

MURDER ON THE BLUFF

SYNOPSIS: 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 tuxedoed 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 island. Part of my job is to find who bashed Cook's head with a flower pot and bound up Annie the maid.

Chapter 15

I Quiz The Aunts

SUDDENLY I rejected my original plan of allowing William to search the first floor while I searched the second. I was just embarking on the most trying experience of that weekend—the experience of suspecting every person in the house. If there was an intruder inside, I reasoned, our search would be reduced to a simple game of hide-and-seek with the odds decidedly in favor of the hider.

And if William could not be counted on—for a moment I considered organizing the entire household into a searching party, but only for a moment. M. Farrington, Cook, Annie and Michael were in no condition to be relied upon. Mike should have been in bed, and the other three showed signs of becoming problem cases on the least provocation. That left William, Higgins, the Skipper, Gay and myself. Five of us. Two of them women and one an old man.

If we were to go together, we were possibly turning the murderer loose to roam the house at will with the invalids unprotected. If I divided into parties of two and three, it was just possible that the murderer was being sent off into the empty house along with another unsuspecting victim. The risk was unthinkable. I am not defending my action. I am merely explaining how it seemed to me at the moment logical.

I stuffed the rope and Michael's handkerchief into my pocket. "William, I've changed my mind. I think I'll have a little talk with the rest before we go on with this."

"Hell, sir, you can't do that! We can't go sitting around talking while some bloody devil—"

My grip on myself wasn't very good, and it was slipping with every uncertain minute. "I can do whatever I see fit," I said curtly. "Come on!"

"All right, but I ain't in favor of it!" "So what?" I growled. But I did glance into every room as we went down the hall—the game room, the living room, the dining room and even the conservatory. They were all empty. If they hadn't been, perhaps I might have realized my mistake, but I was appallingly sure that the person I sought was at that moment conversing glibly in the library.

They all turned at the opening of the door—all except Michael who had been saying something. His doubled fist still rested on the desk and his face was very red. The atmosphere of the room as reflected on their faces was tense.

"You were saying, Mike?" I said. For half a second he held the pose. Then, "You're damned right I was saying that we'd better let bad enough alone."

"Michael," said the Skipper, "sit down and shut up. Now!" I doubt if her words would have had any effect, but she accompanied them with a forceful shove. Michael sat. I motioned to William to park himself somewhere.

"Have you found anything, James?" quavered M. Farrington.

"Yes," I said to William's evident astonishment. "I've found that I was looking for. I'm going to ask questions, and if you aren't particularly enjoying this, I'd advise you to answer them as carefully as possible. Gay, get a pencil and paper and write down every word of it."

There was a pause. After a moment Gay walked to the desk and picked up a pencil.

Aunt Martha Holds Out

AUNT MARTHA, I will begin with you. Your inviting us here at this time of year was unusual. This party was your idea?"

"It was."

"Will you tell us why?" I was being callous and I knew it without looking at Michael's black face.

"Certainly, Barbara seemed unwell and depressed. As I wrote you, I thought she would be better for a little company. And I hoped that—that she might bring herself to confide in you or Michael more readily than myself."

M. Farrington's lips were a thin, straight line. Her eyes at that moment gleamed the light which usually presaged a laying low of the nearest available victim. But I went on.

"Had you any reason for thinking so?"

"I had not." The eery voice of the storm seemed to mock both of us. "Had you any particular purpose in inviting Judith here?"

She stiffened, but she had the grace to blush.

"I thought she might make pleasant company for you and Michael." In spite of the tension, a general smile greeted that.

"Naturally," I said, the thought of the still figure upstairs wiping the smile from my lips with a vengeance. "Now, about last night. At what time did you go upstairs?"

"Directly after you left us. I didn't notice the exact hour. I went straight to bed, if that is what interests you."

"Did you sleep immediately?"

M. Farrington drew herself up. "The next thing I was aware of," she stated deliberately, "was Michael standing beside me with the information that Judith and Barbara were not in the house."

I felt as if cold water had unexpectedly been splashed in my face. And then the realization of my own colossal stupidity struck me. Never repeat what I am going to tell you to anyone! And there I stood before the Skipper expecting to hear it voluntarily repeated. My face burned furiously.

"Did anything unusual happen while we were out in the grounds either last night or this morning?"

"Nothing."

"You heard no footsteps in the hall upstairs this afternoon?"

"I did not."

The Skipper's Stable Trip

I THANKED her and met the Skipper's inscrutable eyes fixed on my face. I took a long breath.

"Skipper," I said, "you asked me to do this. What has been troubling you?"

She reached for a cigarette and lighted it with a steady hand. "I'm 52, Jimmie. When you reach that age it's not so easy to be consistently cheerful. That's all there is to it."

"You didn't go upstairs with Aunt Martha last night?" Stupid question. I had seen her go upstairs. She laughed softly.

"My dear boy, after you left us I smoked a cigarette, bored myself stiff, and went to bed. I think you were the last person I saw en route. Martha was asleep. So I didn't wake her. I lay awake till the thought of that dog got to me. Then I dressed and went out to her. That's all there is, Jim—except that I heard nothing in the hall."

I cleared my throat. "Why didn't you tell Aunt Martha where you were going?"

"It would have worried her."

"You went directly to the stable?"

"I did and I came directly back. I didn't hear anything but wind."

"What did you mean by the next question fly. 'What did you mean last night when you told me to keep Jude away from Michael?'"

The Skipper flicked ash from her cigarette coolly. "I meant that if Mike wants to marry Gay, I see no reason why he shouldn't have a clear field. Gay's pencil snapped.

Should I or should I not ask her point-blank what she and Jude had been talking about when M. Farrington heard them? I decided not to. To all intents and purposes that interview had already been denied. I should be giving away my knowledge and gaining nothing. I turned to Michael.

"What did Jude talk to you about in the game room?"

"His shoulders were hunched. He said that, 'is none of your damned business.'"

"I know he said that in that moment I lost the opportunity of saving us all from that folly. My anger prevented me from seeing the effect that question and his answer had on anyone in that room. Mike's attitude through that entire day had been getting increasingly in my hair. At the demand of the entire party I had accepted a responsibility as distasteful to me as I was inadequate for it. And it was becoming increasingly evident that my inadequacy might prove disastrous.

I tried to keep my temper.

"What did Jude tell you, Mike?"

Michael looked at me—a long look and a strange one. His face was set, and I knew before he opened his mouth that he was lying. Well, they had all lied.

"She told me that she thought the chitrenne were in bad shape and this storm might make them dangerous. She didn't want to alarm anyone else."

It was a feeble attempt, but I knew that a second question would be just so much wasted breath. That much was evident from the set of his chin. Behind me, Gay snorted indignantly.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



Defeated By a Fly

Louis Fox was in the lead at Washington hall, Rochester, New York. His greatest ambition was within his grasp—the winning of the undisputed world's billiard championship. John Deery, co-holder with Fox of the title from the year before, eyed his opponent disconsolately as he noted the somewhat pardonable smirk on Fox's face.

Fox stepped up to the table, sighted down his cue and was about to shoot. A fly lit on the cue ball. Laughingly, Fox shook it away. Again he prepared to shoot. The fly circled past the billiard player's eyes and again landed on the cue ball. Unsmiling, Fox shook it away. Though noisily, he returned his attention to his shot. A buzz and the fly was back. Fox jabbed at it with the end of his cue, hit the ball at which the fly was sitting and saw it roll away as the fly took off and vanished into the blue haze of tobacco smoke which overhung the room. The poke which Fox had taken at the ball constituted a string.

Deery stepped up to the table, took carefully ran out the miring and won the championship. Fox dashed from the hall, ran to a river and jumped in. He was drowned.

Life Control

While science has succeeded in increasing the average human life expectancy, it has failed, as yet, to increase the span of life. Though more men live to ripe old age today

TRADE HOLDS UP DESPITE WEATHER

NEW YORK, May 22—(AP)—Inclement weather took its toll in retail sales this week although the undercurrent of a swelling demand came closer to the surface. Dun & Bradstreet said today in their weekly trade review.

Pending strikes caused abandonment of planned schedule extension in industrial divisions, the agency said, but production totals were little disturbed.

"Buying in wholesale markets lost little of its vigor for summer and fall merchandise; re-orders, however, were smaller in volume," the report stated.

Leading regions were ahead of last year's showing and retail sales for the country as a whole were 8 to 20 percent over last year's figure.

Gains shown in major areas included Pacific coast, 12 to 18 percent.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Hearing!

TOMMY'S APPEAL TO REGAIN HIS LICENSE IS NOW BEING HEARD.

MR. TUTT, PLEASE DESCRIBE WHAT YOU SAW.

WELL, FIRST I SAW THE PLANE FALLIN', IT WAS YELLER, HAD SINGLE LOW WINGS AN' A LONG SHARP NOSE—IT HAD A SORTA DESIGN ON IT READING 'THREE-POINT'.

...THEN IT SMACKED INTER TH' BARN AN' BURNED UP, BUT BEFORE IT DID I SEE A FELLER STAGGER AWAY FRUM IT AN'...

WILL TOMMY TOMKINS COME FORWARD PLEASE!

IS THIS THE PILOT YOU SAW... STAGGERING AWAY....

W-WELL...UH... I'D SAY...YEP, ERR...I MEAN, YES!...HE SHORE LOOKED LIKE 'IM, ALL RIGHT!

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Some Surprise!

RECKON BRIAR AIN'D BETTER TAKE THIS MONEY RIGHT DOWN TO OLD CALEB CRUNCHEN, THE BANKER, EH?

I RECKON SO, TOO, SON.

GOOD MORNING, MR. CRUNCHEN, I'VE COME DOWN HERE TO—

STOP RIGHT THERE, YOUNG MAN! I KNOW THE REST O' THE STORY! YOU'VE COME DOWN HERE TO WEEP THE SAME KIND O' TEARS HETTY HIGGINS WOULD IF SHE COULD, EH?

I'VE COME DOWN HERE TO PAY MRS. HIGGINS NOTE IN FULL WITH INTEREST—

YOU'VE WHAT!!!?

THE NEBBS—Just Easy Money

HELLO SWEETIE PIE, YOU WON'T SEE LITTLE LUTHER PEDDLING HEN FRUIT MUCH LONGER—I GOT AN EASIER WAY OF MAKING A LIVING—I'M PLAYING THE PONIES NOW!

I GET INFORMATION RIGHT FROM THE TRACK—I AIN'T HAD A LOSING DAY YET—LAST WEEK I KNOCKED ONE OVER AND GOT 64 BUCKS FOR TWO AND I GOT ONE THAT'S STEAMING HOT TODAY!

WILL YOU BET TWO FOR ME BUT DON'T LOSE IT—I'M SAVING UP FOR SOME SHOES

THIS ONE WILL BE IN THE BARN BEATING OATS BEFORE THE REST FINISH

BET \$2 FOR ME, LUTHER, BUT I WANT IT ON CREDIT

SUNDAY MORNING

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



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S'MATTER POP

By C. M. PAYNE



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By HAL FORREST

REDISCOUNT RATE HELD AT TWO PC.

\$14,000,000 SUM FOR FREIGHT CARS

SAN FRANCISCO, May 22—(AP)—The Federal Reserve bank of San Francisco announced continuance of the two percent rediscount rate today on borrowings by banks of the seven far western states against commercial paper collateral. This rate has been in effect more than three years.

Discount business of the reserve bank, while at a low level, has been somewhat higher this year than for some time, but chiefly for short-term loans.

The total discounts at the reserve bank May 19 were \$344,000, a drop from \$169,000 in the last week, but virtually triple the amount of a year ago—\$122,000.

LaGrande Pioneer Dies

LA GRANDE, Ore., May 22—(AP)—Mrs. Clara Condit, 71, wife of City Commissioner William Condit of La Grande and a Grande Ronde valley pioneer, died here last night. Funeral services will be held here Sunday afternoon. Mrs. Condit came to La Grande in 1872 from Wyoming and was one of the first women clerks in this city.

NEW YORK, May 22—(AP)—Union Pacific Railroad company announced today details of a freight car building program involving \$14,000,000.

At its Omaha, Neb., and Portland, Ore., shops the company will build 2,088 box cars and at the Grand Island, Neb., shops 700 automobile cars will be constructed.

American Car & Foundry company will build for the road 1,000 ballast and coal cars, and 200 tank cars will be turned over by the General American Transportation corporation.

All of the cars are scheduled for completion as rapidly as possible during 1937, the company stated, in order to take care of expanding transcontinental freight traffic.

Favor Moody for Job

SALEM, May 22—(AP)—The state board of control today approved the action of the capitol reconstruction commission in formally requesting Attorney General I. H. Van Winkle to assign Ralph E. Moody to the full-time task of legal advisor to the commission as an assistant attorney general.