

# I did not kill Osborne

By VICTOR BRIDGES

...UPON Nicholas French, Jerry, Gordon, Moby O'Brien and Jimmy Fox have arrived of Hambridge on Jerry's boat, the "Seagull" to try to trace a formula worth millions, which a man named John Osborne stole from Kelly. Osborne has been murdered, and the formula stolen again. Jerry is going to examine Osborne's workshop, and Nick expects to question the family with whom Osborne boarded. Kelly has remained aboard the boat, with Jimmy. The villainous Peter Griffin, who also wants the formula, may also be in the neighborhood.

## Chapter 32

### THE GOWLLANDS

WE advanced along the roughly gravelled track, till we arrived at the gate which led into the factory grounds, where Jerry produced his keys. The lock opened without the smallest difficulty, and whistling to George, who had drifted off on a tour of inspection, he stepped through into the enclosure. "Good hunting!" was his parting observation, "and don't get too fresh with Mrs. Gowlland. From what I saw of her husband, I should think he was a nasty handful."

Left to myself, I continued my way along the outside of the fence, which extended in a complete circle all round the building. At the rear was another gate, also closed and locked. From this a neglected looking road trailed away inland, and following it for perhaps a hundred and fifty yards, I arrived at the entrance to a narrow lane which branched off to the left in the direction of the farm.

There was a stile here, leading into the adjoining field, and seating myself on the top rail, I filled a pipe and meditated for a little while on the problem that confronted me. What would be the best way of dealing with Mrs. Gowlland, if I were lucky enough to catch her alone? It would be easy to open the conversation by asking for some milk, but to switch from that subject to the private affairs of the late Mr. Osborne was a diplomatic feat which seemed likely to involve considerable difficulties.

How was I to account for my knowledge of the dead man's visit to Hambridge? No mention of this had been made during the trial, and since she must certainly be aware of that fact, her natural conclusion would be that I had derived my information either from Sir William Avon or through some private channel of my own.

I should be forced to put forward one of these explanations, and the question was which of the two seemed the most promising. She had already been closely questioned by Avon's representative, who had apparently come away empty-handed, and any further catechism from the same quarter might only result in arousing her resentment.

On the other hand, if I were to pose boldly as a friend and confidant of Osborne, I should be running a big risk. Quite conceivably her opinion of him might coincide with my own, and in that case, any small chance I had of winning her confidence would be irretrievably lost.

It was a thorny question, and after brooding over it carefully, I came to the conclusion that I had better postpone my choice until I discovered what sort of woman I had to deal with.

She might prove a sour-natured old crone who would bang the door in my face or she might be a simple and garrulous soul quite ready for a friendly gossip.

One opposition was just as probable as the other and the only thing to do when the moment arrived would be to adopt whatever tactics struck me as being the most suitable.

HAVING reached this decision I slid down from the stile and re-lighting my pipe which had gone out in the course of my reflections, set off along the lane.

It was really little more than a mere cart-track, leading from all appearance, only to the farm. On both sides a low hedge shut it off from the neighboring fields, while the surface was so deeply rutted that in wet weather traffic must have been almost impossible.

I trudged along steadily for about half a mile and then, turning a sharp corner, I found myself suddenly confronted by a wooden gate. Beyond this lay a large straggling farmyard, flanked on either hand by thatched outbuildings.

An old hen with a family of young chicks was scratching about busily in the mud—her contented clucking

being a very sound that broke the silence. From somewhere close by came the faint pleasant smell of burning lead to the gate and leaning over the top bar, took a leisurely survey of Mr. Gowlland's property.

On closer inspection I noticed that the whole place had a certain air of neglect. From several of the roofs the thatch was hanging down in ragged patches, while the window of the big barn, which had apparently been broken for some time, still waited disconsolately for a fresh pane of glass; it seemed to offer a silent but eloquent comment upon what I had already observed of the owner's habits and disposition.

I was looking about and taking in these various details when I heard the sound of approaching footsteps. The next moment a woman appeared round the corner of one of the out-houses. She was walking slowly, with a heavy bucket in either hand, and on seeing me she came to a sudden stop.

Mrs. Gowlland, for it could scarcely be anyone else, was so utterly unlike what I had expected that I was almost betrayed into an exclamation of astonishment. In the first place she was unquestionably beautiful. Even the common print gown that she was wearing failed to conceal the perfectly moulded lines of her figure, while a great mass of black hair, twisted into a rough knot at the back of her head, gave her something of the appearance of a startled gipsy.

But it was her face that chiefly fascinated me. Never in my life had I seen a face on which the marks of tragedy and unhappiness were so deeply stamped. With its large haunted eyes staring out from under their dark lashes it reminded me of a picture of Francesca by some unknown Italian which I had once come across in a Florence gallery.

FOR a second or two I stood motionless; then, collecting my wits, I pushed open the gate.

"I hope I'm not trespassing," I said. "I'm off the little yacht which came in this morning, and I wondered whether you could let me have some milk."

She put down her two pails and came slowly towards me.

"We don't sell it as a rule," she said, "but I could spare you a pint if that would be agreeable."

Her voice was low and deep, with a kind of faint huskiness that I found rather attractive.

"A pint will be plenty," I assured her.

She crossed over to an open door on the opposite side of the yard, and after a brief interval reappeared with the jug. I searched in my pocket and found some coins.

"Thank you very much," I said. "I suppose I'm right in thinking that I'm talking to Mrs. Gowlland?"

She gave an almost imperceptible start. "Yes," she said slowly. "I am Mrs. Gowlland. But how do you come to know my name?"

For good or evil I decided to take the plunge.

"There's no mystery about it," I answered. "I am an old friend of someone you used to know—John Osborne."

The effect upon her was extraordinary. A look of utter panic flashed into her dark eyes, and with a terrified movement she glanced round over her shoulder.

"Don't be frightened," I continued, "it's perfectly all right. I only want to have a little chat with you about him. You see..."

"But I don't know anything; I've nothing to tell you!" She put her hand on my arm and almost thrust me towards the gate. "You must go; you must go away at once. My husband doesn't like strangers coming on to the farm. He would be very angry if he found me talking to you."

Her voice scarcely rose above a whisper, but there was an agony of entreaty in it that no words can convey. For an instant, however, I still hesitated.

"Very well," I said soothingly, "only if Mr. Gowlland is so unreasonable, wouldn't it be possible for you to meet me somewhere else?"

With a loud crash the door of the big barn was suddenly flung open, and the gentleman I was speaking about stumbled out into the yard.

To judge from his appearance he had evidently been enjoying a mid-day nap. Coatsless, hatless, his grizzled hair all over the place, he stood blinking at me savagely out of his bloodshot eyes.

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Nick is rescued, tomorrow, from a very ticklish situation.

## CREDIT CO-OP TO MAP YEARS PLANS AT FRIDAY'S MEET

Annual meetings of co-operative marketing associations are the "usual thing" for farm members at this time of year. But right now farmers of this territory are looking forward to a new kind of annual meeting which will be concerned with co-operative credit.

On January 11 the Medford Production Credit Association stockholders will be gathered at the Jackson county court house to review the first year's operation of their organization and make plans for the future.

The morning session will be a business meeting for stockholders only, at which time the board of directors for the ensuing year will be elected. The afternoon will be an open meeting for stockholders, prospective borrowers and visitors.

"This should be an especially interesting meeting to all farmers," Secretary Luther Daniel says, "and we would like to see a good attendance. Everyone will be given opportunity to discuss the affairs of their association and give suggestions for improvement of service. A representative of the Production Credit Corporation of Spokane will be present to answer questions and clear up misunderstandings."

"The Medford Production Credit Association is the farmers' own organization and it is up to all of us to pull together to make this co-operative financing system successful."

## BOSTWICK FINED FOR DRIVE WHILE DRUNK

Vance L. Bostwick, 39, of Medford, was arrested near Gold Hill early Sunday morning by state police on a charge of driving an automobile while intoxicated. He appeared before Justice of the Peace H. D. Reed of Gold Hill yesterday and pleaded guilty.

He was fined \$100 and costs of \$4.50, and given thirty days in the county jail, with his driver's license suspended for one year.

The jail sentence was suspended, and he was given time to pay the fine and costs.

## TWO NABBED AT STILL ON FARM NEAR BANKS

HILLSBORO, Ore., Jan. 9. — (AP) — Two men were arrested and an elaborate distillery was seized last night when deputy sheriffs raided a farm near Banks.

Two men who gave the names of R. Potter, 39, and M. Fritch, 33, were arrested.

Two stills were found, each about 30 feet high. One for producing alcohol had a 300-gallon capacity. The other, a moonshine still, was rated at 150 gallons.

A. A. A. WEAR BETTER CLOTHES. Suits and O'coats to measure, \$21.50 up. Klein the Tailor, upstairs.

WINDOW GLASS—We sell window glass and will replace your broken windows reasonably. Trowbridge Cabinet Works.

Use Mail Tribune want ads

## THE HELPER

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

## SOVIET TO SHOOT RAILWAY WORKERS

MOSCOW, Jan. 9. — (AP) — Sixteen persons were killed and 87 injured in the collision Sunday of two express trains, 130 miles south of Leningrad. It was learned today.

Soviet officials in Leningrad are investigating the accident and persons held responsible for it will be shot.

The dispatcher, other employees at the Torshino station, near where the wreck occurred and many trainmen were arrested.

They testified at a preliminary investigation held by the transport section of the people's commissariat of domestic affairs, which established that one express passed a closed signal at the Torshino and dived into the preceding train.

Testimony indicated the dispatcher and other employees at the station made no effort to halt the second express.

## NEW CAMERA CATCHES NIGHT ACTION SCENES

Of interest to Medford people is the new synchronized flashlight camera just received by J. Vera Shangle. It is one of the very best on the coast, being of recent development, and brings a new service to this part of the country on night action pictures.

At the recent basketball games in Ashland, Shangle got some remarkable pictures of Patterson, colored flash for the Normal quint, and Howell, giant center, tossing the stinging baskets in the Williams game.

Shangle intends taking pictures at local basketball games and wrestling matches, and also interior views of local business houses. Examples of the new camera's remarkable work will be on display in the near future.

Phone 542. We'll haul away your refuse. City Sanitary Service.

## S'MATTER POP

## TAILSPIN TOMMY

—Welcome to Nazi!

## BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER

—Here's Hoping, Ben!

## THE NEBBS

—The Big Guy

## BRINGING UP FATHER

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