

The White Cockatoo

by Mignon G. Eberhart

SYNOPSIS: Sue Tully had in her possession a token with which she must identify herself to her brother Francis, whom she has not seen since childhood, in order to inherit her half of her father's enormous fortune. There have been three murders in the little French hotel in which she lives, connected with attempts to steal the token. Francis arrives—and the token disappears. Jim Sanderson accuses Sue to "bluff" her brother and his detective, David Lorn, while he tries to find the token. Sanderson questions Sue.

Chapter 40
STRANGE QUESTIONS
"THIS is your handkerchief, isn't it?" I asked Sue.
She looked at the delicate wisp of white that I drew from my pocket. She had been, I think, about to question me further, for she looked faintly impatient at the interruption. The impatient look, however, was succeeded by a puzzled little frown.

"Why, yes," she said. "I believe it is. At least, it looks like some I have, and it has a scent that I use. I couldn't be sure, though. It's a quite ordinary handkerchief—it's a get dozens of them in any store in France. Why?"
I did not explain. I said: "I found it on the floor. Will you come with me a moment? I know your brother's waiting and you mustn't be long, but it will only take a moment."

She looked further puzzled, but went with me toward the north corridor.
At the end of the corridor I asked her to stand for a moment before my door. I marked her height against the window. I did not need even to go to the lobby whence I had seen that flying silhouette. Even allowing largely for the angle of my perspective from the lobby, Sue was at least a foot shorter than that brief silhouette had been. I ought to have known it at once.

There was still neither time nor need to explain then to Sue. I said: "Do you see that room up there on the third story—the fifth shutter from the corner of the middle section? About number thirty-four or thirty-five? Were you up there at all the night of the first murder?"
I don't know what she was thinking of me just then. She looked perplexed, but Sue was never dull.

"No," she said directly.
"Another thing," I said. "And forgive me for all this pointlessness." I hesitated here; the thing I was about to ask was not entirely pointless. I plunged on, however:
"Mrs. Byng says she saw you turning out the hotel lights the night of the first murder. She says—'Sue's eyes were widening.' She says, 'I went on miserably as I saw that my very inquiry must suggest to her that I'd believed Mrs. Byng, that she saw you at the switch box, there in the corridor near her door, that she saw you pull the main switch out, and that the lights went out at once.'"

"And you believed her?" said Sue rather sadly.
"No," I had her hands and almost had her, suddenly, in my arms. "No! I didn't believe her. Not when you told me where you'd been at that time."
She pulled back away from me.
"I don't know what Mrs. Byng saw or thought she saw," said Sue. "But I told you the exact truth. About everything."
"I know. I know. Tell me, is Mrs. Byng friendly with you?"

"Why—no," said Sue. "But not unfriendly, either. We've had very little to do with one another. Scarcely talked at all."
"You wouldn't say, then, that she'd ever been particularly interested in you?"
"Heavens, no," said Sue, seeing what I meant and forgiving me simultaneously. "If you mean Mrs. Byng may be—suspect—that's absurd. She's exactly what she seems."
"I'm beginning to think I don't mean anything. You'd best go along to your brother. He'll grow suspicious. I'll go with you to the lounge."
"It's not going to be easy," said Sue. "Facing him, knowing all along that if he suddenly produces his own token I cannot produce mine to match it. I was almost ready this morning to give up the whole thing. After all—why do I want five million dollars?" She said it thoughtfully, as if she really did wonder why.

"Five millions," I said rather bitterly, "is not to be regarded with disrespect. And in this case, if you are in for a penny you're in for a pound."
We were walking back along the north corridor. In two or three days

at the most she would go completely out of my life.
It was then that I knew what a devastating thing it would be never again to see her advancing toward me. Never a sign to catch the gay little challenge of her mouth that was a smile. Never again to watch the gallant lift of her chin, the light in gold gleams on her hair, the delicacy of her hands and her beautiful body.
Yes, it was devastating. It was like being caught in the vortex of a cyclone that you hadn't seen coming.
But even in that destructive moment—and it isn't easy to know suddenly that your only moments of high and magic living are counted and are few in count, and that they'll go swiftly and irrevocably and finally—even in that moment I knew I could not tell her. I could not tell this girl with the golden millions.
I wished she'd gone that morning before her brother came! I wished she'd given up her claim as she said she was about to do—I wished all manner of insane things.
And something said: You won't feel this tearing at you for long; it would be undesirable if you did but you won't, for even the memory of your love will grow dim and faint.

AND that, of course, was worse, and if Sue had turned just then, if she'd faltered or hesitated or looked to me for help, the whole thing would have come out.
But she didn't turn. And by the time we reached the stairway I had walked through heaven and hell and emerged. I loved her, and I was going to give her up. I was even with my own hands helping erect that hateful, glittering path along which her little feet would walk away from me.
Well—I emerged. It is by no means a unique experience. And after all, I'd rather have had it than not. So there was no good making a fuss about it.
It was almost a relief to wrench myself back to the business at hand. The business of helping Sue acquire those damnable millions which not only severed her from me but which threatened her—threatened her—threatened her.

And time was pressing.
Francis was still in the parlor. As we walked down the last steps into the lounge, Lorn came suddenly from the parlor.
"Your brother is waiting for you," he said, and paused, his clouded dark eyes meeting Sue's gaze. He looked peculiarly uncertain and ill at ease. The effect he gave of not having concluded his sentence, and thus of having still something he must say to her, was so strong that both Sue and I paused too, motionless, waiting for what was to come.
But if he'd intended to say something further he thought better of it; he made a rather strange little gesture with his hands, shrugged and walked away. She looked after him perplexedly, then turned toward me with a question in her face. But I, of course, could tell her nothing; I only felt that the detective's look savored, somehow, of warning.
Sue took a long breath, gave me a quick little nod, and walked swiftly toward the stuffy old parlor and the waiting man. There was a fine tempering of steel in Sue; she never lacked courage in a crisis.
I sat in the lounge in full view of the door and waited. After a few seconds I found it impossible to sit, and rose, walkin', back and forth, watching the parlor door, the lift, the galleries. After all, I'd seen little Marcel shot before my very eyes, and I had been powerless to prevent it.
And there was no denying the fact that with Francis' arrival Sue's danger was great. His arrival had forced the climax; now, if ever, the plot would need to be carried to its swift conclusion, for once he was convinced of Sue's identity that plot must automatically collapse. And blind and groping about in the dark as we were—not knowing from what quarter trouble might come—there was every reason to fear that that conclusion might have an unthinkable, ghastly outcome.
With the token stolen, even the small measure of protection its possession had given Sue was gone; with that in the possession of the murderer the next step was inevitably to produce the substitute for Sue—and to silence Sue. And it must be done at once, if ever.

Another terrible complication, tomorrow, snarls Sue's tangle still more.
service. Farther east the market was less firm through Pacific coast eggs remained unchanged at New York.
PORTLAND, Ore., May 22.—(AP)—Clare Williams pleaded guilty in federal court here today to a charge of conspiring to violate the postal laws through a subscription campaign he conducted for a Beaverton, Ore., newspaper. He was sentenced to serve 8 months in a federal road camp.
Pete Donlon, stroke of California's 1928 Olympic Games champion eight-oared shell, has become rowing coach of the South End Rowing club of San Francisco.

POISON EYE WASH MAY COST SIGHT

ASHLAND, May 21.—(Spl.)—Mrs. Ellen Pate at 52 Rocco street is threatened with loss of the sight of one eye as a result of washing her right eye last Monday with lysol instead of an eye wash which she thought she was using. She is confined to her bed because of the accident and although under a doctor's care, the extent of the painful and serious injury will be known for perhaps two or three weeks. The doctor was not called on the case until some time after the accident as Mrs. Pate attempted to take care of the trouble herself.

Carl Hubbell, the Giants' great southpaw, once was advised by Ty Cobb to give up the "screw ball." The delivery that has stumped National league batters on their heads this spring.

WASHINGTON, May 22.—(AP)—Likening Europe to a "smouldering volcano," Senator Borah, in an address tonight, said the Versailles treaty was the "real obstacle" standing in the way of success at the forthcoming disarmament and economic conference.
Speaking before the Women's International league for peace and freedom, the former chairman of the senate foreign relations committee

VERSAILLES TREATY BLAMED BY BORAH

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Twins, B. and W. Rideout of Tuscola, Ill., high school, finished one-two in a mile run at a prep school relays meet, and both were under the track record.

S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE



TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Golden Shower!

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST



BOUND TO WIN—Some Explanations

By EDWIN ALGER



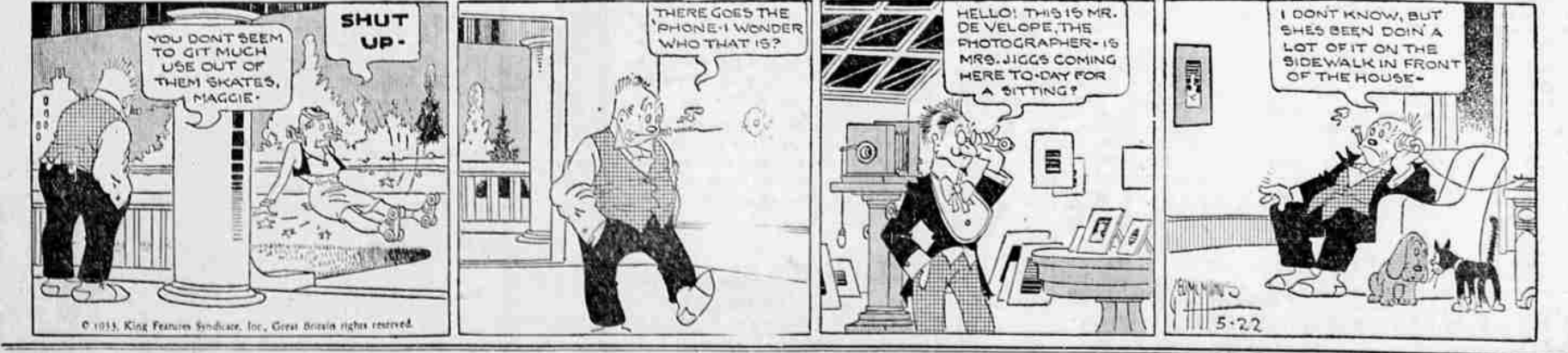
THE NEBBS—Oh, Happy Day!

By SOL HESS



BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



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