

# MURDER ON THE BLUFF

Chapter 30  
**Mike Faces the Test**

"NOT a lunkhead," Gay said in a withering voice. "Just a moron!" Walking back into Higgins' room, she swept the far wall with eager eyes and moved straight to the hole in the plaster. "Here you are, sleuth. Sometime when you're short of cash, why don't you sell that head of yours for a curiosity? You wouldn't miss it."

I tried to look crushed and I managed to beam like an idiot. "I must be getting old," I murmured.

"Or feeble-minded," said Gay. "Come on to breakfast."

"Go ahead down. I'll collect Michael and the aunt. I think the Skipper will be all right for half an hour."

There was one danger that I had overlooked—the likelihood of our being intercepted in the hall. But Gay solved my problem before I could begin to tussle with it.

"I'll go through the kitchen and see if they need help," she said. "Do you think you can get two whole people down the stairs before another brain-storm strikes you?"

I turned my back on her, but I didn't move until I heard her reach the kitchen. Then I turned and galloped down the hall at full speed. Outside Michael's room I paused long enough to screw my face into a glum expression and thrust my hands dejectedly into my pockets.

Michael turned a red face from his one-handed struggle with a tie.

"It's about time," he said. "Fix this damn thing, will you, before I go completely nuts!"

I was ashamed of myself. It was bad enough to plan cold-bloodedly the proof that your best friend was a murderer, but to bait him was inexcusable. Stealing a glance at him, I nearly abandoned the whole idea. He looked terrible.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm—I'm sorry."

He stared at me a moment. "Don't look like that!" he growled. "It's my fault. I'm jumpy. Forget it."

"All right," I shoved my cigarettes at him. "Any sound from the Skipper?"

"No. I wish we could get a doctor here now, Jim. The flare of the match lighted up his drawn face. 'You don't suppose this will have any after effects—heart or anything—do you?'"

"I don't see why it should," I said. "If it does," said Michael bitterly. "I'll never forgive myself."

"You?" Great God! Was the crazy fool going to confide his guilt to me just as I was busily trying to prove it for myself? "Don't be absurd, man! What have you got to do with it?"

"If I'd insisted on her going south, she would have been forced to tell me what was on her mind, and my father would have been sent back where he belonged."

It took me fully 10 seconds to get my breath. "You think your father's presence caused all this?"

"I must have. It was the only unusual thing that I can think of."

Michael crushed his barely lit cigarette. I studied his face.

"Do you think that also explains Higgins' extraordinary behavior?"

"No." The face was cloudy. "Damn it, it doesn't explain anything, Jim. What could have ailed him?"

"You've got me, Mike," I said truthfully. "Has it occurred to you that there's something mighty peculiar about the way Higgins died?"

He whirled on me. "What do you mean?"

"Well," I was picking my words with care, "when a bullet goes through a man's head, it lands somewhere. Of course, the police will be better than I, but I'll be damned if I can find it—anywhere."

"His eyes were boring into my face. 'Are you sure it went through?'"

"Positive. There's a mark where it went in and a gash where it came out."

I delivered the end of that sentence to an empty room. Michael had started for Higgins' door, and if he got a glimpse of the face under that blanket before I had staged my act, it was all over. Everything I had went into the sprint that brought me up to him just as he halted on the side of the bed. Two seconds later and I would not have been in time to grab the hand he reached toward the blanket.

**Mastery Acting, Or—**

"DON'T, Mike. It's—pretty bad."

Ordinarily wild horses couldn't have stopped him. Was it exhaustion or was it guilt in his face and trembling hands?

"Perhaps—you're right." His voice was muffled. There was a silence and then he straightened up. "All we have to do is reconstruct the scene. He must have been either on the bed or beside it—unless someone moved him. Did anyone touch him?"

"Not so far as I know," I said in the steadiest voice I could muster.

"Then he must have been doing one of the two. That means that the bullet—"

His eyes turned to the far wall and picked out the splotch in the plaster immediately. His voice stopped. The next instant his grasp on my arm made me wince. "What the devil is the big idea?"

I was fighting to keep my voice down. "What do you mean?"

"That bullet is right where it should be. What kind of damned stunt is this?"

I shook him off. "I don't know what you're talking about." I grated "There isn't any bullet. I've been over this door a dozen times and never moved the bed and looked in the hall. If you find anything, you're better than I am!"

There was an awful moment of silence, and then Michael began to chuckle—a chuckle that sent the blood back into my singing head.

"Jimmie," he said. "Jimmie—you're a dud! Higgins was—oh, Lord!—left-handed! Look." He pointed to the far wall. "Here's your bullet right where it ought to be."

Either I was working some masterly acting or Michael had no conception of the state in which the body had been found. I stared at that tiny section of cracked plaster as if I had never seen it before in my life.

"Come along," he said at last. "You need food!"

If my little attempt did nothing else, it had at least restored Michael to a good humor. He was still chuckling when we reached the stairs.

"Go look after your love-life," I said. "I'll get the nut. I'll cough when—"

"It won't be necessary," said Michael, clattering down the stairs. M. Farrington alone remained, and I rather relished the idea of an encounter with the irascible old lady. I knocked on her door and called, "It's Jimmie, Aunt Martha."

There was a slight pause and then a truculent voice said, "Come in."

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"Here you are, sleuth."

I fixed it, sank gloomily upon the bed, and took to a studious contemplation of the floor. Michael grunted into a vest, wore himself into a coat, selected a handkerchief to his taste, and finally became conscious of me.

**This Damned Murder Fest**

"WELL," he said irritably, "now what's the matter. Aren't things bad enough without any high tragedy from you?"

"Mike," I said. "I don't like it."

"You don't say. No?" look at me. I just love it! Another minute and I'll be turning handsprings."

That mood always annoyed me. I let my irritation go with a vengeance.

"Don't be any more of an imbecile than you have to!" I snapped. "And keep your voice down. There's no crying necessary for waking the Skipper that I can see."

"Who's waking the Skipper?" He flipped open his cigarette case, found it empty and flung it violently on the bed. "Damn it, Jimmie, I simply request that you do something besides run around looking like Banquo's ghost. For God's sake get over the idea that you're the only person with a headache! I'm the host of this damned murder fest, if you recall!"

# STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



**WEST MEETS WEST!**

**THE AMAZING COINCIDENCE OF 2 NEGROES WITH THE SAME NAME -- WILL WEST --**

**THEY WERE IMPRISONED IN THE SAME PENITENTIARY, LEAVENWORTH, FOR THE SAME CRIME, MURDER -- HAD SIMILAR BERTILLOON MEASUREMENTS AND LOOKED SO MUCH ALIKE THAT PRISON OFFICIALS THOUGHT THEM TO BE ONE AND THE SAME MAN -- YET NEITHER HAD EVER SEEN OR HEARD OF THE OTHER UNTIL THEY MET IN PRISON! -- 1903 --**

**MEMBERS OF THE U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES WORE HATS IN CONGRESS UNTIL 1897**

**FLOYDADA, TEXAS, WAS SUPPOSED TO BE NAMED FLOYDALIA, BUT A POSTAL EMPLOYEE MISPELLED IT AND THE ERROR STUCK!**

**West Meets West**

Convict numbers 2626 and 3426 stared across the room at each other. So far as appearances went, they might well have been looking into mirrors. Few identical twins could have borne a greater resemblance. To make matters still more fantastic, their names were almost identical. Convict 2626 was William West. Convict 3426 was Will West. They met under amazing circumstances.

Will West, a convicted murderer, was brought to Leavenworth in 1903 and taken to the record office to be photographed and measured. The clerk in charge, thinking that he recognized the prisoner, asked him why he was being recorded again. The prisoner denied having gone through the identification process before. Unbelievably, the clerk went to his files,

looked under the name the negro had given and found photographs and measurements of a convict named William West. The photographs gave an almost perfect likeness of the prisoner in front of the desk and the Bertillon measurements were almost exactly the same, but Will West still denied having been previously recorded. The clerk refused to believe him in the face of the evidence.

A call was put through to the warden's office. "What's the gag being pulled here by convict West?" was the query. He's already been recorded, yet he's here in the office claiming he's a new prisoner. A hasty check-up was made and William West was found to be at his work. He was brought to the identification office. There the weird coincidence between the two convicts was disclosed. William West had been com-

mitted to a life sentence in the prison two years before for murder, the same crime that had brought Will West there. The convicts had never seen or heard of each other before they met in the record office.

Known as the "History of the West Brothers' Identification," the case is cited by John Edgar Hoover, director of the federal bureau of investigation, as an illustration of the fact that Bertillon measurements are not an infallible means of identification.

Based on such physical measurements as the length of the head, width of the ears, height, color of hair, etc., the Bertillon system has been largely superseded by the modern system of fingerprinting. A difference was found in a comparison of the "West Brothers'" fingerprints. No two sets of fingerprints have ever been found to be the same.

was defeated by Bronko Nagurski. Physicians advised Detton to remain out of wrestling for at least 60 days. Washburn said, Detton left by plane for Los Angeles, where he is to be further examined.

A baseball derailed a street car in Pratt City, Ala.

**Big Apricot Crop In Dalles Sector**

THE DALLES, July 2.—(AP)—Orchardists made preparations today to pick approximately 1200 tons of apricots, the heaviest crop in 10 years.

Growers' pools have signed 90 per cent of the output. Marketing will be divided between canners and the fresh fruit trade. Early peaches are now reaching the market. The crop is of outstanding quality and the tonnage greater than expected after the sub-zero temperatures last winter.

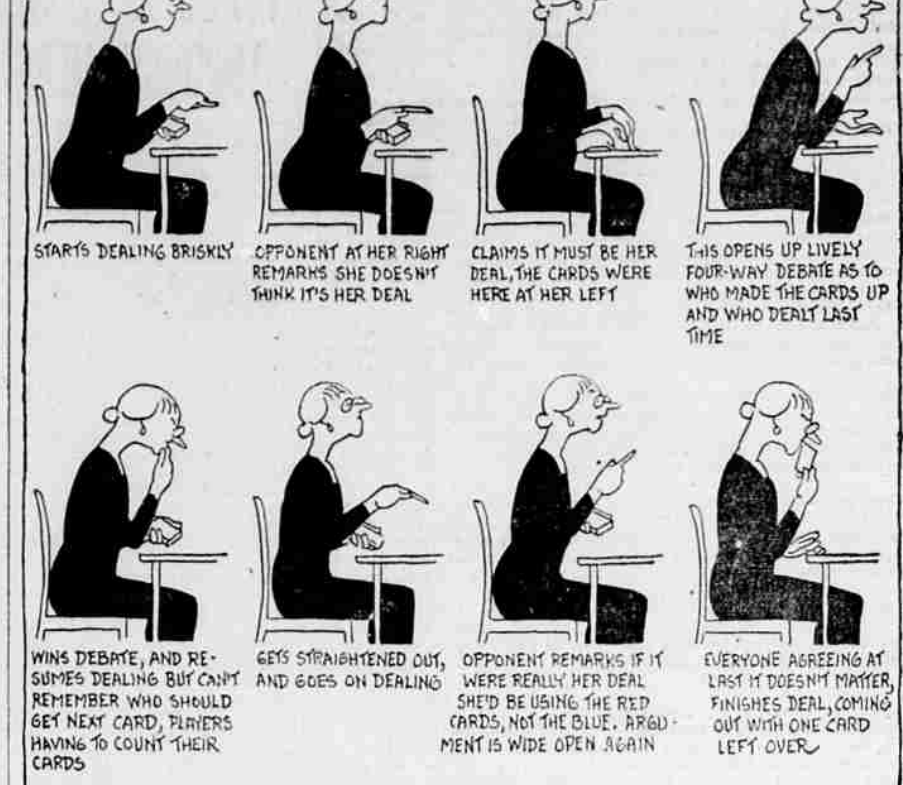
**TAILSPIN TOMMY—Deeper Into Danger!**

**Menaced by Members of the Espionage Gang, Tommy, although sensing the tenseness of the situation, hopes to convince Josef Ort that he is Tony Lacey, slain spy pilot, who greatly resembled him.**

**Ben Webster's Career—Big Surprise!**

**The Nebbs—It's for Money and It's Funny**

# WHOSE DEAL?



# S'MATTER POP



# By HAL FORREST



# By EDWIN ALGER



# By SOI HESS



# CHARGE OIL MAN DODGED TAX LAW

WASHINGTON, July 2.—(AP)—A treasury attorney told the congressional tax committee today Louis Blaustein, a Baltimore, Md., oil man, had effected tax savings of at least \$400,000 since 1934 by creation of 54 trusts for his wife and children.

Paul W. Burton, an internal revenue bureau attorney, said Blaustein, founder of the Lord Baltimore Milling Stations, Inc., and a pioneer in the field of "high test" gasoline, created the trusts shortly before he said his oil interests in the Standard Oil company of Indiana in 1934. A profit of \$9,897,249.

Blaustein said 19 of the trusts were for Blaustein's wife, 14 for his son, Jacob, 17 for his daughter, Etta, and 14 for his daughter Fanny.

# Film Honeymooners Mobbed in Hawaii

HONOLULU, July 2.—(AP)—More than 5,000 excited persons jammed the waterfront today to welcome Hollywood's newest honeymooners, Mary Pickford and Charles "Buddy" Rogers, and Jeanette MacDonald and Rogers Raymond. They reached the islands on the same liner.

Raymond and Miss MacDonald came ashore immediately. They were nearly mobbed and were finally taken away by a police escort around their automobile. They said they would remain about six weeks.

Miss Pickford and Rogers stayed aboard the ship, apparently to avoid the crowd on the docks.

# Wrestler Detton Injured In Match

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn., July 2.—(AP)—Jack Washburn, manager of Dean Detton, who lost his claims to the world heavyweight championship Tuesday night, said the wrestler suffered a dislocated vertebrae when he