

The Leading Lady

By GERALDINE BONNER

WNU Service

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What human being does not love a mystery story? Especially one of those affairs in which a puzzling crime suddenly disturbs the lives of a group of people who have been going along in a normal way. All at once a cloud of malevolence is committed which turns their placid little world topsy turvy. No one knows the perpetrator of the crime, but circumstances are such that any one of the apparently honest, sincere members of the group may come under suspicion. New angles of the affair and new mysteries develop, and a period of the most wracking suspense exists for all.

In this case there is no super-detective with his mathematics, his chemicals, his measuring devices and his methods of deduction to trap the criminal and, by the very completeness of the case against him, force him to a confession. No one but a few confused civilians and a couple of fairly astute law officers, both of the latter working in different directions and by the variance of their theories obstructing rather than aiding a solution. It was one of those crimes which seemed likely to remain a mystery unless some accident occurred to clear it up. And the accident did occur; one of the strangest accidents ever written into a mystery plot, and so terrifying in its effects that it brought a voluntary and quite unexpected confession from the guilty party.

Geraldine Bonner has written many clever stories and established herself as a master of thrill fiction.

PROLOGUE

One of the morning trains that tap the little towns along the sound ran into the Grand Central depot. The passengers, few in number—for it was midsummer and people were going out of town, not coming in—filed stragglingly up the long platform to the exit. One of them was a girl, fair and young, with those distinctive attributes of good looks and style that drew men's eyes to her face and women's to her clothes.

People watched her, noting the lithe grace of her movements, her delicate slimmness, the froth of blonde hair that curled out under the brim of her hat. She appeared oblivious to the interests she aroused and this indifference had once been natural, for to be looked at and admired had been her normal right and become a stale experience. Now it was assumed, an armor under which she sought protection, hid herself from morbid curiosity and eagerly observing eyes. To be pointed out as Sybil Saunders, the actress, was a very different thing from being pointed out as Sybil Saunders, the fiancée of James Dallas of the Dallas-Parkinson case.

The Dallas-Parkinson case had been a sensation three months back. James Dallas, a well known actor, had killed Homer Parkinson during a quarrel in a men's club, and fled before the horrified onlookers could collect their senses. Dallas, a man of excellent character, had had many friends who claimed mitigating circumstances—Parkinson, drunk and brutal, had provoked the assault. But the Parkinson clan, new-rich oil people, breathing vengeance, had risen to the cause of their kinsman, poured out money in an effort to bring the fugitive to justice, and offered a reward of ten thousand dollars for his arrest. Of course Sybil Saunders had figured in the investigation, she was the betrothed of the murderer, her marriage had been at hand. She had gone through hours of questioning, relentless grilling, and had steadily maintained her ignorance of Dallas' whereabouts; from the night of his disappearance she had heard nothing from him and knew nothing of him. The Parkinsons did not believe her statement, the police were uncertain.

Her taxi rolled out into the sweltering heat, incandescent streets roaring under the blinding glare of the sun. Her destination was the office of Stroud and Walberg, theatrical managers. Mr. Walberg offered her a friendly hand and a chair. Mr. Walberg, a kindly Hebrew, was kinder than ever to this particular visitor. He was sorry for her—as who in his profession was not—and wanted to help her along and here was his proposition:

A committee of ladies, a high society bunch summering up in Maine, wanted to give a play for charity. Thomas N. Driscoll, the spool-cotton magnate who was in California, had offered them his place up there—Gull Island was the name—for an outdoor performance. The ladies had wanted a classic which Mr. Walberg opined was all right, seeing the show was for charity, and people could stand being bored for a worthy object. "Twelfth Night" was the play they had selected.

The ladies had placed the matter in Mr. Walberg's hands, and he had at once thought of Sybil Saunders for Viola. She was in his opinion the

ideal person. Compensation was not so munificent, but then Miss Saunders was not yet in the star cast, and all expenses would be covered, including a week at Gull Island.

He had no need for further persuasion, for Miss Saunders accepted at once. She was grateful to him and said so and looked as if she meant it. So, in a glow of mutual satisfaction, they walked to the door. Mr. Walberg telling over such members of the cast as had already been engaged: Sylvanus Grey for the Duke, Isabel Cornell for Maria, John Gordon Trevor for Sir Toby—no one could beat him, had the old English tradition—and Anne Tracy for Olivia. At that name Miss Saunders had exclaimed in evident pleasure. Anne Tracy would be perfect, and it would be so lovely having her, they were such friends.

"And I'm going to give you my best director, Hugh Bassett. If with you and him they don't pull off a success the Maine public's dumber than I thought."

Her business accomplished, Miss Saunders went home. She lived in one of those mid-town blocks of old brownstone houses divided into flats. Letting herself in with a latchkey she as-



Now He Had Grown Bolder, Telling Her Where He Was.

cended the two flights at a rapid run, unlocked her door and entered upon the hot empty quietude of her own domain. She threw her hat on a chair, and falling upon the divan opened the paper that she had carried since she left the Grand Central station.

She folded the pages back at the personal column and settled over it, bent, motionless, her eyes traveling down its length. Suddenly they stopped, focused on a paragraph. She took a pad and pencil from the desk, drew a small table up to the divan, spread the newspaper on it, and copied the paragraph onto the pad. It ran as follows:

"Sister Carrie:
"Edmund stoney broke but Albert able to help him. Think we ought to chip in. Can a date be arranged for discussing his affairs?"

"Sam and Lewis."
She studied it for some time, the pencil suspended. Then it descended, crossing out letter after letter, till three words remained—"Edmonton, Alberta, Canada." The signature she guessed as the name he went by.

She burned the written paper, grinding it to powder in the ash tray. The newspaper she threw into the wastebasket where Luella, the mulatto woman who "did up" for her, would find it in the morning. She felt certain Luella was paid to watch her. But she had continued to keep the evil-eyed creature, fearful that her dismissal would make them more than ever wary, strengthen their suspicion that Sybil Saunders was in communication with her lover.

The deadly danger of it was cold at her heart. She had heard directly from him once, a letter the day after he had died; the only one that even he, reckless in his despair, had dared to send. In that he had told her to watch the personal column in a certain paper and had given her the names by which she could identify the paragraphs. She had watched and twice found the veiled message and twice waited in sickening fear for discovery. It had not happened. Now he had grown bolder, telling her where he

was—it was as if his hand beckoned her to come. She could write to him at last, do it this evening and take it out after dark. Lying very still, her hands clasped behind her head, she ran over in her mind letter boxes, post offices where she might mail it. Were the ones in crowded districts or those in secluded byways, the safest? It was like walking through grasses where live wires were hidden.

A ring at the bell made her leap to her feet with wild visions of detectives. But it was only Anne Tracy, come in to see if she was back from her visit on the sound. It was a comfort to see Anne, she always acted as if things were just as they had been and never asked disturbing questions.

She was Sybil's best friend, was to have been her bridesmaid. But she knew no more of Sybil's secrets since Jim Dallas had disappeared than anyone else. And she never thought to know—that was why the friendship held.

They had a great deal to talk about, but chiefly the "Twelfth Night" affair. Anne was immensely pleased that Sybil had agreed to play. She did not say this—she avoided any allusions to Sybil's recent conducting of her life—but her enthusiasm about it all was irresistible. It warmed the sad-eyed girl into interest; the Twelfth Night costume was brought from its cupboard, the golden wig tried on. When Anne took her departure late in the day, she felt much relieved about her friend—she was "coming back," coming alive again.

Anne occupied another little flat on another of the mid-town streets in another of the brownstone houses. Here was one room larger, for her brother, Joe Tracy, lived with her when not pursuing his profession on the road. There were hammocks in Joe's pursuit during which he inhabited a small bedroom in the rear and caused Anne a great deal of worry and expense. Joe apparently did not worry, certainly not about the expense. Absence of work wore on his temper not because Anne had to carry the flat alone, but because he had no spending money.

They said it was his temper that stood in his way. Something did, for he was an excellent actor with that power of transforming himself into an empty receptacle to be filled by the character he portrayed. But directors who had had experience of him, talked about his "natural meanness" and shook their heads. People who tried to be sympathetic with Anne about him got little satisfaction. All the most persistent ever extracted was an admission that Joe was "difficult." Hugh Bassett had boasted and helped and lectured him. And not for love of Joe, for in his heart Bassett thought him a pretty hopeless proposition.

That evening, alone in her parlor, Anne was thinking about him. He had no engagement and no expectation of one, and it was not wise to leave him alone in the flat without occupation. She went to the window and leaned out. The air rose from the street, breathless and dead, the heated exhalation of walls and pavements baked all day by the merciless sun. To leave Joe to this while she was basking in the delights of Gull Island—apart from anything he might do—it wasn't fair. And then suddenly the expression of her face changed and she drew in from the window—Hugh Bassett was coming down the street.

The bell rang, she pushed the button and presently he was at the door saying he was passing and thought he'd drop in for a minute. He was a big thick-set man with a quiet reposeful quality unshaken even by the heat. He had dropped in a great deal this summer and as the droppings-in became more frequent Anne's outside engagements became less. They always simulated a mutual surprise, giving them time to get over that somewhat breathless moment of meeting.

They achieved it rather better than usual tonight for their minds were full of the same subject. Bassett had come to impart the good news about Sybil, and Anne had seen her and heard all about it. Finally when they had thrashed out all the matters of first importance Bassett said:
"Did you tell her that Walberg wanted Aleck Stokes for the Duke?"
"No, I didn't say a word about it. What was the use? It would only have upset her and you'd put a stop to it."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Real Home Joy

Smile—As self-satisfied as a fellow who has just succeeded in threading a needle for his wife.—Pittimore Sun

The KITCHEN CABINET

(© 1927, Western Newspaper Union.)

The heights by great men reached
and kept
Were not attained by sudden
flight:
But they, while their companions
slept,
Were toiling upward in the
night.
—Longfellow.

WHOLESGOME GOOD THINGS

Now that fresh eggs are plentiful, we enjoy all the tasty dishes which may be prepared from them.



Mexican Scrambled Eggs.—Roast one dozen fresh green peppers, remove the skin and seeds and chop, then boil in a very little water until tender; season well with butter. Beat six eggs, add seasoning and the peppers and cook for a moment in a little butter.

Spanish Meat Dish.—Arrange a layer of thinly sliced potatoes in a well buttered baking dish, add a thinly sliced onion, over this a layer of sliced cold roast beef, steak or hamburger. Cover with a cupful or two of thick tomato and place in the oven to bake; when ready to serve garnish with two or three tablespoonfuls of cooked peas over the top.

Mexican Sauce.—Cook one onion finely chopped in two tablespoonfuls of butter for five minutes. Add one red and one green pepper, one clove of garlic, each finely chopped; add two tomatoes peeled and chopped. Cook fifteen minutes, add one teaspoonful of Worcestershire sauce, a few dashes of celery salt and salt to taste.

For Sunday night supper a bowl of peppers and milk is delicious. It may be ground if preferred.

Popcorn Biscuit.—Sift four teaspoonfuls of baking powder, one teaspoonful of salt, the same of sugar, one cupful of wheat flour, one-half cupful of corn flour, four tablespoonfuls of shortening and one cupful of freshly ground corn. Add enough milk to make a mixture to roll out. Cut into rounds and bake on a hot griddle, turning when one side is brown to brown on the other. They may be baked in the oven if preferred. This recipe makes one dozen biscuits.

Popcorn Soup.—To one quart of milk brought to the scalding point add two tablespoonfuls each of butter and flour well cooked together. Add one cupful of finely ground popcorn and serve garnished with a spoonful of freshly popped whole kernels.

Stuffed Onions.—Prepare as many onions as there are persons to serve. Parboil until tender but unbroken. Drain, remove the centers and mix with butter, chopped ham and seasoning, a little cream and the yolk of an egg. Fill the onions with this mixture and place in deep dish and bake, basting with cream during the baking. Cook covered until nearly done, then remove the cover and put a spoonful of well buttered crumbs on the top to brown.

Food We Like.

If the turkey is not at hand, any fowl may be used for the following sandwiches:



Turkey Sandwiches.—Chop fine three heads of crisp celery. Take three cupfuls of cold cooked turkey from the breast or light meat. Blanch and shred one and one-half cupfuls of almonds. Mix all lightly together, season with salt and pepper and moisten with mayonnaise. Cut thin slices of white bread and spread with pimento butter. Spread half the slices with a thick layer of the mixture and the remaining slices with crisp lettuce, spread with mayonnaise. Put together in pairs, press edges together and cut into three-inch strips. Garnish each sandwich with stars cut from pimentoes. At the point of the star place a tiny pearl onion.

Tea Sandwiches.—Spread thin unsweetened wafer crackers with quince, orange marmalade, or any fruit jam. Set another wafer over the one spread with fruit and arrange in a dainty basket or a plate covered with a lace paper dolly. Serve with tea, cocoa or chocolate.

Orange Meringue Pudding.—Slice three oranges in a pudding dish, sprinkle with sugar to taste. Make a custard from the yolks of three eggs, one tablespoonful of cornstarch, one-fourth of a cupful of sugar, salt, vanilla and one cupful of milk. Cook in a double boiler until smooth and well cooked, then cool and pour over the oranges. Beat the whites of the eggs until stiff, add one tablespoonful of orange juice and one tablespoonful of sugar. Heap lightly on the pudding and set into the oven to brown the meringue.

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In Belfast, Maine, is a black and white coon kitten that loves above all else a saltine, preferring it to meat or fish, and will even uncover the cracker box and steal one in order to satisfy its taste. When the cracker is accompanied with a bit of cheese or an olive, so much the better. The kitten is also fond of vegetables, especially spinach and cabbage. Its mother was born in a grocery store and lived there, and during her three years of existence ate nothing but hamburger steak, and never, as far as her master could determine, did she drink water or milk.

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Toy Industry Booming

In twenty years the American production of toys has grown from a little over \$5,500,000 to \$80,000,000. Also the toys are infinitely better, for where the imported ones were formerly made of flimsy tin and lead those now made in this country are mostly of pressed steel and tough wood, well fitted to stand the rough usage of childhood.

Proverbs are called wisdom.

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Special note: People who want to reduce swollen or varicose veins should get a bottle of Emerald Oil at once. Applied night and morning as directed they will quickly notice an improvement which will continue until the veins and bunches are reduced to normal.

Nellie Maxwell