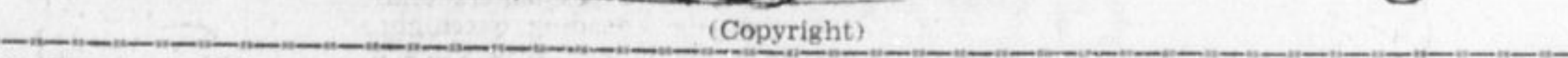


Death goes by bus

by Leslie Cargill



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Travelling from Colborough to Netherton, a country bus develops engine trouble and back-fires several times. Under cover of one of these explosions a male passenger is shot with a pistol. Those on the bus at the time of the tragedy are:

CARTER, the driver.

WITHERS, the conductor.

CALEB WAINWRIGHT, the man who was killed.

MORRISON SHARPE, a mildly eccentric little man whose dominating interest in life is solving puzzles—chess problems, crosswords and the like.

JERRY TUCKLEY, a schoolboy.

JOHN SMITH, who, when interrogated, admits to having been in goal.

GREGOR GARDOPOULOS, a Levantine importer of dried fruits.

HUNTLEY YOUNG, a commercial traveller.

Mr. and Mrs. WYLLIE, a farmer and his wife.

AGATHA HANSON, a dour middle-aged spinster.

From the beginning Sharpe takes a keen interest in the occurrence, and he has a vague impression that there was another passenger.

Sergeant MATTHEWS, patrolling the roads in a police car, comes upon the stationary bus and takes charge of the case. He is a traffic specialist, unfamiliar with serious crime. Impressed by Morrison Sharpe's grasp of the situation, he allows the puzzle solver to sit by him during the road-side interrogation of passengers, and to make suggestions. He permits Sharpe also to see the search of the dead man's pockets. Among the contents is a fine diamond necklace.

Before the bus leaves the point at which the shooting occurs, Sharpe suggests a search in the coppage running alongside the road. He and Matthews and a police doctor, who has arrived, have hardly begun to look for footprints when they come upon the body of a man. There is obvious evidence that he has died from cyanide poisoning. The doctor considers the man committed suicide while Matthews was interrogating the passengers.

The inquest discloses that the suicides was JOHN WINSLOW, a defaulting bank clerk, wanted by the police. He was not connected with the murder. He, the mysterious "missing" passenger happened to be on the bus, and, realizing that he would be interrogated by the police, slipped away and committed suicide in a state of panic.

Inquiries now turn to GARDOPOULOS. Although discouraged by Superintendent MAXLEY, who is now in charge of the case, Sharpe contrives to attach himself to the police officers, detailed to visit the Levantine merchant. In the interview, Gardopoulos admits that he knew Wainwright, who was an Australian. His story is that Wainwright wanted to sell him stolen goods but he would have nothing to do with the proposal. Consequently, Wainwright followed him to Colborough and boarded the bus after him; but they did not speak.

The story told by Huntley Young the commercial traveller is tested and proves to be false, but the man cannot be found.

Suspicion, however, moves swiftly to Withers, the bus conductor. A revolver is found near the scene of the crime in circumstances suggesting that he is the owner. He admits that he is, and that he threw away the weapon from motives of fear.

(Now Read On)
CHAPTER XI (Continued)
"IF 'A' MURDERS 'B'—"

On the way to Netherton the little man busied himself with a sheet of paper, covering it with queer words, figures and symbols. They were understandable only to himself. Resolving a murder into a mathematical equation is a nice little hobby, but hardly a practical one.

However, he did arrive at certain conclusions. Harry Carter was wiped off. So were the farming couple and the boy. But there still remained Agatha Hanson, Huntley Young, John Smith and Jeremy Withers. One of them was guilty. Which? There were far too many unresolvable symbols to arrive at the final answer.

Mr. Sharpe carefully folded up his paper, stowed it away, and looked up into the quizzical eyes of Superintendent Maxley.

"Another puzzle sir?" he asked.

"Yes, rather a novel one. It goes 'If 'A' murders 'B' and so on.'"

"Absolutely impossible," said the Superintendent, shocked at the very idea.

Mr. Sharpe did not seem taken aback. "Well, it can't be helped," he said regretfully. "I might have saved you making a fool of yourself."

"Sir!"

"Sounds harsh, doesn't it. Truth often does. If you were to ask me I could submit a thesis worth consideration."

"Go on!"

"Merely this. Withers did buy a revolver, of sorts, in Belgium last year. But not this one. After the murder he found the fatal one stuffed down between the back of a chair and the seat. Being scared, it kept it on one side until the search was resumed, taking his chance that we should accept it as being left after the tragedy. When the subterfuge was uncovered he spun his story on the spur of the moment. Does that hang together?"

"Perfectly," admitted Maxley. "Withers couldn't think up a better excuse for himself."

"Unless I'm mistaken he'll recount the same one when his back is to the wall. Even confirmed prevaricators fall back on strict accuracy as a last resource."

"He was going to point the moral when two plain clothes men came in"

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that this would have resulted in the disappearance of the typical sleuth. Departures from type are rare.

These two earnest watchers were each attired in loosely-cut blue-jean suits and sported bowler hats. Their feet were encased in square-toed boots without toe-caps. Half Netherton knew that Jeremy Withers was being followed by the police and the populace got their little thrill out of it.

Leaving the bus company's office, Jeremy wandered about for some time doing nothing in particular. Punctually at six o'clock he went into the Fleur de Lys and drank one half-pint of mild beer. When the 6.10 bus left for Colborough he was on board. So were the detectives.

At the town he went into the Golden Lion. Waiting about five minutes, the officers followed him. He was not in the bar, and the smoke room was empty except for a couple of regular customers. According to an observant page their quarry had gone upstairs, presumably to visit one of the guests. Yes, it was possible for the pair to have a look at the visitors' book. Production of identity cards opened useful sources of information.

Running a finger down the list of names the detective halted at an entry several days old.

"John Smith," he repeated. "Does that convey anything to you, Brownlaw?"

"It does. Wasn't that the name of one of the passengers on the bus when Wainwright was bumped off?"

"It was. And he's in records too. We'd better ring up the chief and see if he wants to come in on this himself."

Maxley certainly did. It was what he had half expected, though not quite so quickly. Ordering a car to be sent round immediately he found Sergeant Matthews, and ten minutes after receiving the message they were on their way to Colborough.

Brownlaw and Thornton the detailed watchers were waiting at the Golden Lion. Withers was still upstairs. It would be impossible for him to leave by any other exit, except the fire escape.

"You should have watched that," Maxley remarked, "in case he became suspicious that you were hanging about. Wait here while I go and look round. What room did you say Smith occupied?"

"Number 17, sir."

"Right! If you hear my whistle come up with a rush."

That "rush" was provided by the Superintendent, who came downstairs two at a time, almost before the others realized he had reached the top. From his expression they judged him to be annoyed, a fact that was amply demonstrated when he opened his mouth.

"Of all the cock-eyed idiots," he roared up, after a catalogue effort of choice quality, "that isn't John Smith in number 17—at least not the one we want. I suppose you made no effort to verify the identity."

"Oh yes, superintendent. We asked several people. There was no mistake about the name."

"I know that. But there is about the individual. You've brought me here on a wild-goose chase, and that's all there is to it."

"But young Withers went upstairs," Thornton apologized. "We both saw him."

"And out by the fire-escape," lamented his superior. "Heaven! Can you wonder at it?" He stared at them resentfully. "You look to me exactly like a couple of slops. One glance and all the crooks for miles around get under cover."

"Then we'd better get busy and pick up the trail again," said Brownlaw.

"Too late to-night. By the way, did that register show any other interesting names?"

Apparently nobody had looked beyond "John Smith." Strolling over to the desk Maxley took another glance. When he joined the group it was difficult to tell whether anger or disgust was his uppermost emotion. "You poor mutts,"

he snarled. "There are two other Smiths in this hotel—and one of them is John William and the other plain 'J.'"

"Then our man is still upstairs after all!"

"Unless he's gone down that escape. Better cut round, one of you, and keep all eyes on it. The rest of us will sit down and watch the stairs. To while away the weary hours, and to cool my temper a drink is indicated. Better take a quick one yourself Brownlaw, before you get outside . . ."

One drink led to two and then to a third. Shortly before 9.30 Jeremy Withers came down. With him was the familiar John Smith, and somebody else, whose presence caused Maxley to start all over again on the forceful vocabulary he had already drawn on to good effect that evening.

"Well met!" exclaimed Mr. Morrison Sharpe genially. "I think you had better have another drink. It still wants half-an-hour to closing time."

"How the devil did you get here?"

"Oh I live just round the corner."

"Pah!"

"Dropped in for drink and a chat with some old acquaintances."

"Mr. Smith, eh? And Mr. Withers. Didn't that strike you as rather indiscreet?"

"Not at all. Your men were keeping an eye on our young friend so I didn't see why I shouldn't do something of the kind for myself. Now the easiest way to do that was to go straight to the rendezvous . . ."

"What rendezvous?"

"Dear me, how you do persist with your questioning! The one that Withers kept to-night with Mr. Smith."

"This is getting beyond a joke, sir. How did you know about the arrangement?"

"Simple chess movement. I figured on it being rook to rook . . ."

"Crook to crook," snarled Maxley, impatiently.

"As you like." A waiter brought beer. They sipped it slowly, Smith and Withers were standing some distance away, looking on apprehensively. The Superintendent beckoned and they advanced with a show of hesitation.

Thornton was feeling in an inside pocket, and Mr. Sharpe wondered if that was where the handcuffs were kept. Matthews sat bolt upright, alert for further instructions.

"Ah!" breathed Maxley heavily. His eyes were on the clock. "What," he asked, "will you two gentlemen have to drink?"

Mr. Sharpe winked. He, at any rate knew that the heavy barrage preparatory to an inevitable attack had been postponed. The Superintendent was not sure of his ground.

Ten o'clock chimed, and shouts of "Drink up, please" echoed through the hotel. Coincidentally, as it seemed, the armistice concluded.

"Let us go up to your room for a little chat," Maxley suggested.

John Smith nodded. "By all means, though it is going to be a bit overcrowded with all you lot. Suppose big feet, for one, stays outside. That'll give us more breathing space. He had resorted to that impudent method of verbal attack which is often a potent weapon in the hands of the professional criminal."

The rest of them crowded into the little apartment. Smith sat on the edge of the bed. Matthews was by the door. Maxley perched on a dressing chest, and sharp took possession of the only chair which was not nearly as comfortable as it looked.

"Tell them exactly as you explained to me," he advised. "If there's trouble brewing, you'll do better by taking the skimming and keeping out of the worst of it."

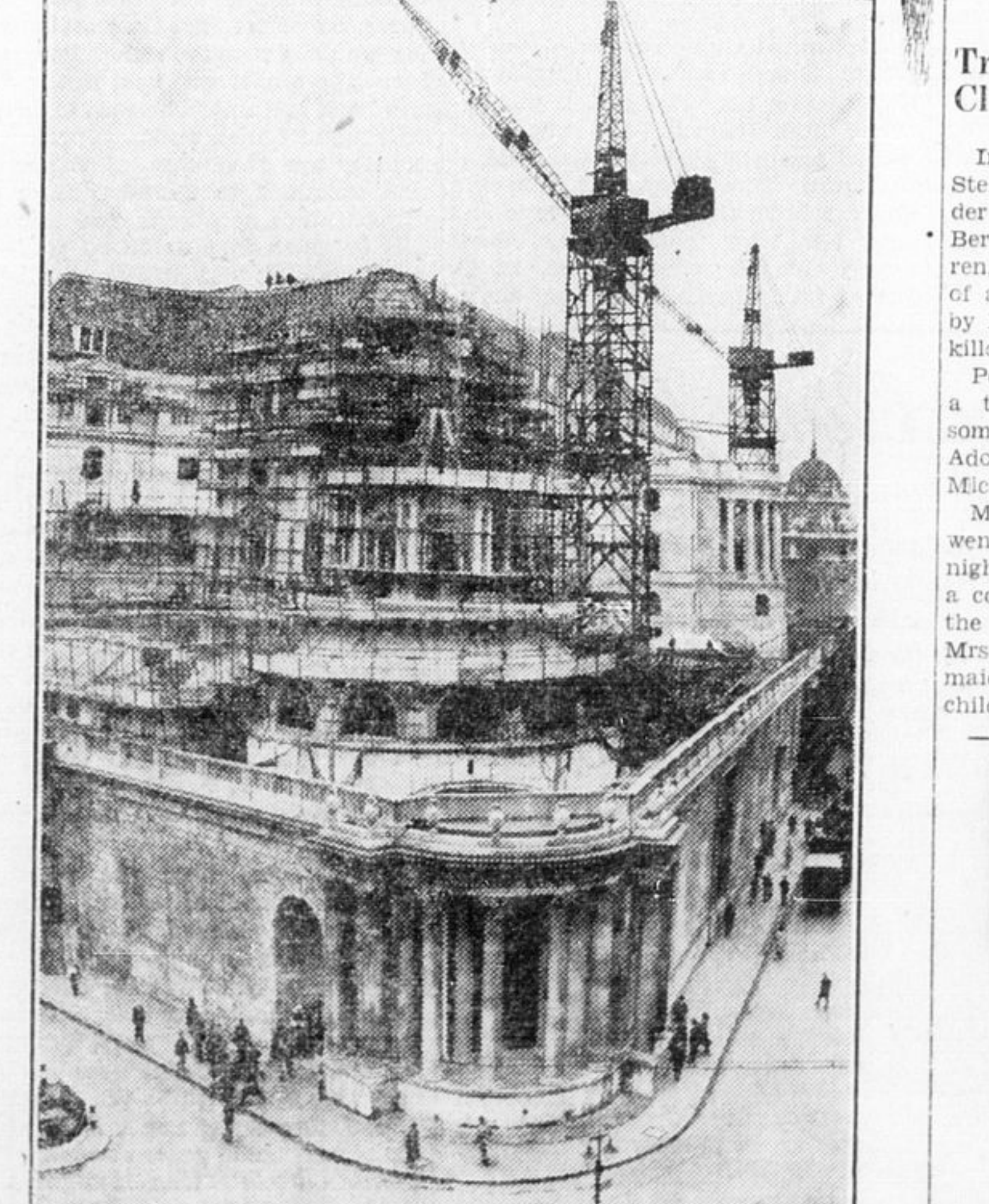
Smith nodded. "All right. Where's Withers, though?"

"Out side with the officer," explained Maxley.

"So, it's like that? Well, here goes. I'll give you the straight griffin. I'll give you the straight griffin."

(To Be Continued)

BUILT TO STAND A THOUSAND YEARS



Almost completed after more than ten years' work, the re-constructed Bank of England, repository of the nation's gold, will stand for at least 1,000 years. It will be virtually impregnable and the strongest building in the British Empire. So strong are the fifty vaults in the bank that it has been estimated 100 cracksmen would take a full year to penetrate them, even if there were no guards and alarms, and the latter are amazing. Above is a general picture of the Bank of England during the re-construction.

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North Should Send Big Delegation to Toronto

(From North Bay Nugget)

Northern Ontario should take a prominent part in the deliberations of the Ontario Good Roads Association at Toronto, February 24 and 25.

T. J. Mahony, secretary of the association, speaking of preparations for the meet which is expected to attract 600 delegates from all parts of the province, stated that for the first time in many years contributions to the programme will come from members of the Ontario government, municipal representatives, engineers and road building experts.

The great need of Northern Ontario is modern, durable roadways and too much stress cannot be laid on the necessity for early remedial action. The plea of the North should be strongly advanced before the Good Roads Association, many of whose members last year gained some knowledge of the handicap this section of the province suffers because of poor routes of travel.

The Toronto conference offers an excellent opportunity to again get the North's case before Southern Ontario and the government. The Cabinet will shortly present the road-building programme for the current year and unless the North drives persistently and intelligently it is probable that the appropriation of Northern Ontario roads will prove disappointing.

Hon. W. A. McQueen, minister of highways, will discuss future plans before the conference. It is believed he is sympathetic towards the North but he will require considerable public support to embark on what he considers the northern part of the province needs immediately.

The Good Roads Association can do much to induce the government to be considerate and generous, but they will not be inclined to go the limit unless the North sends a strong representation to advance its cause.

LARGE ATTENDANCE AT THE FORT WILLIAM CORONATION

Between 500 and 1,000 delegates of various American organizations will be invited to attend the ceremonies at Fort William in connection with the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. It is expected that from 200 to 500 members of the American Legion will attend the celebration.

New Dodge Inaugurates New Era in Automobiles

Introducing new standards of luxury, beauty, silence and safety, Dodge for 1937, presents a series of sixteen smart, distinctive motor cars in three lines: The Dodge Custom Six, The Dodge DeLuxe Six and the Dodge Six. The world renowned Dodge dependability, performance and individuality all find expression in the strikingly beautiful, advanced aerodynamic design of all the new models. Each is a symphony of softly blending, smoothly rounding windstream styling from end to end and side to side. The fleetness of fast planes is expressed in the racy, sweeping lines of their new, glistening radiator grilles. Never have Dodge lines been these new, longer, wider, more spacious more impressively beautiful, than in cars. New beauty of trim and appointment characterizes the luxury of the new Dodge interiors. The chair height seats are wider, accommodating six where formerly only five could ride in comfort. The attractive new design and finish of the instrument panels arouses instant admiration. Instruments and accessories are more conveniently located and more easily seen and readily used, both day and night. In the interest of greater safety, all protruding instrument panel knobs and handles have been banished. The inner and outer handles are modeled with a protective inward curve. The front seat rim is deeply padded. Your safety is well guarded in all the new Dodge body types.

Tragedy at Sault Ste. Marie Claims Lives of Two Persons

Investigation went forward at Sault Ste. Marie last week-end into the murder suicide that took two lives. Mrs. Bernard Mertes, mother of seven children, was allegedly shot on the doorstep of a neighbour's home Saturday night by Robert McPherson, who afterwards killed himself.

Police said MacPherson had written a threatening letter to Mrs. Mertes some days ago. This was confirmed by Adolph Samuels, Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., the woman's brother.

MacPherson, 25-year-old bachelor, went to the Mertes home Saturday night. He apparently entered through a coal chute, police said, and had cut the telephone wires. In the house with Mrs. Mertes were Theresa McCoy, a maid; Herb Myers and the Mertes children, the eldest 11 years old. Ber-

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