MURDER ON THE BLUFF

SYNOPSIS: A mysterious shot kills attractive Jude Hinshop on a wild, stormy night at Farrington Bluff, home of Michael's aunts. A series of strange attacks makes everyone jittery in the marooned household: Mike, the Skipper, his tall, tweedy younger aunt; Aunt Martha, stout and prudish, Gay Palmer, Mike's red-headed sweetheart; myself and the four servants. On the second nerve-racking day, we find a man's body below the cliff. It is Michael's father, insane and supposedly dead since Mike was an infant. Mike gets drunk and scraps with Gay.

Chapter 26

Norman's Story

I CLIMBED out of the hideous silence like a drowning man coming up for the last time.

"Stop it!" I roared; and my voice struck weirdly on my own ears. "Stop it! Are you crazy?"

He whirled on me. "Yes. Do you finally get it? Crazy! Mad! Insane!"

I was struggling desperately with the horrible doubts in my mind. "You're drunk," I said. "You're drunk. There's nothing else wrong with you. You're imagining things."

He moved away from my restraining hand, leaving me with the words still in my throat. "Nice going," he said, and stood grinning at me foolishly.

His unexpected calm frightened me more than his raving. Was it possible that he had inherited — something? Could it have been Michael, and not that wretched bundle on the billiard table, who had—?

"Mike," I said. "Mike, listen—" and we all turned to face the Skipper surveying us grimly from the door. She was looking beyond me, straight at Michael.

"Well," she said at last. "Now what?"

Mike's voice was thick and deliberately blurred, it seemed to me. "Nutta thing," he asserted with loud geniality. "C'mon in, Skipper, and make Jimmie keep quiet."

What the devil was he up to? There had been no liquor in him a minute ago. Putting on an act for the Skipper. Why? I glared at him.

"Skip it!" I growled. "How's Aunt Martha, Skipper?"

The Skipper had gotten the point as thoroughly as any one of us, but she never blinked.

"Sleeping. I dosed her well, incidentally, that's a good prescription for all of us—sleep."

Mike chuckled drunkenly, too damned drunkenly to be convincing.

For a split second he and the Skipper looked at one another, the Skipper's frown enigmatical, Mike's eyes soberly defiant. Then he turned and reeled out of the room.

Gay broke the awkward pause.

"No guts," she said.

"Would you mind," the Skipper's voice was quizzical, "telling us what leads you to that conclusion?"

Gay hesitated. Then slowly, "Nothing. Nerves of my own, maybe."

Hiding A Madman

SHE turned to the mess on the floor, stooped and began to pick up broken bits of glass. After a moment, I moved to help her. Righting the table, I deposited the debris upon it. There was no blinking the fact that with the actual danger gone and a good 18 hours of waiting before release could possibly come, our nerves were going to play the devil with us. Mike was drunk, worn out and suffering from a series of nasty shocks. Upon thinking it over, I put no credence in his wild announcement. It was merely a sample of what we might expect unless we all got a grip on ourselves. Did Gay believe him? Her face was forbidding. Certainly their continual rows had at last gone beyond the joke stage.

Our task was finished without comment from the Skipper, who sat on the divan smoking, her eyes on the floor. Gay, I think, was wishing herself out of that room quite as heartily as I was.

"I think," said the Skipper, "that we'd better clear up a few things right now."

Very decidedly I did not want to hear that explanation.

"Why not wait?" I ventured.

The Skipper shook her head. "There's been too much waiting. I want you to tell this to Michael at once." She was leaning forward, not looking at either of us, her words coming with slow precision. "Norman Farrington was my half-brother — Martha's brother. She was very fond of him. Shortly after Michael was born, his father contracted some kind of jungle fever in South America. He never recovered — mentally. He has been in private asylums ever since. Mike never knew it. There seemed no reason why he should. It had ruined Martha's life and that was enough. The condition was incurable." She paused to draw heavily on her cigarette.

I said eagerly, "It isn't hereditary?"

"Obviously not." She blew a long, steady stream of smoke into the already clouded room. "Several months ago Norman somehow managed to get away from Dr. Crane. Martha used to visit him regularly and I imagine that she slipped him some money. At any rate, he got hold of some, and bribed two of the guards. The place is only 10 miles from here. Half an hour after he got out, he arrived here in a taxi. Unfortunately he was enjoying a temporarily lucid interval, and I had trouble with Martha. His stories of the life in that place were—pitiful. Nothing I could say would convince her that he was not permanently cured."

I poured her some brandy, but she didn't taste it.

"Martha worshiped him. And I—well, he was my brother. Between them, they convinced me against my better judgment to allow him to stay here. No one knew about it but Higgins. Fortunately none of the other servants had seen him arrive. And Higgins was—Higgins.

"We kept him in Mike's room, locked in most of the time. Once or twice we brought him downstairs at night when the other servants were out of the way and it seemed quite safe. Higgins managed his meals and his laundry, and he used some of Mike's clothes. The asylum was constantly in touch with us, but we lied like troopers. He really did seem to be all right. That was eight weeks ago.

"I suppose the strain began to tell on me, and Martha began to worry. She wanted me to see a doctor, and so on. The last thing I wanted in this house was a doctor. I might have gone into town just to satisfy her, but I couldn't risk leaving her here alone with Norman. In the end, she sent for Michael and Jude. Her plan worked, of course. I didn't dare allow that girl to come here without some man in the house to look after her. I was criminally negligent. I allowed you all to come—even asked you myself."

Quietly she drained her brandy glass.

"We transferred Norman to Higgins' room. While we were at dinner Friday night, he escaped. I said nothing to Martha. Her heart is bad. I went out to look for him myself, and when I got back things had happened. I kept quiet because I knew we could get no outside help. We were as much on guard as we could be, and the idea of a roaming, homicidal maniac wouldn't have cheered any of you up.

"Martha is childish in some respects. She will never believe that Norman had anything to do with all this. I'm glad of it. All things considered, his falling over the bluff was the best thing that could have happened. It ends the damned mess anyway. I wish you'd tell this to Mike before he drinks himself into thinking that he's John Wilkes Booth."

She rose slowly to her feet. "I think I'll lie down now for a bit, if you don't mind."

No Wedding In The Spring

I WATCHED her go up the stairs, head and shoulders very straight and the hand resting on the railing limp and weary. Gay was standing stiffly at the window when I finally turned around.

"Well?" I said awkwardly.

She turned with a twisted smile. "I haven't been exactly True Blue Lou, have I, Jim?"

I muttered inanely, "None of us is covered with blue ribbons. Anyone gets off his oats."

She began an aimless ramble about the room, fingering knick-knacks without interest. "That doesn't help things much. We'd been thinking of a wedding in the spring, Jim. I don't think we'll bother now."

"That's stupid!" I said it all the more crudely because I knew that I lied. "The best thing for you to do is to forget that whole damned fuss. It's all over. Why keep it alive?"

"We won't be able to help it. Every time we lose our heads a little, we'll remember that we let each other down. We'll be flinging it at each other."

I had no answer ready for that one. Gay seized the poker and began to beat monotonously on the fender.

"It's been rather a costly weekend for me."

"Look here," I said roughly, "what do you think it's been for Jude? Or the Skipper?"

The annoying rapping continued. "The Skipper deserved it in a way. She brought it on herself." She was deliberately working herself up. More nerves.

"Bunk!" I snapped, heading for the door. "I'm going to talk to Mike. There's nothing for you to worry about. Why don't you go to bed?"

"There's a lot to worry about," doggedly. "The more I think—"

But I walked out and left her to her thoughts. Higgins was in the hall, arranging some roses.

"Storm's over, Higgins," I said. "Everything will be all right by morning."

"Mr. Jimmie—" He stopped me on the stairs. "Could I— That is, would you have time to—"

I had never heard the man stutter before in all my life.

(Copyright, 1937, Ethel Tyler)

A bullet rips through Aunt Martha's shoulder, Monday.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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

The Henpecked Pirate

To Major Stede Bonnet is attributed the origin of "walking the plank," the quaint method used in the heyday of piracy for getting rid of captives at sea. Also credited to Major Bonnet is a rating along with history's bloodiest cutthroats of the sea. Yet, strange as it seems, he lived a respectable life until he was middle-aged and was driven to piracy by a nagging wife.

An officer in the British Royal Colonial Army in Barbados, the Major retired on half pay and became a planter. A pillar of his church, dignified and wealthy, he became one of the most prominent and esteemed men in the West Indies, but little of the esteem was held by his wife. A raging shrew, she made life miserable for her husband. He stood it as long as he could, then in the spring of 1717 began looking around for a stout ship. No one knew what he wanted it for. He was known to be almost entirely ignorant of nautical matters.

A vessel he bought, though, and lining up as shady a bunch of seafaring men as he could find on Barbados, he put to sea. A few miles out, his merchant marine flag was hauled down and up fluttered the "Jolly Roger" in its place. Major Bonnet, retired army officer and planter, had become Captain Bonnet, pirate. Strangely enough, he proved a very successful one.

Falling in with Blackbeard, the most dreaded pirate of the day Bonnet served a brief apprenticeship in the business, then went out on his own ship. Ship after ship fell prey to him. Within a year, his name made fair to eclipse even that of his late instructor, Blackbeard. His career was destined to be short, however. Captured on Sullivan's Island near Cape Fear, Bonnet was brought to trial at Charleston in 1718 and was hanged on September 10.

OLD FOLKS SEEK TO OUST JEFFREY

PORTLAND, June 4.—(AP)—A meeting of a Portland faction of the Townsend pension plan movement at which a demand was made for the immediate removal of John A. Jeffrey, district manager, without waiting for expiration of his term at the end of June came to light today.

A formal resolution was addressed to the area board, demanding action against Jeffrey. Leaders of the abdication move explained that of 60 clubs in Multnomah county, 38 are committed to a program or reorganizing the district are a board and the replacement of Jeffrey.

Use Mail Tribune want ads.

Mrs. Hunt Presents Force With Berries

A box of Oregon improved strawberries was the present to "Mail Tribune folks," today from Mrs. C. G. Hunt, 1279 Sunset avenue.

The gigantic berries were 5½ to 6 inches in circumference and some weighed one ounce. They were grown by Mrs. Hunt, and lasted no time at all, although several man-sized bites were necessary to get rid of one berry.

BATH NIGHT — By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

'S MATTER POP — By C. M. PAYNE

TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Federal Agent Contacts Tommy! — By HAL FORREST

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—The "Idee" — By EDWIN ALGER

THE NEBBS—Great Grief — By SOL HESS

CHAMBER MEMBER SEALS NOW READY

Official seals to be displayed by members of the Jackson county chamber of commerce are ready for distribution, chamber officials announced this morning.

The seals, first ever to be used by the local chamber, are cardboard circles 8 inches in diameter and advertise membership. Products, attractions and industries are pictured within the circle as follows: Crater Lake, aviation, onions, tomatoes, peaches, pears, farming, tourists, stock, fishing, gladiolus, mining and lumber.

A. H. Banwell, chamber secretary stated that the emblems would be sent to members as soon as possible, but that an unusual rush of business might delay distribution. For that reason, citizens are requested to call at the chamber office to receive their seals, if possible.

Lawn mower service, call and del. Ideal Bike Shop. Tel. 895. 411 E. Main.

JEAN HARLOW ILL OF GALL TROUBLE

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif., June 4.—(AP)—Jean Harlow, stricken with inflammation of the gall bladder, was confined to her home under a physician's care today.

The blonde screen actress passed a comfortable night, said her mother, Mrs. Jean Bellow.

She became ill last Saturday. Work on her picture with Clark Gable, "Saratoga," was suspended pending her recovery.

It was her third illness this year. Returning from a personal appearance tour in the east, she suffered an attack of influenza last February. Early in April, she was in the hospital after having several wisdom teeth extracted.

WINDOW GLASS—We sell window glass and will replace your broken windows reasonably. Trowbridge Cabinet Works.

Use Mail Tribune want ads.