I did not kill Osborne

By VICTOR BRIDGES

SYNOPSIS: Nicholas has been acquitted of the murder of his former school friend Osborne, but finds indications that the public does not agree with the verdict. His cousin, Sir Seymour, has suggested that Nicholas leave the country, and Nicholas has furiously denounced him. Now after a dinner alone, Nicholas is walking down a lonely road to his studio when a hoarse voice accosts him.

Chapter Eight

TWO MESSAGES

"GORBLIMEY!" the voice exclaimed. "Strike me dead if it ain't Mr. Trench!"

Out of the gloom a tattered but familiar figure lurched into view. It was Bob Hicks, a genial old derelict who hung about outside the neighboring pub, and whom I sometimes employed to fetch me a taxi.

"Hello, Bob," I said. "Waiting to welcome me home?"

"Loriuvus! you could 'ave knocked me down with a feather, you could!" He thrust out a grimy paw. "If you don't mind, guv'nor, I'd be proud to shake you're 'and."

We exchanged grips. "Thanks Bob," I said. "It's nice to know that somebody's pleased to see one."

"Pleased! Why, when the noos come along this arternoon, I was that there glad I could 'a' turned a bleedin' cartwheel. If it 'adn't been close on openin' time I don't know as 'ow I'd 'a' carried on."

I searched in my pocket and discovered a shilling. "You look a bit shaky even now," I said. "Perhaps you'd feel better after you'd drunk my health."

He took the coin and spat on it explosively. "Gawd bless yer, guv'nor! It's a fair treat to see you back again, an' I only 'ope the party as done the dirty on yer will get it in the blinkin' neck. Pinchin' a gentleman like you, and tryin' to make out as 'e goes about corpsin' folk. Never 'eard such blarsted foolishness!"

I laughed. "How have you been getting on out here?" I inquired. "Anything exciting happened while I've been away?"

He tilted back his cap and scratched his head. "Nothin' special, guv'nor. Old 'Arry, the noospaper seller, 'e's gorn. Runned over by a bus in Camden Town last Sunday and I did 'ear tell that the stoodio next door to your's been tooked by a laidy."

"What sort of a lady?" I inquired.

"I ain't seen 'er meself. It was the bloke at the milk shop as told me."

"Well, it can't be helped," I said "As long as she doesn't play the piano I dare say we shall hit it off all right." I paused. "By the way, Bob," I added, "if you're around in the morning you might give me a look up about nine. I'll probably want you to do some shopping for me."

"Right you are, guv'nor. I'll be there."

He shambled off into the dusk, and continuing my journey up the hill, I arrived at the narrow passage which led to my retreat. I was just turning the corner when a diminutive telegraph boy appeared from the opposite direction.

"Beg pardon, sir," he inquired, "but does this 'appen to be Queen Studios?"

"Yes," I said, "who are you looking for?"

"Name o' Trench."

"That's me," I replied ungrammatically.

He produced a buff envelope which he thrust into my hand, and wishing me good night, sauntered off with surprising trustfulness.

PUSHING open the gate in the fence, I found everything in complete darkness. The next door building showed no sign of life, and concluding that my new neighbor had not yet taken up her residence, I unlocked my own front door and switched on the electric light.

The first thing that met my eyes was a note lying on the hall floor. When I picked it up I saw that it had been sent by special messenger. The envelope was addressed in typewriting, and wondering who was in such a hurry to get in touch with me, I walked on into the studio.

Ever since my arrest the place had, of course, been in the hands of the police. It was obvious, by what had come out at the trial, that they must have ransacked my belongings from top to bottom in the hope of discovering further evidence against me, but of this laudable activity there seemed at first sight to be practically no trace.

Except for a neatly arranged pile of letters on the desk everything appeared to be exactly as I had left it. Even the timetable in which I had looked up my train to Brightsea that fateful morning was still lying on the table—a mute, but not uneloquent witness to the truthfulness of my defense.

I glanced up the stairs that led to my bedroom. The door was shut, and without troubling to explore any further for the moment, I walked over to the desk.

A brief examination of my correspondence showed that it consisted entirely of demands for money. Every tradesman I owed seemed to have taken the opportunity of presenting his bill, hoping apparently that, in the event of my being condemned to death, I should employ my remaining leisure in settling up my accounts.

Dropping the whole lot into the wastepaper basket, I slit open the telegram. It had been dispatched from Dover, and at the sight of the signature my heart gave a quick jump.

Just got in here and seen evening paper million congratulations first we've heard or should have been back before coming up late tonight will be round early tomorrow cheerio Jerry.

With an exclamation of delight I crumpled the message into a ball and tossed it across the studio. That Jerry was home and actually on his way to London was in truth the most welcome news I could possibly have received.

I FELT as if Providence had suddenly answered an unspoken prayer, and hardly able to credit my good fortune, I turned to examine the letter which I had picked up in the hall. It was dated from Tresham House, Cornhill, and ran as follows

SIR WILLIAM AVON & SONS. LTD.,
ENGINEERING SPECIALISTS.
PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL
DEAR SIR,

I think it very possible that we may be in a position to render each other a mutual service, which would be of considerable benefit to both of us. The matter, however, is one which, I fancy, you will agree with me could be better discussed personally. If you will ring me up here tomorrow morning I shall be pleased to make an appointment with you at any time convenient to yourself. I have taken the precaution of sending a duplicate copy of this letter to the offices of your solicitor, as I am anxious to get into communication with you at the earliest possible opportunity.

Yours faithfully,
WILLIAM AVON.

For a moment or so I stood staring at the typewritten words in puzzled astonishment. Like every other newspaper reader I had, of course, heard of Sir William Avon. I knew that in addition to being one of the foremost engineering contractors in the world, he was also a man of enormous wealth, but what his object could be in seeking an interview with me I was utterly at a loss to imagine.

Was it, I wondered, in any way connected with Osborne? That the dead man had been mixed up in some queer and sinister business I had no doubt whatever. His obvious nervousness and his attempt to arrange a plan for escaping secretly to the Continent both pointed to the same conclusion, but that such a distinguished and important person as Sir William could be implicated in the same mystery was too startling a theory to be readily accepted.

I was on the point of reading the letter through for a second time, when, considerably to my surprise, I heard a ring at the front door bell. The sound indeed was so unexpected that I gave an involuntary start.

Who on earth could it be? I had confided my plans to nobody except Mr. Cresswell, and, surely, if it were one of my friends who had come round to congratulate me on my acquittal, he would at least have taken the trouble to ring me up first in order to make certain that I was back at the studio.

The bell trilled again, and putting down the letter I went out into the hall and jerked back the latch. Two men were standing outside—one of them a tall bearded figure in gold spectacles, and the other shorter and clean-shaven, with a soft hat pulled forward over his forehead. As far as I could remember I had never seen either of them before in my life.

It was the taller man who spoke first.

"Good evening," he said in a slightly foreign accent. "Am I addressing Mr. Nicholas Trench?"

"You are," I admitted.

"My name," he went on, "is Stellman. I must apologize for disturbing you at this hour, but I have just come into possession of a certain piece of information which I think you ought to be acquainted with at once. If you can spare us a few minutes I assure you it will be to your advantage."

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Tomorrow, a mysterious voice interferes with a murder.

MEIER, HOLMAN SQUABBLE OVER RELIEF METHOD

SALEM, Ore., Dec. 5.—(AP)—Governor Julius L. Meier late yesterday turned over to federal relief authorities the question as to whether or not state liquor funds, now used for regular relief cases, could be diverted this month to Multnomah county for indigent relief there.

The action followed the board of control meeting here when Multnomah county representatives appeared and requested $67,000 from state liquor revenues for the care of those unable to work. The governor indicated at the meeting that federal approval of any diversion of the funds would be needed if Multnomah county received its request.

Meier held that issuance of certificates would "establish a dangerous precedent," because other counties might attempt a like move. "As governor of Oregon I do not intend that there shall be any raid on our relief fund," he stated.

At this point State Treasurer Rufus Holman interposed and said he understood the government had already ruled on whether unemployment relief funds could be used for the care of indigents.

Meier replied, "anyway, there isn't anything before this board to vote on."

"Yes there is," Holman returned, "I have already introduced a resolution providing that certificates of indebtedness shall be sold to meet the indigent relief situation in Multnomah county."

"I haven't seen any such resolution," stated the governor, "and there isn't anything in the record."

"Things I suggest don't go in the record," Holman retorted.

"That probably is a good thing," Meier replied.

GRAM PROPOSES OLD AGE PENSION

SALEM, Dec. 5.—(AP)—Charles H. Gram, state labor commissioner, will ask the county judges of Oregon at their annual convention in Portland December 18, to consider a legislative bill which he proposed, providing for compulsory old age insurance, Gram indicated yesterday.

The commissioner stated 60 per cent of the county judges already had signified their approval of his proposed legislation.

Under the plan worked out by Gram, all persons over 18 years of age, with the exception of housewives, would pay 1 per cent of their earnings into a compulsory old age insurance fund. To be eligible, a person would have to be past 60 years of age and to have lived continuously in Oregon for at lehst 15 years.

The labor commissioner estimated that present earnings would make it possible for a beneficiary to receive $60 a month. A commission would administer the act. Under his proposal the maximum monthly payment to the insurance fund would be $15.

STATE HOSPITAL HAS GREATEST POPULATION

SALEM, Ore., Dec. 5. (AP)—A new high for population at the state hospital here was reached yesterday, Dr. R. E. Lee Steiner, superintendent, announced. Patients being treated reached a total of 2,678, not including Eastern Oregon hospital inmates.

The historical acuppernong vine, which Sir Walter Raleigh's first colonists found on Roanoke Island, is still there.

SNAPSHOTS OF A MAN MAKING OUT A CHRISTMAS LIST

BY GLUYAS WILLIAMS

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S'MATTER POP— By C. M. Payne

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TAILSPIN TOMMY—Nazil—Land of Romance and Intrigue By Hal Forrest

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—The Wild Boy of Borneo By EDWIN ALGER

THE NEBBS—Good-Night By Sol Hess

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BRINGING UP FATHER By George McManus

UNIFORM EGG GRADING AIM FOR NORTHWEST

PORTLAND, Ore., Dec. 5.—(AP)—As the first move to bring about uniform egg grading rules for Oregon, Washington and Idaho, a meeting of the Oregon egg grading committee has been called for next Friday by A. E. Tully of the Oregon department of agriculture. Idaho interests will meet December 18.

Uniform egg grading and regulations for the industry in the three states has long been discussed.

Soviet Claims Glider Record

MOSCOW (UP)—What is said to be a world's endurance record for two-seater gliders was established recently at the Soviet glider institute at Koktebel. Pilots Gavrish and Shemietiev in an SH-5 type of glider succeeded in remaining aloft for 17 hours.

PORTLAND COPS OPEN AFTER HOUR'S DRIVE

PORTLAND, Dec. 5.—(AP)—In an attempt to round up all available law-breakers, city police here are inaugurating an "after-hours" drive.

"Persons who cannot give satisfactory explanations for being on downtown streets at late hours will be placed in jail on after-hours charges and will have to explain it to the judges," said Captain Frank Ervin, new commander of the second night relief.

U. S. Flag Stolen

DALLAS, Tex. (UP)—Something unusual in the way of burglary was reported to the Dallas police by Deputy United States Marshal E. R. Goss. The perplexed deputy said an American flag was stolen from Judge William Hawley's bench in the federal courtroom.