

MURDER ON THE BLUFF

SYNOPSIS: A mysterious shot kills Jude Blinshop, my old flame, at the start of our stormy weekend at Farrington Bluff, home of Michael's aunt. A series of strange attacks occurs. Then we find the body of Michael's mad father below the bluff. Aunt Victoria, the stout and Victorian, is shot in the shoulder, and nearly finished with sleeping powder. The Skipper, Mike's tall, tweedy younger aunt, disappears. Cook, William, the chauffeur, and Annie, the maid, suspect Higgins, the old butler. I look him in his room, half believing him the killer. Then I find Mike arguing with his fiancée, Gay Palmer.

Chapter 45 'Look For The Loft'

CLOSING the door behind me, I leaned against it. The person who had forced the door of Jude's room to lure or to force Norman Farrington out toward the bluff must have known that the old man was there and that he had used a key to get there. No one else should have known of the existence of that key. And Norman Farrington's son had gone in search of it and found it!

He was standing there gazing at me as a man might gaze at a snake which had sprung at him in the middle of Fifth avenue.

"You heard that, I suppose?" Michael's voice was bleak.

"Yes." Suddenly, unreasonably, I thought, "We are three characters in a play. Nothing has happened. Nothing will happen until we remember the lines."

Michael's hand shot into his coat pocket and dragged out something which dropped into my own hand. I found myself staring down at the skeleton key from Norman Farrington's pocket, staring at it and wishing violently that I had never seen the damned thing.

"How did you know it was there?" "Guilt!" Michael's voice was hurt, not bitter. And Mike was no actor—or was he? The next instant—

Gay rushed to his rescue. "This is ridiculous! I was being a sap. That's all."

"So you think? This time Michael's voice was harsh. "But Jimmie doesn't look at his face."

"Hold on, Mike," I said. "I haven't said a word. Answer me decently, can't you?"

He looked at me and suddenly his face crashed into a grin. "All right," he said. "I went snooping around. Saw the broken lock on Jude's door and just happened to think that if my father had a key that you were, we could be pretty sure that you were right about his fall not being an accident. You see, if he was the guy who crowned William, he must have gotten through that door after it was locked. I saw you examine it afterward and it was all right the second time you looked it."

I didn't believe him. He was following my own train of thought—but I didn't believe him. Would anyone ever be able to trust anybody after this ghastly mess was over?

"Good!" The friendliness of my voice was a little lesson in hypocrisy all in itself. "That was what I was thinking. We're letting ourselves get too lumpy."

Gay sprawled on a sofa. "I'm curious she sighed gustily. "If I ask another question, brings my neck who has a cigarette?"

Watching Michael's lighter flare, I observed, "A few more questions and we'll all go gaga. It's time this outfit did a little relaxing."

But we didn't do any too well at it. There we sat, three people who were sure hours before would have sworn on a stack of Bibles that we would have trusted each other till the end of time. And we hadn't—and didn't.

I was distrustful of Mike. Gay had precipitated the whole scene because she shared the feeling. And Mike, if he were innocent, could have taken that key for only one reason—to prevent the murderer's finding it. If he had been sure that neither of us was the murderer, he would certainly have told us of his discovery. If he were innocent—if he had been sure—if I'll say it! The word beat a weary, rhythmical refrain in my head the while we chatted aimlessly about little Tessie Blake and her meandering husband, about the inadvisability of looking for a new apartment until our plans for the summer were more definite.

"Cook?" I said. "Hysterics? I'll just have a look at her. He right back."

"Meaning that we'll see you at breakfast?" demanded Gay testily.

William, his face decidedly strained, opened Cook's door.

He didn't seem to have any intention of letting me into the room. "She's better, sir. I guess she'll be all right. Has Miss Barbara been—" He left the question dangling.

"No," I said shortly. "Do you mind?" And I elbowed past him.

Cook's hysterics had been genuine enough. Her face was ghastly. There were great sagging circles under her eyes and her chin was quivering painfully.

"How are you now?" I tried to sound kind.

All of her remarkable volubility was gone. She played restlessly with the covers without looking up.

"I ain't so good, sir." It was the weak, exhausted voice of a sick woman. "I ain't so good."

Well, considering the state she had been in when she had prepared dinner, that was not at all surprising. "It's nearly morning now. It will soon be over."

"Yes," closing her eyes, "yes—nearly morning."

I waited for William to close the door after me. Then I stepped across to Higgins' room, found my key, knocked softly, and went in. The old man had been sitting on the bed, head in hands and fully dressed. His face was haggard.

"It's only I, Higgins," I said, sitting down beside him. "Don't be frightened. I came to see how you were."

"I'm doing very well, sir." With a start I realized that he had been crying.

"Higgins," I said. "I don't for a minute believe that you are guilty and I'm trying my best to prove that you're not. Do you believe that?"

"For a fleeting second his eyes rested on my face, but they immediately looked away."

"Yes—Mr. Jimmie," he said shakily.

I put a hand on his shoulder. "You almost told me something once," I said. "Tell me now. No one can hear us, and it may be important."

"I can't, sir. It ain't that I don't trust you. I'd trust you like I would Mr. Michael himself. It ain't that at all, sir."

"Then what is it, Higgins?"

"I was wrong, sir. And you might not believe that I was, and that that would be awful. Awful! I found out how wrong I was. I can't tell you nothing, sir!"

"Can't you tell me what you found out? It might be just as important."

"No! The fierceness of his answer made me jump."

One Last Desperate Try

LIGHTING a cigarette, I got to my feet and began to pace the small room. His head in his hands, the old man seemed to forget my existence. He was not guilty. But he knew who was—and it was all right the second time you looked it.

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Hysterics With Trimmings

THE conversation dragged, dwindled and finally expired. Coherent thought, it would seem, expired with it. If I tried to think about the Skipper's whereabouts, the probable guilt of the Millers obtruded itself into the picture. If I tried to come to any conclusion about the Millers, I immediately thought of Higgins. And so it went. Out of the long silence came Michael's voice.

"I'm tired and I'm going to bed," he said. "Hysterics with all the trimmings."

I jumped at a loophole for escape.

We find the Skipper, tomorrow.

NEW TRAVEL RECORD EXPECTED TO BE SET AT CAVES MONUMENT

OREGON CAVES, June 26.—Early indications point toward another record-breaking travel year for this national monument which began its regular summer season May 15, offering scheduled guide trips through the caves and carrying on general services.

Early travel has shown a substantial increase over 1936 figures, especially during the past two weeks. Out-of-state points are well represented, attesting the growing popularity of the caves area as a national attraction. Final preparations for the summer throng of visitors are now being completed.

With the arrival of the complete summer staff within the next week or so, evening programs under the stars around a blazing bonfire will be started, presenting talent from Oregon colleges in songs, instrumental music, readings and other entertainment.

Picnic grounds are available within

NEWSMEN GIVEN RIGHT TO GUARD INFORMANT

HARRISBURG, Pa., June 27.—(AP)—Governor George H. Earle signed today a bill permitting newspapermen to withhold the sources of their information, from any court.

The newsmen would have the same professional status as attorneys, clergymen and physicians on the witness chair. The law is effective immediately.

The governor said that, unlike laws in other states, the Pennsylvania statute affects only those actually engaged in the collection, writing and preparation of news.

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STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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THE RISE OF THE WHITE RACE!
400 YEARS AGO, THE WHITE RACE WAS CONFINED TO ABOUT 2,000,000 OF THE EARTH'S 57,000,000 SQUARE MILES OF LAND SURFACE... TODAY WHITE GOVERNMENTS CONTROL EIGHT-NINTHS OF THE EARTH THOUGH OTHER RACES OUTNUMBER THE WHITES ABOUT 3 TO ONE

All the more remarkable is this "rise of the white race" when it is considered that the people of the colored races outnumber the whites about three to one. The world's white population is, roughly, half a billion. The rest of humanity is made up of about one and a half billion non-whites. This overwhelming preponderance of the colored races is being increased every day. Their birth rate is far higher than that of the white race. The question now seems to be how long the white minority can keep its domination over the "rising tide of color."

Symphony At 8
Introduced to music at the age of three, Mozart (his full name was Joaquinus Christophorus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart) studied the harpsichord with his sister under the instruction of his father, a noted violinist. At four, he played minuets and had already begun composing his own little pieces.

Taken on a tour of the "crowned heads of Europe" when he was six, Mozart remained unspelled by the attention and praise bestowed on him. In April of 1764, as an eight-year old, he was presented to the royal family of England. Immediately afterward, he composed a symphony (K.16), along with a set of sonatas, dedicated to the queen, and a tiny anthem ("Spruch") for four voices.

HISTORIC MINING TOWN PARTIALLY DESTROYED

BONANZA, Colo., June 27.—(AP)—Flames left a third of this historic mining camp in ruins today.

A fire, starting in a store building, swept quickly through abandoned portions of the old camp, most of which were unoccupied since the days when Bonanza was a "boom" town.

A new camp, established nearby since the revival of mining operations in recent years, was not endangered.

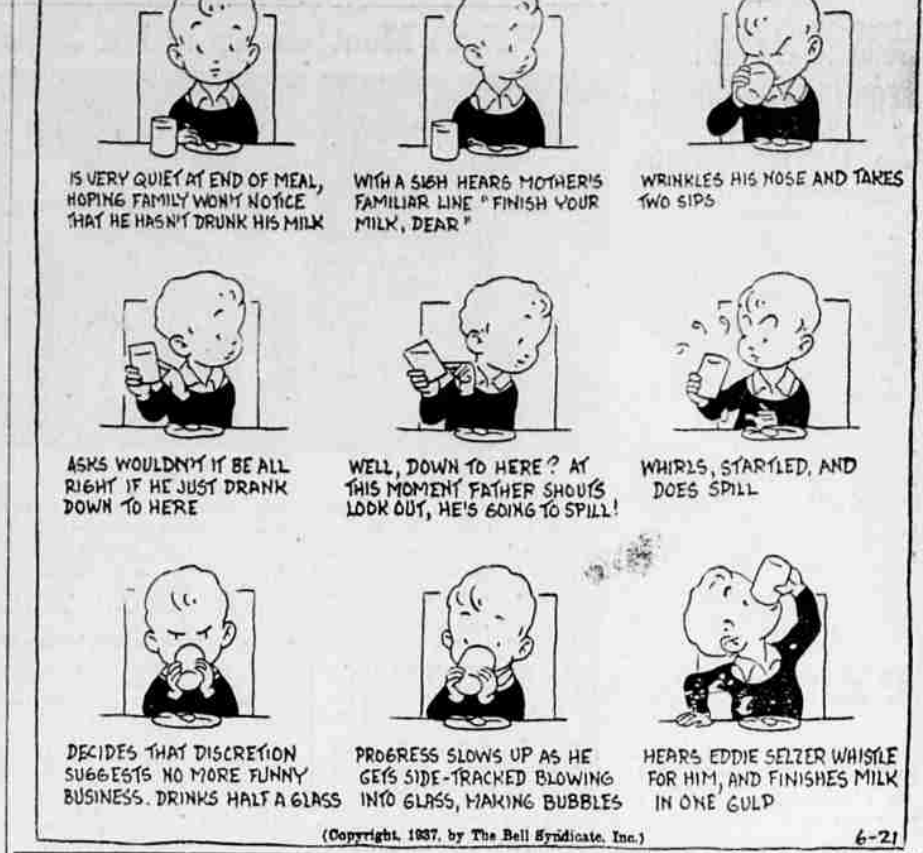
A patrol was maintained over the smouldering ruins.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Flying Into Danger!

A SPEEDY MONOPLANE CLIMBS UP INTO THE MOONLIT SKY AWAY FROM UNION AIRPORT AT METROPOLIS CITY... 2847

IN IT SITS A GROUNDED FLYER, TAILSPIN TOMMY, NOW SECRET AGENT NO. X-109...

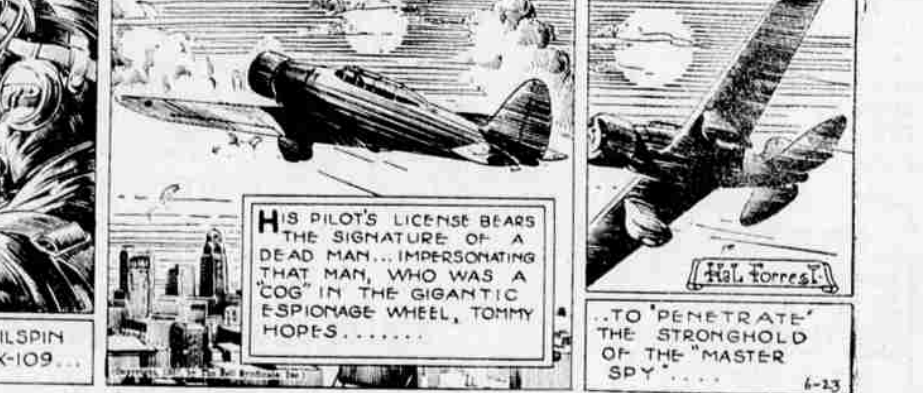
FINISHING MILK By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



S'MATTER POP By C. M. PAYNE



By HAL FORREST



By EDWIN ALGER



By SOL HESS



THE NEBBS—The Fashion Plate

