

MURDER ON THE BLUFF

A mysterious shot kills Judge Blinshop, my old flame, at the start of our stormy weekend at Farrington Bluff, home of Michael's aunts. Strange attacks follow; then we find the body of Michael's mad father below the bluff. Stout, Victorian Aunt Martha is shot in the shoulder and nearly finished with sleeping powder. The Skipper, Mike's tall, tuxedoed younger aunt, disappears; we find her six hours later, bound in the loft, all but dead. A shot draws us to the room of Higgins, the butler, whom we had strongly suspected shortly before. He is dead, supposedly a suicide.

Chapter 48 Murder No. 3

I BLINKED dazedly. That was the question. What earthly reason could there be for Higgins' amazing actions? A contented, gentle old man with the rest of his life mapped out for him as pleasantly as anyone could wish, suddenly goes haywire and kills a girl he has known since her babyhood, a man whom he has spent a good part of his life caring for, and finally attempts to kill the two people who represent all the family and security that he has. It didn't make sense. There could be no question of money as a motive. I happened to know that the entire Farrington fortune had been left in trust for Michael by his grandfather with a request that Higgins be provided for as long as he lived. The only solution seemed to be insanity.

"It's a hopeless mess, William. Can you think what could have ailed him?" William shook his head. "Must have been plumb nutty, I guess. Didn't seem like that, but he must have been. Funny. You know, when I was working for the Blinshops, I always thought Higgins was crazy about Miss Judith."

I looked around that bare little room and shivered. Then I walked out—very softly.

My watch said 20 minutes past six. There was little point in trying to hustle people off to bed. We were bound to be routed out again within a very few hours, and I knew from experience that a little sleep is worse than none at all. It was highly doubtful that anyone would be able to sleep anyway.

Snapping on the low lamp on the dresser, I turned out the glaring overhead lights. I closed the door on Higgins' room and made off in the direction of the main house. Cold showers, a hot and a plan of action were in my mind.

Michael's room was empty, but in mine the Skipper was still sleeping soundly. He was standing at the window.

"Where are the others?" I whispered.

"I'm not sure. They went down the hall somewhere—Miss Farrington's room, I guess. Jim— are you sure it's over?"

"Absolutely sure, Gay. Was the Skipper disturbed at all?"

"No." Her hands were restless. "Whatever possessed him? Does anyone know?"

I drew her into the next room. "I don't know," I said, "and I doubt if anyone ever will. Now listen, kid. Go take a cold shower and freshen up. William will stir up some breakfast. See that Aunt Martha does the same thing and send Mike along to me. All the majesty of the law is going to be loose around here in a little while and it isn't going to be much good."

"O.K." There was something about the jaunty tilt of the kid's chin that I liked. I stopped her.

"Gay," I said, "there'll be a pretty big fuss over this in the papers. If Mike suddenly gets noble ideas about not soiling the hem of your gown, don't let him get away with it. She flashed me a grin that sent my spirits soaring.

"Sonny," she said, "if he thinks he can get away from me now, he'll need the militia to help him."

Michael Gets A Shower
HER feet clattered cheerfully down the hall. Hauling out clean clothes, I felt a little better. It was over at last. I was jumping around in the shower when I heard Michael come in. Grabbing a towel, I strode dripping after him.

But if my spirits were up, his were hitting a new, all-time low. He flopped down on the bed.

"Don't be such a damned Pollyanna!" he growled.

My spirits began to slide. "How's the devil?"

"How do you think? Jim, what the devil do you suppose ailed him? Why did he do it? It's— it's—"

"Cut it out, Mike," I said. "We don't know and probably we never will. What difference does it make now? Get into that shower. You're all in."

In his life but look after my damned family?"

Michael has an Irish streak which calls for the noble and highly dramatic. Right then I had no answer for him. I felt rather like a person lost in the woods who knows there is an animal of some sort behind him, but doesn't dare turn around to look.

"The police," I said, "will have no reason for thinking anything but that the poor old chap lost his mind. You haven't either. Stop trying to dig yourself up a family skeleton. Go take—"

"The hell with your shower!" Michael exploded. "Who gives a damn what the police think? I've got to know why he did it. I've got—"

"—to take a shower," I finished grimly. Picking him up, clothes and all, I carried him, struggling, into the bathroom. It was something of a job to hold him, but he was thoroughly doused before he managed to send me crashing on my ear and stalk out. I threw him a towel.

"Take a rubdown," I said. "You go to hell!" But he caught the towel with his bad hand. I grinned and set to work on my own dressing, leaving him to his fuming. The atmosphere was so natural that I could have whooped for joy. I was busy with my tie before he got to the point where he could directly address me.

"Do you suppose there is any way that they could leave the aunts out of all this? If the story about my father hits the headlines, Aunt Martha will never get over it. Foster ought to be able to keep them away from the Skipper for a while anyway."

I said, "I think the best thing to do, Mike, is for me to go into the village on the first boat that gets here. I'll go straight to Foster and leave it all up to him. Then, if he'll let me, I'll push on to the Blinshops. Ought to be back by seven tomorrow night, easily."

Michael was silent for a moment. "That's decent of you, Jim."

I climbed into my coat. "Forget it," I said. "Keep your ear cocked for the Skipper. I'll see how the breakfast is coming."

Spotch On The Wall
IN broad daylight, the effect of the electricity in the hall was rather ghastly. The sooner we got all the lights out and the house nearly normal, the better for everyone concerned. Switching them off as I went, I headed down the hall and into the servants' quarters. At the head of the back stairs I remembered the lights in Higgins' room and in Jude's. I turned back. With my eyes averted from the bed, I made for Higgins' dresser. And then something leapt into my mind.

Directly in front of me at the level of my eyes, was a spotch in the wall plaster, and within that spotch the bullet which had ended Higgins' life. Passing a bewildered hand over my eyes, I looked again. There was no mistake. The bullet was there. My memory of the situation blurred? I rushed to the bed and flung back the blanket.

Higgins lay on his back with his arms flung out at his sides, the revolver lightly clenched in the right hand. In his right hand was the bullet hole, and in the left, the nasty gash made by the bullet tearing through. But the mark in the plaster was in the wall on his right!

Idea began bouncing through my head. A man falling in a faint or for any reason other than a blow, falls on his face. Unless he has been sitting on the bed, he could never have landed in that position. Could he have been sitting? I crouched until my head was approximately at the level of a person sitting on the bed.

For a bullet to have passed through both sides of the man's head and landed where it had, it must have passed right through the top of his skull. And Higgins' wounds were in his temples.

Much as the idea of the old man's guilt hurt, I wanted the whole thing to be over with. Perhaps, I reasoned, miraculously, the impact of the bullet spun him around. Perhaps—My next realization sent me staggering against the wall. The revolver was in his right hand, and Higgins had been left-handed! Murder number three!

Right then and there my state of mind clarified. All along, I had been nearly as much afraid that we would catch the murderer as I was that we wouldn't. But I thought of that tortured old face as I had last seen it was then. And I wanted that murderer. If it was Michael himself, I was going to see him die before my own eyes.

My mind began to work as coldly as if it were dealing with a problem in bridge. Not the Skipper. I had been sitting beside her when the shot was fired. Furthermore, the murderer had been sitting behind the murderer. Higgins must have seen them, to his undoing.

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I devise a trap for the murderer, tomorrow.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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Daughters of Their Husbands.
Early Roman law held women in complete disdain. Under its provisions members of the fair sex were excluded from holding civil or public office, could not sign wills or make contracts, were not allowed to act as witnesses and could not inherit property from anyone dying intestate other than their brothers or husbands.

Modern Cave Town.
On the banks of the Loire river in southern France is Troo, one of the strangest towns in the world. Carved out of a rock cliff, its homes are a combination of the ancient days of the cliff dwellers and our own days of electricity and modern conveniences. "Main Street" in Troo consists of a stairway leading past the town's cave homes.

Presidential Slave Owners.
Strange as it seems, two of the United States presidents who owned slaves played major parts in the freeing of the slaves. One was U. S. Grant, commander of the Union forces during the latter part of the Civil War. The other was Andrew Johnson, vice-president and successor to Abraham Lincoln, the "Great Emancipator."

"Pester" Derivation.
"Pester," derived from the Latin word "pastorium," originally meant "to shackle or clog a horse," came to mean "to encumber or clog" generally speaking, and eventually arrived at its present meaning, "to annoy."

Tomorrow: Political Hodgepodge.

MARY McCORMIC FILES DIVORCE APPLICATION

CHICAGO, June 30.—(AP)—Mary McCormic, the opera star, filed suit for divorce today, charging Homer V. Johansson, a lawyer, knocked her down last March 17 and threw her across a table six days later.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Into the Enemy's Camp!



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Tessie Tuttington



THE NEBBS—Honey Face?



STAR PITCHER



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S'MATTER POP



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By HAL FORREST

Civil Service For Attorneys F. R. Aim

WASHINGTON, June 30.—(AP)—President Roosevelt asked congress today to enact legislation to place attorneys and experts of the social security board under civil service.

Ancient Warehouse Burns in S. F.

SAN FRANCISCO, June 30.—(AP)—A spectacular fire swept through historic Mission Rock warehouse, a relic of the old sailing days, Tuesday. A watchman, only person known to have been on the rock, rowed ashore safely.

Astoria Prepares For V.F.W. Session

ASTORIA, Ore., June 30.—(AP)—The Astoria post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars completed arrangements today to greet the Oregon department at its 17th annual encampment Thursday through Saturday.

Land Bank Measure Passed By Senate

WASHINGTON, June 30.—(AP)—The senate completed congressional action today on a bill to extend for one year the 3 1/2 per cent interest rate on federal land bank loans.