The White Cockatoo

by Mignon G. Eberhart

SYNOPSIS: Feverishly Jim Sundean works to help Sue Tally out of the tangle in which she is enmeshed. The token with which she must identify herself to her brother Francis, whom she has not seen since childhood, is stolen just as Francis arrives in the French hotel where she lives. Three murders have been committed in an effort to steal the token. Sue herself has seemed to do suspicious things. David Lorn, Francis' detective, calls Sue to talk with her brother—and Sundean, fearing the murderer may make a last desperate attempt on Sue's life, watches outside.

Chapter 41

THE THEFT

THERE was one faint hope. That was that whoever it was who had killed so swiftly, so mysteriously, with such ghastly silence and stealth, striking without warning there in the blackness of the old hotel and vanishing as mysteriously as he had come—whoever he was might possibly believe that, without that token, Sue would not be able to convince her brother.

But the faint hope was so very faint that it was almost untenable.

Sue's only assurance of safety lay in convincing Francis of her identity. And she was going to him empty-handed, without that token on which had been placed such ill-proportioned significance.

At any rate, she had the birth and marriage records; if Francis were only inclined to be fair and reasonable, those written records would go a long way toward establishing her identity.

It was with taut nerves that I saw Francis appear in the doorway, and heard him call to Lovschiem, and saw Lovschiem, after a moment or two, emerge from the parlor and waddle fatly toward his own rooms. He's going to his safe, I thought, and lit a cigarette and forced myself to wait quietly.

If Francis would only credit the evidence of that long-ago marriage certificate and Sue's own birth record, things might yet go well with Sue. Given time and luck, we might recover the token.

But I was not exactly easy. It was somehow not really a shock to witness Lovschiem's hasty return, his fat flurried hands, his agitation and his cries that he'd been robbed. The safe had been opened, he cried, gasping and wheezing for breath. Miss Tally's envelope was gone. Nothing else. Only the envelope.

The strange thing about it was that his agitation was not affected. It looked to me to be real.

My opinion of the Lovschiems was going up and up.

I felt sure, while I watched the resultant commotion that brought them all—Francis and Sue and Lorn and Grethe—into the lounge, I felt sure that neither Grethe nor Marcus had known of the theft of the envelope Sue had entrusted to them.

I was at last convinced that they had actually wanted Sue to have that envelope and to go away with her brother. Which conviction completely reversed my whole train of speculation regarding the Lovschiems.

At the same time, I was interested in discovering from the resultant conversation with its implications that they undoubtedly had known more than Sue believed they had known about her inheritance and the conditions of it. For Francis was not guarded in his remarks even before my ears, and the Lovschiems were obviously not puzzled by his allusions.

"HOWEVER," said Francis crisply at last, interrupting Lovschiem's perspiring expostulations, "The papers in the envelope were not of first importance. It's true that my sister——" He checked himself, glanced at me, and made his first allusion to the secrecy of the affair. "I conclude that you've taken your—er—friends—" he gestured toward me and the Lovschiems, an inclusion which, despite my rising regard for the Lovschiems, I did not relish—"into your confidence regarding this affair."

"Only Mr. Sundean," said Sue. "Who has——"

"Well, well," Francis interrupted. "It's quite all right. The important thing——"

"But I did not tell anyone else," went on Sue firmly, refusing to be interrupted.

Francis glanced fleetingly at the Lovschiems. I followed his glance and was caught by a curiously still expression on Grethe's face. She met Francis' eyes directly, but there was a look in hers I could not fathom as she said very deliberately and distinctly:

"Miss Tally's mother told us something of the strange conditions under which Miss Tally would inherit money from her father. She told us in confidence, hoping that we would give what assistance we might to Miss Tally. She had no other friends." There was a nice lack of emphasis on the words "other friends," but they stood out definitely in their implication.

"I hope I do not need to assure you that we have told no one. If there is, as we have feared, a scheme to rob Miss Tally of her inheritance, it is not one we have brought about by a careless revealing of her mother's dying confidence. We have even kept the fact of our knowledge from Miss Tally. We understood, of course, that it was a delicate matter and one that invited danger."

Fine and fair and careful.

At once my growing opinion of the precious two gave one feeble flicker and collapsed. It was far too fine and fair and careful. Grethe's eyes were too cautious; and they held too brooding a flame as they met Francis Tally's. I felt that her claws were unsheathing themselves, her white muscles gathering tensely.

And a look at Marcus's face confirmed my feeling, for it bore a silly look of combined dismay, fright, and ludicrous relief as his quicker-witted mate spoke.

"Oh, of course. Of course," said Francis Tally carelessly, as if it didn't in the least matter. "The point is we don't need the papers that were in the envelope. There is a perfectly simple way for my sister to prove her identity. And I suppose she is willing to do so at once and end this uncertainty."

"I'll match your own token, Francis," said Sue pleasantly.

FRANCIS whirled sharply to look at her. Even Lorn, who had, as usual, mysteriously turned up at a crisis, seemed to sense something under her voice, and I caught his speculative, thoughtful look and wondered about it.

There had been something queer about Lorn—some impalpable difference. It had come with Francis Tally's unheralded arrival, but it was nothing to which I had a clue. What had he been doing—what, perhaps, had he discovered? There was certainly something very strange back of his guarded dark eyes as he watched Francis Tally.

"What do you mean?" Francis' voice went upward a note or two.

"Only that," said Sue still pleasantly.

Francis' face slowly darkened.

"But, my dear girl," he said, "it is you who must prove your identity to me. Don't you think you are reversing matters a little?"

"No," said Sue quietly. There was firmness under her voice, but it was still quiet and, curiously, there was a spark of gayety in the glance she flung toward me. I was interested to note that Francis' face was less bland. What would he say? What would he do? He shot a glance at Madame Grethe, who watched with her feline look of secret, guarded waiting. He said:

"You forget that I am sole arbiter of the matter. And in any case, sister, I think it might be better to continue our conversation in a less public place. Shall we——" He motioned toward the parlor, and Sue preceded him, meekly enough, but with another glance at me.

Grethe, with a sharp word to Lovschiem, vanished, Lovschiem followed her, and Lorn, looking undecidedly after Francis, as if waiting for some indication of Francis' wishes, sat down beside me. Neither of us spoke for a time: I was lost in my thoughts, and Lorn was equally engrossed in some mysterious speculations of his own.

"Well," I remarked at last, having reached a cul-de-sac in my reasoning from which there was only one exit, and that too incredible to take.

"Well enough, I suppose," he replied a bit grudgingly. He was watching the door to the parlor carefully. "Well enough."

I said bluntly:

"See here, Lorn, I've got a feeling that you know more about this affair than you are willing to admit. Is that true?"

His chin sank a little into the collar of the dark topcoat he still wore owing to the barn-like chill of the hotel. He had slouched down in his chair, and looked flabby and baggy-trousered and altogether ineffective.

"Yes and no," he said. "If I do know something, the time isn't ripe for it yet."

He flicked a look at me. I could read nothing at all in his clouded dark eyes.

"You're not telling me to mind my own business, are you?"

"Not precisely," said Lorn, with rather startling candor, "but it might be better for you if you did."

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Unexpected danger assails Sundean, tomorrow.

PUNISH ELDERS WHO TOLD BOY TO SUICIDE

NAIROBI, Kenya Colony, May 23.—(AP)—Seven elders of the Nandi tribe today started serving sentences varying from two to four years at hard labor for aiding a 14-year-old boy to commit suicide in accordance with Nandi law.

The boy, a cowherd, accidentally struck and killed a companion while he was practicing spear-throwing. The elders decreed he must pay blood-money to relatives of the dead youth, but the boy had no money, so they told him to kill himself.

Woodcraft Convenes.

PENDLETON, Ore., May 22.—(AP)—Over one hundred delegates from various lodges in this district were today attending the district convention of the Neighbors of Woodcraft here. The sessions will be concluded Tuesday.

C. OF C. COMMITTEES HAVE BUSY SCHEDULE

This week is scheduled to be a very heavy one for chamber of commerce committeemen with the calendar crowded with meetings for the first three days. The tourist and convention committees met Monday. One retail merchants group Monday and one Wednesday. The industrial committee will meet Wednesday, the dairymen's group of the agricultural committee and the civic affairs today and a meeting of the board of directors has been called for Friday, as have meetings of the etxation committee and the aviation committee.

Judge Would Retire.

SEATTLE, May 23.—(AP)—Federal Judge Jeremiah Neterer, 70, forwarded a request for retirement to President Roosevelt today. He is a Democrat and has been on the federal bench here almost 20 years.

S'MATTER POP— By C. M. PAYNE

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WAKING UP By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

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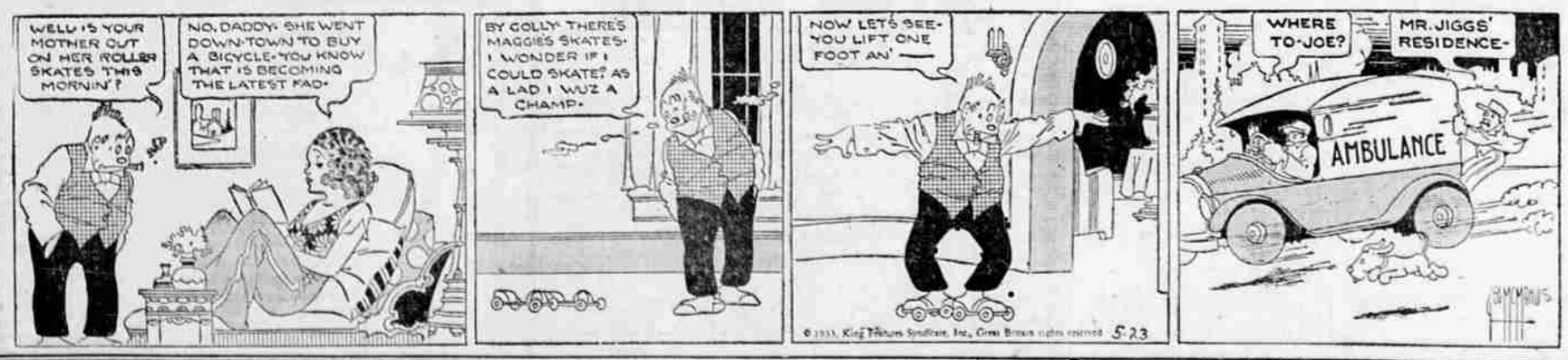
TAILSPIN TOMMY—Isabella Won't Be Left Behind!

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST

BOUND TO WIN—Two Generous Men By EDWIN ALGER

THE NEBBS—Oh, Well, That's Different By SOL HESS

BRINGING UP FATHER By George McManus



WASHINGTON, May 22.—(AP)—Ferdinand Pecora, counsel for senate banking committee, predicted in an interview today that the investigation of J. P. Morgan and company, opening tomorrow, would result in "much important legislation" to reform banking laws.

LOS ANGELES, May 22.—(AP)—Lyle William Eder, 19-year-old University of Southern California premedical student, was shot and killed early today in front of the Los Angeles Athletic club in downtown Los Angeles when, police said, he resisted an attempt to rob him.

There's No Guesswork in Tribune A. B. C. Circulation