



I did not kill Osborne

By VICTOR BRIDGES

Killed John Osborne, apparently stole the formula for a new and valuable metal. Nicholas Trench, just acquitted of the murder, learns from Molly O'Brien, daughter of the inventor of the formula, that Osborne himself had stolen the formula from Molly's father. Molly also has accused Nicholas from two foreigners who had come to his studio demanding the ubiquitous formula by pretending to call the police. Nicholas and Molly are talking in the former's studio.

CHAPTER 12

I STARED at the girl for a moment, without speaking. "To judge by appearance," I said finally, "it looks to me as if our friend Osborne had been chattering."

"He may have known Dimitri and he may have told him something. Perhaps they had arranged to work together, and then, at the last moment, when father died..."

"That must be it," I cut in. "Osborne saw his chance and suddenly decided that if he were going to be a thief there was no point in sharing the plunder. I'm not surprised that the other lad was a trifle annoyed. He probably—by Jove! yes—now one comes to think of it that would explain everything!"

"How do you mean?" "Put yourself in Osborne's place. Supposing you'd played a dirty trick on a man like Dimitri, and somehow or other you found out that he'd managed to get on your track. What would you do—that would anyone do?"

"Run away," she said. "Exactly. And if somebody hadn't scattered Osborne's brains over the hearthrug..." I stopped. "But let's finish your story."

"There's not much more to tell. I'd already made up my mind that you were innocent, and I wasn't going to stop in there and see you tortured. I was waiting until Dimitri turned his back to me. Directly he did I meant to shoot him, and then I suddenly caught sight of the telephone by your bed, and that gave me the idea of pretending to ring up the police."

"I didn't even go near it as a matter of fact. I stopped just where I was, and if Dimitri had come upstairs as he wanted to, I should have fired at him as soon as he opened the door. With a man of his kind there was nothing else to do."

"I entirely agree with you," I said, "but, taking it all round, perhaps we're better off as we are." I got up, and walking slowly across the room, stood for a moment looking down into the empty stove.

"I'm not much of a hand at thank ing people," I began; "it always embarrasses me, but..." "Please!" She rose too. "I don't want you to thank me. I only want you to believe that all I've told you is absolutely true. I know it sounds..."

"Of course I believe you," I interrupted. "It's much too impossible a yarn for anyone to invent, and, besides, a girl like you doesn't tell lies." I began to laugh quietly. "I'm thinking of Jerry," I explained. "He'll be absolutely all over this."

She looked a trifle bewildered. "Who's Jerry?" she asked.

"Oh, I forgot you didn't know him." I came back to where she was standing. "Jerry's a rather particular pal of mine. His full and proper name's Sir Jerrold Mordaunt—we were up at Cambridge together—the same time that Osborne was there. I got a wire from him this evening to say that he'd just arrived back in England and that he'd be round here first thing tomorrow."

"But"—she hesitated—"do you propose to tell him about—about tonight?" "Why not?" I demanded. "He'll jump at the chance of coming in with us. He's always on the look out for some fresh excitement—this will be a lot more amusing than potting snipe on a Dalmatian island."

"Then you do mean to help me?" "Of course. Why, hang it all, we must work together. We're practically in the same boat. You want to find the man who's got your formula and I want to find the man who killed Osborne. Then there's the question of common or garden gratitude. After what you've done for me I couldn't possibly let you down. Besides, though I'm not quite so passionately fond of trouble as Jerry is, a job of this sort does rather appeal to my boyish fancy."

"With a faint sigh my visitor sank down again in her chair. "I thought I was right," she murmured contentedly.

"We'll make a kind of triple alliance of it," I went on, "like the three musketeers—you and I and Jerry. We can call ourselves the A. D. Syndicate; that will do either for Anti-Dimitri or Assassination Detectives."

She laughed softly. "There's one thing I absolutely insist on. You've seen the sort of people we've got to deal with and I'm not going to let you run all this risk and danger for nothing. If we do get the formula you and your friend will each have to have a share in it."

"Oh, that's nonsense," I protested. "Jerry's disgustingly rich already: it would be positively indecent to offer him any more."

"And you?" "Money means nothing to a sculptor," I explained. "He lives entirely on the joy of his art."

"Her lips set in a mutinous line. "In that case I shan't have anything more to do with either of you."

"Well, of course, if you're going to be obstinate..." I paused. "Look here, let's meet each other half-way. If we get this bit of paper back for you, and it turns out to be as valuable as you think, you shall contribute towards the expenses of my trial and buy Jerry a new car. How does that appeal to you?"

She shook her head. "I think it's very unfair. All the same, it's no use arguing about it now."

"Profoundly true," I agreed. "The first thing we've got to decide is what we're going to do next. It's not unlikely that by this time Mr. Dimitri and his whiskered pal have tumbled to your bluff. If they're watching the studio and they don't see any police turn up..."

"YOU think—you think they might come back?" "I wouldn't put it beyond them. Persistent-looking gent, that blight er Stelman. I wonder what his real name is."

"He sounded to me as if he was a Russian or a Pole. I've met Russians in America who spoke very like that."

"Well, he's a nasty bit of work anyhow," I observed. "I should hate him to find out that it was you who had messed up his arrangements."

"He is bound to guess that," she said calmly. "We can't work together without the other side knowing it."

"No," I admitted, "I suppose not, but it's your going back all alone to that empty studio that I don't like. If they should take it into their heads..." I pulled up short as a brilliant inspiration suddenly struck me. "If you come to that, I continued, "why not stop here until it's daylight?"

"Here!" She gave an almost imperceptible start.

"Yes, why not? It would be madness to risk more trouble just for the sake of a mere silly convention. Besides, as far as that goes, it's all perfectly proper and respectable. You can sleep in my bedroom and I'll curl up on the sofa. Even Mrs. Grundy herself..."

"Oh, I'm not stupid about that sort of thing. I wouldn't mind staying here; in fact, I should feel a lot less frightened if I did; what worries me is the idea of turning you out of your own room. Why shouldn't I have the sofa? I am sure you must want a good night's sleep after what you've been through today."

"I shall sleep considerably better," I said, "if I know that you're safely locked in there. As for my being comfortable—well, you needn't bother about that. Compared with a prison bed it will be absolute luxury."

"Her blue eyes scanned my face. "It's queer how different people are," she said slowly. "I wonder why God makes some of them like you and others like Osborne and Dimitri?"

"I bowed. "It's a question," I said, "that has been much debated. And talking of Dimitri, I went on, 'how do you feel about lending me that revolver of yours just for the night? No one can disturb you unless they come through the studio first.'"

"Of course you must have it." She handed it to me without hesitation, and slipping it into my pocket, I glanced at my watch. "Close on half past ten," I observed. "Would you like to turn in now, or..."

"Yes, I think perhaps it would be best." She rose from her chair. "I don't feel up to much more tonight and we shall have lots of time for talking in the morning."

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Nicholas ends things a bit brighter in the morning.

INDIANS TO HAVE HERD OF BUFFALO

HARDIN, Montana.—(UP)—Inspired perhaps, by success of its famous experiment with importing reindeer herds for the American Eskimo, the government intends to launch a similar program on the Crow Indian reservation.

Superintendent Robert Yellowtail, full-blooded Crow leader, believes a similar experiment with buffalo may work out beneficially for the Crows.

Yellowtail said he has been promised by the government 50 head of buffalo cows and two buffalo bulls from the Yellowstone Park herd.

The park bison would be transported to the Big Horn Canyon range on the reservation, and in time, Yellowtail hopes, the bison will multiply sufficiently to take care of a large portion of the Crow food and clothing problems, just as the reindeer have for the Eskimo.

Paradoxically, before the white man invaded their domain, the Crows subsisted almost entirely on buffalo meat, wild berries and used the bison skin for clothing. If the scheme works, history again will repeat itself.

U. S. TO ATTEMPT HALT MINE FIRE

NEW STRAITSVILLE, O.—(UP)—The famous burning coal mines of New Straitsville will be surveyed by the federal government, Rep. Mell G.

S' MATTER POP—

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Betty Takes the Air!

WISH MY PLANE WAST A SINGLE SEATER, INEZ, I'D TAKE YOU UP WITH ME.

BE CAREFUL, DARLING—AND HAPPY LANDINGS!

THANKS, INEZ—IF I MEET EL ZORRO, I'LL SAY --BEGGIE, WILLING TO CALL THE MARINES!

I AM AFRAID THAT EL ZORRO WOULD NOT BE IMPRESSED, BETTY, THE MARINES ARE TOO FAR AWAY.

BUT DO BE CAREFUL, DEAR.

IT WOULD BE FUNNY IF I SHOULD MEET THIS GANDIT, EL ZORRO...

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—The Answering Call

JUST A MINUTE, FOLKS! YOU WON'T NEED THEM WEAPONS—

NOW, SIR, I'M GUPPY, AN OLD-TIME CIRCUS CLOWN, AND I NOT ONLY KNOW THIS PARTICULAR WILD BOY, BUT I KNEW HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, TOO—HE AIN'T SO WILD AS YOU THINK! IF YOU FOLKS PROMISE ME THAT—

—YOU WON'T HARM HIM, AND YOU'LL LET ME TAKE HIM AWAY, I'LL FETCH HIM IN NO TIME IF HE'S IN THESE PARTS—

THAT'S FAIR—WE'LL BE DOGGONE GLAD TO BE RID OF HIM!

WAHOO! WAHOO! OH, WILLIE! THIS IS GUPPY!

THE NEBBS—Bye Bye

THE CAESAR HEIT'S FATHER AND MOTHER-IN-LAW OF THE NEBBS DAUGHTER BETSY, ARE PLANNING ON COMING FOR A VISIT. FANNY'S NOT SO HOT ABOUT IT.

LISTEN, YOU CAN'T PACK UP AND LEAVE WHEN YOU'RE COMING YOU JUST CAN'T, THAT'S ALL.

JUST WHO SAYS I CAN'T?

SHE'S COMING DOWN HERE FOR HER HEALTH. I'M GOING AWAY FOR MINE. WE BOTH CAN'T HAVE HEALTH UNDER THE SAME ROOF!

OH, DON'T BE SILLY—YOU'RE TOO BIG A WOMAN TO BE LIKE THAT.

I DON'T KNOW JUST HOW TO TAKE THAT EITHER. DO YOU MEAN MENTALLY OR PHYSICALLY? BUT WHATEVER YOU MEAN, SAVE YOUR ARGUMENTS—FANNY'S GOING BYE-BYE!

BRINGING UP FATHER

MR. CARL LATERAL, THE PRESIDENT OF THE PUTTIN' AND TAKKOUT BANK, TO SEE YOU, SIR.

MR. JIGGS—I'M HERE TO SPEAK TO YOU ABOUT YOUR WIFE'S BROTHER—IS HE STILL IN TOWN?

IF YOU WUZ THINKIN' OF GIVIN' HIM A JOB, IT'S NO USE, HE AINT COMIN' BACK.

ARE YOU POSITIVE? MAY I USE YOUR PHONE?

HELLO! THIS IS CARL LATERAL. AM I TALKING TO THE MANAGER OF THE BANK? WELL, OPEN THE BANK AGAIN AND DISCHARGE THOSE GUARDS AND TELL THE POLICE THEY NEEDN'T WORRY ANY MORE.

SHOW HIM IN—DON'T KEEP HIM WAITIN' HE'LL CHARGE ME INTEREST.

NO, HE LEFT LAST WEEK.

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