

# **Murder While You Wait**

**Inspector Felton**

**by Emile C. Tepperman, 1899-1951**

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*One by one the most eminent doctors in the city were found—their throats ripped raw by tearing fangs. Who would be next?*

DOCTOR LUCIUS WHYMER awoke with a tingling sensation of impending danger. His examining room was in total darkness. He recalled that when he had

lain down for a nap at the close of office hours, he had left the floor lamp on at the other side of the room.

Now there was no light.

He sensed, more than heard, a queer shuffling movement in the room. Someone was there, close beside his couch...

In the split second of transition from troubled sleep to wakefulness, his mind conjured up a picture of the hideous death of his colleague, Doctor Devoe, the day before—with the marks of beast-like fangs upon his throat. And in that second he realized—perhaps intuitively—that the same ghastly doom was upon him, too.

A space of five seconds ticked by in utter silence. Whymer was frozen with fear. Stoutish, sluggish, peaceful, he was unprepared to face death from the darkness with coolness of mind.

Then a faint, rustling sound was audible beside his couch. He opened his mouth to scream, but no sound ever left it. For a flashlight clicked on at the doorway, smearing his face with its cruel brilliance.

That light was like a slap in the face. He blinked, raised his lids, and his eyes became distended with dread as two hands like talons reached into the illumination and pinioned his arms to his sides.

"All right, Stravinski," a voice from behind the flashlight in the doorway said. "There's another one to play with!"

Whymer knew that voice!

He had raised his head in terror. Now he dropped it hopelessly back on the couch. His eyes rolled, and his lips were dry and parched.

He lay helpless in the grip of those two hands, and shouted hoarsely, "Lakno, Lakno! I know you! What are you doing? Is this a joke?"

But he knew it was no joke. "God, Lakno," he cried despairingly, "what are you going to do with me?"

There was no answer.

But out of the fringe of darkness beyond the light, a face crept slowly down toward him—the face of the one whose hands were gripping him.

Stravinski!

He recognized at once the insane criminal whom he and Doctor Lakno and the dead Doctor Devoe had tried to cure years ago; the deep-set eyes that burned out of a bulging skull, the sparse stringy hair, the two projecting, fang-like molars that hinted of some obscene animal transmuted into a man.

The sight broke Doctor Whymer's nerve.

HE opened his mouth and uttered shriek after shriek; and the shrieks died against the soundproof walls of the examining room. His vocal cords gave out. He whimpered, in a voice so low it was almost a whisper, "Lakno, for God's sake, take him away!"

The man in the doorway said nothing, but kept the flashlight steady. Stravinski's face moved lower, closer. A low, bestial growl came from his throat as Whymer tried to struggle feebly. Flecks of foam appeared at the corners of his lips, and the two teeth that looked like fangs gleamed hungrily...

Mercifully, Whymer fainted...

There was no sound in the room save for an odious, grumbling growl that came at intervals from Stravinski. This too, ceased a moment later as he arose from the mangled throat of Doctor Whymer. His face was bloody, his eyes rimmed with red. He spread his claw-like hands and looked at the man in the doorway. He said nothing, but his face carried a loathful grin of satiety.

"That is well, Stravinski," the man whom Whymer had named as Lakno said from the doorway. "Come now. There is more work for you."

He opened the door and walked out into the corridor, throwing the light before him. Stravinski followed him to the outer door. Lakno, in the light from the street lamp that flowed into the vestibule, appeared tall, with a pointed beard beneath a ruthless mouth.

He made sure the street was empty, then allowed Stravinski to go out first, saying, "Walk to the right and around the corner. My car is parked there."

He was about to follow, when he drew back with an oath. A uniformed patrolman had just come around the corner at the left. Lakno dropped the flash, and tried to draw Stravinski back, but the beast-man shook off his hand and leaped down the stoop, growling deep in his throat.

The policeman stopped short as Stravinski charged down at him. He shouted, "Hey, what the hell!" Then he glimpsed the bloody face and the snarling lips, and reached frantically for his gun.

Lakno, unseen, drew back quietly into the shelter of the corridor, then sped silently toward the rear. He let himself out the back way, climbed a fence, and came out around the corner where his car was parked. As he stepped on the starter he heard the explosion of a heavy police thirty-eight.

NO one would have thought, to look at Inspector Cass Felton, that he was one of the foremost criminologists of his time, a man who had conferred a signal favor upon the new police commissioner when he gave up his private practice to take charge of the Homicide Bureau.

His face was thin with a hint of asceticism, the nose patrician like a Roman emperor's. The sparkling eyes betrayed the highly acute intelligence that functioned behind them. And there was a studiousness, a cloister-like quality about him that seemed incongruous with his official position.

He had before him now, at Headquarters, the reports and exhibits in the Whymer murder case. Detective Sergeant Gayner, who had had immediate charge, was seated comfortably across the desk from him.

"Go over the highlights again, will you, Sergeant," Felton requested. "There's something elusive in this business that I can't seem to put my finger on."

"Well, sir," Gayner related, "the first thing is that this Doctor Devoe was killed yesterday—chewed to death. Then tonight, this Stravinski comes dashing out of Doctor Whymer's house, jumps O'Rourke, the cop on the beat. O'Rourke gets panicky and gives Stravy a slug in the guts. He goes in the house and finds Whymer dead with his throat chewed up." He spread his hands in a gesture of finality. "So I come on the scene and pat O'Rourke on the back because he killed the murderer of Devoe and Whymer."

Felton leaned across the desk, smiling quizzically. "And the motive, Sergeant?"

"Easy, sir. Devoe and Whymer were two of the members of the lunacy commission that committed Stravinski to the hospital for the criminal insane."

"I remember reading something about it in the papers," said Felton. "How did he get out?"

"There was something funny about that, sir. A while ago, Doctor Lakno, another one of the commission—he has a big laboratory out on Staten Island—got permission of the court to take Stravinski out in his custody and try an experimental cure on him. But Stravinski escaped from the laboratory. We lost him till tonight."

Felton's eyes narrowed. "You say that Devoe, Whymer and Lakno were members of this commission? Were there any others?"

"Yes, sir. A Doctor Sheffield, on Eighty-seventh Street. The four of them are well-known alienists. They were co-trustees of the million dollar Noble Fund for the regeneration of the criminal insane. I guess Stravinski would have got them all if he'd had the time."

Felton fingered the exhibits on the desk. "This flashlight. It appears to have been dropped by Stravinski. There were no prints on it?" He drew it out of a chamois case where it had been placed by the fingerprint man.

Gayner shook his head. "Not a print, sir. And we can't trace it. It's a common flash that's sold by hardware and five-and-ten cent stores everywhere."

Felton toyed absently with it a moment, then replaced it in the chamois bag and pocketed it.

Gayner glanced at him questioningly.

He smiled. "I'm going to take it home with me. I want to test the batteries and see how much use they've been given. Perhaps we could tell by that how long Stravinski had it. You know—" he pointed a long finger at Gayner—"it's peculiar that a wanted man like Stravinski should have been able to get around, acquire flashlights, without being picked up."

"What's the use, sir?" Gayner said, "Stravinski's dead. The case is closed."

Felton slowly wagged his head from side to side. "The case is *not* closed, Sergeant." He stood up. "Doesn't it seem strange to you that this man should suddenly exhibit the tendencies of a wolf—literally chew people up? Was he known to have those tendencies before?"

"No sir. But you can never tell about nuts. They'll—"

He stopped as a knock came at the door. At Felton's "Come in," one of the patrolmen assigned to messenger duty in the building entered.

"What is it?" Felton inquired.

"We got a guy downstairs, sir," the messenger said, "who's gone loco. Absolutely lost his mind. Inspector Burns told me to let you know. He thinks you'll be interested, even if it ain't a homicide; figures you'll want to see him."

"Have you identified this man yet?"

"Yes sir. He's got his papers an' all with him. An' someone knew him down on the Staten Island ferry where he was picked up. It's a Doctor Sheffield. His office is on Eighty-seventh Street!"

THE thin silence that followed this announcement was broken by Gayner's shocked exclamation. "Sheffield—the fourth trustee of the Noble Fund!"

"I think," said Cass Felton, "that we'll go down and take a look at Doctor Sheffield."

THEY had Sheffield in a little office behind the charge room. One of the medical examiner's assistants was looking him over. He sat stolidly, dull-eyed, staring vacantly at the ceiling while the physician worked over him. The examiner finally closed his bag, shaking his head perplexedly.

"What is it, Doc?" Felton asked. "Amnesia?"

"Hell, no!" the doctor answered. "Amnesia is a pathological disturbance which affects memory only. This man has absolutely no mental reactions. It's just as if his entire mind was atrophied!" He shook his head. "I've seen nasty things, Inspector Felton, but this takes the cake—this, and that body of Stravinski down in the autopsy room!"

Felton drew him aside. "What did you find on Stravinski?"

The doctor gazed at him somberly. "You won't believe me, Inspector. You'll think I'm crazy, too."

"Don't worry, Doc, I'll believe you," Felton snapped impatiently. "What is it?"

"Well, I'll tell you. The post-mortem of Stravinski's body shows that something terrible—something incredible—was done to him." He placed the tip of his forefinger on Felton's chest. "Do you know what the parathyroid glands are?"

The inspector nodded. "They're found in animals—embedded in the thyroids."

"Right." The doctor's eyes were gleaming strangely. "They're not found in adult human beings. Well, Stravinski has had a set of parathyroids *grafted* into him! They must have come from some animal—we can't tell which."

"A wolf?" Felton mused. "Would that account for his chewing people up?"

The doctor shrugged. "Who knows? Nobody's ever tried such a devilish experiment before. The parathyroids contain thymic tissue and certain corpuscles known as the corpuscles of Hassall. It is possible that they are the seat of instincts, influencing behavior, though such a theory would perhaps sound insane to one who has never thought along those lines... But listen to this, Inspector: I haven't told you the half of it yet. There was something else..."

He glanced furtively at the quiescent Sheffield, who sat stolidly without a flicker of intelligence showing in his face, then went on huskily: "*Stravinski's brain cells were decomposed!* I can't account for it any more than I can account for Sheffield's condition."

Felton said dryly, "Thanks, Doc." He stepped over and looked at Sheffield. His mouth was grim as he noted the lack of expression in the noted alienist's face.

Gayner stood beside him. "God, sir! What sort of devil did that to him?"

"The same one, no doubt, that made Stravinski a snarling wolf. And he's a cunning devil, too. Look at this man. Perhaps only yesterday he had one of the keenest minds in his profession."

"And we don't even know what was done to him!" Gayner ejaculated.

Cass Felton stooped and lifted Sheffield's right hand. The alienist offered no objection while the inspector examined closely a diamond ring on the middle finger of the limp hand. There was a clot of blood on the stone, and a sliver of skin.

Felton asked the medical examiner, "Can you tell what this is, Doc?"

The doctor took a magnifying glass, from his bag and studied the ring. "It's a bit of skin from someone's cheek," he announced. "There are a couple of stiff bristles in the skin—black hair."

"Not his own, sir," Gayner said. "He's blond."

"Perhaps he put up a struggle," Felton mused. "Maybe that bit of skin and blood will finally burn the one behind it all."

He was thoughtful for an instant, then, "Let's go, Gayner!"

Gayner followed him to the corridor. "Where to, sir?" he asked.

"Get a car. We'll drive out to this laboratory of Doctor Lakno's that you told me about, on Staten Island."

AS Gayner toiled the car out of the ferry slip and out into Hylan Boulevard, he said, "I begin to see it now, sir. You figure that with Devoe and Whymer and Sheffield eliminated, Lakno gets control of the whole million dollar Noble-Fund, since he's the only surviving trustee."

Felton was lost in speculation. "It's a possible motive," he answered absently.

"And you figure he used Stravinski as a cat's-paw to kill the first two, and then when Stravinski got killed he did this to Sheffield?"

"Maybe."

"But why wouldn't he kill Sheffield?"

Felton stirred. "Because, Sergeant, he's too smart to commit murder with his own hands. As it is, he's in the clear, unless we can pin something definite on him."

They reached a private road, at the end of which an ugly cement building loomed in the darkness.

"You going in there alone, sir?" Gayner asked uneasily.

"Yes."

"But why not let me come along? We'll take him in and sweat him."

Felton laughed shortly. "And he'd be out in an hour on a writ." He put his hand on the sergeant's knee. "Don't you see, Gayner, there's no charge we can make stick? We don't even know for sure what was done to Sheffield and Stravinski. We'd be laughed out of court. What we have to do is trick him some way—get something definite to hold him on." He eyed the cement structure moodily.

"All right, sir, you're the boss. But be careful. I hear he's got a powerful dynamo in there. He's liable to electrocute you or something, and call it an accident."

"Don't worry, Sergeant. I don't need a wet nurse."

"Just the same, sir," Gayner assured him grimly, "if you don't come out in a half hour I'll come in after you." He allowed a narrow grin to split his face. "The Commissioner told me to be sure nothing happens to you!"

The inspector got out of the car. "Okay, Sergeant. Tell you what else you do. Prowl around a little. Don't let him see you in the car. I want him to think I came alone."

Gayner saluted and got out on the other side. In a moment he had vanished into the darkness.

Cass Felton walked up the short road to the laboratory, and rang the bell. From somewhere within came a soft whir which he identified as the sound of a dynamo

in operation. The door was opened by a huge man with pinpoint eyes set in a wide face.

"I am Inspector Cass Felton of the police department," the criminologist announced. "I should like to talk to Doctor Lakno."

"Come in, sir," said the big man, non-committally. "Doctor Lakno will be glad to see you." There was something sinister in the way he uttered the ready invitation.

Felton entered. The door closed behind him.

THEY were in a small foyer. All the fittings were of Bakelite. There was no metal in evidence, save for a large dial set in one wall. It was not exactly a dial, but was in the shape of a semicircle, with numbers along the arc and a hand that pointed to zero. It was in appearance like the speedometer of an automobile.

As they approached this dial the handle began to move back and forth with quick, jerky motions, and ended up pointing at the extreme end, opposite from zero. The big man stopped short. "I am sorry, sir," he said, "but the metal indicator shows that you have something on your person—perhaps a gun?"

"I have," Felton acknowledged.

"You will have to leave it here, sir. No metal that is not grounded may be admitted to the laboratory. Doctor Lakno, as you probably know, experiments with terrifically high voltages. The electro-magnet, for instance, will throw a spark across the room; and a loose bit of metal may short-circuit the whole business."

Felton produced the gun from its armpit holster, and handed it over with a wry smile. The man put it into a box in the corner, that was lined with chamois. "It'll be safe in there," he commented. Felton also contributed an automatic pencil, a cigarette case and a cigar lighter. All went into the chamois-lined box.

It was not until the last article had been deposited in the box, and the lid closed, that the handle of the metal indicator returned to zero.

Then he followed the attendant down a short hall and into a peculiar office. It contained a desk, two chairs, and a quantity of control instruments with buttons and levers. One entire wall was of glass, like the control room of a radio broadcasting station.

Through the wall Cass Felton could see that the rest of the ground floor was taken up by the laboratory. At one end was a huge mass of coils which he knew to be an electro-magnet. Closer by was a cement chair that had been built into the floor. Beside it stood a mercury-vapor lamp, its fittings all cased in Bakelite. The lamp was so arranged that its rays would fall directly upon the chair.

Felton was wondering what purpose the mercury-vapor lamp could serve in such a laboratory, when he was startled from his thoughts by a smooth voice behind him. "How do you do, Inspector? I see you are interested in my little gadgets!"

Felton turned slowly and surveyed his host. Lakno was tall, thin, but he gave the impression of sinister strength. And Felton's pulse beat faster. For he had seen a small strip of adhesive tape on Lakno's left cheek!

"Glad to know you, Doctor Lakno," he said. Then he set himself. He was going to take the bull by the horns. "I thought I'd come," he said casually, "to congratulate you on your devilish ingenuity!"

He held his breath. Would Lakno rise to the bait?

But the tall doctor was clever. For a long heartbeat he was utterly silent, his eyes boring into Felton's. Then he wet his lips and said softly, "You talk in riddles, Inspector."

Felton smiled. "You are wasting time, Doctor. You may as well admit everything. You see, there is a piece of skin from your cheek on Sheffield's ring!"

HE watched the color drain from Lakno's face at his words, continued, "You are no different from other criminals, Doctor, though perhaps much cleverer. You made the usual one mistake—you forgot to wipe off your victim's ring after he'd struggled with you and scratched your face!"

It took Lakno a moment to regain his composure. Then a bleak, dangerous light glittered in his cruel eyes. "You are a brave man, Inspector," he said, and his voice was almost a whisper.

Felton grinned thinly. "Meaning what?" he asked.

"Meaning that this is the end for you. You are the only man on the police force with the intelligence to have tripped me on such a slender clue. It will be too bad to destroy such intelligence!" He raised his voice. "All right, Melek!"

Felton had neglected to keep watch of the big attendant. Abruptly, now, his arms were pinioned to his sides from behind! He was embraced in a crushing bear-hug, and literally lifted from the floor. He glimpsed, over his shoulder, the grim-set face of the man who had admitted him.

"Take him out there, Melek." Lakno motioned to the cement chair in the laboratory.

Felton struggled, but his efforts were futile. Like a baby in a giant's arms he was carried out and deposited in the chair. Lakno took from a pocket several lengths of catgut, with which they bound him securely across the chest, his arms pinioned at his sides. Then they bound his ankles. He could move his arms from the elbows only.

"Go out and look around," Lakno ordered the big man. "See if anybody came with him." Melek went out as directed.

Lakno waited until he was gone, then said, "I have heard of you, Inspector. You were the only man I was afraid of, for your intelligence is of a higher order than that of the police. But it was foolish of you to come here this way."

"Do you admit," Felton demanded, "that you caused Stravinski to kill Devoe and Whymer; and that you did something horrible to Sheffield's brain?"

Lakno shrugged. "Why not? You will shortly be as harmless as Sheffield." He was working on the mercury-vapor lamp while he talked. "I did all those things. I grafted the glands of a wolf into Stravinski's thyroid. He already had certain deep-rooted animal instincts, and the parathyroids accentuated them."

He finished his work on the lamp.

Felton wriggled desperately under the catgut bonds. He wondered if he had overplayed his hand. Had Melek found Gayner outside and overpowered him? His lips were dry. "What's this lamp for?" he demanded hoarsely.

Lakno permitted the ghost of a thin smile to play on the cruel lips. "It is to render you harmless," he said. "I put Stravinski and Sheffield under it. It is my own invention. The ordinary mercury lamp, as you may know, throws a light containing only about twenty percent of ultra-violet rays. This lamp, however, has



been stepped up with a high voltage." He indicated the powerful electro-magnet. "It now throws a light containing *ninety* percent of ultra-violet rays. You have seen Sheffield, and know what it does to brain matter. It has no effect on the skin, however, because of the shortened wavelength."

He bent closer, smiled again. "It is *your* turn now to get an ultra-violet treatment, Inspector. After I turn you loose, you will be a human shell with the intellect of a moron. You will be harmless to me!" He tapped his own cheek. "Believe me, Inspector, it would have been better—far better—for you if you had never noticed this little strip of adhesive tape!"

CASS FELTON said nothing. His mind was racing from one desperate alternative to another, and finding no means of salvation.

Lakno bowed ironically. "I'll see you—afterwards, Inspector. I will operate this lamp from the office. It's safer. That electro-magnet conducts ten thousand volts of electricity..."

He walked noiselessly back to the office. Now Felton could see him through the glass partition, working at the control boards. Soon the immense electro-magnet burst into life with a hum.

The lamp beside the chair began to radiate a pale emanation of light. The rays struck squarely at Felton's forehead. He twisted about, but could not escape them. No matter what position he assumed, the insidious rays attacked some portion of his head. He could not feel them, but he knew enough about ultra-violet light to realize what effect they would have upon him. He shuddered as he saw himself, a dull-eyed idiot, booted out to be picked up somewhere by the mystified police, with a rotting, decomposed brain!

His mind was working fast under Lakno's gloating eyes. He moved his hands awkwardly, exploring his pockets. If he could only find something—some piece of metal. It might attract a spark from the electro-magnet, and cause a short circuit. It would undoubtedly kill him, but that was better than what awaited him if he remained quiescent under the sinister lamp. He bit his lip. Everything metallic had been deposited in the chamois box in the anteroom.

Then abruptly his eyes sparkled. Hope burned anew. His hands had come in contact with the chamois bag in which he had placed the flashlight found on the scene of Dr. Whymer's murder! The indicator in the anteroom had not discovered its presence because the flashlight was wrapped in the non-conducting chamois. He himself had forgotten it, when searching for metal in the foyer!

He dragged out the bag and worked at the slip-cord that tied it. He saw Lakno rise from the control board, the gloating expression giving way to one of alarm. He had seen the bag; but more than that, the change of expression on his victim's face told him that the bag contained some trick.

Lakno rushed out of the control room. Felton worked frenziedly at the slip-cord, but before he could open it, Lakno was upon him. The doctor snatched the bag from his hands.

"Sorry, Inspector," he said with a thin smile. "I'll have to take it. That's one reason for the glass partition—so I can see what's happening." He laughed harshly. "I might have known that a man like you wouldn't come here without some little trick he could resort to in a pinch. Let's see what it is."

He pulled the slip-cord, turned the bag down. As the flashlight slid into his waiting palm, a look of puzzlement came over his features.

"Well—" he said.

That was the last word Doctor Lakno ever uttered. As full realization dawned upon him, stark panic wiped off the puzzled frown. Frantically he tried to jam the flashlight back into its container. But too late...

Felton shuddered as there came a mighty *hiss* from the electro-magnet. A tremendous spark of crackling current leaped out from it, stabbed at the flashlight in Lakno's hand. The air was fresh with the smell of ozone, vibrant with ear-ringing sound.

The doctor's face went black. His mouth opened as if to utter a scream; but no sound came forth. His body twisted agonizingly and crumpled to the floor. It lay very still.

Almost on the instant every light in the building went out, and Felton was left in utter darkness. Cooling, life-giving darkness... A great weight seemed to have been lifted from his forehead as the rays of the ultra-violet lamp died out.

Felton's eyes tried to pierce the blackness, looking toward the spot where he had seen Lakno's scorched body drop. But the darkness was thick about him, and the silence awesome. He struggled with his bonds.

Then he heard a fumbling at the door. It swung cautiously open. A flashlight beam searched the room and came to rest on him. He flinched from it; it was so reminiscent of the all-too-recent peril of the ultra-violet lamp.

"Inspector Felton!" He relaxed, smiling, as he recognized Sergeant Gayner's startled tones. "Glory be! I thought you were a goner!"

Gayner made his way across the room. "That big guy came out lookin' for trouble," he said. "But I saw him first." He rubbed his knuckles and grinned. "I think he's got a fractured jaw."

"Don't talk so much, Sergeant," Cass Felton said. "Come here and take this catgut off me!"

