

Two Murders Too Many by Blurette Matthey

Except

Blanche Gruman sprawled on the park bench in front of the Presbyterian Church Monday enjoying the afternoon sun, her long, tanned legs stretched out on the sidewalk in front of the bench. She looked serene, with her face turned sunward, eyes protected by aviator sunglasses. Her blonde hair was almost white, bleached by the sun, and she wore it long and loose.

“Afternoon, Blanche,” Charlie said as he made his way toward town hall.

Blanche turned her head to see who had spoken. “Well, hey, Charlie!” she replied. She quickly sat up, pulling her bare legs primly under the edge of the bench. It was a lady-like move; just what you would expect from Blanche. A broad smile, showing perfect pearl-white teeth lit up her face.

Blanche Gruman owned and operated a successful hair salon in town. For Shannon, it was an exclusive salon. Blanche was an excellent cutter and stylist, and her flamboyant but tasteful sense of style attracted the cream of Shannon’s women to her salon, as well as some of the more prominent men. She had expanded her business over the course of a decade, hiring additional staff, but she was the queen bee, and closely guarded her select clientele.

Blanche had never married, though she’d had a fairly constant parade of suitors. Rumor had it that when someone had once asked her why she had never married she had flippantly replied, “Why marry one man when I can make so many happy?” Whether or not this was true, it was generally agreed that Blanche had a less traditional approach to relationships with men than her female contemporaries, and it was speculated that many of her female devotees who religiously came to Blanche for hair treatment did so as a means of keeping an eye on her latest paramour, primarily to make sure it wasn’t a wayfaring husband.

“You look mighty pleased with yourself,” Charlie said. He stood in front of her, blocking the sun from her eyes. She removed her sunglasses, hooking one of the templates on the V-neck of a snug knit top that accented her generous curves.

“It’s a great day to celebrate life,” she told him, “and that’s just what I’m doing.” Clearly, she was enjoying herself.

Charlie changed the subject. “You hear about what happened to Otto Hilty the other night?”

His question soured Blanche’s mood noticeably. Her voice took on a hard edge when she responded. “That SOB ...” she began. “I don’t truck with what happened to Otto,” she said, “but I’ll not shed any tears for him.” She put her sunglasses on and stood, facing Charlie. “Like I said... it’s a great day to celebrate.” She walked off leaving Charlie standing, literally, with his mouth agape.