

# I did not kill Osborne

By VICTOR BRIDGES

**SYNOPSIS:** A valuable formula which has been stolen from Molly Osborne is being sought by various sinister interests. Nicholas Tremont and Jerry Bradford are aiding her. In her attempt to recover it, suddenly Molly disappears from her hotel. It was said that she was taken ill, and had to be removed to a hospital. But Jimmy Fox, page boy whom Nick has befriended, follows and tells Nick that Molly actually has been hidden in a room. They leave a trap at the end of the street and start to find Molly.

### Chapter 29

#### BATTLE FOR MOLL.

RELIEVED by the knowledge that we had at least secured our retreat, I set off with Jimmy along the empty terrace.

It was a depressing thoroughfare, consisting of shabby-looking three-story houses, most of which were doubtless let out in lodgings. None of them had apparently been painted or done up for years, and in many cases the stucco was peeling off their fronts.

A thin driving rain added to the general air of sordid discomfort.

We trudged on in silence until, a little way ahead of us, the roadway began to slope upwards. At the top of the rise it narrowed into what was evidently a bridge—a short stretch of about twenty yards with high iron railings on either side of it. "Is this the canal?" I inquired.

Jimmy nodded. "That's right, sir. Runs along at the back of the 'house'."

He volunteered no further information until we had reached the opposite end, when he pulled up abruptly under the light of a street lamp.

"You can see for yourself now, sir. That's the place we want—the second one past the yard."

I stared down into an untidy litter of timber and old barrels. Beyond this I could make out the black shape of two buildings, each of which seemed to possess a narrow strip of ground running down to the canal bank. Both of them were in complete darkness.

"Better have a look at the front first," I observed. "If there's nothing doing there we can come back and try this side."

We continued our way down the farther slope, and in a few steps arrived at the entrance to Wharf Lane. It was a gloomy cul-de-sac with a blank wall on the left, terminating, as Jimmy had said, in a rough piece of waste ground, raised in from the road. Facing this was a couple of gaunt houses, with high steps leading up to their front doors.

Treading as softly as we could we moved on past the gate in the yard, and pulled up outside our destination. Like its next-door neighbor the place looked as though it were deserted. Not a ray of light appeared anywhere, and the only sound that broke the stillness was the faint patter of the rain amongst the bushes opposite.

I peered through the half-open gate which led down into the area. Dark as it was I could see that the kitchen windows were heavily barred, the stout iron stanchions reaching up to within a few inches of the top arch.

On the left, however, just above the dim outline of the dustbin, there was something else. It was a small pane of partly broken glass about two feet square, and at the sight of it a sudden inspiration flashed across my mind.

"Come on, Jimmy," I whispered. "Let's go down and do a bit of scouting."

SLIGHTLY as cats we descended the steps, and creeping forward to the side of the dustbin, I pulled out a pocket electric torch which I had brought with me from the flat. The broken pane was about six feet from the ground. I raised myself on my toes, so that I could just see over the lower ledge, and inserting my torch through a hole in the glass, pressed down the switch.

I was looking into what was evidently a disused coal cellar. There was nothing in it except a few dirty sacks and the door, which was only half closed, led out into a passage.

I turned off the light and pushed cautiously on the wooden frame-work. At the second attempt it yielded to my efforts, swinging open with a noisy creak. I stepped back, and bending down, placed my lips to Jimmy's ear.

"It's not big enough for me," I whispered. "Are you game to climb through and unlock the back door?" "Not a bit, sir."

with a quick wriggle I felt him twist himself around. There was a shower of dust and grit, a brief straining scramble; the weight on my arms suddenly relaxed, and a muffled bump from inside told me that he had landed safely.

With the rain trickling down my neck I stood there in the darkness scarcely daring to breathe. Twenty—twenty—thirty seconds passed. From somewhere close by a church clock chimed out the half-hour, and then, breaking in on the stroke, came the harsh grate of a key. Almost simultaneously the back door swung open and Jimmy stepped out into the area.

"We're all right, str." he whispered cheerfully. "There's no one about, leastways not down 'ere."

I took back the torch which he held out to me. "You wait where you are, Jimmy," I said. "I'm going in to search the house. If you hear a row and I don't come down again or give you a shout, clear out quick while you've got the chance. Get hold of the first policeman you can find and tell him that there's a young lady here who has been kidnapped and locked up. Do you understand?"

He nodded silently. Flicking on my lamp I moved past him into the corridor. It was a short, narrow passage with doors on either side of it. At the farther end it opened out into a kind of stone-flagged basement, and tiptoeing stealthily forward I found myself confronted by a flight of wooden stairs. From under the door at the top came a faint glimmer of light.

FOR several seconds I stood still listening. There was not a sound to be heard, and taking hold of the rickety banisters I mounted up a step at a time until my fingers closed silently on the door handle. I turned with a faint creak, I dropped back the torch into my pocket, and giving a gentle push, stepped out softly into an empty and dimly lit hall.

The light, such as it was, came from an old-fashioned gas jet, which had been turned down almost to its lowest point. It gave just sufficient illumination to reveal the fact that there were four rooms—two on either side of me, and that in the centre another staircase led up to the first landing.

I was on the point of moving forward when my heart gave a violent jump. Without the slightest warning one of the doors on this right was suddenly jerked open, and out of the darkness merged the figure of a man.

He was dressed in trousers and a dirty shirt, and his huge tattooed arms were bare to the shoulder. Through the mop of tousled hair which hung down over his forehead he stood glaring and blinking at me like some monstrous ape.

"Clove jis allyats," The words, whatever they meant, came out in a hoarse growl, and somehow or other the sound of the brute's voice steadied me instantly.

"You dirty swine!" I said. "Where's Miss O'Brien?" I took a step towards him, and at the same moment he sprang at me like a wild beast. One clawing hand gripped me by the shoulder, and I felt the blood spurt beneath my knuckles as my left fist crashed home full in his face.

Back went his head and up came his chin. Swift as a flash, and with the full weight of my body behind it, I slung in my right. It landed square on the point of his jaw, and lurching back against the wall, he toppled to the floor with a thud that shook the house.

A trifle dazed by the suddenness of it all, I stood staring stupidly at the sprawling bulk in front of me. He lay flat on his back—one arm flung out at full length, and the other doubled under him. His mouth and chin were covered with blood and I noticed for the first time that he had silver rings in both ears.

There was a shuffle of footsteps in the passage below. In another moment Jimmy came scrambling up the stairs. "Crikey!" he ejaculated. "That was some punch, that was!" He inspected my handiwork with a kind of awed interest. "I wish I'd seen it," he added regretfully.

"I want you to keep an eye on this chap," I said. "While I go and find Miss O'Brien. He's not afraid, are you?" "Not me," was the cheerful response. "If 'e moves I'll kick 'im on the 'ead."

Jimmy and Nick Put a Quick End to a Disturbing Situation.

his direction members of the organization will consider all phases of the fruit and vegetable industry—one of the most important in the life of America. Practices and policies of the association will be formulated for the coming year.

Every large terminal market in the United States will be represented at the meeting, according to word received here, and in addition to the work of the convention, visitors from the east, middle west and south plan to inspect many of the vast agricultural enterprises of the west before returning to their homes.

Several special trains have been engaged to carry delegates to San Francisco. President Cochran and a large group of delegates will travel from Detroit on the so-called "President's Special." Another special train will move from New Orleans, picking up delegates en route, it was stated.

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## PUBLIC EDUCATION IN OREGON MAKES MARKED ADVANCE

SALEM, Ore. (UP)—Growth of public education in Oregon in the last 50 years has been tremendous, according to Charles A. Howard, state superintendent of public instruction.

Between 1884 and 1934, the number of pupils attending schools has increased five-fold, the length of the school term has nearly doubled and the number of school districts grown more than 50 per cent, figures from Superintendent Howard's biennial report show.

Fifty years ago there only 80,018 boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 12 included in the school census. Only 46,107 attended school, a percentage of 57.6. The average daily attendance was only 31,505 pupils, and the term was 95 days long in 1836 school districts.

In 1933-34, the school census showed 238,000 children eligible to attend school, and a total enrollment of 201,654 for a percentage of 84.7. The average daily attendance was 169,277, for a term of 166 days in 2123 school districts.

When there were no jobs in 1932-1933 for those of high school age, schools had their highest percentage of enrollment, 78.9 per cent, with 362,498 between the ages of kindergarten and high school were counted. The average daily attendance was also highest then the figure reaching 267,328.

The longest school term ever taught in the state was in 1927-28, when classrooms were open 174.3 days.

## SCHOOLMANS GIVEN TASTE OWN MEDICINE

SALEM, Ore. (UP)—The tables were turned when Oregon's schoolmarm was given a spelling test in recent examinations. Teachers checked their pencil-ends over the following list of words:

Apparatus, violinist, equipped, hurrying, guarantee, creative, clipping, cordial, parmenter, performance, allowance, incidentally, informal, contemplate, worrying, descendant, comply, soliciting, pennant, identify, gracious, artificially, marvellous, scarred, breadth, pertaining, hoisting, removal, leisure, analysts, accepted, luxury, plateau, comedy, response, sovereign, wedged, conqueror, inaccurate and descend.

## OREGON INDIANS NUMBER 4,644

SALEM, Ore. (UP)—Oregon has an Indian population of 4,644, according to the annual report of Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes.

At total of 2,295 males and 2,349 females were counted by the census takers. Three-fourths of the number live on reservations.

Klamath agency and reservation, with 1,964 Indians, is the largest in the state. The jurisdiction of the Chemawa school here extends over 1,148 Indians. A total of 1,149 live on the Unstilla agency and reservation and 997 at Warm Springs.

The Indian population of the United States to nearly all in 22 states. Oklahoma, with 94,980, has far more Indians than any other state. On the Pacific coast, California has 23,822 and Washington 13,418.

## STORMY WEATHER

By GUYAS WILLIAMS

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## By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

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## SMATTER POP

By C. M. Payne

12-31-34

Tommy Explains

2067

Ben Webster's Career—Codfish Charley's Idea

THE NEBBES—T'was Ever Thus

BRINGING UP FATHER

12-29

## COAST FRUIT JOBBERS TO OPEN CONVENTION IN 'FRISCO JANUARY 22

With representatives in attendance from all parts of the country, the thirty-first annual convention of the Western Fruit Jobbers Association of America will be held in San Francisco, January 22 to 26, it was announced here today.

Of particular interest to growers and shippers of fruits and vegetables in the Pacific coast area, the San Francisco meeting is expected to attract a record number of delegates, including many persons from this state.

B. M. Cochran of Lansing, Michigan, president of the association, will preside at the convention, and under