

Miriam deFord has given a good deal of thought to crime and criminology of other times and spaces (see Editorial). Now she turns her talents to constructing a "true crime" of the future—and its solution. Herewith, then, a criminologist's lecture-report on:

THE AKKRA CASE

Illustrated by ADKINS



By MIRIAM ALLEN de FORD

DELIBERATE murder being so very rare a crime in our society, an account of any instance of it must attract the attention not only of criminologists but also of the general public. Very many of my auditors

must remember the Akkra case well, since it occurred only last year. This, however, is the first attempt to set forth the bizarre circumstances hitherto known only to the authorities and to a few specialists.

On February 30 last, the body of a young girl was found under the Central Park mobilway in Newyork I. She had been struck on the head with some heavy object which had fractured her skull, and her auburn hair was matted with congealed blood. Two boys illegally trespassing on one of the old dirt roads in the park itself stumbled upon the corpse. She was fully dressed, but barefoot, with her socsandals lying beside her. An autopsy showed only one unusual thing—she was a virgin, though she was fully mature.

Two hundred years ago, say, this would have been a case for the homicide branch of the city police. Now, of course, there are no city police, all local law enforcement being in the hands of the Federal government, with higher supervision and appeal to the Interpol; and since there has been no reported murder (except in Africa and China, where this crime has not yet been entirely eradicated) for at least 20 years, Fedpol naturally has no specialists in homicide. Investigation therefore was up to the General Branch in Newyork Complex I.

The murderer had stupidly broken off the welded serial number disc from her wristlet—stupidly, because of course everybody's fingerprints and retinal pattern are on file with Interpol from birth. It was soon discov-

ered that the victim was one Madolin Akkra, born in Newyork I of mixed Irish, Siamese, and Swedish descent, aged 18 years and seven months. Since it is against the law for any minor (under 25) to be gainfully employed, and there was no record of any exemption-permit, she had necessarily to be a student. She was found to be studying spaceship maintenance at Upper Newyork Combined Technicum.

People who deride Fedpol and call it a useless anachronism don't know what they are talking about. It is true that in our society criminal tendencies are understood to be a disease, amenable to treatment, not a free-will demonstration of anti-social proclivities. But it is also true that every member of Fedpol, down to the merest rookie policeman, is a trained specialist in some field, and that most of its officers are graduate psychiatrists. As soon as Madolin Akkra's identity was determined, it was easy to find out everything about her.

THE circumstances surrounding her in life were sufficiently odd in themselves. Her mother was dead, but she lived with her own father and full younger sister in a small (only 20 stories and 80 living-units) co-operative apartment house in the old district formerly called Westchester, once an "exclusive" settle-

ment but now considerably run down, and populated for the most part by low-income families. Few of the residents had more than one helicopter per family, and many of them had to commute to their jobs or schools by public copter. The building where the Akkras lived was shabby, its chrome and plastic well worn, and showed the effects of a negligent local upkeep system. The Akkras even prepared and ate some of their meals in their own quarters—an almost unheard-of anachronism.

The father had served his 20 years of productive labor from 25 to 45, and the whole family was therefore supported by public funds of one sort or another. When the Fedpol officers commenced their investigation by interviewing this man, they found him one of the worst social throwbacks discovered in many years—doubtless a prime reason for the bizarre misfortune which had overtaken his misguided daughter. To begin with, the investigators wanted to know, why had he not reported his daughter missing? To this, Pol Akkra made the astonishing reply that the girl was old enough to know her own business, and that he had never asked any questions as to what she did! Everyone knows it is every adult's responsibility to report any deviation by the young more serious than

the mischievous trespassing by the boys who had found Madolin Akkra's body, and who at least had gone to Fedpol at once. The officers could get no lead whatever from the girl's father.

To find the murderer, it was of first importance to establish the background of this strange case. Access to the park is difficult—has been difficult ever since, more than a century ago, the area became a hunting-ground for thieves and hoodlums, and was transformed into a cultivated forest and garden preserved for aesthetic reasons, and to be viewed only from the mobilways above. (The boys who found the body are, of course, proof that the sealing-off of the park is not entirely effective—but surely only a daring and agile child could insinuate himself under the thorn-set hedges surrounding the park, or swing down to the tree-tops from the structure above.)

If the victim had been killed elsewhere, how was her body carried to the spot where it was found? Both murderer and corpse would have had to penetrate unobserved into an almost impenetrable area. Could the body have been thrown from above? But if so, how could the remains of a full-grown girl have been transported from either a ground car or a copter on to the crowded mobilway, brightly

lighted all night long? She must have gone there alive, either under duress or of her own accord.

The first and most natural question, to Fedpol, was: who did have access to the park? The answer was, the gardeners. But the gardeners were out: they were all robots, even their supervisor. No robot is able to harm a human being. Moreover, no robot could have brought the victim in from outside if she had been killed elsewhere. The gardeners never leave the park, and they would repel any strange robot from elsewhere who tried to enter it. And one could hardly imagine a sane human being who would go to the park for a rendezvous with a robot!

IT WAS Madolin's little sister, Margret, who interrupted the futile interrogation of the surly and resistant Pol Akkra and provided the first clue. She caught the eye of the investigating officer, Inspector Dugal Kazazian, and quietly went into the next room, where Kazazian followed her after posting his assistant with the father.

"I promised Madolin I would never tell on her," she whispered, "but now she's—now it doesn't matter." She had loved her sister; her eyes were puffy from weeping. "She—she'd been going to Naturist get-togethers."

Kazazian almost groaned

aloud. He might have known—this was the first time they had been linked with murder, but it seemed to him that in almost every other affair he had investigated for the past few years, the subversive Naturists somehow had crept in. And if he had reflected, he would have suspected them already, since there seems to be no school or college which does not harbor an underground branch of these criminal lunatics.

I need hardly explain to my auditors who and what the Naturists are. But to keep the record complete, let me say briefly that this pernicious worldwide conspiracy, founded 50 years ago by the notorious Ali Chaim Pertinuzzi, is engaged in an organized campaign to tear down all the marvelous technical achievements of our civilization. It pretends to believe that we should eat "natural" foods and wear "natural" textiles instead of synthetics, walk instead of ride, teach children the obsolete art of reading (reading what?—the antique books preserved in museums?), make our own music, painting, and sculpture instead of enjoying the exquisite products of perfected machines, open up all parks and the few remaining rural preserves to campers, hunters and fishers (if any specimens worth hunting can be found outside zoos), and what

they call "hikers"—in a word, go back to the confused, reactionary world of our ancestors. From this hodgepodge of "principles" it is a natural transition to political and economic subversion. No wonder that the information that Madolin Akkra had been corrupted by this vile outfit sent a chill down Inspector Kazazian's spine.

IT explained a great deal, however. The Naturists profess to oppose our healthy system of sexual experimentation, and Madolin had been a virgin. The weird family situation, and her father's attitude both toward her and toward the Fedpol, aroused suspicion that he too was affiliated with the Naturists, not simply that Madolin had flirted with the outer edges of the treasonable organization, as a "fellow-seeker," without her father's knowledge.

Suppose the girl, fundamentally decent and ethically-minded, had revolted against the false doctrine and threatened to betray its advocates? Then she might have been killed to silence her—and what more likely than that, as a piece of brazen defiance, her murdered corpse should have been deposited in the only bit of "natural" ground still remaining in the Newyork area?

But how, and by whom?

THE first step, of course, was to fling a dragnet around all known or suspected Naturists in the district. In a series of flying raids they were rounded up; and since there no longer exist those depositories for offenders formerly known as prisons, they were kept incommunicado in the psychiatric wards of the various hospitals. For good measure, Pol Akkra was included. Margret, at 13, was old enough to take care of herself.

Next, all Madolin's classmates at the Technicum, the operators of her teach-communicators, and members of other classes with whom it was learned she had been on familiar terms, were subjected to an intensive electronic questioning. (Several of these were themselves discovered to be tainted with Naturism, and were interned with the rest.) One of the tenets of Naturism is a return to the outworn system of monogamy, and the questioning was directed particularly to the possibility that Madolin had formed half of one of the notorious Naturist "steady couples," who often associate without or before actual mating. But day after day the investigators came up with not the slightest usable lead.

Please do not think I am underrating Fedpol. Nothing could have been more thorough than the investigation they under-

took. But this turned out in the end to be a case which by its very nature obfuscated the normal methods of criminological science. Fedpol itself has acknowledged this, by its formation in recent months of the Affiliated Assistance Corps, made up of amateurs who volunteer for the detection of what are now called Class X crimes—those so far off the beaten path that professionals are helpless before them.

For it was an amateur who solved Madolin Akkra's murder—her own little sister. When Margret Akkra reaches the working age of 25 she will be offered a paid post as Newyork Area Co-ordinator of the AAC.

LEFT alone by her father's internment, Margret began to devote her whole time out of school hours to the pursuit of the person or persons who had killed her sister. She had told Kazazian all she actually knew; but that was only her starting-point. Though she herself, as she had told the Inspector, believed that the murder might be traced to Madolin's connection with the Naturist (and though she probably at least suspected her father to be involved with them also), she did not confine herself to that theory, as the Fedpol, with its scientific training, was obliged to do.

Concealed under a false floor

in her father's bedroom—mute evidence of his Naturist affiliation—she found a cache of printed books—heirlooms which should long ago have been presented to a museum for consultation by scholars only. They dated back to the 20th century, and were of the variety then known as "mystery stories." Margret of course could not read them. But she remembered now, with revulsion, how, when she and Madolin were small children, their mother had sometimes (with windows closed and the videophone turned off) amused them by telling them ancient myths and legends that by their very nature Margret now realized must have come from these contraband books.

Unlike her father and her sister, and apparently her mother as well, Margret Akkra had remained a wholesome product of a civilized education. She had nothing but horror and contempt for the subversive activities in the midst of which, she knew now, she had grown up. The very fact, which became plain to her for the first time, that her parents had lived together, without changing partners, until her mother had died, was evidence enough of their aberration.

But, stricken to the heart as the poor girl was, she could not cease to love those she had always loved, or to be diverted from her resolution to solve her sister's

murder. Shudder as she might at the memory of those subversive books, she yet felt they might inadvertently serve to assist her.

It was easy to persuade the school authorities that her shock and distress over Madolin's death had slowed up her conscious mind, and to get herself assigned to a few sessions with the electronic memory stimulator. It took only two or three to bring back in detail the suppressed memories, and to enable her to extrapolate from them.

ONE feature of these so-called "mysteries" that came back to her struck Margret with especial force—the frequent assertion that murderers always return to the scene of their crime. She decided that she too must plant herself at the spot where her sister's body had been found, and lie in wait for the returning killer.

It would be useless to try to obtain official permission, but she was only 13, as lean and agile as any other child, and if boys could evade the hedges and the robot gardeners, so could she. The audiovids had displayed plenty of pictures of the exact scene, and Margret knew where to find it. But an inspection of the hedges showed her that it would be easier for her to get in from above, at night—a likelier time also for her prey.

She located a place where the trees grew almost to the mobilway and shaded a section of it between the lamps. Perched on the stand-pave and watching for a pause in the stream of gliders-by, she dropped lightly into a tree and climbed down to the park beneath. Hiding from the gardeners, she made her way to the bushes where the boys had discovered Madolin.

For nearly a week, fortified by Sleepnomer pills, Margret spent every moment after dark in this hideaway. It was a long, nerve-wracking vigil: the close contact with leaves and grass, the sound of the wind in the trees, the unaccustomed darkness away from the lights above, the frightening approach of wild squirrels and rabbits and even birds, the necessity to stay concealed from passing robots, kept her on edge. But stubbornly she persisted. And at last she was rewarded.

It was not late—only about 20 o'clock—when she heard a scramble and bump not far from her own means of access to the park. It was not the first time since her watch began that she had heard other adventurers, invariably small and rather scared boys who dared one another to walk for a few feet along the dirt paths, then in a panic rushed back the way they had come. But this time the steps came directly toward her—human foot-

steps, not the shuffle of a robot.

Hidden behind a bush, Margret saw them approach—two boys of about her own age. And then, with a sickening lurch of her heart, she recognized them. She had seen them, acclaimed as heroes, on the videoscreen. They were the two who had found Madolin. She could hear every word they said.

"Come on," one of them urged in a hoarse whisper. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

"Yes, there is," the other objected. "Ever since then, they've got the gardeners wired to describe and report anybody they find inside the park."

"I don't care. We've got to find it. Give me the beamer."

MARGRET crouched behind the thickest part of the shrubbery, her infra-red camera at the alert. The tape-attachment was already activated.

The second boy still held back. "I told you then," he muttered, "that we shouldn't have reported it at all. We should have got out of here and never said a word to anyone."

"We couldn't," the first boy said, shocked. "It would have been anti-social. Haven't you ever learned anything in school?"

"Well, it's anti-social to kill somebody, too, isn't it?"

Margret pressed the button on the camera. Enlarged enough,

even the identification discs on the boys' wristlets would show.

"How could we guess there was a human being there, except us? What was she doing here, anyway? Come on, Harri, we've got to find that thing. It's taken us long enough to get a chance to sneak in here."

"Maybe they've found it already," said Harri fearfully.

"No, they haven't; if they had, they'd have taken us in as soon as they dusted the fingerprints."

"All right, it's not anywhere on the path. Put the beamer on the ground where it will shine in front of us, and let's get down on our stomachs and hunt underneath the bushes."

Grabbing her camera, Margret jumped to her feet and dashed past the startled boys. She heard a scream—that would be Harri—and then their feet pounding after her. But she had a head start, and her eyes were more accustomed to the dark than theirs could be. She reached a tree, shinnied up it, jumped from one of its limbs to another on a higher tree beneath the mobilway, chinned herself up, and made her way out safely.

She went straight to Fedpol headquarters and asked for Inspector Kazazian.

The frightened boys were picked up at once. They were brought into headquarters, where they had been praised and

thanked before, and as soon as they saw the pictures and heard the tape-recording they confessed everything.

That night, they said, they were being initiated into one of those atavistic fraternities which it seems impossible for the young to outgrow or the authorities to suppress. As part of their ordeal, they had been required to sneak into Central Park and to bring back as proof of their success a captured robot gardener. Between them they had decided that the only way they could ever get their booty would be to disassemble the robot, for though it could not injure them, if they took hold of it, its communication-valve would blow and the noise would bring others immediately; so they had taken along what seemed to them a practical weapon—a glass brick pried out of the back of a locker in the school gym. Hurling by a strong and practiced young arm, it could de-activate the robot's headpiece.

When, as they waited in the darkness for a gardener to appear, they saw a figure moving about in the shrubbery bordering the path, one of them—neither would say which one it was—let fly. To their horror, instead of the clang of heavy glass against metal, they heard a muffled thud as the brick struck flesh and bone. They started to

run away. But after a few paces they forced themselves to return.

It was a girl, and the blow had knocked her flat. Her head was bleeding badly and she was moaning. Terrified, they knelt beside her. She gasped once and lay still. One of the boys laid a trembling hand on her breast, the other seized her wrist. There was no heart-beat and there was no pulse. On an impulse, the boy holding her wrist wrenched away her identification disc.

Panic seized them, and they dashed away, utterly forgetting the brick, which at their first discovery one of them had had the foresight to kick farther into the shrubbery, out of view. Sick and shaking, they made their way out of the park and separated. The boy who had the disc threw it into the nearest sewer-grating.

The next day, after school, they met again and talked it over. Finally they decided they must go to Fedpol and report; but to protect themselves they would say only that they had found a dead body.

DAY after day, they kept seeing and hearing about the case on the videaud, and pledged each other to silence. Then suddenly one of the boys had a horrible thought—they had forgotten that the brick would show their fingerprints! . . . They had come desperately to search

for it when Margret overheard them. Kazazian's men found it without any difficulty; it had been just out of the gardeners' regular track.

In view of the accidental nature of the whole affair, and the boys' full confession, they got off easy. They were sentenced to only five years' confinement in a psychiatric retraining school.

The suspects against whom nothing could be proved were released and kept under surveillance. Pol Akkra, and all the proved Naturists, were sentenced to prefrontal lobotomies. Margret Akkra, in return for her help in solving the mystery, secured permission to take her father home with her. A purged and docile man, he was quite capable of the routine duties of housekeeping.

The killing of Madolin Akkra was solved. But one question remained: how and why had she been in Central Park at all?

The answer, when it came, was surprising and embarrassingly simple. And this is the part that has never been told before.

Pol Akkra, a mere simulacrum of the man he had been, no longer knew his living daughter or remembered his dead one. But in the recesses of his invaded brain some faint vestiges of the past lingered, and occasionally and unexpectedly swam up to his dreamlike consciousness.

One day he said suddenly: "Didn't I once know a girl named Madolin?"

"Yes, father," Margret answered gently, tears in her eyes.

"Funny about her." He laughed his ghastly Zombie chuckle. "I *told* her that was a foolish idea, even if it was good Nat—Nat-something theory."

"What idea was that?"

"I—I've forgotten," he said vaguely. Then he brightened. "Oh, yes, I remember. Stand barefoot in fresh soil for an hour in the light of the full moon and you'll never catch cold again.

"She was subject to colds, I think." (About the only disease left we have as yet no cure for.) He sighed. "I wonder if she ever tried it."

THE END

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