

The White Cockatoo

by Mignon G. Eberhart

SYNOPSIS: Sue Tully must identify herself to her brother Francis by means of a token, which she cannot claim, her share of her father's great fortune. After a series of murders and shootings, the token has been stolen. But Sue "bluffs" Francis, demanding that he first show his identifying token. Meanwhile Jim Sundeen, whose regard for Sue has wavered with the danger in which she has been, is warned by David Lorn, a detective employed by Francis Tully, that the police have new reasons for suspecting him of murder. Lorn departs with a mysterious hint that Sue had best delay negotiations with Francis Tully for a few days.

Chapter 43 THE DIVISION

WE WERE to become immediately ranged in two different camps. And it happened just then, when the muffled sound of voices in the parlor became more definite and clear and all at once Sue swept angrily into the lounge.

Francis, angry too and showing it less pleasantly, followed her. His face also flushed, his eyes were narrow back of those studious spectacles, his hands were working nervously.

Sue said, every word falling like a brittle little icicle and yet marvellously polite at the same time: "I hope you don't mind my telling Mr. Lorn and Mr. Sundeen of our talk, Francis. You see, she turned to me, 'I have asked Francis if he will permit me to have a lawyer represent me. I feel—'

"No reason for it at all," burst in Francis. "I came here from America to settle things with this girl. To give her a chance at five million dollars—and she holds back and prattles about a—"

"I beg you not to interrupt me, Francis," I was faintly amused to note that as Francis grew angrier Sue grew sweeter and cooler, but it was most infuriating sweetness and coolness.

"I'm most grateful to my brother for such an effort," she went on. "Though perhaps it might have been made sooner—before I had been subjected to—" Her sweetness faltered a little there, and she swept on quickly, preferring not to talk of the horror that had dogged her days.

"At the same time, I can't help feeling that just because of the amount of the money involved, it is only fitting and suitable to ask a lawyer to conduct negotiations for me."

Francis's eyes were very narrow; I heard a slight rustle behind me, and I saw him dart a quick glance in that direction, and I had no doubt Madame Grethe had made her appearance.

"Come now, Sue," said Francis rather pleadingly. "All you need to do is let me look at the token you have. If it is what it is supposed to be, the thing is done. Do be sensible."

"But, Francis," said Sue very sweetly, "is there any particular reason why you refuse me a lawyer?"

There was an instant or two of silence before Francis's gathering rage rose to his lips. She attacked so sweetly, so coolly—so gallantly from my own viewpoint, because I knew of her empty hands. I knew of the infirmity of her ground.

"Do you mean," demanded Francis, "that you don't trust me?"

"What a thing to say! What a thing to say!" cried Sue, giving a soft little ripple of laughter that stung Francis and that actually shocked me in its deceiving sweetness. All women can shock you that way.

"THEN," said Francis, again glancing past me to where, with a quick following look, I saw Madame Grethe standing, motionless, her green eyes shining—"then," he said heavily, "you do trust me?"

Then Sue, very suddenly, and in a totally easy and meaningless voice, said an extremely odd thing. She said, her eyes then on Francis, and her voice quite flat and even a bit bored:

"Why should I not trust you? For now we see through a glass darkly, but then—" And there she stopped and carefully stroked her crimson scarf at her throat as if it had her entire interest. But her eyes through their dark eyelashes watched Francis.

Francis did not speak. He only looked angry and baffled, and his eyes sought Madame Grethe again.

There was a swift little swish of silk that broke the singularly tense moment. Grethe stepped forward and passed her round silken arm through Sue's.

"Don't you think you are a little overcautious, my dear?" she said smoothly to Sue. "Forgive me for speaking, but I could scarcely help hearing you, you know. For your own good I must say this. It is better for you to do as your brother wishes. Follow the terms of your father's will and prove your identity to your brother and let him take you away. It is only a matter of form. And while I have hesitated to speak before, lest I make you feel unwelcome in this, your only home—still—still you must see what—a thing you have brought upon us all."

She paused. I was glad to see that Sue was sternly unmoved. But I think she was still doubtful, still loath to discredit Grethe's motives in her own mind. And Grethe said suavely:

"Think what's waiting for you, dear. Five million dollars—five millions. The things you can buy. The things you can do."

It was just then that Sue's long, purposefully blind loyalty collapsed. She removed her arm quietly from Madame Grethe's clasp.

"Don't think for a moment, Madame Lovschlem," she said sweetly, "that I shall forget what you've done. And I'm sure my brother—will feel most grateful to you in your attempt to smooth the way before us."

GRETHE looked placid, then faintly puzzled, then suddenly comprehending. Her white lids dropped over her secretive eyes, and she said gravely, as if taking Sue's words at their face value:

"Don't thank me, my dear. I've only done what I could do."

"I'm afraid I'm not thanking you," said Sue quite frankly. "You see, it wasn't altogether kind of you, to keep what my mother told you a secret from me. It was a reticence which is not of a nature to maintain my confidence in your friendship. You and your husband are the only people in Armons besides myself who know of the circumstances of my inheritance."

I think Sue had not actually intended to say so much. Knowing her must fight whether she liked or not, she struck a little too blindly, choosing in her haste a weapon whose sharpness she did not quite comprehend. But its very unexpectedness frightened Madame Grethe.

Though, to be sure, only a close observer might have caught her fright in the sudden leaping of her eyes, in the placative manner in which she addressed Sue and put an end to the situation with less adroitness than one might have expected of her.

"You are tired and unstrung," she said. "Otherwise you would not speak in such a way to me. To your only friend. To—"

"I have other friends," said Sue, cutting into Grethe's soft speech without visible compunction.

"The trouble is we are all tired and nervous and upset, and no wonder. I'll order tea, and we'll all feel better."

She walked with a swish of green silk to the bell and pushed it with her square, vigorous white thumb.

Blissfully Sue's little smile flashed. I liked her being able to achieve it. She said with a quiver of mirth in her voice: "I'm not quarreling. I'm only telling you what I think. I'll go and call Mrs. Byng if we're going to have tea. She won't want to miss it."

She turned quickly toward the doorway, and Lorn started to follow her, but I sprang ahead of him. "I'll go along," I said, and we were on the stairs before anyone could stop us. I caught a green flicker from Grethe's eyes and heard her saying sharply something about Miss Tully's new acquaintance, and then we passed around the landing.

We turned from the lounge well with its blank galleries and tiny group waiting down below—and went along to Mrs. Byng's door. Sue knocked. Mrs. Byng did not reply immediately, and I said in a low voice: "Don't knock again for a moment. I want to talk to you."

She glanced up and down the corridor. Away at the end a policeman's blue coat and light trousers came into view. She said: "Here in my room."

She opened the door. I've never known why I remembered in that hurried moment to enter it first in order to look about. At any rate, that's what I did while she stood there in the corridor.

The room was empty. No one was about. It was only the quivering of the door to the massive wardrobe that caught my eye.

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What dread secret will the old wardrobe reveal, tomorrow?

CHAMBER DRIVE GETS PUBLICITY

National publicity for Medford was received today in a letter from the commercial organization department of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States of America, according to chamber officials. The organization department each month sends a news letter to all secretaries in America and chambers of commerce which have performed outstanding service are given mention.

In the news letter received this morning only nine chambers of commerce throughout the United States were given mention and the following was reported regarding Medford: "141 new members: The Medford, Ore., chamber of commerce reports a campaign which added 141 new members to that organization. A little different note was injected into the set-up. The chairman of the campaign was called the 'architect,' his four assistants were termed 'foremen,' who in turn had ten workers each known as 'hod carriers, carpenters, plasterers, bricklayers,' etc. Descriptive circulars of the campaign are available."

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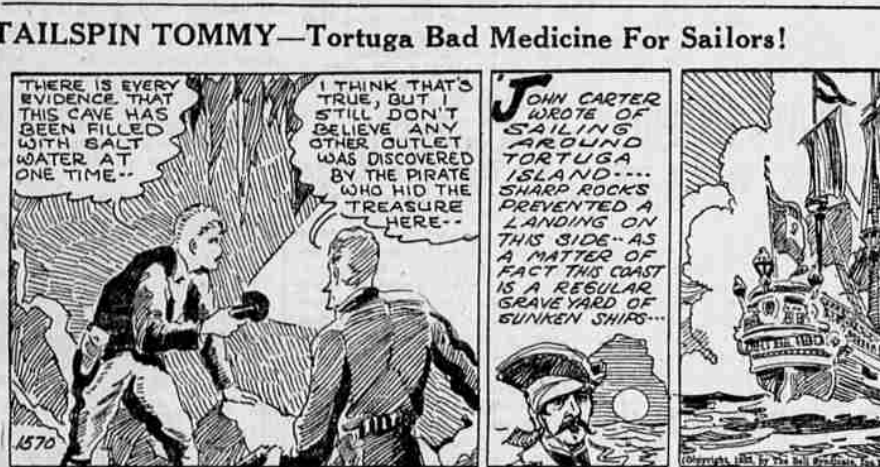
PILOT WOUNDED BY MACHINE GUN

OCEANSIDE, Cal., May 25.—(AP)—Leut. Carl H. B. Morrison, naval aviator, was seriously, but not critically wounded today when the machine gun on his plane was accidentally discharged while he was lying on the ground resting in front of it at an emergency landing field here. The bullet struck him in the thigh.

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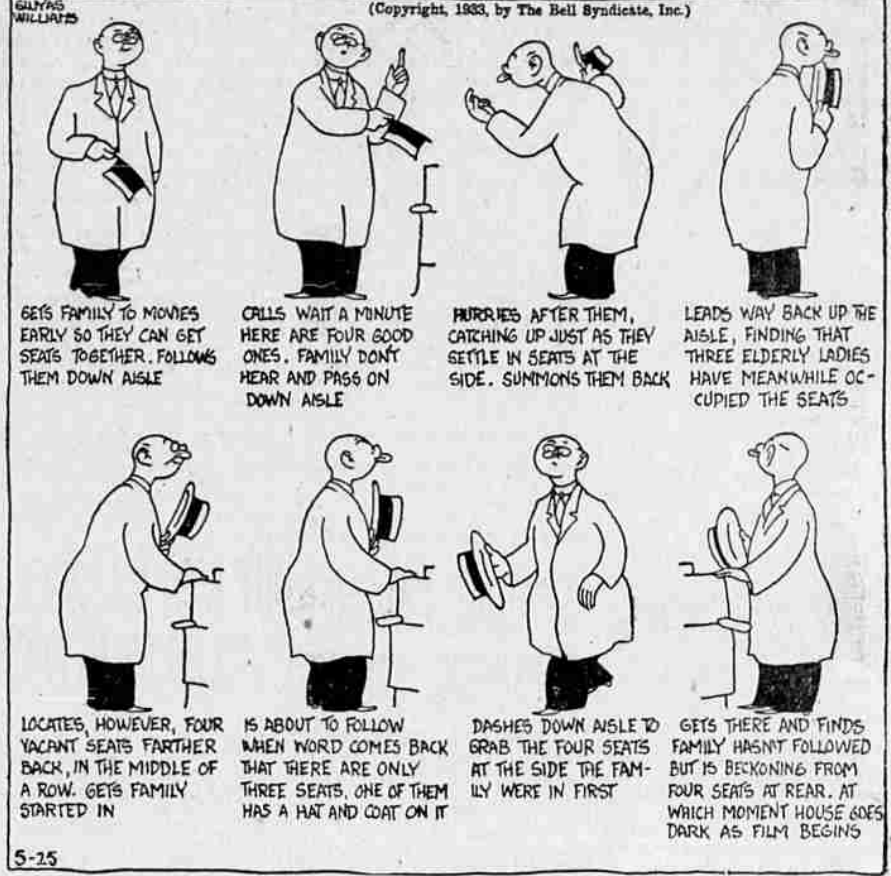
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McNary To Fight Chemawa Closing

PORTLAND, May 25.—(AP)—A vigorous fight to prevent the closing of Chemawa Indian school near Salem will be made by Senator Charles L. McNary. In the face of a written declaration by the commissioner of Indian affairs that this school and several other non-reservation institutions throughout the country will be abandoned temporarily under federal economy plans.

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