FICTION FROM 'BEST SHORT STORIES' BY AFRO-AMERICAN WRITERS

One Way To Victory

Victory is sweet — especially when you have to outslick some slickers to gain it. Here's a pleasant little story with a surprise twist at the end. You'll like it.

By Nick A. Ford

The telephone rang. Harry Anderson looked across the card table at his three friends. They shrugged in unison.

"This is it," Harry announced with finality, as he rose and stalked across the lavishly furnished room.

The three friends sat motionless, their eyes focused on Harry and their ears attuned to hear the worst.

On the table beside the four hands of cards lay three shiny revolvers. Mr. Anderson had picked up the fourth, which he held clutched in his right hand as he lifted the receiver.

* * *

"HELLO . . . Yes, this is Mr. Anderson." The three friends leaned forward. They knew Harry would be equal to the emergency, and they were willing to let him barter their lives away if he wanted to.

"I'm listening," Harry said in a hard, metallic voice. The three friends looked at each other, and their minds sped back to that memorable day twenty years ago.

It was commencement day at Middle City High School. Harry, Bob, George and Andrew, known as the "four horsemen," were graduating.

* * *

THEY WERE popular among their white classmates, but they knew life in Middle City would pass them by unless they could fight harder and think faster than their white competitors.

They had pledged never to lose touch with each other during the years of their professional preparation and to come back to Middle City to practice their professions.

Everything had progressed as one might expect on graduation day until the principal started to read the names of graduates who were going away to continue their education.

Bob was going to Howard University for pre-medical work, George was to study dentistry at Meharry, Andrew had signed up for pharmacy at State University.

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THE AUDIENCE had taken in this information along with similar plans of the white graduates with the usual polite applause of approval.

But when the principal had announced that Harry Anderson intended to enter the Engineering School of State University, the audience uttered a gasp of disapproval.

"Why do you want to waste your time studying engineering?" the superintendent of city schools had asked Harry when the four boys were leaving the platform. "There is no opening anywhere for a colored engineer."

But Harry had not been moved. He finished State University with highest honors.

* * *

TEN YEARS later he was called back to his Alma Mater to construct a huge power plant at a cost of a million and a half dollars.

Since then, Harry had built more than a dozen important bridges in various sections of the country. He had amassed a fortune that ran into seven figures.

"A colored man can succeed in any profession on earth," he told his three friends when he came back to Middle City to buy the beautiful thirteen-room mansion in which they were now sitting.

* * *

THE TEN-ACRE estate on the rolling hills of Middle City's most exclusive residential area had cost $110,000.

Harry knew it was really worth $15,000 less, but the real estate agent had insisted upon the enormous bonus for turning the deal.

"So that's it?" Harry was saying in the mouthpiece of the telephone. The three friends suddenly came back to the present.

Their brief excursion into the past had made them more determined than ever. Each one grabbed a revolver from the table and released the safety catch.

"You're damn' right I'm staying," Harry went on. "I'll be here until hell freezes over."

* * *

THERE WAS A pause at the other end of the line. Harry could hear hurried consultation among frightened voices. He beckoned his three friends to come closer that they might hear the other party.

"I don't think we'll need those guns," Harry said. "The case has taken another turn. It seems they have decided not to challenge us with physical force. They say they have some information that will pin my ears back."

"Are you listening?" came a frightened voice through the receiver.

"Yes," boomed Harry. "Shoot the works!"

"We have discovered that part of your estate is covered by a restrictive covenant," the voice explained. "The covenant part includes your house and two additional acres."

"I know it," Harry shot back. "I found that out before I bought the place. What about it?"

"Our Community Improvement Association is prepared to take the matter to court," the voice continued. "And I think we'll win.

"We can't do anything about the unrestricted four acres, but we can make you lose the house and a fortune in attorney fees. That is, if you're not willing to sell and move out."

* * *

THE U.S Supreme Court had not passed down its now famous decision nullifying restricted covenants based on race or religion, and the chances seemed two to one that Harry Anderson would lose.

The three friends winced. They knew Harry was prepared to fight lead with lead, but they didn't know about this new turn of events. Harry had not discussed such an eventuality with them.

But Harry did not hesitate. He clutched the receiver with an iron grip and his eyes narrowed to tiny slits.

"All right," shouted Harry, "I accept your challenge. But let me tell you this: If you do win, you'll be sorry; for I'm prepared to spend $100,000 to build the most notorious slums on those unrestricted four acres that the city has ever seen!

"I'll throw up a hundred shacks within six months time, and fill them, rent free, with the poorest white people in this city. And there is no law on earth to stop me. I guarantee that property values in this exclusive section will fall fifty per cent within a week after my project is completed."

"You wouldn't do that, Mr. Anderson," a bewildered voice pleaded from the other end.

"So help me, God!" Harry pledged. "If you will not accept a decent, law - abiding, educated colored neighbor, I'll spend a half - million dollars to force upon you a hundred ignorant, poverty - stricken, slummy white neighbors."

* * *

HARRY SHOVED the receiver back on the hook. The tension was broken. The four friends stuffed their guns in their pockets and sat down to resume their card game.

"You outsmarted them that time, Harry," Bob smiled as he picked up the cards for a new shuffle.

"Yes, that's one way to victory," George commented, lighting his pipe and extending the lighter to the tip of Andrew's cigarette.

"Three no trumps," Harry bid, and the games was on in earnest.

THE END

"I'll fill those shacks up with poor whites. See how you'll like that."

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AFRO Magazine Section

THE AFRO-AMERICAN, MARCH 1, 1958

Harlem's Perfect Crime?

Twenty-seven years ago. Feb. 15, 1931, a quadruple murder was discovered in a New York apartment. A pretty chorine, Thelma Scott, her mother, aunt and niece were found strangled to death. The killer has never been found.

Five years later a man, known as Peg Leg Smith, was executed at Sing-Sing Prison. Before he walked the last mile, the AFRO received a telegram stating: "Again as I told you it would be well to interview Peg Leg Smith about the Scott-Reed murders before he goes to the chair." It was signed, A Reader.

The investigation was reopened, all clues tracked down, but the murderer remained unknown — he is unknown today.

Here is a story of this baffling crime, told by an AFRO Correspondent who was on the scene when the bodies were discovered.

By Alvin E. White

Thelma Scott, after being missing for a week, was found in bed with her throat slashed.

Thelma Scott

Who killed Thelma Scott?

For 27 years, that question has gone unanswered.

Today, Harlem's perfect crime still defies solution and baffles the best brains in New York's police department.

Just as from the outset, mystery completely surrounds the brutal murder of the pretty Harlem dancer, her mother and her aunt — all slain by a madman in the sixth floor apartment they occupied in the house on the busy corner of 136th St. and Seventh Ave., just two blocks from Harlem's 32nd Police Precinct station house.

The police are no closer to a solution than they were that blustery Sunday night, Feb. 15, 1931, when they broke into the death house and found the three badly decomposed bodies and a welter of clues which apparently were either muddled through or badly messed up.

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THE SORDID murders came to light through a stray remark overheard the night before, Saturday, in the Renaissance dance hall at 138th Street and Seventh Avenue.

From there on, the story rivals the best detective mystery written, only this wasn't fiction, it was fact and again, this one defies solution. Here's what happened.

* * *

THE RENOWN Social Club was staging its annual midwinter dance at the Renaissance, and being an ex-officio member of all the best clubs in Harlem, as well as a newspaper man, I was there.

Standing alone in a balcony box, waiting for the arrival of the club occupying the box, I overheard two well known characters in the next box chatting idly.

Said one:

"Say, have you seen Thelma Scott this week?"

His friend replied,

"Come to think of it, I haven't. Wonder where she is?"

* * *

THAT MAY not have meant anything to a stranger, but when you lived in Harlem and got around with the younger folk, you knew that was strange.

Thelma was a "girl-about-town" in that she knew everybody, went everywhere and was a lively, friendly companion. Besides, she had a little talent and had aspirations to become a chorus girl — in those days, chorus girls were in demand.

To achieve her aims, the girl also had on the debit side — good looks, pretty long black hair, a swell shape — and knew how to be agreeable, or so it is said.

Therefore, when two "men-about-town" had missed seeing a popular figure — it added up.

* * *

THELMA BELONGED to the Norma Girls Club, one of the most popular in town. So when the president of the club showed up, I made it my business to ask if she'd seen Thelma and if she hadn't, as president, she ought to busy herself and find out what was going on. That started it.

Early next day, I received a wire; then before I could get out of the house, the frantic president, her sister and another friend taxied to my house with startling news.

They had been to the apartment at 136 and Seventh. In the mail box in the lobby, they found an accumulation of mail a week old.

Upstairs at the Scott door, they found several notes stuck in the door — visitors looking for Thelma who got no answer when they rang the bell.

* * *

I VISITED the apartment and discovered these things for myself. The girls were with me. We made a quick trip up the six flights of stairs, but no amount of bell ringing and pounding on the door brought a response. The girls went home, frightened thoroughly.

I picked up a friend and again, we revisited the house. From across the street we noticed a light burning in the apartment although it wasn't dark enough for the lights to be on. And the shades were pulled down — tight.

We scurried up the stairs again, and even went to the roof to peep down the air shaft, hoping to get some view of the inside. Even the shades on the airshaft were tightly pulled down. Again in the small hallway at the top landing, we tried the door again

* * *

A STRONG wind was blowing outside, whistling around the house. It swept through the apartment and through a crack in the door, I got a whiff of a peculiar odor.

I asked my friend "Do you smell something?"

He said, "Yes, there's a dead rat around here somewhere."

"That's no rat," I told him. "Let's get out of here."

On the street again, my friend went his way and I went mine — looking up Thelma's boy friend. When I found him, he was at a little Sunday tea — one of those informal things where you pay two bits to dance and while away a couple of hours. I asked him when he'd seen Thelma last and he told me not since last Sunday.

"Funny thing, I had a date with her Wednesday night and when I went to the house, I couldn't get in."

"Well, fellow, you'd better stick with me — something's wrong there and when I go to the police, they are going to want to see you."

* * *

HE FOLLOWED my advice and went with me to the temporary police station on West 136th St. (they were building the new station then in West 135th Street).

Inside, I handed my police card to the man at the desk to identify myself and related the story.

From the superintendent, I had learned that no one in the apartment had been seen for five days. The super was worried too because the tenants beneath the Scott's had reported a leak; water was seeping through their ceiling. But the super couldn't get in the apartment.

* * *

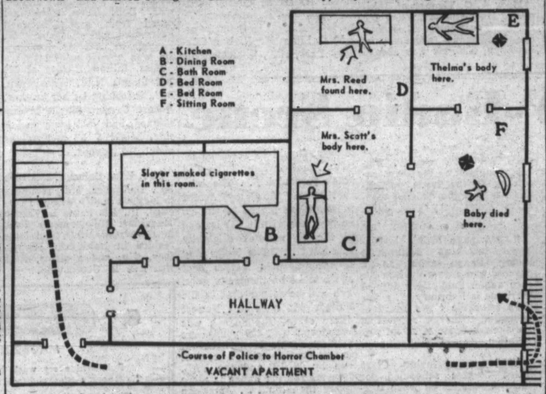
THE DESK sergeant called a patrolman Saffer, assigning him to the case. We arrived at the apartment house, having picked up the patrolman on the beat, and immediately went to the superintendent's apartment.

He had a pass key to the apartment next door — there were three on the floor and all three were vacant — that is if you could call the Scott's apartment vacant.

Upstairs, the stout door resisted all efforts to smash it in. So with the super's pass key, we entered the apartment next door. There we got the full charnel house odor — the stink having seeped through the walls. We dashed down a long hall, heading for the fire escape on the front.

It took only a minute to

(Continued on Page 3)



The murder scene, sixth-floor apartment at the corner of Seventh Avenue and 136th Street, New York City.