Week-end MURDER

by GABRIELLE E. FORBUSH

CHAPTER XXXVIII

TOM shook his head. "Nothing much happened," he said. "They ended the bridge game about 12, you know. I didn't linger afterward to talk to Pratt and DeVos. They must have some agreement for today with Fleur and Dolly but I didn't want to question them unnecessarily. I've taken the ground that this is his hotel and they can do as they please from here. Statlander's main problem today. Fortunately he still feels we need another talk on the set-up of the fall campaign. That man lives for business."

Linda said ruefully. "Certainly he discovered that he has no small ..."

"And I'm not altogether concerned about Shaughnessey. That appearance of his is still to be explained."

"And Mr. DeVos wanted me to go boat-riding alone with him," said Linda dreamily.

"What?" Tom sat upright and his voice was charged with horror. "Good heavens, Linda. When?"

"Yesterday afternoon — when we were talking on the lawn."

"Tell me just what happened."

She frowned thoughtfully, feeling for the exact words. "He asked me," she said slowly, "whether I could run or rather handle the Pinafore. And he said he would have ordered an hour on the water—or words to that effect. When I told him I could take the wheel but not the engine, he suggested that probably you didn't care to have anything to do with it but yourself."

"What then?"

"Nothing especially. You see, Pratt's boat—the Comet—had just gone past."

"Just one thing, Binks. Did he really say alone? Did he use that word?"

* * *

She thought again. "No, he didn't. He said the boat could be handled by one person. And then he asked if I were as skillful as Pratt, who could handle hers alone. That was the connection, as I remember it."

Tom released his breath in a long sigh and laughed a little.

"You have a nice dramatic way of dropping an important fact casually into the conversation. I must say, however—taking it all in all, there's plenty left to do and we'd better get ourselves together and start on it. All ready, Binks? Alley oop."

"DeVos was saying in the office the other day—" Tom broke off and signaled her for silence. Above their heads they heard footsteps—then a pause, a creaking board—then quiet, as they held their breaths. Then the footsteps again, clear and quick, as if to pass over that momentary pause at (Linda knew as well as if she had been in the hall herself) Cousin Amos' door. Someone had stopped, cautiously turned the knob, found the door still locked—and now was coming downstairs, was almost upon them. Linda dared not look to Tom or even flash him a quick glance.

"I'm getting positively light-headed over all this," she thought. "I feel as if I were taking a mild but perpetual electric shock. It's Marvin! Why did Tom get that pause. I wonder! Well, he elected Marvin for—"Hello, there! Sleep well? It's a nice day, isn't it? Not quite so hot."

"I've got to see about breakfast," Linda said hastily when the conventional greetings were over. "You two go out on the terrace until it's ready."

* * *

They were earlier than Linda had supposed. The girls were just back from mass and only starting their work. Returning to the central room, she was in time to meet the next down and to prevent him from interrupting the terrace conversation. "Oh, good morning, Mr. Statlander," she cried brightly. "You're just in time to help me, if you will. I want to cut some flowers for the table, and this is the best time, before the sun's too strong."

"I'm the bearer of a message from my husband," she went on. Being able to think of no acceptable excuse for before breakfast small talk she clutched almost in desperation at the task Tom had assigned himself. "You know, Mr. Statlander, that while we enjoy having you here, Van is really the one who arranged it and Tom feels it's not fair to her to break up our little party before you and he have a chance to go over everything in preparation for the Monday morning conference—" and she proceeded with the invitation that had now become slightly mechanical.

As Tom had hoped, the appeal to duty won and by the time they had reached a large flower bed under Mr. Shaughnessey's bedroom window, the western manager had agreed—as a sound business proposition — to stay. The another idea struck her.

"Mr. Statlander," she begun, "I've felt you weren't very comfortable in that little room, since we've had this terrific heat wave. Wouldn't you like to move over to the nursery for tonight? It's on the water side and does have a little more air. I think the ceiling's perfectly safe. Of course, there's the big room but I—I don't suppose you'd care for that. The one Mr. Peabody had—"

"On the contrary!" He jumped eagerly at her suggestion. "I'd have no objection at all to sleeping in the other room. It is very pleasant—large—cool. If this heat continues—"

"It will," interrupted Linda darkly.

"In that case I will take advantage of your offer—and thank you very much."

* * *

Nipping a full-blown rose carelessly, she accidentally let it drop, and with no very good grace he stooped to retrieve it. Linda studied his broad back speculatively.

"Thank you!" She gave him her most enchanting smile as he rose. "I didn't want to lose that beauty. Are you fond of flowers, Mr. Statlander?"

"Not at all," answered her reluctant helper uncompromisingly. "A garden is altogether too wasteful of time and energy—and money." He nodded in the direction of a denim-clad figure working along the border toward the adjoining property. "That man, for instance. Do you pay him to spend his entire time puttering around this place?"

"Heavens!" thought Linda, "the questions have begun again!" But she answered demurely; "That's William—our community gardener. He works for me part of every day—when he remembers to come. But if we could afford it, I'd certainly have a full time man. I could keep him busy."

"Busy!" Mr. Statlander suddenly slapped at the back of his neck where a mosquito had lodged. "A full-grown man—busy—every day!" His annoyance with the mosquito added unusual severity to his tone. "How many servants did you say you need to keep up this place, Mrs. Averill?"

"I didn't say, that I remember," answered Linda meekly. "But I have two maids all the time and a nurse for the baby—and a woman who comes in to help when we need her—I send the laundry out—and a part-time gardener—"

"I see. And what—"

The next question was unexpectedly interrupted. From the windows above them appeared a tousled head and Shaughnessey, evidently just aroused, blandly greeted his hostess.

"Good mornin' to you, Mrs. Averill. And would ye be having a good opportunity for a bright stable-boy, or likely a chauffeur, and what would be the wages of the same?"

Linda's uncontrollable peal of laughter was quickly checked. Looking toward the house she saw her husband beckoning them back.

"Be right there! Breakfast's ready, Mr. Statlander. I'll carry the basket back. Thanks ever so much for holding it for me. Did you get your hands dirty? Do you want to wash them down here?"

"No, thank you . . . " But Statlander clenched his fists at the suggestion, as if he would have liked very much to use them in a more aggressive fashion against a certain impudent Irish face.

(To Be Continued)

BOYS IN MANHOLE

BOSTON.—Three small boys went down into a manhole in Lynn to catch fish that had been swarming up Moore's Brook under the street. The manhole cover had been replaced while they were in the hole, and they were imprisoned. John Murray, driving over the manhole, heard cries coming from under his car. He stopped, raised the cover and rescued the youths, who were in the last stages of fright.

LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE

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