

The White Cockatoo

by Mignon G. Eberhart

SYNOPSIS: Jim Sundean just has been released from the French fall into which he had been thrown as a murder suspect. Sundean's release is caused by David Lorn whom Sundean does not like. But Lorn was sent by Sue Tally, and Sundean both likes and trusts her. Lorn's saving shot is that the dead man was poisoned not stabbed, as everyone believed. Then Sundean sees Sue who promises to join him later for a talk but confesses she is in danger. There is a knock—but Madame Grethe, wife of the hotel manager, enters, not Sue.

Chapter 17 CURIOUS CALLER

MADAME entered as I held the door open. She looked rather nice; she wore again the clinging, copper-green silk gown, and her red hair shone under the light. Gold hoops swung at her ears; her face was white and soft and her lips heavily rouged.

The white cockatoo sat on her shoulder; his crest was fared handsomely upward, and he was twisting his head this way and that in an inquisitive but faintly reproving manner.

I shouldn't have been at all surprised if he'd said to me conversationally, "So this is where the murder was. Tut, tut!"

"Am I disturbing you?" said Madame Grethe. Her green eyes were shining, and her manner was very pleasant.

"Not at all," I said and then, as she gave every indication of having come merely to pay a social call, I added: "Won't you sit down?"

She moved in a graceful, leisurely manner to the chair opposite me and sat down; the cockatoo clung to her shoulder and made an admonitory remark which was aimed apparently at me.

"Pucci, Pucci," she said in a caressing voice. "I am sorry about your being arrested, Mr. Sundean. My husband and I regret it very much."

There was a shade of mockery in her shining eyes.

"At any rate," I said, "it didn't last long."

"No. Apparently not. I hope that is all you will hear of the affair."

"Your hope is shared, madame."

For the instant I employed the ghost of Marcel's shrug, a useful gesture which I was growing to admire very much. It irritated her.

Her eyes lit for a moment, then she dropped smooth lids over them, lifted one rather large but soft and white hand to Pucci's neck, caressed him for a moment, and then glanced about the room.

"How the wind blows!" she said. "Doesn't it annoy you at night? Surely there is a loose shutter somewhere near."

"One of those on the window, there."

"I must tell Marcel to repair the catch. Although—shouldn't you like another room, Mr. Sundean?"

"I'm quite all right here, thank you," I wondered what time it was.

"Come, come, Mr. Sundean, admit that you'd be happier in another room. One not so far from the rest of us. One not so near—"

She moved one supple hand in a quick gesture toward the corridor.

But I was firm, mainly because she insisted, for I had no reason to like my present room, heaven knew! And I was beginning to wish she would leave. It would soon be time for Sue's promised arrival.

"Oh, very well, then," said Madame at last rather sharply.

"On your own head be it, Mr. Sundean—"

she leaned suddenly forward, and gave a hoarse cluck of disapproval—"why are you here?" she asked almost in a whisper, her green eyes shining into mine.

"I came to meet a friend," I said. "Will you have a cigarette?"

"You are evasive, Mr. Sundean," she said in a less caressing way than she had previously employed.

"Evasive? You ask me why I have come to this hotel. I tell you, to meet a friend, which is the truth." I smiled at her.

"At such a time, Mr. Sundean, one must ask questions of unidentified strangers."

"No doubt," I said pleasantly. "What's it all about, madame? An attempt on my life and a murder at my threshold. That's more than coincidence. Are you so determined to make me leave?"

I had spoken experimentally, more than from conviction, and I was a little astonished to see how my words affected her. She leaned

quietly back in the chair again, but her face had gone rather sharp and set, and I did not like the look of her eyes back of their darkened eyelashes. It was a good sixty seconds before she spoke, and in the little interval Pucci cast me a reproving glance and then pushed his wide bill against Grethe's red hair and fared his yellow crest.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Sundean," she said at last. "Surely you don't think the murder of last night had connection with you?"

It was clear, of course, that there was something evil going on in the old hotel. But I think that, until that very moment, I had not felt so definitely the presence of widening and entangling currents.

She did not, I think, detect the course of my thoughts, although her green gaze was very sharp. I said quietly but more cautiously:

"No, I don't think anything of the kind. While I may not be a particularly welcome guest, still I don't think anyone would go to the trouble of murdering a man in order to get rid of me. By the way—who was the murdered man?"

"I don't know," she said in a tight voice; narrowed eyes watched my face. "Do you?"

"I? Absurd! You know that. But another question, madame." In my turn I leaned toward her. "Why were you anxious to keep me from arrest last night?"

"I don't know," she said softly.

HER smooth lids went down again, but not before I'd caught a look that warned me. She rose, and I rose too, naturally, and the move brought her very close to me. So near that I could feel the warmth of her body. Her lips were parted a little, and her eyes, lifted again to mine, were very bright and shining.

"It should not be difficult to find the answer for that," she said softly.

She would be pliant and warm and exciting in my arms. I wondered fleetingly how soon I could replace the faintly triumphant look I'd caught in her eyes with something quite different.

I tossed my cigarette into the fire. I took the cockatoo from her shoulder and set him on the chair near and bent over her mouth.

But it waited for me, and I straightened suddenly without touching it or her.

"Madame," I said pleasantly, "is more than kind. Madame is also beautiful. The cockatoo is eating fringes off the chair."

He was actually doing just that, in a heaven inspired moment but with a very dubious look. He took another bite without eagerness but philosophically, as if in scientific pursuit one must put up with a poor tasting bite now and then, and Madame Grethe looked at me.

I was rather interested to note that there was nothing but a kind of faintly surprised curiosity in her gaze. Then she laughed a little, turned and picked up the cockatoo—he rested out of pure devilry, stretching out his neck for more fringes and squalling, but her hands were firm about him—and she faced me again, still smiling.

"And Monsieur," she said, "is a very reckless young man. Good-night."

I opened the door for her. She held out her hand to me, still smiling, and I think genuinely amused and not in the least angry. I bowed very low over her hand, and she turned gracefully into the corridor, and I closed the door behind her and took a long breath and hoped she wouldn't meet Sue. At least until she was at a considerable distance from my room.

I was thinking of Sue when I heard her knock on the door. As I opened it she was looking rather fixedly at the spot on the corridor floor where the dead man had hidden. She looked small and quiet and frightened, and I took her hand and pulled her quickly into the room and closed the door.

"Were the corridors creepy?" I said. "Come over to the fire."

She shivered and said yes rather breathlessly and sat down in the chair I had just left.

"It's very queer," said Sue. "But for the last week or two I've been ridiculously nervous about going through these half-dark corridors. I keep feeling that there's someone coming along behind me. Or looking out of closed doors."

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Sue confesses, tomorrow, a chilling fear that haunts her.

WOMAN PILOT FOUND ON SIAMESE ISLAND

RANGOON, Burma, April 25.—(AP)—Mrs. Harry Bonney, cousin of the missing Bert Hinkler, noted Australian aviator, has been rescued after being lost three days on a Siamese island.

EUREKA FUGITIVE IS TAKEN IN NEW YORK

NEW YORK, April 25.—(AP)—William Herder, 31, a sailor, was arrested late today at the Seamen's Institute, charged with being a fugitive from Eureka, Cal., where, police said, he is wanted for the murder of a deputy sheriff in a postoffice hold-up.

HAWLEY SUSPICIOUS INFLATION BENEFITS

SALEM, April 25.—(AP)—Home after 26 years of service in Washington, D. C., Ex-Congressman W. O. Hawley spoke concernedly of inflation, farm relief and public finance. He said he was happy to be once more in his native state.

THE WORLD AT ITS WORST

By GUYAS WILLIAMS

TAILSPIN TOMMY—A Glimpse Into Haiti's Past

By ULENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORRESTER

BOUND TO WIN—A Pretty Big Problem

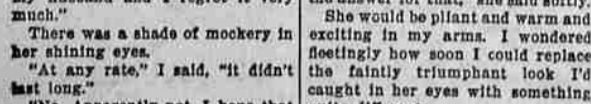
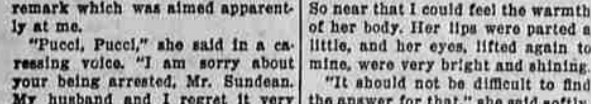
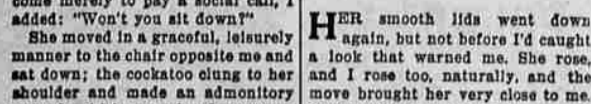
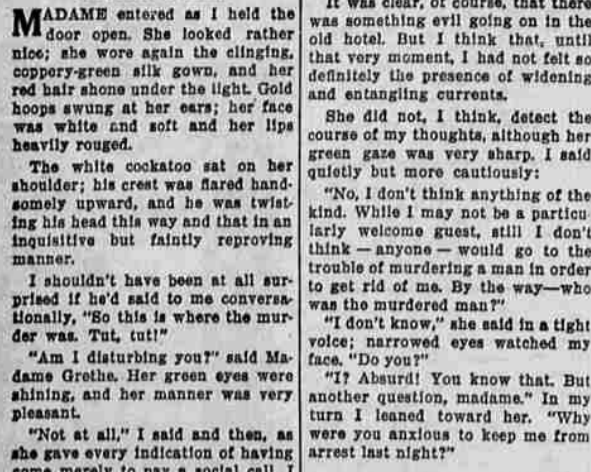
By EDWIN ALGER

THE NEBBS—It's A Way With Him

By SOL HESS

BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



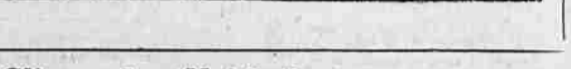
S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE



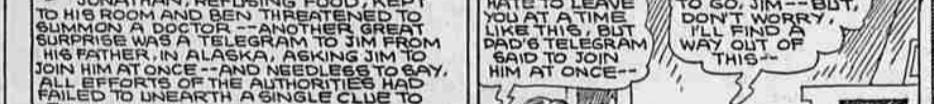
THE WALNUT AVE. TIGERS, ONCE THE SMARTEST LOOKING OUTFIT IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD LEAGUE, FIND THAT THEY HAVE OUTGROWN THEIR UNIFORMS, AND NOT THE SLIGHTEST CHANCE OF GETTING NEW ONES

By GUYAS WILLIAMS



TAILSPIN TOMMY—A Glimpse Into Haiti's Past

By ULENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORRESTER



FRANKNESS NEED IN SOCIAL EVILS

Representatives from Utah, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, Montana, Alaska and California attended.

"Children of the west have the best child health record in the nation," said Dr. Bertola. "But there is one thing necessary to improve child health conditions. We must face the thought of the 'social disease.' We must prevent the birth of blind babies. We must prevent the spread of diseases that increase infant mortality."

We are proud to announce the elevator "Patrol Jane" was frocks exclusive with us. A wide variety of styles that are adorable at \$1.95. THE BAND BOX & SHOE BOX. "The store that saves you money."

WRIGLEY'S SPEARMINT NOW EVEN BETTER

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