SYNOPSIS: Molly O'Brien, Nick French, Jerry Mordaunt and Jimmy Fox have come down to Hambridge on Jerry's yacht to try for some information about John Osborne. Osborne stole a valuable formula belonging to Molly, worked a while in a deserted factory at Hambridge, and then was murdered. The formula disappeared, and Peter Orloff is also searching for it. Now Molly and Nick are going to examine Osborne's workroom, and Jerry is to try to extract some information from the people with whom Osborne boarded at Hambridge.

Chapter 39

THE TRAP

IT was the first time Molly and I had been alone together since I had said good night to her in the bedroom at the flat. The memory of that moment had been constantly with me, but in the unsentimental atmosphere of a small boat, and the tense excitement of our joint enterprise, it had gradually come to appear like some remote dream.

Whether she even remembered the kiss she had given me I was at a loss to tell. Tired out and half drugged, as she had been, it was quite possible that she had acted merely from an instinctive feeling of gratitude, and that when she had awakened next morning the whole incident had been entirely forgotten.

She had certainly greeted me without the smallest trace of embarrassment, and ever since then she seemed to have included both Jerry and myself in a kind of frank and affectionate comradeship, which, as far as appeared on the surface, made no distinction between the pair of us.

All the same, as we walked along the uneven shore, I found it a trifle difficult to preserve that detached and alert frame of mind which the occasion obviously demanded.

She had slipped her arm through mine, and the soft pressure induced such a pleasant thrill that the machinations of Mr. Orloff and his friends seemed for the moment to be comparatively unimportant.

I felt an almost overmastering longing to tell her how much I loved her. I wanted to sit down beside her there and then on the wet grass and . . .

"What are you thinking about, Nick?"

With a guilty start, I came back suddenly out of my dream.

"Lots of things," I prevaricated. "Jerry chiefly. I wonder if we were right in letting him go up there alone?"

"I didn't altogether like it," she admitted. "Still, we've got to do something, and on the whole it seemed to be the best plan. I'm sure he'll bully Mrs. Gowland a lot better than you could."

"You don't know all my accomplishments," I protested. "I can be a perfect fiend with women when I'm in the right mood."

She laughed softly. "That's just your conceit, Nick dear. Why, I wouldn't trust you to dismiss a housemaid—not if she was pretty."

I produced the keys which Jerry had returned to me, and opening the iron gate, held it back for Molly to pass. It swung to behind us, and, having tested it to make sure that it was properly closed, I followed her up the rough causeway and unlocked the big front door.

THANKS to Jerry's previous investigations, we were more or less prepared for what awaited us. On stepping inside, we found ourselves in an empty circular-shaped hall, lit by a couple of long, grimy windows.

Out of this ran a broad corridor leading to what had evidently been the principal manufacturing room, a large, barn-like structure, with a domed glass roof, where rows of stout wooden trestles and a pile of stacked benches could be dimly discerned in the grey light that filtered down from above.

On either side of the corridor ran a number of smaller rooms or offices.

"That must be Osborne's workshop," I said, "that first opening on the right. Let's start there and look over the rest of the place after."

A few paces brought us to the head of another and narrower passage, at the farther end of which we could see through an open doorway into the curious apartment that Jerry had already described to us.

Like the main room, it was illuminated from above by means of a glass skylight, but owing to the fact that the panes had apparently been recently cleaned, the light here was of a somewhat more satisfactory nature.

The principal object which it revealed was what looked, to my inexperienced eyes, like a rather odd-shaped electric cooking stove, with an impressive array of plugs and switches shining from the brick wall behind it.

Molly uttered a sudden exclamation. "Look at that, Nick! It's exactly like the small furnace father used to have in his laboratory at home. Oh, yes—this is where Osborne worked all right!"

She hurried forward, and following her down the passage, I paused for an instant to examine the door which Jerry had presumably left open. It consisted, as he had said, of a single slab of solid steel.

Judged by its appearance, the weight must have been considerable, but the whole thing was so beautifully poised that it swung to and fro at the lightest touch.

Leaving it half closed, I stepped across to the furnace, which Molly was scrutinizing with rapt interest.

"Practically a duplicate," she announced excitedly, "and, what's more, it's made by the same people—the Acme Electric Corporation of Buffalo—there's the name on that little plate."

"'Money no object,' evidently." I remarked. "I wonder what it cost Avon, fitting him out with all these gadgets."

"Some of them may have been here already. This room was specially built for making experiments in—that's obvious."

"How do you know?" I inquired.

"Look at the door and the thickness of the walls. As Jerry said, it's just like a prison cell. You could blow yourself up in here quite comfortably without hurting the rest of the building."

"Well, I'm glad Osborne didn't do anything so idiotic," I remarked thankfully.

She glanced up. "Why, Nick? It would have served him right and it would have saved you a heap of trouble."

"Quite so," I admitted, "but as a set-off against that I should never have met you."

FOR an instant her blue eyes rested on mine with a kind of half grave, half smiling tenderness; then, to my utter bewilderment, her whole face suddenly went white and rigid.

"Look!" she gasped. "The door!"

I spun round in a flash, but I was too late. Before I could move, the great slab of steel had swung forward into its place, shutting us in ruthlessly and silently, like the doorway of a vault. Almost simultaneously I heard the sharp click of a key.

"My God, Nick! We're trapped."

I had flung myself across the room and was already wrenching feverishly at the handle. It twisted backwards and forwards in my grip, but nothing further happened.

Thrust and strain as I would, all my efforts were useless, and at last, releasing my hold, I stood staring helplessly at the blank, immovable barrier in front of us.

"You have my congratulations, Mr. Trench. The last time I called on you, you expressed a hope that we should meet again. I trust you are now satisfied."

It was Orloff's voice, faint, but distinctly audible and at the sound of those smooth, mocking tones a chill sense of utter despair crept into my heart. I drew in a long breath.

"So it's you, Orloff," I said steadily. "You seem to have a habit of turning up when you're not expected."

There was the ghost of a laugh. "I keep my word, as you will shortly find out."

The voice seemed to come from somewhere over my head, and, looking up, I caught sight of a narrow iron grating let into the brick wall above the top of the door.

"Very interesting," I replied, "but I take it that you haven't shut us up in here in order to discuss your own psychology."

"That was not my principal object. The fact is, that you have become a nuisance. So much so that I find it necessary to put an end to your activities. In a few minutes from now you will both be dead."

Molly stepped forward noiselessly and slipped her hand into mine.

"What's the sense in murdering us?" she asked calmly. "We haven't got the formula."

"My dear young lady, I am afraid you are under a misapprehension. I am quite aware that my original assumption was wrong, but unfortunately you and your friends have become a little too well acquainted with my private affairs. There are interests at stake compared with which your lives do not matter the snap of a finger."

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Tomorrow, Jimmy Fox takes a hand once more.

SHRINERS CIRCUS OPENS WEEK'S RUN MONDAY EVENING

The days of suspense are about over. The opening of the big Shrine circus, so anxiously awaited by Medford and Jackson county people is scheduled for tomorrow night at the Armory with a whole week of swell entertainment in store.

Never before has there been an indoor show of this calibre to exhibit in this city, and Shrine members report a tremendous advance sale of tickets. With 15 high class vaudeville acts each night, followed by a big dance, local people are presented the opportunity of enjoying an entire evening at little expense, with a type of show that will appeal to everyone.

First on the program will be Capt. Burns and his troupe of trained dogs, monkeys, and ponies.

The famous little lady, Miss Gladys LeTourneau, will do her high trapeze act, and the Hood sisters, rated the greatest juvenile acrobats and contortionists, will be here, direct from a two-year run in Europe.

The Henry trio, who do slack wire and comedy juggling on the silver wire twenty feet above the stage, will thrill the audience nightly, as will the "Man on the flying trapeze," who also does daredevil balancing feats on the wire while seated in a chair, of all places!

Besides the feature programs and the dance, music for which will be furnished by Harry Schell's Royal Commanders, there will be concessions, merchants' exhibits, and an auto show.

The doors open at 7, and the regular circus performance starts at 8:15.

On Monday afternoon, Jan. 19, the doors will be open at 1, with the performance starting at 2, in a matinee for school kids. The admission will be nominal.

Tickets may be obtained from any Shriner, or at the downtown offices in the Sparta building.

Boy Scout Notes

Troop No. 5: By Donald Price, Scribe—Boy Scouts of Troop No. 5 held their regular meeting last Wednesday night in the gymnasium of the Washington school. James K. Hoey, Scoutmaster of the Troop, conducted the meeting. After the flag ceremony, the boys played "Crows and Cranes" for about fifteen minutes. Later in the meeting the Scoutmaster gave a talk about maps and how a Scout can know his location in the woods if he has a contour map.

Meeting closed at nine o'clock. We would be pleased to have any interested boys and fathers come to our next meeting, January 16 at Washington school at 7:30 p. m.

Troop No. 8: By Larry Schade, Jr., Scribe—A Troop meeting was held January 8. First aid, knot tying and other Scout work was studied. Our attendance has been good at all meetings. Scouts are working hard for the coming Court of Honor in February.

Thursday we travelled to Eagle Point, about twenty-six boys making the trip. Troop No. 18 at Eagle Point knew nothing of our coming and were taken by great surprise. A grand time was had by all. Wieners and buns were served. All Scouts and parents agreed it was a fine party. Troop No. 8 is planning many others for this winter.

Troop No. 16: By Irwin Doty, Troop Reporter—At Christmas time the Scouts of the Troop filled baskets with food and clothing and distributed them to needy families.

At the Court of Honor last Monday, three boys from Troop No. 16 appeared for awards. Shirrell Doty, Raymond Miller and Ivan Newton were awarded merit badges and Shirrell Doty advanced to the rank of Star Scout.

At the Troop meeting held the same evening, first aid instruction was given, the correct use of the tourniquet being shown by the Scoutmaster, Harold L. Larsen. Mr Larsen explained how the improper use of the tourniquet can result in the loss of life.

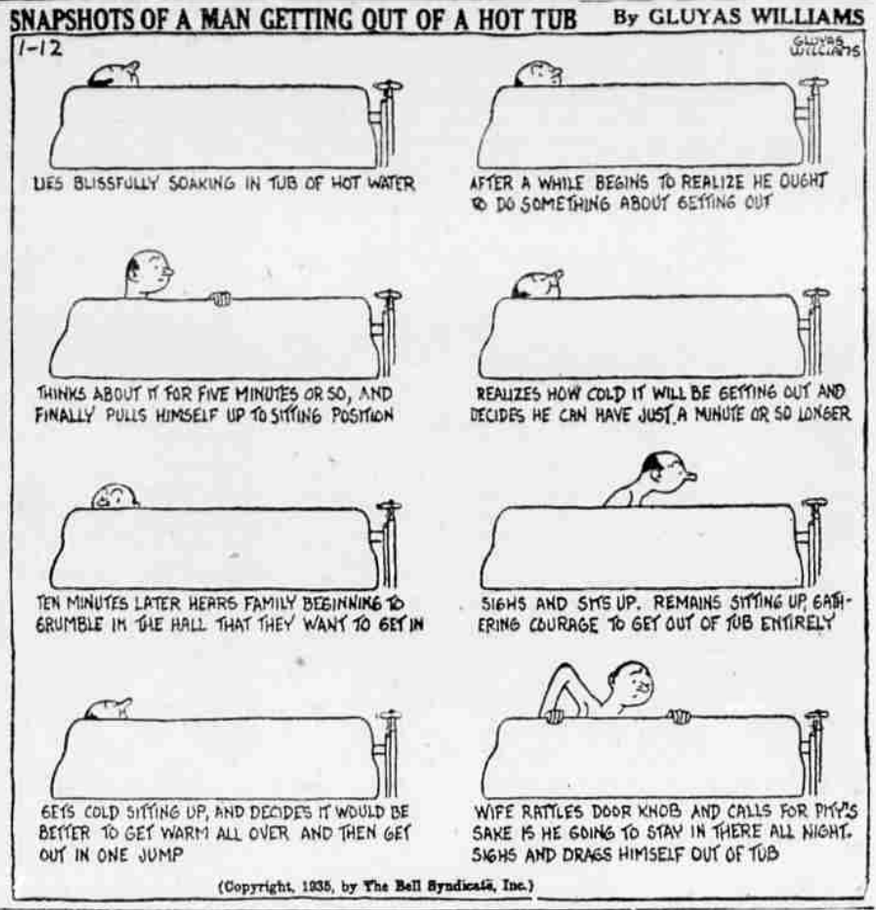
A Tenderfoot Investiture is planned for the Troop meeting this Monday evening. Five new boys have passed their Tenderfoot tests and will be invested as Scouts of the Troop. They are: Bill Kizer, Vernon Holland, Lorin Chitwood, Vern Strayer and Keith Copinger.

Back From Trip East—Rudy Lueck, lookout observer at Watchman peak, Crater Lake, returned Friday night from an auto trip to Washington, D. C., and Boston, having been accompanied east by Harry Fuller of Boston, who has also been employed at Crater Lake national park, as foreman of the winter crew and snow plow operator. Lueck made the return trip alone, stopping briefly at several places enroute. He will remain in Medford for several days as guest at the home of William Warner, then will return north to his home at Lebanon, also visiting at Seattle and Spokane.

Use Mail Tribune want ads.

SNAPSHOTS OF A MAN GETTING OUT OF A HOT TUB

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. Payne

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By Hal Forrest

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—What Ben Heard

By EDWIN ALGER

THE NEBBS—It's Just Too Bad

By Sol Hess

BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus

Tolo

TOLO, Jan. 12.—(Spl.)—Ike Peterman and family visited relatives in Ashland Sunday.

An appreciative audience enjoyed the Medford Diamond Jubilee over again when Mr. Smith, lighting engineer for Copco, presented a series of pictures Monday night in connection with a demonstration on proper lighting.

Miss Alva Peterman was an overnight guest of Miss Edyth Anderson recently.

Tracy Muse, with the army at Fort Douglas, Utah, arrived Wednesday for a visit with his parents and other relatives here. He has a 30-day furlough.

Mrs. P. A. Tracy was hostess at her home on Gold Ray dam road to members and friends of the Tolo Community club January 10. Next meeting will be with Mrs. H. D. Hanor on St. Valentine's day.

Mrs. Alida Tule has announced that on account of flu and bad colds there will be no school program for the month of January. The same committee, of which Mrs. Tule is chairman, will prepare an entertainment to be given the latter part of February, in commemoration of several notable events.

MILL CITY HOSPITAL DESTROYED BY BLAZE

MILL CITY, Ore., Jan. 12.—(AP)—A fire, thought to have originated in the basement of the building, completely destroyed the Mill City hospital here this morning. Nothing was saved except a few surgical instruments.

The hospital was owned by Dr. W. W. Allen of Mill City and was valued at between $10,000 and $15,000. The loss was partially covered by insurance. No one was in the building.