

# The White Cockatoo

by Mignon G. Eberhart

**SYNOPSIS:** Two murders have been committed and two attempts have been made on Jim Sundson's life, the last of which wounded him seriously. All are connected. Sundson and the detective David Lorn believe, with an attempt to steal the stolen by means of which Sue Tully, their "elbow guest in a little French hotel, must claim her half of her father's vast fortune. Sundson, although suspected of the murders by the French police, is chiefly concerned about the safety of Sue Tully. He is awakened in the middle of the night, and smells tobacco smoke nearby.

## Chapter 21 WHENCE THE SMOKE?

I was very cold, and the glow from the red ashes still lighted the room sufficiently for me to see that there was no one about and the table before the door was undisturbed.

My shoulder throbbed as I pulled a dressing gown around me and went to the window. One casement was already a little open, and I pulled it wider and opened the shutters and looked down into the street.

There was no one about, and I closed the shutters and, partially, the window again.

There was the courtyard. Cautiously I moved the table away and opened the door.

No one was in the long, half-dark corridor. Across the shadowy court the window and glass-paned door of the lobby made bright rectangles of light, and I could see two policemen; they sat at a small table directly under the light and were peacefully playing some kind of card game.

The men were not smoking, although, if they had been, the odor would never have reached my room.

But behind me the whole north wing was deserted and silent. I walked carefully along its length. It even opened, very cautiously, a door or two near my own room. But the rooms were black cavities, and the air that rushed to meet me was cold and stale and had that peculiarly musty, dank smell of rooms that are very old and have been empty for a long time.

Moreover, the smell of tobacco smoke was much fainter here—was indeed so faint that I was not sure it was there at all. It was only when I returned to my room that it was definite and strong again.

I closed the door, puzzled, and snapped on the light.

It puzzled me so much that I examined the room and adjoining bathroom. There was no one there, of course, and no evidence that anyone had been there. I even looked for hidden entrances to my room, feeling a little silly and melodramatic about it, but thinking still that there might be some such thing in that old place, built in the days when secret doors were the most matter-of-fact of arrangements.

But there was nothing; indeed, there was no place for anything except behind the enormous wardrobe, and if I moved that I should rouse the whole hotel in the process, for it was very heavy and large.

However, I did drift into uneasy dreams again, and by morning the odor of tobacco smoke—a silly and trivial thing at its clearest—had merged into those dreams and no longer seemed important, although I told Lorn about it when I saw him.

That was when we met in the lounge after breakfast.

MARIANNE, red-eyed and dark and somehow sullen, had brought in the breakfast tray and hunched out again. All her glisters were gone, poor child. I wondered what little Marcel had been to her.

Lorn listened politely, but without much interest, to my story of the tobacco smoke—which did, in fact, sound extremely trivial and fanciful by the light of day—said in a listless way that it was probably a policeman somewhere, but that he would try to make sure; asked how my shoulder was and said he was off to try to discover what the police were doing.

The matter of Father Robert's alibi would, I thought, await more important investigations, though I felt that the sooner we came to a conclusion about the information little Marcel had given me the better.

I followed Lorn through the small lobby and into the court. No one was in the lobby, but Father Robert was sitting outside in the court; he was smoking and hastily put up a newspaper as he saw me and began to read absiduously.

Pucci was sitting disconsolately on a chair back near the priest, and I took another chair. It was rather

disconcerting to see a policeman's head and blue cap pop out from around the wall by the entrance arch, survey me unblinkingly and leisurely and then pop back again in a way that left no doubt in the world that I had actually the closest of company.

Suspiciously I sniffed at the tobacco the priest was smoking, could no trace in it the fragrance of the tobacco smoke that had inexplicably drifted into my room during the night and felt to speculating regarding that enigmatical figure. Why had he taken so much trouble about an alibi?

The fact that he had so carefully arranged a needless alibi was in itself suspicious. Highly suspicious, I told myself, looking at his long black legs and American shoes. He'd explained the shoes when he'd said casually that he'd spent two years in America.

But it suddenly struck me that his beard itself was a suspicious point. As a rule, only missionary priests or Russian priests wear beards, and he had the appearance of being neither. And yet, if assumed for purposes of disguise, it would have entailed a long and patient process, for it was a real beard.

He had not only taken pains to arrange a false alibi, but he had lied himself, and—which was still less what one might expect in a man of God—he had practically forced little Marcel to lie in order to support his story.

Pucci croaked, scratched and fidgeted clumsily down from the chair. The bird had been in the lounge with me just before Marcel had entered it the previous afternoon. I wondered what he had seen. I wished there were some way to wrest from him the knowledge that might be back of those bright, shobut eyes—eyes that looked as knowing and secretive as his mistress' eyes.

THIS time Pucci croaked as disconsolately as he had scratched, sidled over to the priest and pulled himself up on his knees, whence he scrutinized the beard closely.

There was suddenly an impatient rustle of the newspaper, and behind it the priest's red beard and angry eyes appeared. I did not realize that I must have been looking, as I felt, faintly amused at the cockatoo's cynical expression until Father Robert snapped:

"Well, have you stared at me enough? And is it so amusing an occupation?"

"As a matter of fact, I was watching the cockatoo," I said, "and thinking of what Marcel told me."

I was looking directly into his eyes, and it was with interest that I noted the singular way they became fixed and rigid like a cat's. His face, too, looked suddenly rather yellow, back of that flaming hair.

Presently he said, his yellow-gray eyes never wavering in that rigid secret stare into mine: "Marcel? And what was that, since you've introduced the subject?"

I hesitated, resolved in a fraction of a second that I was doing no harm, and replied:

"He told me the truth about the story you gave the police concerning your whereabouts the night the unknown man was murdered. He said you were not ill and that he was not in your room with you."

It occurred to me that he had braced himself for it; had perhaps known what was coming. He said coldly:

"Well?"

I shrugged, and promptly resolved not to indulge in that gesture again until my shoulder had healed.

"Well?" I said, with his own inspection. His eyes remained still, and yet it seemed to me there was an angry flash back of them. Clearly he resented the implication that it was not my place to speak.

He remained stubbornly silent for a moment, but he was not of the temperament to keep his feelings in leash for long. Fully conscious of the seething rage back of those still yellow eyes, I took out my cigarettes. In a leisurely fashion I leaned forward, extended the package toward him, and said pleasantly: "Do have a cigarette."

He made an angry motion with his hands and sprang to his feet.

"Oh, you are insulting!" Father Robert cried. "You are insulting!" "Oh, come now," I said mildly. "It is scarcely an insult to offer a man a cigarette. Hey—don't step on the bird!"

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Father Robert makes a curious statement, tomorrow.

## U. O. MOTHERS TO BE ENTERTAINED

Plans have been completed for the continued Junior Week-End-Mothers' Day celebration to be held on the campus of the University of Oregon May 12, 13 and 14.

Day celebration to be held on the campus of the University of Oregon May 12, 13 and 14. Beginning with the campus luncheon Friday noon events for students, mothers and visitors will fill nearly every hour of each day from morning to midnight. The campus luncheon, to be held Friday from noon to 2:30, will be enlivened with several features. Priests, senior honor society for men, and Mortar Board, senior women's society, will file about in caps and gowns. "Tapping" those seniors selected for membership in these groups. The university band will play and other entertainment will be offered. Queen Margaret I, Miss Margaret Wagner of Salem, will also be crowned queen of Junior week end at this time. Sunday morning the newly elected executive committee of the Oregon Mothers will meet and at 11 o'clock all churches will hold special Mothers' Day services. Each living organization will honor mothers at dinner on this day also.

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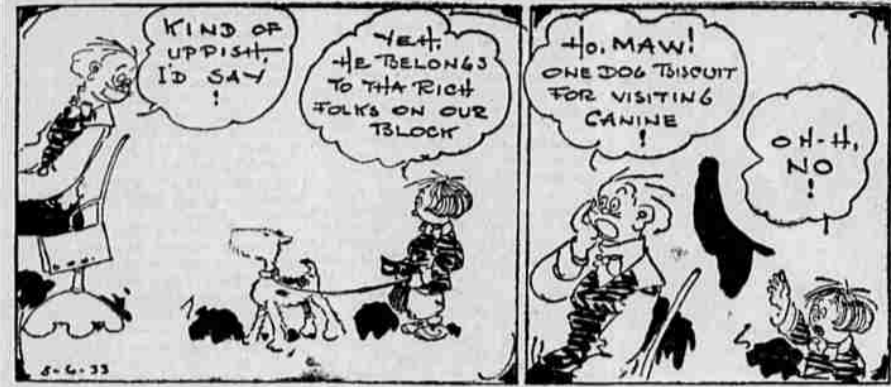
## Helman's Pool Reopens Today

Mrs. O. O. Helman and Mrs. Frida Burger, managers of Helman's Baths in Ashland, announce that the white sulphur spring swimming tank and tub baths will be open today for the summer season. Swimming instruction will be given this summer in

both classes and by appointment, according to the management. There are two covered tanks, hot and cold, which have a continuous flow of white sulphur water, and there is also a free picnic ground. PERMANENTS—\$1.50, \$2.50, \$4, \$5.50. Bowman's, Phone 57. Real estate or insurance—Leave 15 to Jones. Phone 798.

## S'MATTER POP—

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## TAILSPIN TOMMY—Uneasy Lies The Head That Looks For Pirate Gold!



## BOUND TO WIN—Leaving At Once!

By EDWIN ALGER



## THE NEBBS—Oh, Very Well

By SOL HESS



## BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



## TWO MORE FLIERS IN SOUTHWEST TRAGEDY

SAN ANTONIO, May 6.—Two Brooks Field fliers, Lieut. Edmund Wolf, pilot, and Sgt. Meredith, were reported killed Friday in the crash of their airplane near Devine. This accident brought to five the number of army aviators killed in

the southwest in the past three days in three different accidents. Four other men were in the Fort Clark hospital from burns suffered in a crash at that post Thursday.

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