



I did not kill Osborne

By VICTOR BRIDGES

OSBORNE: Jerry Mordant just returned to his room after getting his cutter ready for a sail, to find the apartment full of friends. Molly Osborne is there. Just rescued from possible torture by a group of men determined to have a formula they think she has. Nicholas French, her rescuer, is there, and so is Jimmy Fox, erstwhile page-boy at Molly's hotel, who has helped in the rescue as well. Nick and Jerry are trying to help Molly and the formula, worth millions. It has been stolen from her.

Chapter 32

MOLLY'S STORY

"By the way," said Jerry as he started out of the room, "what shall we do with Jimmy Fox?"

"If you've no objection," I said, "I hope that we take him into the syndicate. He'll certainly get the sack from the hotel and we can't let him down after the way he behaved last night."

"I should think not," was the answer. "Besides, he'll be useful on the Seagull. He can wash up and look after George."

Leaving me to my ablutions, Jerry took himself off, and somewhat hampered by my damaged knuckles, I proceeded to make a hasty toilet. I was in the act of brushing my hair when the gong sounded, and as I came out into the hall, Molly emerged from the opposite bedroom. Swathed in a dressing-gown at least three sizes too large for her, she looked comically pretty.

"Good morning, Nick," she said cheerfully. "I hope you had a good night?"

"Slept like a top," I replied. "And you?"

She made a little grimace. "The headache's gone, but I've still got a funny taste in my mouth."

"Breakfast will cure that," I assured her. "How's the check?"

"It feels rather stiff and sore," she tilted up her face. "Am I a dreadful sight?"

I inspected her carefully. "You look lovely," I said. "Like an angel on her way to the bathroom."

"Angels don't have baths," she objected. "They—oh, here's Jerry!"

"Hello, Molly!" He had come out of the study, followed by Jimmy, who in his crumpled livery, and with his tousled hair, still seemed to be only half awake. "This is a nice sort of trick to play on a chap!" he continued. "Getting yourself drugged and kidnapped when I wasn't there to rescue you."

"Sorry, Jerry." She dropped him a penitent curtsy. "It was horribly careless of me, wasn't it? If it hadn't been for Nick and Jimmy..."

She stopped. "Oh, that reminds me—I haven't thanked you yet, Jimmy."

She crossed over to where he was standing and bending down, kissed him on the cheek. "I think you're the bravest boy I ever met, and I really am most faithfully grateful."

"That's all right, miss," Jimmy, who had turned a rich crimson, shifted awkwardly from one foot to the other. "I didn't do nothing. It was Mr. French who sloshed 'im—not me miss."

We all laughed.

"Never mind," said Jerry consolingly. "You got the prize anyhow. Now cut along to the kitchen and Dawson will give you some breakfast." He slipped his arm through Molly's. "For pity's sake let's go in and make a start. I was up at six o'clock this morning and I'm simply famished."

FACED with a steaming dish of eggs, bacon and sausages, I found that my own appetite was by no means to be despised. I ladled out three generous helpings, while Jerry attended to the coffee, and dumped one of them down in front of Molly.

"Get your teeth into that, partner," I said, "and when you feel a bit stronger you can tell us how it all happened."

"I am ready to start now," she replied. "I can talk and eat at the same time."

With a familiar gesture she brushed back the lock of copper-colored hair which had fallen forward across her forehead.

"You mustn't mind my being a bit vague about things. I suppose it was the stuff they gave me, but somehow or other it all seems like a bad dream."

She took a sip from the cup which Jerry handed her. "I had been up in my room the whole evening reading a book, and about half-past nine I thought I would like a glass of milk before going to bed. I rang the bell and told the maid to bring it up. It tasted all right, and I was just beginning to undress, when I suddenly came over all queer and giddy."

"I tried to get to the door but I suppose I must have tumbled down."

Anyhow, I don't remember anything more until I woke up feeling terribly sick and found myself on the bed in that horrible little room with Orloff and Dimitri looming over me.

"I didn't know where I was or how I'd got there, and I'd no time to think. They started on me straight away. It was Orloff who did the talking, while Dimitri just stood by looking at me. I shall never forget the expression in his eyes—" she shivered—"it was loathsome."

Jerry muttered something under his breath.

"What did Orloff say to you?" I demanded.

She knitted her forehead. "I've been trying so hard to remember. I was half stupid, you see, and it's all jumbled up and confused. I know he asked me any amount of questions about the formula."

"He wanted to know where Nick had hidden it, and what the paper is like it's written on, and whether we were trying to sell it to Sir William Avon. All the time he was questioning me he kept on squeezing and pinching my arm. It hurt so I could hardly help screaming."

She pulled up the sleeve of her dressing-gown and a muffled oath escaped from Jerry's lips. Just above the elbow two or three livid bruises stood out against the white skin.

"I wish I'd seen those last night," I said savagely. "I'd have smashed that swine's face in."

"Go on," said Jerry gruffly. "What else had he bound to say?"

"He told me that I was to write a note asking Nick to give him the formula. He said that otherwise I should be put on a barge, and taken down to a Russian ship that's lying in the river, and that once I was there they'd soon make me do whatever I was ordered."

"Well, as I knew you hadn't got the formula, and it couldn't possibly make any difference, I agreed to write it. As soon as I'd finished it, he started questioning me again."

"He wanted to find out about this place Hambridge and why we were going there. When I said I didn't know, they tied me down to the bed, and it was then that I got this cut on the cheek."

"After that I think I must have fainted, because the next thing I remember is hearing a noise in the hall and seeing Nick's torch as he came in at the door."

Jerry scooped out some marmalade and dug back the spoon viciously into the pot. "We ought both to be kicked. We should never have left her there after that business with the water. It's plain enough the blighter heard what we said. He must have given them the tip that we were thinking of clearing out, and I suppose they made up their minds to grab hold of her while they had the chance."

"Well, don't worry about it," said Molly soothingly. "The important thing is what are we going to do now?"

"Carry on, of course. We must see this farmer and his wife; though I don't suppose we shall get much out of them. Anyhow, you'll be safer on the Seagull than anywhere else."

"How about her things?" I struck in. "We can't leave them at the Milan. If they don't get any message from her they'll probably think she's dead and hand them over to the police."

Jerry reflected for a moment. "You must scribble them a line," he said, turning to Molly, "and I'll send Dawson round with it now. Ask them to give him your account and to hand him over your luggage. You can explain that I'm taking care of your things until you're out of hospital."

I presented George, who was sitting beside me, with my last piece of bacon. "Do you mean to start for Leigh at once, then?"

He nodded. "Sooner we get a move on the better. The boat's quite ready. I've stocked her up with enough food for three or four days, and if the wind's right we can slip round on the evening tide. By the way, I suppose you've got those keys?"

"Yes," I said, "they're in my bedroom. Avon sent these round yesterday."

"Good!" He sat for a moment staring thoughtfully in front of him; then his features relaxed in a sudden characteristic grin. "Funny how keen one gets about a thing! I shall never be really happy until we dig out this blessed formula!"

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The "Syndicate" starts, to-morrow, on a Dangerous Sail.

BANK CALL ISSUED BY COMPTROLLER

WASHINGTON, Jan. 4.—(AP)—The comptroller of the currency issued a call Thursday for the condition of all national banks at the close of business December 31.

Supplementing the comptroller's call was a similar one issued by the deposit insurance corporation to insured state banks which are not members of the federal reserve system.

This call also contained a request for a statement of earnings and dividends for the calendar year 1934. On receipt of this information, combined with like data being obtained by the comptroller and by the federal reserve board, there will be available for the first time income and expense data for virtually all commercial banks in the country.

SALEM, Jan. 4.—(AP)—A. A. Schramm, state superintendent of banks, Thursday issued a call for the condition of all state banks at the close of business December 31, 1934.

LOS ANGELES, Jan. 4.—(AP)—Los Angeles Judge Frank H. Norcross of Reno, Nev., center of violent controversy when his name was proposed

for promotion to the United States ninth circuit court of appeals, today withdrew his name from further consideration for the post.

He announced he had wired Nevada's Senators Key Pittman and Pat McCarran not to press for confirmation of his appointment in the senate.

Senator Pittman this morning presented the withdrawal to President Roosevelt, Judge Norcross said.

There are now two vacancies in the ninth circuit—the newly created bench on which Judge Norcross was to have sat and the vacancy caused by the recent death of Judge William H. Sawtelle.

Lupe Velez has had enough of temper tantrums from her husband she said today in again seeking a divorce from Johnny Weissmuller, screen Tarzan.

Dodging flying furniture, she explained, interfered with the concentration necessary for her film roles, made her nervous and ill.

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SCHULER'S AUTO SUFFERS DAMAGE

City police received reports Thursday afternoon that I. E. Schuler escaped injury in an auto accident in the morning on the overhead bridge near the Tolo junction. His car was badly damaged.

According to the reports Schuler was traveling south and crossing the bridge when his car went into a skid on the icy pavement, struck the rail and then added into a truck. The truck was operated by E. W. Stillwell of Pierce Auto Freight lines.

Police said the truck, which had approached on the bridge from the south, was stopped when Schuler's car struck it. The front end of the latter was crushed, but Schuler, uninjured, was brought to Medford in the car of a Grants Pass state police officer.

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THE MINUTE THAT SEEMS A YEAR

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

After spending an hour getting yourself changed, washed, combed, and brushed for company at supper, you find the party has been postponed until tomorrow night.

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NORCROSS OUT OF JUDICIARY RACE

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