose careers will be ruined if this manuscript is published in its current form, with a live author to back up his allegations. If I give you their names, and you bring them here tonight, I think we can solve a murder. What do you say?"

A short time later the suspects were gathered together. A tall, dapper gentleman, wearing a blue blazer, spoke first.

"Before we begin," he started, "I'd like to say we bear no animosity toward poor Arnold. He was a pitiful, petty, delusional person. It seems that whatever sordid daydreams were burning in his brain finally drove him to self-destruction."

"Let's forget Myers for the moment, and talk about you," responded Jessica, tapping the manuscript in her hand. "I found your life story very interesting. Born, Samuel V. Torrence III, quite a regal name for a poor farmer's son. College football hero. Navy fighter pilot with two Purple Hearts. Congressman at 29, Senator at 33. Conservationist, nature lover, and sportsman. Prime presidential material. But you'll never be president - not if Arnold Myers' memoir is published. It seems, Mr. Torrence, that just about every woman in Washington has been in the back seat of your limousine. Every woman, that is, except your wife! Myers kept his mouth shut and his eyes on the rear view mirror. Once this book comes out --- "

"Lies! Insinuations! Rumors!" bellowed Torrence. "Without a witness to back it up, that story has all the credibility of a supermarket tabloid."

"And I suppose that trash has my name in it, too?"

The speaker was a slim woman with a cynical smile.

"Adelle Sims!" announced Jessica Fletcher. "Psychologist, television personality, author of the popular advice column 'Tell Adelle'."

"Which is read by millions of American teenagers," Adelle chimed in. "They believe in me because I am a caring, sensitive person. And they won't believe one ounce of what that idiot chauffeur wrote about me!"

"As I was about to say," continued Jessica, brushing off the interruption. "Your show business career started in a small way - sixteen millimeter, to be exact. You starred in an embarrassing little film with the revealing title, 'The Sins of Laila'. It would be worth a small fortune if it were to be released. And you paid a small fortune to buy the negative and destroy the film before it destroyed your career. Myers was your errand boy for that transaction, according to his memoir. Did you know that he watched the film before turning it over to you? He even wrote a review of it that he included in his manuscript. Actually, he thought you were quite talented."

"Enough! Why should we listen to this woman?"

The speaker was a stout, red-faced man.

"Mister Krieger!" announced Jessica. "Welcome back to America. Did you fly from Algeria? Or did you smuggle yourself in with one of your crates of illegal machine guns?"

"By the way, I read in the newspaper that you were about to finalize a 70-million-dollar contract with the Army. But I doubt the Army will want to buy arms from the same man who supplied them to thugs, dictators, and terrorists around the world. Take my advice, Mr. Krieger, don't talk

business in the back seat of limousines anymore.

"You have no proof!" was all the flustered arms dealer could say.

"That's quite true," Jessica said. "This manuscript will not be taken too seriously now that Arnold Myers is dead. That's why I don't believe for one minute that Myers would commit suicide and leave his book to speak for itself. And I certainly don't believe he would have approved the disclaimer that the publisher tacked onto the last page, the sentence in the rectangle which reads, 'Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental. I'm sure now that Myers was about to cross it out this afternoon just as he was interrupted by one of you.'"

"One of us!" exclaimed Adelle Sims.

"You're mad!" shouted Krieger.

"Really, Mrs. Fletcher..." Torrence began.

"I don't think so either, Mrs. Fletcher," interrupted the Lieutenant. "We checked with witnesses and found out that all three of these people were working in their offices until five o'clock today. It looks like Myers died at 4:30."

"Not quite," Jessica Fletcher said. "One look around this room tells me three things:"

"Number One: Myers did not die at 4:30 as the clock would indicate."

"Number Two: Arnold Myers did not write a suicide note. Nor did he intend to. The murderer fixed things to make it look like he did."

"Number Three: The murderer left a 'calling card' on the desk."

"It's all here. It's undeniable. It's murder!" exclaimed Jessica Fletcher.

Can you discover the clues that Jessica Fletcher found in the room? Reread the story then piece together the jigsaw puzzle. All the answers are contained in the puzzle picture!