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54/08/14 Near Fight, Cry of Lie, End Steve's Accusation of Houk

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Near Fight, Cry of Lie, End Steve's Accusation of Houk

The bespectacled, serious-faced man in the brown suit and Panama hat stepped off the elevator on the third floor of Central Police Station.

Looking straight ahead, he walked past the closed door of Detective Chief James McArthur.

The door opened, and Clarence Hawkins, veteran secretary of the Detective Bureau, looked out. "In here, Dr. Sheppard," he called.

Dr. Stephen Sheppard, 34, stepped into the room and one of the most dramatic moments of his life.

The young osteopath didn't change expression as Bay Village Mayor J. Spencer Houk, who had considered Dr. Steve a friend until short days ago, leaped to his feet and shook his fist. "You liar!" the 42-year-old mayor blurted.

Dr. Steve's eyes wandered about the room, taking in McArthur, Homicide Capt. David Kerr and Detective Adelbert O'Hara.

On the green wall was a framed quotation about "Loyalty." It was loyalty to his younger brother, Dr. Samuel H. Sheppard, 30, that brought Dr. Steve into this scene.

Glancing out McArthur's window, he could see the grim gray sandstone of the County Jail, where Dr. Sam sat in a cell block—charged with the July 4 murder of his pregnant wife, Marilyn.

Dr. Steve was in this room because he had pointed the finger of suspicion at Mayor Houk, Sam's close friend. In an effort to free his brother, he had splashed serious aspersions on the reputation of his murdered sister-in-law.

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The seeds of the emotion-packed confrontation were planted Thursday, when Dr. Steve paid a surprise visit to police headquarters.

He wanted to "provide some new leads," he told Mc-

Near Fight, Cry of 'Lie' End Steve's Accusation of Houk

(Continued From Page One)

Arthur and Chief Frank W. Story.

McArthur jotted down notes as the intense osteopath spilled out his "facts and suspicions" for more than an hour.

"I hope you'll do something about this," Dr. Steve said.

He said he had come in of his own volition—that Sam's chief defense counsel, William J. Corrigan, didn't know of his personal effort to save his brother.

Story and McArthur slept on Dr. Steve's accusations. They resented the charge of Corrigan and the Sheppard family that they had "closed your minds" to the possibility that Marilyn Sheppard might have been murdered by anyone but her husband.

Friday morning, McArthur dictated his notes, and Story gave the terse order: "Bring Houk in for questioning as a

suspect in the Marilyn Sheppard murder investigation, on the accusation of Dr. Stephen Sheppard. . . ."

Astonished by Order

Houk, worn and haggard from the strain of the 41-day old murder investigation, the most trying experience of his career as a suburban mayor, was home at 29014 Lake Rd. when the doorbell rang.

He was astonished when O'Hara told him he could

"come downtown" voluntarily—or else. . . .

The startled mayor came voluntarily, without bothering to change from his T-shirt and baggy blue slacks.

He glanced at the tree-shrouded murder home at 28924 Lake Rd. as the police car started downtown. He was summoned to this home by a frantic phone call from Dr. Sam, with whom he is co-owner of a \$200 aluminum boat, on the morning of July 4.

From that moment on, Houk's life has been one of constant storm and stress.

Balked at Arrest

On July 4, he refused the demand of Coroner Samuel R. Gerber and Cleveland homicide detectives that Dr. Sam be arrested and charged with murder. His reluctance to order an arrest without "absolute proof" gave Dr. Sam 26 days of freedom.

And here was Houk—not under arrest, but in police custody, being brought to headquarters for grilling as a suspect on the unsupported statement of a man at whose home he and his wife had dined in happier days—a man he had considered a friend.

The Bay Village mayor, a normally tactful, ultra-polite person, exploded with indignation when the blunt charge was hurled at him.

"The damndest lie I ever heard!" he roared.

McArthur, Kerr and O'Hara pulled no punches in their interrogation. They fired questions at him with machine-gun rapidity.

Here as a Suspect

"You're not here as the mayor of Bay Village," they told Houk. "You're here as a suspect in a murder case. You'll receive the same treatment as any other suspect. This is what Dr. Stephen Sheppard says. Is it true?"

Flushed with fury, Houk denied the allegations, point by point.

His ordeal of quizzing began at 11:45 a. m. It continued unbroken—without lunch—until 3:45 p. m., when Dr. Steve entered the room to confront him.

Houk gritted his teeth, clenched his fists, and at one time attempted to strike his accuser as MacArthur read off Dr. Steve's statement.

"Lies, damn lies," he spluttered.

Dr. Steve complimented McArthur on the accuracy with which he had taken down his "information."

A light smile crossed the detective chief's lips.

But Houk found nothing amusing in the situation. "The biggest lie I ever heard!" he roared. "You're a liar!"

Houk glared angrily at his accuser. Dr. Steve sat tautly, his eyes drifting about the walls, taking in the pictures of former police chiefs and mayors.

At 5:10 p. m. McArthur said, "You can both go now."

Dr. Steve left the room first. Saying not a word, he strode towards the elevator, looking straight ahead.

Then Houk came out, looking somewhat relieved. "No comment, fellows," he said. "I'm tired. I'm going home."

As Houk approached the elevator, Dr. Steve turned away to get a drink of water. Houk went down with O'Hara, who drove him home to his waiting wife, Esther. Both must come downtown again on Monday to testify at Dr. Sam's preliminary hearing.

Dr. Steve rode downstairs alone, got into his car, and drove off alone.

Judge, Lawyers Inspect Scene

A "preview" of Monday's preliminary hearing on the wife murder charge against Dr. Samuel H. Sheppard was held in his home at 28924 Lake Rd., Bay Village.

Common Pleas Judge William K. Thomas, who will preside at the hearing, conducted the hour-and-a-half inspection.

With him were Defense Attorneys William J. Corrigan and Fred Garmone, Bay Village Law Director Richard S. Weygandt, Assistant Prosecu-

tor Thomas Parrino, and Bailiff Richard McDonnell.

Dr. Sheppard waived his right to be present at the inspection, which was made to familiarize Judge Thomas with the scene. Thomas will have sole responsibility for deciding whether Dr. Sam is held for Grand Jury indictment.

Just as the inspection ended, Prosecutor Frank T. Cullitan announced he would seek to bypass and cancel the preliminary hearing.