

I did not kill Osborne

By VICTOR BRIDGES

SYNOPSIS: The "Seagull" has dropped anchor off Hambrid where its passengers have gone to try to trace a formula worth millions, which belongs to Molly Osborne. Molly is aboard, an ex-Nicholas French, Jerry Mordant, and Jimmy Fox, a boy friend of Nick's. Aligned against the four are the forces of the unscrupulous Peter O'Grady, John Osborne, who first stole the formula from Molly, worked at Hambridge for a month, and the "Seagull" passengers hope to learn something from the people who boarded him there.

Chapter 35 FIRST STEPS

I HAD hauled in the job and was just moving aft to help tidy up, when I was arrested by a sudden exclamation from Jimmy.

"See that bloke over there, sir? Wonder where 'e's come from?" His eyes were fixed on the factory, and turning my head sharply I caught sight of the intruder. He was standing about thirty yards from the shore, a little way outside the barbed wire fence. From under one arm protruded a long double-barreled gun, and beside his feet crouched a big rough-coated dog.

He was a broad-shouldered, sturdily built man of between forty and fifty, dressed in dark clothes and wearing leather gaiters. I watched him for a moment and then made my way to where the other two were standing.

"That must be our friend Gowland," I said. "Out after rabbits, I suppose." Jerry granted. "Don't know what he's after, but he seems to be precious interested in us. Shall I give him a hand?"

As he spoke I saw the dog lift its head, and a vicious snarl echoed across the water. It was answered promptly by a deep growl from George.

"No, let him alone for the present," I replied. "As you said yourself, we don't want to rush things." With a gruff word of command, the stranger shouldered his gun and, turning on his heel, began to walk slowly away. Something peculiar in his gait struck me at once, but before I could remark on it, Molly had caught me by the sleeve.

"Nick," she whispered, "he's drunk." "He can't be at this hour of the morning," I objected.

"But he is. I can see it from here. Look at the way he's lurching about!"

"Well, he hanged to him anyhow!" broke in Jerry cheerfully. "Let's go below and have some grub."

"HOW about it, Nick?" I holstered myself from the bunk where I had been lying smoking, and looked at my watch. The time was close on eleven o'clock.

"I'm all in favor of getting to work," I said. "We've lots to do and the sooner we make a move the better."

"Where shall we begin?" inquired Molly.

"Well, as a first step, I think the wisest thing would be if Jerry and I had a look round."

Her face took a trifle. "Oh! Can't I come too?"

"I'd rather you didn't—not until we see how the land lies. I don't suppose there's anything to worry about, but it would be just as well to do a little bit of preliminary scouting."

"You think—she paused—"you think they may have followed us down here?"

"It's not impossible," I replied. "O'Grady must have heard something about our plans or he wouldn't have asked you those questions."

"Seems a shame to leave you behind," struck in Jerry, "but if you wouldn't mind stopping on board just for this morning..."

"Why, of course not," she smiled. "You needn't be so tactful, Jerry. I promised to obey orders."

"My idea is this," I explained. "We'll go ashore together and take George with us as if we were giving him a run. While Jerry's playing about and throwing sticks for him, I'll amuse myself by having a little walk. I suppose there's a path of some sort that leads up to the farm?"

"There's a path all right," replied Jerry. "It joins the road at the back of the factory." He leaned forward and knocked out his pipe. "What's the idea, Nick?"

"Nothing definite. Just going to have a smell round, that's all. I want to get hold of Mrs. Gowland when that husband of hers is out of the way."

"Why not take along the jug and ask for some milk? Give you a chance to see what she's like."

"That's a bright idea!"

And while you're about it," he continued, "I don't see any reason by George and I shouldn't have a look at the inside of the factory. We can examine it properly later."

"I feel horribly like Cinderella," said Molly. "Sitting at home while you two go out to a party."

"Oh, I say!" Jerry glanced at her a trifle uncomfortably. "Look here, if you'd rather..."

"Nonsense, I was only joking. I shall be quite happy here with Jimmy." She jumped up. "After all, I've had my share of adventure. It's your turn to get into trouble now."

"We'll be back as soon as we can," I assured her; "then we'll have a cabinet council and report progress if we've inspected Mrs. Gowland and the factory. It will be something to go on at least."

Putting on my cap and taking down the milk jug from the rack, I led the way out into the well. The other two followed, and after a brief glance at the sky, which was still covered with threatening clouds, Jerry scrambled aft and began to haul up the dinghy.

MOLLY remained beside me, her eyes wandering over the cheerless prospect.

"Look, Nick!" she said suddenly. "Isn't that a mast sticking up there behind those trees?"

She was pointing inland, where the estuary, now reduced to a narrow mud-bordered creek, made a sharp bend to the north. A little distance beyond the turn, stood a cluster of straggling elms and amongst them, plainly visible through a gap in the foliage, rose the slender spar of some small anchored craft.

"Seen that, Jerry?" I asked, as he arrived back with the painter.

He nodded. "Probably one of the Burnham lot come through out of the Crouch. They use this way some times if they don't draw too much water." He stared at it reflectively. "I suppose you've got those keys on you?"

"Here they are," I said. "The big one unlocks the gate in the fence, and the other lets you into the building. They're both labelled."

"Good!" He slipped them into his pocket and, accompanied by George, dropped down into the dinghy. I was just preparing to follow him when Molly put her hand softly on mine.

"Take care of yourself, Nick," she whispered.

The tide had already run down to such an extent that the bank was now not more than thirty yards distant. Instead of being partially submerged, the end of the jetty stood out some three feet above the water, and sculling leisurely up to it, Jerry grabbed hold of the rusty chain which served as a hand-rail.

"This will be cleaner than the shore," he observed. "We can push the boat ashore without getting our feet muddy."

He made the painter fast to an iron ring, and preceded by George, I clambered cautiously ashore. The steps were coated with wet slime, and festoons of green weed trailed down from the sodden timber.

"I wonder Avon doesn't look after his property a bit better," I complained. "The whole place seems to be going to rack and ruin."

Jerry shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, it was only a makeshift job run up during the war. I don't imagine it's ever been used since—at least only for Osborne's experiments."

He led the way along the slippery plank until we reached the firm ground beyond, where I turned round to wave a good-bye to Molly, who was still watching us from the deck. "Feel like coming inside first?" he added, "or would you rather push along to the farm straight away?"

"I think I'll stick to my original plan," I replied. "We're in for a regular ducking from the look of it, and I'd like to get this job over before it starts."

"Perhaps you're right. I'll just have a nose round, and then if you're not back I'll probably stroll along and meet you."

He glanced once more in the direction of the elms. "Unless it's pouring with rain we might walk over afterwards and take a squirt at that boat. Always a good thing to make sure who one's neighbors are."

"So it occurred to me," I admitted. "I was going to suggest it myself only you..."

"I didn't want to frighten Molly. She's had enough shocks already, and besides, I wouldn't mind betting a hundred to one that it's some perfectly harmless chap cruising around for his own amusement."

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The Gowlands turn out rather curious people, tomorrow.

NORMAL STUDENT GETS JAIL TERM ON THEFT CHARGE

ASHLAND, Jan. 8.—(Sp.)—Ray Woodyard, 19-year-old Southern Oregon Normal school student from Coquille, was sentenced to 15 days in the county jail and ordered to pay costs of \$4.50 in justice court Monday on a charge of petty larceny, filed by Chief of Police Talent.

Woodyard was charged with stealing two cans of tobacco and a roll of films from Nininger's cafe at 11:30 Sunday night, the last of a series of escapades, all of which have been handled leniently by police officers since the opening of school last fall.

Officers Hall and Burns were called to Nininger's, where Amos ("Poke") Nininger was holding the youth, who had thrown the merchandise, which he took off the counter, into the street when Poke detected him. The officers escorted Ray to the car, but he bolted out of the other door and dashed up East Main. Dick Hall gave pursuit and caught him after a two-block chase.

Officers state that Woodyard was under the influence of liquor and that he remonstrated when they put him under arrest. He was lodged in the city lockup over night and received a hearing Monday when he pleaded guilty.

Woodyard, together with another student, has been living at the home of Chief Talent since a similar occurrence four months ago. Ray had

EMPIRE SALES CHIEF IS GRANTED PARDON

SALEM, Jan. 8.—(AP)—Frank Keller, Jr., former sales manager for the Empire Holding company and the only one convicted in the fraud case against the company officials in 1933 brought by the state corporation commissioner, was granted a pardon by Governor Julius L. Meier today.

Keller was sentenced to five years in the penitentiary by Judge Arlie G. Walker of Polk county July 7, 1933, after the other officials, including former Justice Oliver P. Coshaw of the state supreme court, were either acquitted or cases against them dismissed.

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GERMAN CONSUL WILL BE HERMIT'S LAWYER

PORTLAND, Jan. 8.—(AP)—Robert G. Cloeternann, German consul here, said today he had agreed, on request of the Josephine county district attorney, to act as defense attorney for Hugo Mayer, "hermit of the cragies," who goes on trial at Grants Pass January 14 for murder.

Mayer, a native of Germany, fled from that country about 25 years ago to escape compulsory military service.

LINER PASSENGERS ENJOY BREAKFAST AFTER SHIPWRECK

MIAMI, Fla., Jan. 8.—(AP)—Shipwrecked passengers who went calmly to breakfast before braving a rough sea in lifeboats told a vivid story today of the grounding of the war liner Havana on a Bahama coral reef.

The ship struck the reef Sunday while most of those on board were asleep, but the passengers arriving today on the freighter El Oceano said the impact when the liner grounded was so gentle many were not awakened.

Another rescue ship, the United Fruit steamer Peten, sped toward Havana with other passengers taken off the Havana. The El Oceano landed here with 38 of the 51 passengers on the ship's list and some of the crew, while the Peten carried 11 passengers and members of the crew.

One passenger, identified as Robert Rittenhouse of Brooklyn, N. Y., died of pleurisy in a lifeboat, the only known fatality.

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WITH AN ARMFUL OF WOOD SLIPPING FAST, YOU SHOUT FOR SOMEONE TO OPEN THE DOOR, AND HEAR THE FAMILY BEGIN TO ARGUE WHETHER SOMEONE IS CALLING AND IF SO, IS IT IN THE HOUSE OR ACROSS THE STREET

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SMATTER POP—



By C. M. Payne

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TAILSPIN TOMMY—Captured by Rebels!



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BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—"And Without Salt and Pepper"



By EDWIN ALGER

THE NEBBS—Money, Money



By Sol Hess

BRINGING UP FATHER



By George McMan

JACKSONVILLE H. E. POSTPONES MEET UP 22 PER CENT

JACKSONVILLE, Jan. 8.—(Sp.)—The Home Economics club of the Jacksonville Grange will not meet Wednesday, as is usual, on account of the death of John March, member of the Grange.

The funeral will be Wednesday from the Conger funeral parlor in town. The Grange will have charge of the services at the grave.

The Grange will hold its usual Friday night meeting, the first of the new year, with drafting of the charter and appointment of new committees by the Grange master.

Refreshments will be served by the young people of the Grange, Leona Conger being chairman of the committee.

Tax collectors for Jackson county for both current and delinquent taxes, showed approximately a 22 per cent increase the past year over 1933, according to a statement prepared by Chief Tax collector Deputy Oertrude Martin.

In 1934, the total taxes collected amounted to \$1,252,041.72. In 1933 the total amounted to \$1,027,859.72. This was an increase of \$224,181.94.

Receipt of federal money from various sources and a return of confidence to the people, were stated as the chief reasons for the improvement.

Phone 542. We'll build away from Jackson City Sanitary Service.