MURDER ON THE BLUFF

BY ESTHER TYLER

SYNOPSIS: Attractive Blinshop is shot to death on a wild and stormy night at Farrington Bluff, home of Michael's aunts. Mike dislocates a shoulder hunting for the missing Skipper, his tall and tweedy 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 gets me to lead a group investigation of the murder. (The storm maroons us on this island.) Suddenly we find Cook knocked out by a flower pot and Annie the maid bound up. I start questioning everyone.

Chapter 16

'You're All Lying!'

IT HAD been 9:30 by my watch when the Skipper went upstairs. That sprightly conversation in the hall might have taken five minutes, but probably less. And in any case, according to Michael, the conference in th game-room must have ended shortly after I went into the library.

"And just why didn't you rejoin the party?"

Michael swallowed. "Jude had a letter to write and I decided to go out and have a look at things—the chimneys and bridge and all that."

I could have wrung his neck. If he had to lie to me, why in hell couldn't he lie plausibly? My hand came down on the desk with a whack.

"If you're all guilty, there's no point in my going on with this. If you're not, you might be decent enough to tell the truth!"

M. Farrington's voice broke the deadly silence.

"You feel that someone has been untruthful, James?"

"Untruthful!" I fairly howled. "You're lying, every damned one of you! Do you expect me to read your minds?"

The atmosphere was charged with something I could not place, something unhappy and a little eery. There was no answer, even from M. Farrington. I should have done anything but what I did do, which was nothing more nor less than to lose my head completely.

Feverishly I hurled questions at the rest of them at Gay, at William, at Annie, at Higgins, at Cook. I wasted just that much breath. They knew nothing, any of them. They had gone to bed at hours varying from Cook's nine o'clock to Higgins' eleven. Gay had taken aspirin and gone to sleep. Cook had slept naturally. William, Annie and Higgins admitted to not sleeping, but had heard absolutely nothing but the storm.

"And no one here went into the kitchen at any other time?" My sense of futility increased with every second of that pause. I whirled on Michael.

His chin came up aggressively. "No!"

My next gesture was even more foolhardy. I reached in my pocket.

"Then how did this get into the kitchen?" I demanded, and threw in front of him the handkerchief I had found in the entry.

Exposing All My Cards

THEY all stared. All except M. Farrington, I think, realized what it was. Slowly the red mounted in Mike's face. He reached for the thing, and I thought that he started as his eye caught the daintily executed name in one corner. His voice was the voice of a man who had been hit on the head.

"I don't know." His fingers played absently with the thing. "I don't know." He sat down slowly.

"But it's yours?"

He passed a hand vaguely over his eyes. "I don't—Yes. It must be. He went on staring at it, fascinated.

"But there is nothing to indicate that Michael took it to the kitchen." That was M. Farrington, bristling like a mother hen. "Surely one's handkerchief case is not under lock and key. It would be a simple matter for anyone to—"

For the first time in my life I interrupted M. Farrington, and I did it rudely. "Yes, I know," I said. "But it rather conclusively proves that the person who hurled that pot at Cook has been in the house long enough to be either borrowing or stealing handkerchiefs."

I should have had sense enough to realize the danger of putting all my cards on the table, but it was blurted out beyond recall. And in characteristic ways every person in the room reacted to the statement.

M. Farrington's hand flew to her throat with a quivering "Oh!" The Skipper sat suddenly bolt upright, her face stern. Instinctively Gay clutched Mike's arm, and they huddled together. Beyond them I caught a glimpse of Higgins' face and of William, rigidly motionless. Annie and Cook began to jabber meaninglessly.

With an almost mechanical rhythm we eyed each other—you—you—you? It was horrible. Had a board creaked or a window rattled, I firmly believe that we should all have dived for shelter under the nearest pieces of furniture. But nothing creaked.

You? You? You?

The Skipper broke the spell. She pushed back her chair with a clatter. "This is ridiculous! Why should anyone in this room strike Cook or Annie? Any one of us could go into the kitchen for a dozen reasons. There's someone else in this house, Jim. And a person who forced his way through locked doors would have no difficulty in finding a handkerchief."

A Low Agonized Whimper

"I WAS merely supposing," I said. "I'm in a nasty spot, and I'm not trying to wriggle out of it. I'm simply putting it up to you. The murderer is either in this room or at large in the house. If he or she is here, a search would provide a good opportunity for more deviltry. If not, and we fail to search, we are leaving ourselves at the mercy of somebody who has already killed one of us. I'm leaving it up to you. I won't take the responsibility. What shall we do?"

"Search," said the Skipper promptly. "Does anyone have a different opinion?" I said.

Breathless silence.

"Very well. We'll all go. There are nine of us." I did some rapid arithmetic. Four men—one along in years and one incapacitated. Of the five women, Gay alone looked capable of walking across a room without staggering. In my coat pocket my fingers brushed the revolver with which I had disgraced myself earlier in the day.

"Higgins," I said, "take this revolver and stand on the landing. If anyone you don't know shows up in either hall, you are to shoot, do you understand? And shoot straight. William—Miss Palmer, Mr. Michael, and Miss Farrington are to go with you. Keep check on every member of your party, and be sure that Higgins is at his post as you come out of every room. We'll search this room now. Then you wait in the hall and give Higgins moral support. When we finish the first room upstairs, we'll signal Higgins and you can go through the next one down here, and so on. Make sure of all the doors and—"

From the hall came a sound—a low agonized whimper that cut short my orders as if by the push of a button. It came from the hall and with it came another sound—a slow, soft shuffling. It was coming nearer—nearer! The hair on my neck was prickling.

Nearer — nearer — It was in the room! For a moment I could not see a thing, but one step brought me within full range of the open door.

(Copyright, 1937, Esther Tyler)

We find havoc in Aunt Martha's room, tomorrow.

"You're lying!" I shouted.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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

Monte Carlo

Hardly a motion picture or story based on the famous gambling casino of Monte Carlo fails to include at least one suicide, murder or theft. Yet, in reality, Monte Carlo has one of the lowest suicide and crime rates in the world. This is chiefly due to a remarkable system of espionage developed by the management, the "Association of the Watering Place and Strangers Club of Monaco."

Whenever possible, an investigation is made into the finances of each gambler who is lured to Monte Carlo by the dream of "breaking the bank." When he loses all that the management believes he can afford to lose, he is politely but firmly requested to leave. In some cases, however, there is a slip-up in this system and a gambler goes broke. A special fund is provided for this eventuality. Rather than have a man on their hands who might be driven by desperation to commit suicide or turn criminal, the management pays for his transportation "back home" after warning him against ever coming to Monte Carlo again.

Temperature Paradox

Whether you are right or left handed, the chances are that your body temperature is higher on the left side than on the right, but that your left hand is colder than your right, according to a series of experiments recently conducted at the Worcester State hospital, Massachusetts. The differences in temperature are relatively small but definitely ascertainable. No reason for the varying temperature paradox has been discovered.

Human Horses

A weird sight was the crew of couriers maintained by early sultans of Turkey. Decked out to resemble horses, these men ran entirely barefooted, carried pieces of silver bits in their mouths and wore mane-like feathers in their hats. In one hand they carried a hatchet, in the other a water container. From their belts and garters hung tiny bells.

Tomorrow: The Broken-Hearted Queen.

Movie Pickets Irk, Plan "Wreck Squad"

HOLLYWOOD, Calif., May 24—(AP)—The screen actors' guild today threatened to organize a "wreck crew" to drive strike pickets away from the motion picture studios if they do not "lay off molesting, intimidating or attempting to intimidate actors."

The ultimatum, in the form of a statement issued by the guild, followed a series of incidents at Paramount yesterday. The gasoline was drained from the automobile of an actress, and a rock was thrown through the window of another player's machine.

Travel organizations in South Africa plan to spend $400,000 annually to attract tourists.

Salem Ranks Third

SALEM, May 24.—(AP)—Among 32 key cities of the Pacific northwest Salem ranked third place in building activity for the first quarter of this year, says a statistical report by the Equitable Savings & Loan association. Only Portland and Seattle were ahead of Salem. Salem's total for the three months was $483,210 of which $122,456 was for residential construction.

SUBURBAN HEIGHTS

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

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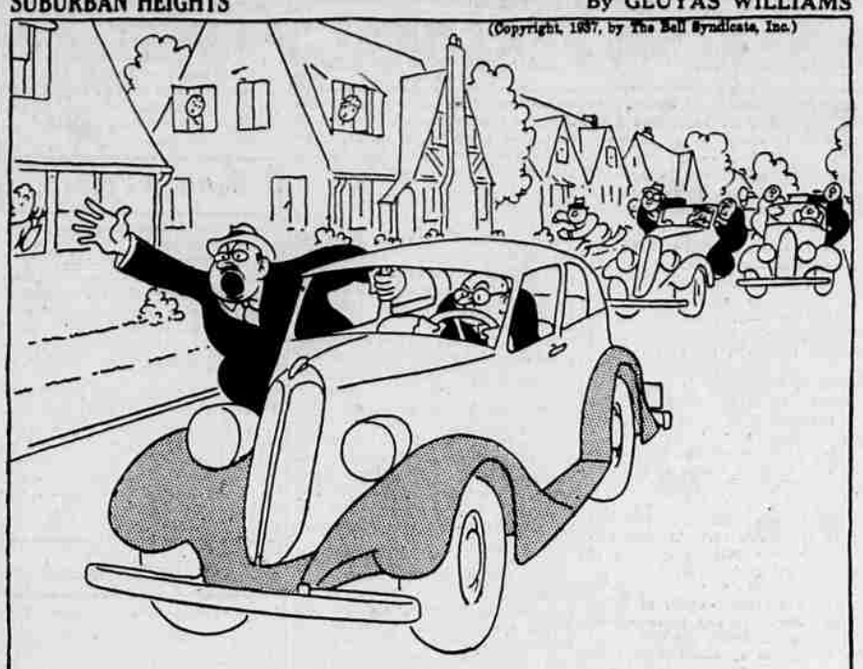

IT LOOKED LIKE A CASE OF A STOLEN CAR WHEN FRED PERLEY COMMANDEERED A NEIGHBOR'S AUTOMOBILE AND SET OFF AFTER HIS FLEEING CAR. THE WHOLE COMMUNITY JOINED IN THE CHASE AND WERE A LITTLE DISAPPOINTED WHEN THEY FOUND THAT MRS. PERLEY HAD MERELY GONE OFF WITH FRED'S GOLF CLUBS IN THE CAR

5-18 GLUYAS WILLIAMS

S'MATTER POP

By C. M. PAYNE

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TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Cards Stacked Against Tommy!

By HAL FORREST

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—What's the Secret?

By EDWIN ALGER

THE NEBBS—Duck Soup

By SOL HESS

Chinese Tortured For Coin By White Pair

PORTLAND, Ore., May 24.—(AP)—Despite his pleas that he had no money, Chin Soo, 89-year-old patriarch of Portland's Chinese colony, was tortured today with a hammer and a blazing candle by two unidentified white men.

Chin told detectives the men accosted him while he was seeking scraps of old boxes which he sells as kindling, the pair demanding to know where Chin kept his cash box.

After the men "roughed" his face with a hammer, they took off a shoe, applying heat with a candle.

Chin finally gave in and revealed the location of the box—containing only a thin dime.

The Law's Inequality.

KANSAS CITY, Mo., May 24.—(UP)—Roger S. Miller was scolded and given a traffic ticket for failure to signal a turn in his automobile. Driving on carefully he was stopped again by another policeman, commended as a "careful, experienced driver."

Craters of Moon Open.

ARCO, Idaho, May 24.—(UP)—The Craters of the Moon, Idaho's only national monument, officially opened today with state and local dignitaries taking part

Invitations Mailed F.D.R. Jr. Wedding

WILMINGTON, Del., May 24.—(AP)—Invitations to the wedding of Miss Ethel Du Pont and Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., on June 30 have been mailed, it was announced today.

The invitations fix the wedding for 5 p. m. (eastern daylight time) at Christ church, Greenville, near the home of the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Du Pont. A reception will be held at their home after the ceremony.

President and Mrs. Roosevelt announced in Washington recently they would attend the wedding and reception.

Justice Belt Back

SALEM, May 24.—(AP)—Justice Harry H. Belt of the state supreme court returned here today after attending the American Law Institute at Washington, D. C. Returning by a southern route Judge Belt motored 7,800 miles.

Transport Damaged

FORT WASHINGTON, Md., May 24.—(AP)—Fire of undetermined origin swept the superstructure of the U. S. army transport General Rucker, tied to a dock here today. It caused damage which post officers estimated unofficially as high as $30,000.