# I did not kill Osborne

By VICTOR BRIDGES

*SYNOPSIS: Nicholas Trench has been to call on Sir William Avon, and each has told the other what he knows of the mysterious disappearance of a formula worth millions, which has been stolen from Molly O'Brien. Now Molly and Jerry are making plans to regain the paper; Nick has been amazed to find that the man named Stellman who threatened him with death if he did not hand over the formula is known to Sir William Avon as "Peter Orloff."*

Chapter 24

EAVESDROPPER

JERRY sat up and stared at me approvingly. "You've done very well, Nick. I don't often pay you compliments, but . . ."

"Wait a moment," I interjected. "You haven't heard the most important part yet."

As briefly as I could I went on to describe our encounter with Mr. Peter Orloff and my staggering discovery with regard to his identity.

"You may think I'm quite mad," I finished, "but I never felt more certain of anything in my life. I'd recognize the brute's voice anywhere. He's Stellman right enough — you can take my word for it—and now perhaps you'll suggest what we're going to do about it."

It was Molly who was the first to speak. "I know what I'm going to do," she said. "I'm going straight to the Cathedral and I'm going to light a candle to Saint Anthony. I prayed to him specially last night, and you see he's beginning to help us already."

"And a jolly useful bit of work, too," Jerry turned to me. "Why didn't you tell Avon?"

"I really don't know," I admitted. "Partly, I think, because it all happened so suddenly, and partly because he seemed to be under the impression that we were a couple of well-meaning mutts. I don't like being despised—even by a millionaire."

"It gives us a freer hand, anyhow," Jerry observed with a considerable relish. "We know something about the blighter that no one else does except Dmitri." He paused. "I wonder whether he has any idea that you spotted him?"

"I don't think so," I said. "I'm not even sure that he noticed me. I slipped into the car directly I heard his voice."

"It's a pity we're not certain. If he did, and if what Avon told you about him is right, things look like being a bit hectic. These Russian lads don't stick at much. They've pots of money and a devilish big organization, and if he thought there was the smallest chance of our giving him away to the police I rather fancy that Mr. Peter Orloff might be inclined to turn nasty."

"He wouldn't have far to turn," I observed.

"It's Molly I'm thinking about. As far as you and I . . ."

"Look here!" Molly straightened herself indignantly. "You've just got to drop that nonsense or the whole thing's off. I'm not standing for any of the sweet sheltered girl business. We're all in this together, and if there's going to be trouble I'm ready to take my share of it."

"You mustn't be angry with him," I said. "It's natural for a baronet to be a bit old-fashioned."

"Sorry!" Jerry made her an apologetic bow. "Your fault, you know, for being so beautiful. If anyone went and stuck a knife into you it would sour the whole of my future life."

MOLLY laughed. "I should be annoyed, too." She leaned across to the writing-table and helped herself to a cigaret. "What's your idea?" she demanded. "I can see you've got some scheme or you wouldn't be worrying about me."

"It's more than a scheme," returned Jerry, "it's an absolute brain wave. We want to find out all we possibly can about Osborne, and, as Nick says, the first chap we've got to see is this farmer at Hambridge. Now you can bet your boots that Orloff doesn't mean to let us out of his sight. He'll have someone shadowing us all the time, and if we try to go down there by road or train we shall simply be giving away the whole show."

"That's true enough," I admitted. "Still . . ."

"Half a second!" He shot out a long arm and caught me by the sleeve. "Why shouldn't we go round in the Seagull? She's lying down at Leigh, and it's only a question of running over her gear and shoving a few stores on board. I could have her ready for sea inside twenty-four hours."

I slapped my knee with a resounding bang. "By Jove, you've hit it!" I exclaimed.

"What's the Seagull?" inquired Molly.

"She's an old tub belonging to Jerry," I explained; "a little eighton cutter just big enough for three of us."

"You see the notion?" resumed her owner with enthusiasm. "If we go round by water we shall have them completely flummoxed. Besides, it will settle all the difficulty of keeping you out of danger. If they don't know where you are they can't very well cut your throat."

"Would you mind roughing it a bit, Molly?" I asked. "It won't be as comfortable as the Mauretania, you know."

"Don't be stupid, Nick," she returned. "What do I care about comfort? Why, I'd go anywhere in the world with you two."

"I suppose you know this creek or whatever it is, Jerry?" I said. "Judging by Avon's description it sounds a pretty awkward place to get at."

"Oh, I know it right enough. I've been in there twice. It's a sort of shallow estuary, half-way up the coast between Shoeburyness and the Crouch. No one puts in there as a rule because there's nothing to go for. Apart from that, there's a beast of a sand bar right across the entrance that you can only get over at high water. The first time I was there I stuck on it for eight hours and nearly drowned myself."

"Well, now you've had a rehearsal," I observed, "I hope you'll be less clumsy."

"When can we start?" inquired Molly. "I'd like to get away as soon as we can."

"IT'S no use until the keys turn up," I pointed out. "Avon will probably send them along tonight; he's got my address."

"I'll run down tomorrow anyway," said Jerry. "She'll want a certain amount of overhauling, so as likely as not I'll sleep on board, and come back and fetch you in the car next morning."

He jumped up, his face all alight at the prospect of getting back to his beloved hobby. "We must have a drink on the strength of this," he continued. "I don't know whether Molly . . ."

He stopped abruptly in the middle of the sentence, and looking up, I saw him standing tense and motionless staring over our heads in the direction of the screen.

"What on earth . . . ?" I began.

"'Sh!"

With the swiftness and silence of a panther he glided forward across the room. Molly and I sprang to our feet, and the next moment, to my utter amazement, a struggling and protesting figure was being hauled in unceremoniously through the open door. Dumbfounded as I was, I recognized the man instantly. It was the waiter from downstairs who had brought us our whisky.

"What do you think you're doing."

Jerry thrust his captive back against the wardrobe, and stood regarding him with baleful eyes.

The fellow put up a shaking hand to his throat.

"I do not understand. I was doing nothing. I . . ."

"Don't lie to me. You were sneaking about outside, trying to listen to what we were saying."

The other made an obvious effort to pull himself together. "You have no right to say that," he stammered. "It is not true."

"Yes it is," retorted Jerry viciously. "And, what's more, you had the cheek to open the door." He advanced a step nearer. "I don't know who you are or where you come from, but I've a precious good mind to smash your face in."

It was at this point that I ventured to interrupt. "Steady on for a moment," I suggested. "Let's hear what he's got to say."

"It is all a mistake, sir." Our visitor turned to me with a kind of tremulous eagerness. "When I got downstairs just now I find that I have lost a ten-shilling note. I say to myself perhaps I have dropped it in the passage. I came up here again to see if I could find it."

"How about the door?" I inquired. "Did that open itself?"

He made a gesture with his hands. "I suppose I did not shut it properly when I went out, I thought it was closed—yes—but perhaps I was mistaken."

"Perhaps you were," I said politely.

"What's your name?" demanded Jerry.

The man, who was evidently beginning to recover his nerve, turned to him half defiantly.

"Kliner," he replied. "Jacob Kliner."

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Tomorrow, the "Syndicate" finds a job for Jimmy Fox.

# ILLUSIVE AUTHOR GAINS SECRETS OF FORBIDDEN TIBET

## 'Europe's Mystery Woman,' Alexandra David-Neel, Explores and Writes of Far and Little Known Lands

By MARY KNIGHT

United Press Staff Correspondent.

PARIS— (UP) —Europe's "Mystery Woman is being discovered. She is Alexandra David-Neel, born here but of Viking ancestry, which has made her such an illusive creature that no one has been able to pin her down until now.

Madame David-Neel is mysterious, not because she is unknown, but because she is very well-known in literary and geographic circles, but has seldom been seen in the flesh. Few pictures of her have been published and her own life is a complete enigma.

In an interview with the United Press, however, Madame David-Neel spoke with a frankness and sincerity which characterizes her work. She is the only woman who has crossed the forbidden territory of Lhasa in Tibet, and for 14 years she lived amongst the natives of that little known country, learned to speak their language and to interpret their many legends hitherto never recorded in any written tongue.

"It is not mystery that I have always sought," she confided, "but only to be completely unknown myself, that my work could be carried on without interruption; that I could come and go and no one would know who I was; and that also my writings and the authenticity of my explorations could be judged with more fairness and interest."

**Last Year's Work.**

Last year Madame David-Neel's "The Gesar of Ling," the Iliad of the Orient, and "Magic and Mystery in Tibet" were published in English by Claude Kendall of New York. For her "Journey to Lhasa" and "Meetings on Far Off Tracks," she has just been awarded a medal by the French Geographical society. The medal was presented to her by the president of the French republic, Albert Lebrun, at a banquet assembling 300 guests, among whom were Marshal Franchet d'Esperay who has just become a member of the French academy.

Madame David-Neel has been spending the summer at her villa in the hills of the Riviera near Digne—a villa incidentally which is a copy of the private apartment of a Tibetan Lama of rank. With her, either in her travels or while she is resting and writing, are her adopted son, the Lama A. Yongden, and Miss Violet Sidney, her English translater.

**Missed America.**

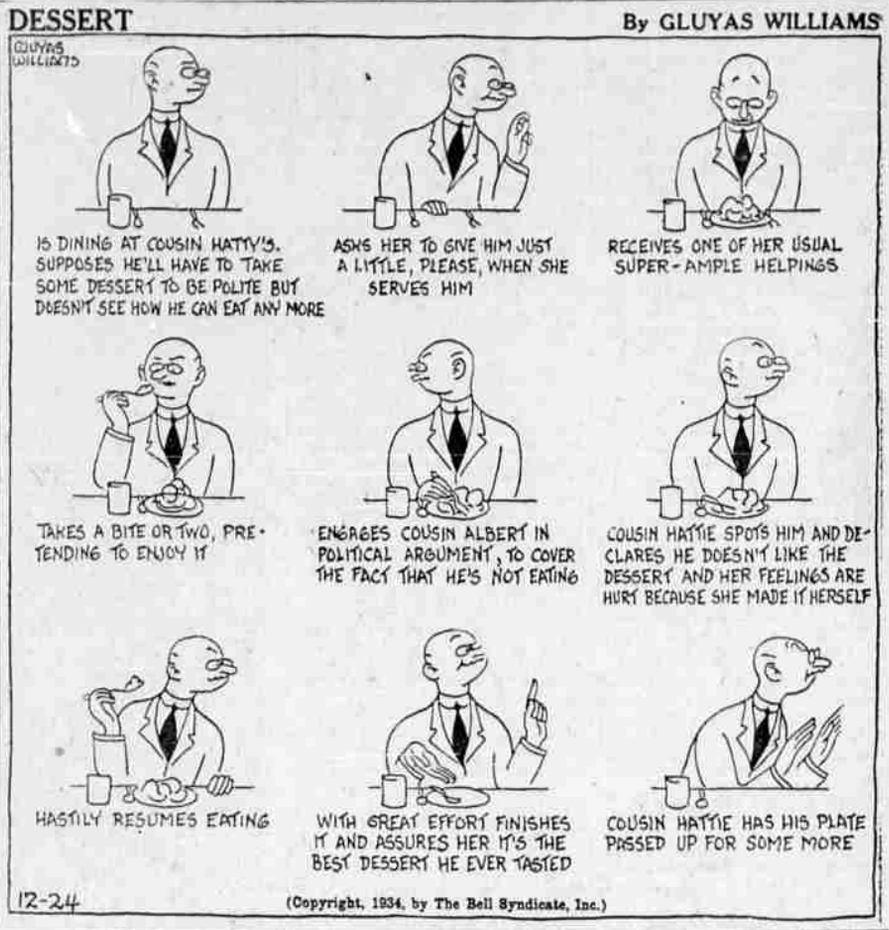
Although she has journeyed over practically every inch of the Old World, Madame David-Neel never has been to America.

"Perhaps I am afraid I do not speak English fluently enough," she said. "But I am counting on that journey sometime. In some ways, I feel that America is as little known as Tibet. Money is the main thing that the world has asked from America and Americans, but I am convinced that there is a great deal more than money yet to come out of America. In Europe, many people think of America as the country of nightclubs, cocktails and gangsters, especially kidnapers now, and while those things do exist there, they are only the scum on the surface of a deep pool. Americans are energetic and right-minded people. They have conquered their country by physical and mental strength."

Madame David-Neel expects to return to China in the spring. She travels with almost no baggage and always sleeps on a collapsible desert cot—even when in fashionable hotels in Paris. "I'm used to it," she says, "and there is no use in tempting myself to get soft."

DESSERT

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS




S'MATTER POP—

By C M Payne

TAILSPIN TOMMY—An Interruption!

By Hal Forrest

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Pity the Lions!

By EDWIN ALGER

THE NEBBS—"I'm Laughing"

By Carl Ed

BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus

# BIRTH RECORDING IS BABY'S RIGHT

SALEM. — (Spl.) — Prompt and official recording of birth is a child's first right as an American," Governor Meier said today, urging that all parents fill out and send in the cards which are being supplied them by the census bureau in cooperation with the Oregon state board of health and the state emergency relief administration.

"In reality," continued the governor, "a birth certificate is an infant's citizenship papers. Moreover, official birth records are becoming increasingly necessary as demands for proof of age and nationality grow. A properly recorded birth certificate proves age, inheritability and legitimacy, among other things."

In each family all births occurring during the last 12 months are to be reported on the card.

**High Students Die**

CANONSBURG, Pa., Dec. 24. — (AP) —Four high school students, coming home from a school Christmas dance, were killed early today as their automobile was struck by a Pennsylvania passenger train at a downtown crossing.

**A Texas Killing**

SAN AUGUSTINE, Texas, Dec. 24 — (AP)—Two men were killed and another was wounded, probably fatally, late today in a shooting in the W. H. Thomas store. A fourth man was wounded badly.

Radios old or radios new, they work their best when we get through. "Pruitt's can do it." Phone 22.