The White Cockatoo

by Mignon G. Eberhart

SYNOPSIS: Jim Sundean has discovered evidence that seems to connect the man known as Father Robart with the plot to steal the token with which Sue Tally must prove her claim to a great fortune. Perhaps he also has a connection with the two murders that have horrified the guests of the small French hotel that has been their scene. But when he and David Lorn, the detective, are ready to inform the police, they learn that Father Robart has disappeared. Then there is news.

Chapter 33

THE COFFIN

THE police had discovered the owner of the gun. It was a man by the name of Michael Stravsky. And a photograph of the dead man had been mailed to the gunsmith, and he had said that without a doubt it was a picture of the man who bought the gun.

"That must be the murdered man, then," I said. "Michael Stravsky."

Lorn nodded. His face was impassive as ever, but I think he was actually as excited over the development as I was.

"And it was a bullet from that gun that killed Marcel?"

"Yes. They extracted two bullets, and it was that gun."

"But the man was dead long before that gun was used to kill Marcel. If the murdered man was Stravsky that very fact links the murderer of Stravsky and the murderer of Marcel. Stravsky's murderer searched his pockets, took the dead man's gun, among other things, and later user the gun on little Marcel."

"Perhaps," said Lorn. "He would feel safe in getting rid of it as he did. Simply tossing it to the lounge floor, knowing that, even if it were traced, it could do him no damage. I tell you, Sundean, this is an exceptional criminal. It took nerve to do that."

"It took," I said hotly, thinking of Marcel, "a devil. I thought the gun would eventually prove to belong to the priest."

"I thought so myself," said Lorn. He pulled his coat tighter about him. We were talking in the courtyard. Inside in the little lobby were several policemen with Lovschiem, fat and protestant and frightened in the midst of them, and Madame Grethe listening coldly at one side.

"Why are they questioning Lovschiem now? Trying to discover if he knew the man?"

"I suppose so," said Lorn without much interest.

"Do you think he did?"

"I don't know. It's possible."

"Stravsky—he might have been in cahoots with the priest."

Lorn nodded impatiently, as if I were very slow at arriving at the conclusion.

"There's another thing," he said. "The poison was a compound of nicotine. No, no—" he forestalled my inquiries quickly—"that's all I know now. I'm off to the police station. Perhaps I'll know more when I get back. Ah-h——"

He hesitated and looked a little embarrassed, as if he had just remembered his more pressing duty, and then said: "You don't mind just keeping an eye on Miss Tally, do you?"

I didn't mind. But I believe I managed to say so without undue warmth.

IN the hall upstairs I met Sue. She looked tired and pale even in that dim light, and hadn't, she told me, slept well.

"I felt—haunted," she said and then laughed a little tremulously.

Well, I had felt that way myself. I said:

"I'm delegated to 'keep an eye' on you this morning. Lorn wants to hobnob with the police."

"The police? Have they made any discoveries?"

Briefly I told her what they were, and she listened thoughtfully. After a moment she shrugged her shoulders.

"There's nothing we can do, I suppose, but wait," she said. "But the inactivity is rather bad.—Come," she said suddenly. "You must see the show piece. I'll show you the famous Pope's piano."

I followed her through the dim corridor, admiring as I went her graceful smooth carriage, the slope of her shoulders, the proud way her head bent on her slender neck.

It was just at the turn from the middle corridor into the north wing that an unexpected thing occurred.

She was wearing again the gray tweed suit and crimson scarf at her throat, and as she entered the north-wing door the scarf floated out, caught on a projecting latch—caught and held and all in a second whirled her around sharply against me and into my arms.

It was very sudden, and it caught me off my guard, and there was no one near, and the corridor was dark and empty and still, and my arms were tight around her and holding her close to me, and her hair brushed my face.

And immediately the empty corridors and the hotel and the world ceased to exist, and there was nothing but darkness and warmth and Sue in my arms with my mouth against her mouth.

Then Sue was a small figure in the darkness apart from me, her face a white blur. And I was trying to steady my voice so I could speak, and my heart was pounding as if I'd been running a race, and I wanted her in my arms again, and I dreaded what she might say. It's true that a kiss is only a kiss. But the girl was Sue. It made such a difference.

"I'm sorry."

I waited. I thought of trying further apology.

Then all at once Sue spoke. She spoke in a breathless little voice that I'd never heard before. But she said coolly enough:

"Weren't we going to look at the Pope's piano?"

I OPENED the door and then paused.

"It's dark in here," I said, with perhaps a note of warning in my voice.

"Well," said Sue, and there was just a spark of laughter in her eyes. "Well—open the shutters."

But as she followed me into the large, empty, funereal room the laughter fled.

"How cold it is!" she said with a shiver. "And how musty." She followed me to the window and held back the curtain while I flung back the window, which let in a breath of crisp fresh air, opened the shutters, and as the gray light crept in closed the window again.

The light did nothing to remove the gloom that hung over the old room. Even the flowered carpet and the gilt cupids on the mantel mirror looked garish and desolate and ugly.

The color had gone from Sue's face.

"It isn't exactly lively in here," I said, "in spite of the frivolous furniture."

"The furniture makes it worse," said Sue with a shudder. "However, there's the piano."

It loomed up in the shadowy corner—enormous, dark, long, like a great black coffin on legs. Neither of us was in a hurry to approach it.

Sue looked about her, walked over to a long, white table with a faded pink velvet cover which stood under the dead chandelier, and paused there meditatively.

"Dust," she said, drawing a slim forefinger across it.

Her voice broke off and changed, and she said with sharp impatience: "What is the matter with this room!"

"It's been closed too long," I said prosaically, though I knew what she felt. "And it's cold."

The room had all at once become intolerable. Its silence brooded; the cold was musty; the shadows dim; there was an intangible feeling of menace hanging over it and us. Instinct bade me get Sue out of the place.

But in that little moment of silence between us came a very strange and startling thing.

Someone—somewhere near us—sighed heavily.

It was a long sigh—long and struggling and inexpressibly weary. It was distinct and unmistakable and dreadful in that chill, breathless silence.

Our eyes leaped to meet. I was on my feet. So was Sue. Neither of us spoke.

Then I went to the piano. It was dark in that corner. I held the revolver in my hand.

There was no one there.

I lifted the lid of the huge shape.

After a moment my fingers dropped the revolver into my pocket again, and I touched cautiously something inside.

"What——?" whispered Sue.

I closed the lid. It was, then, in very truth a coffin.

"Please leave. Leave at once."

Sue did not move.

I was thinking that the crowded thing under that lid couldn't possibly have uttered that heavy, struggling sigh. It was too long dead.

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The third victim of the killer is identified, tomorrow.

JUDGE SAYS BEER WILL INTOXICATE

GREELEY, Colo., May 13.—(AP)—Sweeping aside the opinions of some of the ablest constitutional lawyers in congress, who aided in drafting the 3.2 per cent beer bill, District Judge Claude C. Coffin has declared its passage in violation of the constitution.

In his decision yesterday, which denied the Greeley Elks club and Fred N. Fetch, cafe owner, a writ of mandamus which they sought to compel the Greeley city council to issue beer permits, Judge Coffin said the congressional declaration that 3.2 beer is non-intoxicating is contrary to the "generally known physical facts."

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GLEEMEN'S CONCERT SCHEDULED MAY 25

May 25th will be the date of the much anticipated spring concert by the Medford Gleemen, which will be sung at the high school auditorium, announcement was made by Dr. E. W. Shockley today.

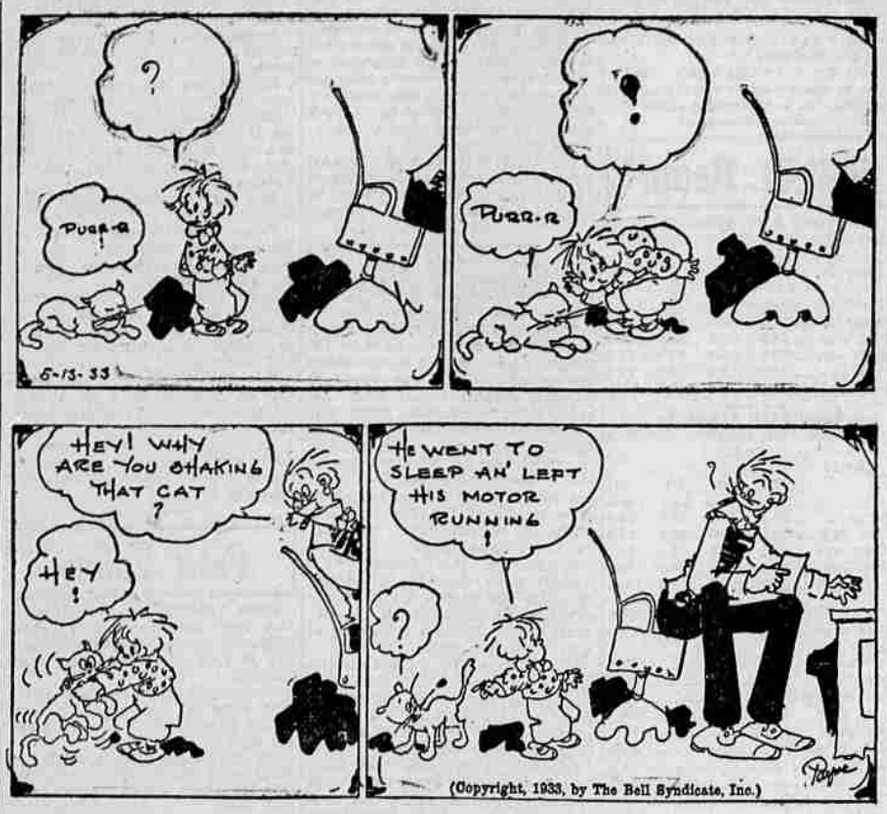
Rehearsals for the concert have been underway for many weeks and the program will be released in the near future.

Real estate or insurance—Leave it to Jones. Phone 696.

Two Fatalities.

SALEM, May 13.—(AP)—W. J. Barham of Salem, contractor, and Earl Olson of Arlington, a truck driver, were the two fatalities listed during the past week as the result of industrial accidents. A total of 419 accidents occurred during that time, the industrial accident commission today announced.

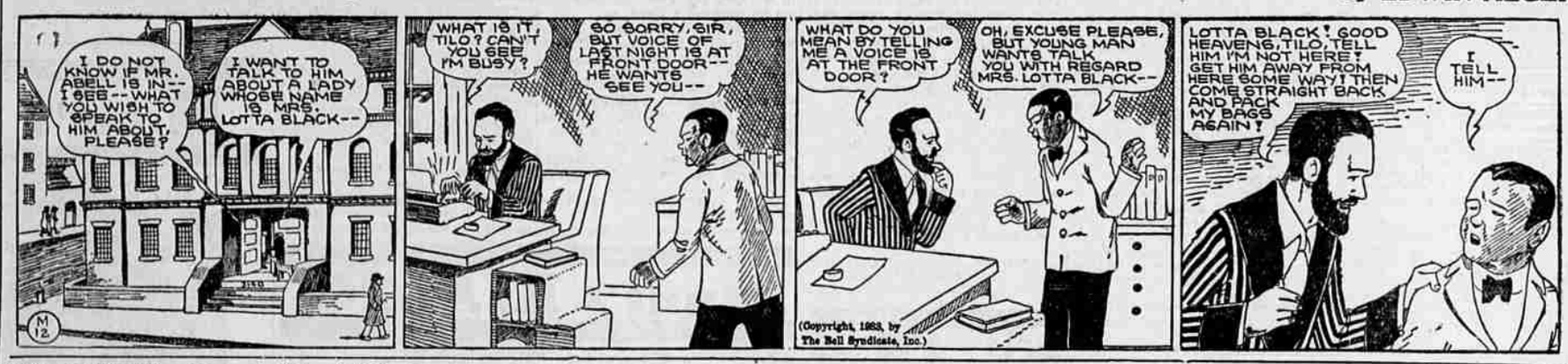
S'MATTER POP— By C. M. PAYNE



SNAPSHOTS OF A FATHER GETTING A LETTER WRITTEN By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

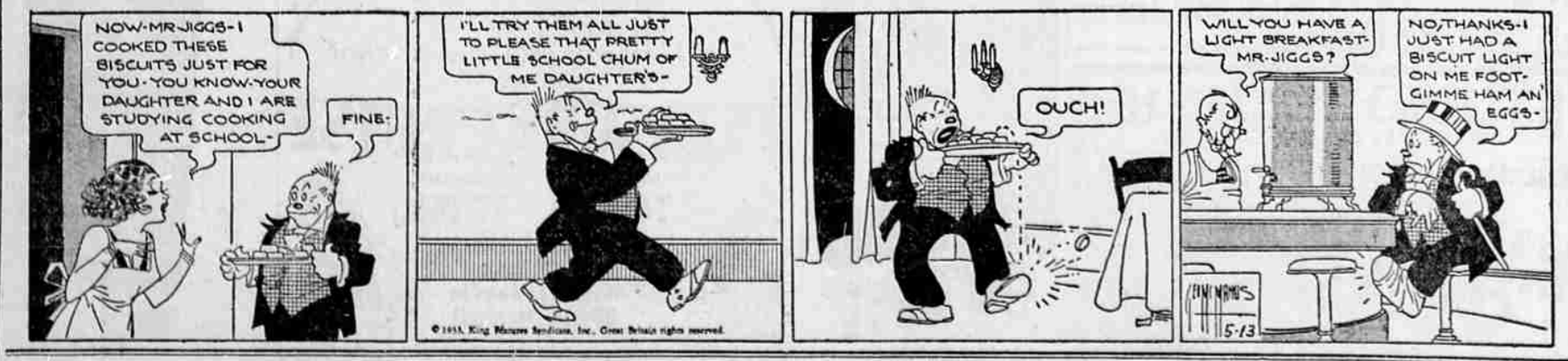
TAILSPIN TOMMY—Who Knows—Indeed? By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST

BOUND TO WIN—A Strange Situation By EDWIN ALGER



THE NEBBS—He's A Nice Little Guy By SOL HESS

BRINGING UP FATHER By George McManus



CHINESE MAP DEFENSE AGAINST JAP THREAT

PEIPING, May 13.—(AP)—Chinese authorities moved swiftly today for the defense of Peiping after a second reconnaisance of the city by a Japanese war plane.

This plane, like that of yesterday, dropped handbills saying the Japanese are ready to extend their attack to Peiping and Tientsin unless the Chinese cease armed resistance.

Says Roosevelt For Movie Probe

WASHINGTON, May 13.—(AP)—Representative Sirovich (D., N. Y.) created a sensation in the house today when he declared President Roosevelt favored his resolution calling for a congressional investigation of the motion picture industry. His statement was immediately questioned by a number of members.

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