

MURDER ON THE BLUFF

STORMY IN ONE wild, stormy night at Farrington Bluff, home of Michael's aunt, beautiful Jude Bins top is shot to death on the bluff, the Skipper, Mike's tall and tanned; younger aunt, disappears, and Mike dislocates his shoulder in a fall. The Skipper turns up; she's been in the state with a sick child. Aunt Martha, stout and prudish, has a few genteel tantrums, but Gay Palmer, Mike's red-headed sweetheart, keeps fairly calm. Next morning we search the grounds for an intruder and find that someone has slept in the room over the garage.

Chapter 11 I Become Head Sleuth

IN my room, Michael was sprawled on the bed, waiting. He had managed to get out of the olivines, but the feet stretched in front of him were still encased in hip boots. "Well!" he said jerkily. "Nothing" after a moment's hesitation.

He straightened up to study my face. Whatever he saw there appeared to satisfy him. He stretched out gingerly on the bed.

"I told you so," his voice was tired. "Get me out of this stuff, will you?"

Only once did I speak to him during the long, tedious process of getting the two of us ready for M. Farrington's lunch table. I couldn't stand the tight lines around his mouth.

"Mike," I said, "the Skipper is square. You know it."

He turned away, picking up a comb. When his voice came it was perfectly steady. "I know it."

I didn't try again. With fendish intensity, I concentrated on soap, towels, collar - buttons - anything. The lunch bell rang while I was struggling with Michael's tie.

M. Farrington was worth her weight in gold at that lunch table. Right there she made amends for every Farrington state dinner I have ever endured.

"Well" said first and discuss this afterward," she stated.

No one argued. Gay was white and shaken, the Skipper abstracted, Michael silent and morose. But M. Farrington and I talked. We talked about the deplorable condition of the drama, if I remember correctly. And when I gave out, Gay took it up. Not until Higgins withdrew at the end of the meal, was there silence. M. Farrington took a deep breath and plunged in.

"I surmise," she said, "that you are all satisfied that no one is lurking in the grounds?"

No answer.

"Then I think that all the steps we may take, can be taken right here with a little thought and a little co-operation from each one of us."

More silence. Michael's lighter flared.

"I fail to see," he observed, "any necessity for taking steps. There has been an accident. Very well. As soon as we get in touch with the mainland, the police can do everything that is necessary."

M. Farrington's Proposition

WE all stared at him. There was that alternative of course. Any sort of story might be bluffed through. William and Higgins were to be counted on. And the police would have no reason to question it. Gay made up her mind first.

"I don't like that, Mike."

"Why not? We might as well face it. The chances are that the person who shot Jude is sitting at this table. Do you think anyone here would shoot her intentionally?"

M. Farrington spoke briskly. "Michael, if you are right, we can end this situation here and now. We are all friends. If one of us was so unfortunate as to cause this accident—that person should speak out now for the sake of all of us."

We waited for an interval that seemed like several centuries. The Skipper sat motionless, her eyes on the table, and her right hand clenched in front of her. M. Farrington, a trifle pale, was studying Michael's face. It was absolutely expressionless, but the hand that held his cigarette shook slightly. Gay's frightened eyes caught and held mine. There was a question in them that puzzled me. M. Farrington's hard, dry voice cut through the silence.

"Very well. The police will be here by tomorrow or the next day at the latest. If we wait for that, things will be very unpleasant. I am of the opinion that an organized investigation will be much happier than an individual and futile one."

It was only common sense. We all realized that, but to one encouraged the idea.

M. Farrington smiled grimly. "At all events, it would be more successful and it might spare us the ordeal of a public police investigation."

Police! At Farrington Bluff! But of course there would have to be police. For the first time the matter ceased to be personal. Gay's hand gripped my knee convulsively.

"Oh, surely—" she began.

"Very surely," said M. Farrington. "Someone must take charge. I should prefer it to be neither a woman nor a servant. Since Michael has seen it

to go bathing in February, obviously not Michael, James, I am afraid you will be obliged to offer your services."

Without warning, laughter engulfed me, shrill, meaningless gusts of it.

"Well," said M. Farrington's sardonic voice, "is that an acceptance or otherwise?"

Michael answered for me, eyes narrowed, a peculiar expression on his face.

"Jim's your sleuth, Aunt Martha. He'll love it. An authority on the subject, in fact."

There was something in that remark that I didn't like, and a great deal about the whole proposition that I liked even less. I glared at him.

"Well!" impatiently from M. Farrington.

"All right," I said stiffly. I was to trap Jude's murderer. If And if I should turn out to be— I didn't dare finish the thought.

"Thank you," pursued M. Farrington dryly. "Of course, there is, of course, the possibility that you are conducting an investigation against yourself. But we shall have to run that risk. It is understood that we are all pledged to help you in every way. Proceed, if you please."

I, the creator of Billington Truth-swaite, sleuth extraordinary, surveyed the members of the party. No blissed quip rose to my lips. Neither did my steel-gray eyes glint menacingly. Rather I gaped foolishly for a full minute before I could so much as blurt, "I'll have to think. You—I wish you'd all go to your rooms and stay there."

Michael snorted at the feeble attempt. I heard M. Farrington's "Come, Barbara," felt the reassuring pressure of Gay's hand, and suddenly found myself alone in the room with the Skipper.

"I'm sorry about all this, Jim, sorry that it had to happen at all and particularly sorry that you were dragged into it. But, believe me, Martha is right. It's better this way than in the hands of the police. Don't blink; anything. We leave it to you."

"Watch The Servants"

THEN I was alone in the dining room. They were both right, of course. And yet—I poured myself a stiff drink and gulped it foolishly, rang for Higgins. The man looked sick.

"Higgins," I said, "at Miss Farrington's request I am taking charge here until we can get in touch with shore. I wish you would so inform the servants."

"Very good, sir."

"I have asked everyone to go to his or her room for a short time—and in return, I should be greatly obliged if you would keep a careful check on all the servants. And if you should see any of them outside of the quarters between now and the time I call you, notify me immediately."

He blinked. The man was, I thought, on the verge of saying something, but changed his mind. He bowed automatically and withdrew.

I took myself into the living room. The impossibility of the situation no longer interested me. I was beginning to appreciate to the full the shortcomings of my own attempts at fiction. The thought of my remarkable Billington infuriated me.

I finally sat down at a desk and located pencil and paper. I decided to go carefully over the whole confounded visit and jot down every peculiar incident. It was no easy task. At the end of an hour I had a list that read like this:

1. Something is wrong with the Skipper—something that prompted M. Farrington to send for us in the middle of winter, diverted her from trying to marry of Mike, and has even urged Higgins to come away. He was certainly of his feet last night.

2. Why is the Skipper so averse to seeing a doctor?

3. Did she want to keep Mike away from Jude for the obvious reason?

4. What did Jude tell Mike and when did they separate?

5. What did Mike expect to find in the bathroom that prompted him to jump over the cliff?

6. Did Jude tickle or was she carried to the spot where we found her? If she tickled, for whom or what was she looking? Obviously she went in a great hurry. No hat or coat.

7. Where did Mike until he called us? Outdoors, apparently. He was soaking wet. He said he saw the bridge down at 10 o'clock, just the time I went to bed. What was he doing out there? Why did he later head so determinedly for the bathroom?

8. Where was the Skipper? But did they come last night or before that? Would even the Skipper spend such a night in a stable with a sick dog? Why didn't she tell M. Farrington where she was going? Why did she object to Jude? What were she and Jude talking about when M. Farrington heard them? Where did they go? Was the Skipper the last person to see Jude alive?

9. Why doesn't Mike want a search or investigation of any kind?

10. Whose footprints are on the tennis courts and in the garage? Who slept in the garage last night? Who tried to leave the Bluff in the Skipper's car?

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A scream makes us rush to the kitchen, tomorrow.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

For further proof address the author, inclosing a stamped envelope for reply. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.



Ghost Handicap
Taking the inside position as the field rounded into the home-stretch on the Pomona track one day in September, 1935, Virginia Mac pulled up with the leaders, passed them, and flashed across the finish line in first place.

Everything about the race seemed quite in order until the owners went to collect the purse on their winning entry. They were told Virginia Mac had been disqualified. Why? Because a search through the Jockey Club records had disclosed the fact that the horse was officially dead. A ghost had won the race!

At the beginning of her racing career, Virginia Mac had failed to show much promise, was sold, and became a polo pony. Purchased by three Hollywood screen writers, Robert Ives, Howard Green and Claude Binyon, she was brought back to the racing game. Not knowing that her Jockey Club registration had expired and made Virginia Mac officially dead, her owners entered the mare in the Pomona meet. It is believed that they have since taken care of her "reurrection" in the Jockey Club files so she can never be disqualified again on the grounds that she's a ghost.

Silent statesman
Famous as the author of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," Edward Gibbon was elected to Parliament in 1774, left in 1780, returned in 1781 and retired in 1782. In his eight years as a member of Parliament he did not make a single speech.

Balsam of Peru
A widely used healing drug, perfume base and vanilla substitute, Balsam of Peru received its curious misnomer many years ago from the Spanish and has retained it ever since. Though it is generally believed that balsam was misnamed entirely by mistake due to vague geographical knowledge of the time, it has been said that it was misnamed on purpose so that nations other than Spain would look for the valuable tree in Peru instead of Salvador. The tree from which the balsam comes is the Myroxylon peraiac—unknown outside Central America.

Tomorrow: The Most Prolific Pen.

SANTA FE STREAMLINER SPEEDS TO NEW RECORD

CHICAGO, May 18.—(AP)—The Santa Fe railroad claimed a new rail speed record for the Los Angeles-Chicago run Monday when its "Super Chief," new diesel-powered streamliner, arrived after an elapsed time of 36 hours and 49 minutes.

The train averaged 60.8 miles an hour on elapsed time for the 2,228 mile run, but actual running time boosted the speed to 63.9 miles an hour. It made 17 stops.

NEW YORK TO PARIS AIR DERBY BLOCKED

WASHINGTON, May 18.—(AP)—The state department formally notified the French embassy today that the United States government could not permit a proposed New York-to-Paris air derby this summer because of the "risk of needless loss of life."

LATE PARTY

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



MATTER POP

By C. M. PAYNE



TAILSPIN TOMMY—Tommy Is 'Grounded!'

By HAL FORREST



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—The Proposition

By EDWIN A. GER



THE NEBBS—The Fresh Guy

By SOL HESS



WOMAN AIDS HUSBAND IN SNARING MOUNTAIN LIONS FOR LIVELIHOOD

EAGLE PASS, Tex. (AP)—A slight young woman, mother of a 7-year-old daughter, has become the leading southwest trapper of her sex.

She is Mrs. Beattie Davies Kennedy, and her husband, Robert, is a state-paid trapper of mountain lions, wolves, coyotes and bobcats. Robert Kennedy is recognized as the best in his profession and his catch of 168 coyotes in a single month still is the record.

Mrs. Kennedy, however, is the more amazing of the two. She surprised residents of this borderland town early last March by hauling in a huge mountain lion on the running board of her dust-covered car. Less than two weeks later, she came in with an-

other—a feat that few men have equalled.

The first mountain lion was a tawny, scarred veteran of many a battle over the prey in raids on sheep herds. It weighed 160 pounds and was 7 feet, 8 inches long. The second was smaller, weighing 145 pounds and measuring 6 feet, 9 inches. Both struggled in their traps and snarled at Mrs. Kennedy before a bullet from her rifle ended their lives.

The Kennedys live in Maverick county and trap in the "Indio" country—a 100-mile square area notorious for its wild animals and its lack of trails. Most of the area is owned by the Indio ranch and few improvements have been made since the Spanish conquistadors established the ranch's boundary three centuries ago.

FISHING TACKLE and Picnic Supplies at Huson's Confectionery. Open evenings and Sundays.

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