

MURDER ON THE BLUFF

...was: it's a wild, stormy night at Farrington Bluff, home of Michael's aunt, when attractive Jude Blinshop is shot to death on the bluff. Mike dislocates a shoulder hunting for the missing Skipper, his tall and hooded younger aunt who turns up with an alibi. Gay Palmer, Mike's red-headed sweetheart, worries about him. Next day, stout and prudish Aunt Martha proposes that I lead our group investigation of the murder, for we are marooned on this small island. An unknown assailant bushes Cook's car in a foot-pot and binds up Annie the maid.

Chapter 14

The Handkerchief Clue

I TRIED another tack. "Where were you when I rang Higgins?" Did I imagine it, or did he look frightened?

"In the library, sir. I was looking through one of the upper shelves for a volume of Goethe which Miss Farrington has been unable to find, sir."

Very pat. A little too pat. Higgins had been asked to keep an eye on the other servants.

"You hadn't been in the servant's quarters since I had spoken to you?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I went directly there after leaving you. I delivered my message, and then it occurred to me that this volume—"

I threw caution to the winds. "Just why did you tell me that they were all waiting in this room?"

"I told them to wait, sir." He spoke without an instant's hesitation. "I assumed that they had."

It wasn't the sort of remark one would expect of Higgins. For a moment I rather stumped me. I turned to Cook again.

"When did William go upstairs?"

"Just a little while after Mr. Higgins left us—right away practically."

In a way it all pieced together. Someone might have come into the kitchen through the back door, banged Annie over the head, and put her in the entry, only to discover Cook in the next room. It was quite possible that the commotion had aroused Cook from her nap. She had played directly into the hands of the intruder by going into the kitchen. Perhaps he had intended to handle her as he had handled Annie, but she had whirled round and surprised him. If Annie had been struck by a flower pot, it was probable that William would start on his second exploit with the same missile in his hand. Unexpectedly confronted by his victim, he would have hurled it involuntarily. And then—My eye fell once more on the stinging door.

Cook might have been the person who had set it in motion. But the back door was locked from the inside. Our quarry must have turned the key himself and gotten out of the room before we came rushing in. It was only a step to the game-room from which, after our mad rush en masse into the kitchen, he could proceed wherever he chose. The intruder must be in the house!

I Saw The Eyes

I ADVANCED upon Cook. "Who did you see in that doorway?" I shouted, pointing theatrically.

The effect was tremendous. Gay screamed. The Skipper half rose from her chair. Higgins backed toward the wall. But Cook glared back at me, fascinated.

"So help me," she whispered. "I saw the eyes!"

Either she was a magnificent actress or the dim light had actually protected the person she had seen in the doorway. There was no way of telling which. But—the prowler in the upper hall!

"Do you sleep lightly?"

"Sleep?" Her mighty voice rose again. "I'll never sleep again, and God's my witness! Till this day I could lay me down and sleep with the best of them—"

Simultaneously with the Skipper's short laugh, William opened the door. His face was still anxious.

"She's all right now, sir."

"Good," I said crisply. "Come in here, William, and keep an eye on everybody in this room. I want to talk to Annie." Of all the people on the Bluff right then, the chauffeur was the one I most trusted and relied on. He advanced into the room reluctantly.

"Very good, sir," I watched him settle onto the table before I closed the door.

Annie still lay on the couch in the servant's hall. She looked limp and pathetic. In a vacuous way, her tear-streaked face was pretty. I spoke as gently as I could.

"All right now, Annie?"

"Yes, sir."

"You'll have no more trouble. We'll see to that. You went out to get Cook's glasses, didn't you?"

"Yes. Her eyes were afflicted."

"Just what happened?"

The girl shivered. "I don't know, Mr. Wells. I started to open the table drawer and something—hit me. I'm—I'm scared! Why should anyone want to hit me?"

"We'll take care of everything," I said with more conviction than I felt. "Don't worry. How long were you in the entry as nearly as you can figure?"

She was shaking from head to foot and her eyes glistened dangerously. But her face screwed in thought, and at last she said earnestly, "About four hours."

I stared at her dumbfounded. Then and there I began to appreciate the difficulty of extracting the truth from the most well meaning people.

"I suppose it must have seemed that long. Who was in the kitchen when you went into it?"

"Nobody. Honest! I didn't see nobody from the time I left Cook till Miss Barbara opened the door. Gosh! It was awful! I couldn't get up and I couldn't say a word, and I was scared. Suppose nobody had heard me and the guy who put me there had—"

"How do you know a man put you there?" I snapped.

"I don't. I didn't say no man—"

"All right," I felt a bit foolish. "I was just wondering. Look here, can you stand up? I think it would be a good idea for this party to stick together."

She could stand up, and she did. She could also talk, but her conversation was not particularly illuminating. It intimately concerned her sensations upon waking to find a gag in her mouth and her opinion of some person or persons unknown. I steered her into the kitchen quickly. Two things demanded immediate attention. There was an unknown person at large in the house, and a second night was practically upon us before I, as investigator had had a chance to question the suspects about the events of the first. It seemed to me that our prowler deserved first consideration.

Houseful of Quasi-Lunatics

"I WISH you'd all go into the library," I said. "I mean everyone but William and myself. I'm going to search the house, and I want to be sure that you're all together. Each one of you is responsible for seeing that no one leaves the room until we get back. Skipper, will you ring when everybody is there—including Michael and Aunt Martha?"

Alone with William, a sense of normal being came upon me. In that household of quasi-lunatics, he seemed as steady and sane as a rock. "Better wipe off your face," I suggested.

William grinned from beneath the caked lather on his face. At the dish towel rack, he followed my suggestion. Then from a drawer beside the sink he produced a flashlight.

"All set, sir. Shall we look around a bit here?"

My eyes swept the room. Broken pottery all about, but otherwise normal. One drawer in the table still stood open, and Cook's glasses were in plain sight. If our visitor had come from the muddy drive outside, he must have flown across the kitchen floor. There was no sign of footprints.

We went through the two pantries thoroughly. We examined all the closets and table drawers. As a paring shot, I stepped to the back door and opened it.

In the light of William's torch, the entry scene of Annie's incarceration, revealed two startling facts: first outside the door stood a double stack of flower pots, and all over the floor were smears of red clay—the clay of the tennis courts. Annie's bonds and gag still lay where William had dropped them. Mechanically I stopped and picked them up. An ordinary piece of clothing, one end of it freshly cut, and a handkerchief of fine white linen, embroidered and hand-made, lay where a man's maid might give him. I thought with a chuckle. But the laugh froze on my lips.

Daintily stitched in one corner of the handkerchief was the name, "Michael Farrington." As I stared in horror at the thing, the bell in the kitchen sounded the Skipper's signal.

William's voice called me from my trance. "Nothing out here, sir."

"I'm afraid my 'No' was rather weak. I was just thinking—trying to forget that I was dealing with Michael and his family—trying to function as if I were merely considering fiction for a grimly-minded public. Would it have been possible for Michael to have called the mess in the kitchen? Anyone in the party, Cook, Annie and myself excepted, could have been the prowler in the upper hall. Any one of them could have sneaked down the servant's staircase and handled Annie. The handkerchief pointed to Michael.

But the affair with Cook was peculiar. If logic had anything to do with it, Cook must have screamed just before the flower pot struck her. And when we heard that scream, every member of the party but William and the victims had been in the room with me.

One glance at William assured me that he really had been shaving. Part of his face glistened like an apple, and the rest was encased in a brief but decided stubble. It flashed across my mind that in Section William would certainly be guilty. The most innocent seeming and the most helpful is any author's villain. But I wrote that sort of thing; I didn't believe it. Still, it was possible that the lather might have been applied and partially removed while Cook was slumbering peacefully on her sofa."

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My quiz meets with glib evasions, Monday.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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The Flying Wreck
Ten years ago today a silver bullet flashed out of the clouds over Le Bourget Field, Paris, circled a couple of times and landed. A young man stepped out of his plane and introduced himself as Charles Lindbergh. The first flight from New York to Paris had been completed. A great forward step in aviation had been made.

Twenty-five years ago, November 5th, another milestone in man's conquest of the air was completed. A stuttering wreck lumbered over a Los Angeles field, wobbled its wings and bounced to a landing. Galbraith Rodgers had completed the first transcontinental flight across the United States—but what a flight! The plane he landed on the California field had exactly four pieces of the original equipment with which he had taken off from New York 49 days before, two wing struts, a vertical rudder and, strange as it seems, a glass bottle tied to his wing brace. The distance he had flown was 4231 miles for an average mileage on the trip of a little more than three and a half miles per hour.

Following Rodgers on his flight was an automobile with material for temporary repairs for his plane and a freight car that was literally a repair shop on wheels. The aviator made good use of both of them. He crashed 18 times enroute! By the time he arrived in Los Angeles, enough parts had been replaced on his Wright ship

to have built four new planes! Sixty-eight stops were made enroute, the longest hop made being 133 miles. Actual flying time on the trip was approximately 82 hours.

Rodgers was killed a few months after the transcontinental flight when his plane crashed at the same spot where he had completed his flight from New York.

Royal Flutist
Henry VIII of England went for variety in musical instruments as well as wives. He owned a collection of about 400 music makers but his favorite was a recorder, a form of flute on which he performed daily. He owned 153 other flutes and occasionally organized a band of as many as 40 flute players to play for him.

one of the most merciless wars in French history.

TICONDEROGA, N. Y. (UP)—The Rev. John P. Delaney, Canisius college setologist, believes that earthquakes may be forecast some day, just as the weather is predicted now. Father Delaney said that progress along this line of scientific research is being made.

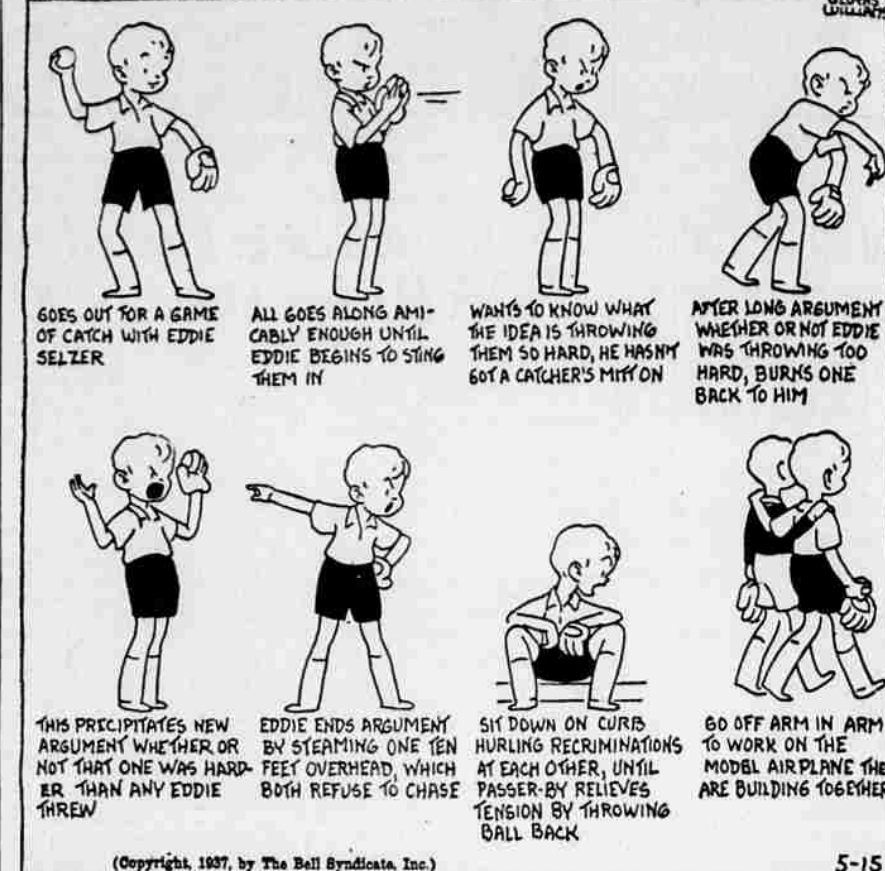
termination and damage caused by rats more than \$4,000,000. This has caused authorities to think seriously of getting rid of the pests for good.

The many old quarters of Paris are naturally honeycombed with their roads and they only can be eliminated once for all by the erection of new houses. This part of the program is going ahead rapidly.

Today the so-called northern system is being examined for application in Paris. First used in Denmark and now winning favor in England, this method consists in deliberately infecting the rats with a killing disease which is harmless to human beings. It is bacteriological warfare carried out not against man but against his age-old enemies. There will be no declaration of war, but soon Paris authorities will carry out

PLAYING CATCH

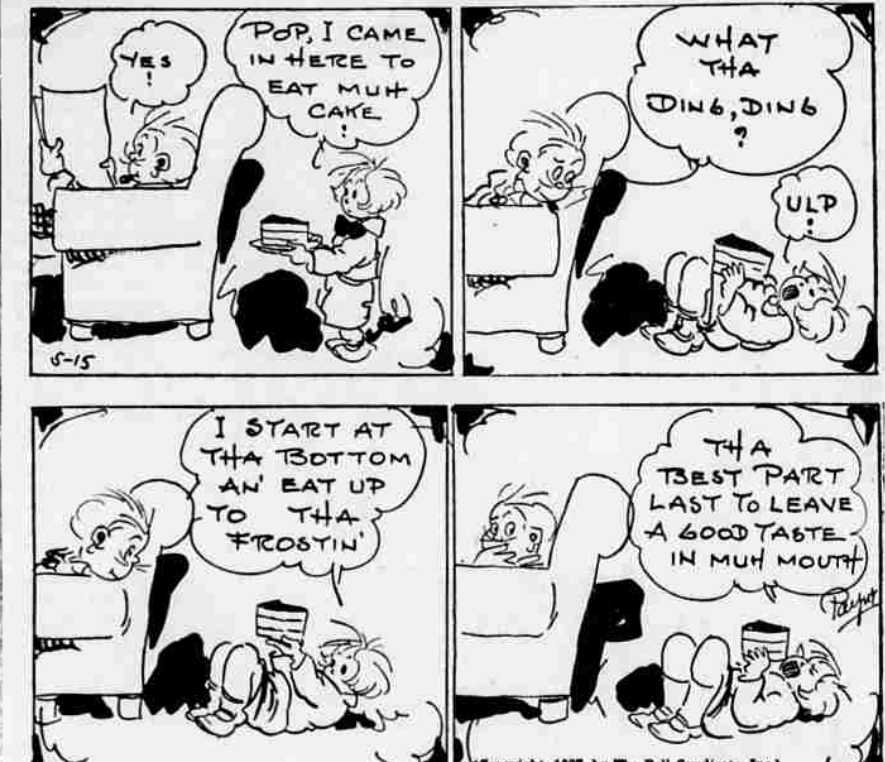
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Paris to Destroy Rats; 10 Million Infest City

PARIS — (UP) — Although Paris, plagued during the Middle Ages by the black death—the dread bubonic plague spread by rats—long since has forgotten about the dangers of these pests, their ravages cost France \$48,000,000 annually.

Rats suddenly leaped to the Paris front page recently when a girl was bitten by a rodent in a subway corridor. Parisians immediately began finding out about the little beasts that live around them all the time. Gabriel Pettit, member of the French Academy of Medicine and expert on pests, revealed that the rat population of Paris exceeded its human population. Conservative estimates, he said, placed the Paris rat colony at about 10,000,000.

In the Middle Ages every European city was subject to regular periods to the dread bubonic plague. In 1800 the rats drove them VII out of London, and he went as far as Calais before he stopped. In France they were a real danger down to the time of the

French revolution. Since then mankind has found more effective means of fighting the rodents and the disease they are likely to carry.

The last epidemic occurred just after the World war—the plague usually follows closely after war periods, when physical resistance is low and rats have had a hard time foraging for food. The origin of the epidemic was traced in a ship from India which had docked in the Seine. Rats escaped and carried the germs to their neighbors of the Paris rat colony. Soon the toll began to mount among human beings. There are 91 cases of the plague treated in 1920.

By the use of mass vaccinations and a huge rat-killing campaign the epidemic was stemmed at once. There have been no cases since 1921 in Paris. Moreover, in 1934 of 3523 live rats captured and examined in the city's laboratories, there were none bearing the bubonic germs and only four were considered suspect.

Each year France pays in rat-ex-