

MURDER ON THE BLUFF

Chapter 53 Aunt Martha's Machinations

I SUPPOSE Martha thought she had done away with all possibilities of Mike's hearing about his father. She handed Higgins the gun and went quickly back to bed. Poor Higgins made sure that he could do nothing for Mike. He cleaned and reloaded the gun and resolved to talk to me before he said anything to anybody else.

"As for me, my situation got increasingly worse from the moment I walked into the kitchen. I felt sure that either Martha or Norman had done it, but I had not one shred of proof—and didn't have until Higgins spoke to me yesterday. Martha staged a frightened, elderly woman act. I could get nowhere with her. I did nothing because we were as much on our guard as we could be and I wanted to avert panic.

"How the dickens Norman managed to elude us when we searched the grounds in broad daylight, I don't know. He may have let himself into the house more than once with that key. I don't think there's any doubt that he was the intruder who dealt with Cook and Annie. That handkerchief he used on Annie was yours, as a matter of fact, Mike. He'd been using some of your clothes. Higgins was the prowler in the hall. He told me so. But poor Norman must have ransacked Martha's room and mutilated the cat in just the sort of frenzy the doctors had predicted.

"I'm sure that you and William suffered at his hands, Jim. Then, I imagine, he let himself into Jude's room with his key and concealed himself in that horrible fashion. Martha must have known that he was there. I suppose she really thought that he was better dead than confined. At any rate, the minute I realized that he was gone, I could think of only one thing—the spot on the bluff where his mother died and where Martha used to brood for hours as a girl. In her mind she had made a martyr of her mother. Something told me that she intended to do the same with her brother. I knew what we would find at the foot of that cliff before I had taken a single step.

"You see, I still hadn't talked to Higgins. I knew this, we were at the mercy of a homicidal maniac, but I had not one shred of proof and my chances of being believed were pretty slender. I put her to bed and I thought she was sleeping when I left her. Apparently she wasn't. Higgins was on the verge of selling you the whole story, Jim, when he saw her standing outside the window in my oilskins—listening. She frightened him half out of his wits. What she was doing out there I don't know. Looking at the scene of Norman's death possibly. At any rate from then on she began to distrust Higgins. After you went looking for Mike, Jim, he let her in. And she threatened him, poor old boy! He was terrified. He got her to her room and went in search of me.

'My Aim Was Rotten'

"MEANWHILE you got the wacky notion that you were insane, Mike, and I did the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. I went to Higgins' room, got his revolver, and walked straight down the hall to Martha's door. In view of Higgins' story she must have just left the oilskins in my room and started to undress. She was at the dressing-table and as she turned toward me, I shot her. Unfortunately, my aim was rotten. Higgins had caught sight of me in the servants' hall. As I turned around he was right at my elbow. He never said a word. Took the gun out of my hand, wiped it clean with his handkerchief, and showed me to the head of the stairs. To all intents and purposes we were coming up there as you rushed down the hall, Mike. Higgins had the alibi right on the tip of his tongue.

'I Am Was Rotten'

"When I heard that I had failed, I knew that I had ended your lives more than ever. Martha knew who had shot her, although I don't think she actually saw me. She knew and she laid her plans accordingly. "I was with her for some time, you may remember. She pretended to be asleep, but I knew she wasn't. She was my sister—practically my mother—and a grand girl. God! How I pitied her! But we sat there

within two feet of each other and planned each other's death. I waited until she asked for another sleeping powder. I went into the bathroom to fix it, where she could not possibly see me, and I put a half a box of the damned powder into her glass. "But she was ahead of me. I came back to find her crying. It wasn't as if her state of mind had been her fault. Seeing her that way—got me. I tried to comfort her, but she wouldn't listen for a long time. Then something appeared to snag in her and she poured out a story. She said that she had lured you into the old loft, Mike, and shot you. Then, frightened, she had put you inside one of the cedar chests and left you there—alive.

"If I had stopped to think, would have known that she was lying. She hadn't been out of my sight since you had left the room. But she knew me well enough to know that I wouldn't stop. That loft was used as a sort of strong-room in Grandfather's time. I had forgotten its existence. I lost up to it, dragging her with me. And when I got to the place where she wanted me, she simply crowned me with something. The rest of that—let's not talk about."

The Skipper's pauses were becoming longer and more difficult, but she went on. "I think Higgins suspected her, but the place had never been used in his time. He didn't know how to get into it, and he knew that Martha was watching him. I heard someone tapping around down here trying to find the opening, and I imagine it was Higgins. Also, he probably was sure of himself. Martha's nearly dying after she finally took the powder probably made him wonder what I hadn't simply attempted to murder a second time and then beat it escape being caught.

"I heard him calling to me several times through the floor in his room. He apparently knew I was there. I thought I could answer him or come down if I wanted to. When Martha knew that I had been found—dead or alive—she knew that Higgins would talk. Poor old Higgins has been protecting her with his life. He even removed those letters that she planted in William's room. She begged the originals from me long ago and kept them all this time. Those letters were forgeries, of course. Higgins had saved her life, but now he was dangerous. And so—she killed him."

A Moral Somewhere

The Skipper stopped abruptly and the sudden silence was painful. Michael sat up and looked at the whole band, was tornless. Gay's subdued hands was turned toward him, and his eyes were anxious. But the Skipper sat straight and stiff between them her face a mask and her eyes straight ahead. Finally Michael raised his head. "Is that all?" he said in a muffled voice.

"That's all. If you like, Jim, you can and Jack Blinshop out here to me. I suppose it's poetic justice that I should be the person to tell him."

Blindly I groped for words, found none, and choked out, "I'm telling him."

Gay got suddenly to her feet and dropped one swift kiss on the top of the Skipper's head, and went noiselessly from the room. I wanted to follow her, but my feet seemed riveted to the spot.

"I suppose," the Skipper's voice went on, "there's a moral somewhere in this, although at the moment it eludes me. Something about the wages of sin, no doubt. Only, Mickie I— Her voice caught and stopped (one instant) there was silence; the next the room was filled with dry hard sobbing. Michael crashed to his knees. "I slipped through the game room and out the side entrance to the lawn, barely feeling the sting of the cold, salt air. I needed a coat, but my body enough to go back for one. The foot of the drive confronted me before I was really aware that I was walking. Pausing, I stared out across the water toward the mainland. A motor dory was headed straight for the spot where I stood. In another minute the leathery old face of Andie Darrel was staring up at me from under his sou'wester. "Hi there!" he trumpeted nasally.

THE END

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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Cornelius Vanderbilt. THE FARM LAD WHO BECAME ONE OF AMERICA'S GREATEST FINANCIERS, OWNED, OPERATED AND COMMANDED A SHIP AT 16... AT 18 HE OWNED TWO SHIPS AND WAS CAPTAIN OF A THIRD! THE WOMAN MAILMAN of Anaconda, Mont. IN 18 YEARS MISS ANNA McDONALD HAS WALKED A DISTANCE GREATER THAN TWO TRIPS AROUND THE EARTH AND CARRIED OVER 253 TONS OF MAIL! THE KIWI, FLIGHTLESS BIRD OF NEW ZEALAND, OFTEN LEANS ON ITS BILL TO REST... Christy Mathewson PITCHED 68 CONSECUTIVE INNINGS WITHOUT GIVING A SINGLE BASE ON BALLS! -New York, N.Y., 1913-

It was Cornelius Vanderbilt who founded the vast fortune that established the Vanderbilts as one of the most prominent families in America. The son of a Dutch farmer, he was raised near Stapleton, Staten Island, N. Y. His education was meager, but his driving ambition, his shrewd business head and his amazing faculty for sizing up men overcame his lack of schooling. The age of 16 found him already embarked in shipping, the business that was to be the stepping stone to wealth. Owner and commander of a ferry boat, he scraped up enough money to buy, he operated a profitable passenger and freight business between Staten Island and New York. Two years later he owned another ship and was captain of a third. At 23, Vanderbilt was operating the first steamship ever run between New York and New Brunswick, N. J., and was already a powerful figure in American shipping. California's gold rush netted him about ten million dollars when he established a fast line to California with passengers being transferred across the Isthmus of Nicaragua. The Crimean war brought him into the international shipping limelight. English shipping forsook the seas and Vanderbilt cashed in by establishing a steamship line between New York and Havre, France. Cornelius Vanderbilt died in 1877, leaving a fortune estimated to have been in the neighborhood of one hundred million dollars. Most of it was left to his son, William H. Vanderbilt.

Woman Mail Man When world war enlistments thinned out the ranks of Uncle Sam's small carriers, the government issued a call for women to fill their shoes. Miss Anna McDonald of Anaconda, Mont., is said to be the last woman still on active duty of those who took the job. In line of duty she has walked about 58,500 miles, averaging 11 miles daily, six days a week. With her average two-day load weighing about 95 pounds, she has carried a total of more than 253 tons of mail. Tomorrow: Leapfrog on the Race Track! Lilliputian Village Built. LORAIN, O.—(UP)—Mr. and Mrs. F. C. Fairhead have transformed their back yard into a Lilliputian village. The miniature town contains a castle, a church, two small houses and a tavern. All buildings are made of small stones gathered and cut by the Fairheads themselves.

Record Claimed. LONDON.—(UP)—A world record milk yield for a Shorthorn is claimed for Baggarmald, a cow owned by Capt. E. S. Fielding Johnson, of Manor Farm, Campton Bassett, Wiltshire. In 24 hours she gave 72 pounds of milk, bringing her yield up to 32,715 pounds in 357 days.

Talent Gets Full Sway. SAN LEANDRO, Cal.—(UP)—The parents of 10-year-old Vicky White consented to her carrying out an ambition that had possessed both her mother and three sisters to become a roller skate dancer. In preparation for the necessary training the family moved from an apartment to a private residence.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—If Tommy Had Only Told Skeeter—

Believing that TOMMY'S QUEER ACTIONS EARLIER IN THE EVENING ARE THE RESULT OF HEAD INJURIES WHICH HIS PAL SUSTAINED IN THE CRASH OF HIS RACING PLANE, SKEETER SOUGHT OUT JUSTINA AND INNOCENTLY TOLD HER THE FLYER, WHOM SHE THOUGHT WAS LACEY, IS TAILSPIN TOMMY. STAY HERE... I'LL BE RIGHT BACK. UH... ERR... YES M. NOW THERE'S A GAL WITH CLASS TOO BAD SHE DIDN'T FALL FOR ME INSTEAD OF TOM. SHE ACTED KINDA FUNNY, THOUGH, WONDER WHY? THAT FLYER IS A FEDERAL AGENT... BUT I MUST NOT ACT ALARMED BEFORE HIS FRIEND!

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Herb Hookem Again!

ALL RIGHT, BRIARGIE, WE'LL CALL IT A DAY—BUT WAIT A SECOND, OLD FELLOW—I WANT TO TELL YOU IT LOOKS LIKE HIGGINS STORE IS OUT OF THE WOODS! HMMMM, THE KID'S LOCKIN' UP—PRETTY LATE—WONDER IF IT'S GOOD BUSINESS THAT'S KEPT HIM LATE, OR JUST WORRY? HERB HOOKEM! HIYA, PAL! WELL, IF IT AIN'T LEM PILLINGS HIMSELF, IN PERSON, AND NOT A MOVIN' PITCHER! WHATCHA DOIN' ROUND HIGGINS' THIS TIME O' NIGHT? THOUGHT I'D SELL OLD HETTY ANOTHER BILL OF GOODS, LEM—SHE JUST SURPRISED US BY MAKING A BIG PAYMENT ON THE LAST BATCH.

THE NEBBS—The Agitator

HELLO, YOUNG MAN, I JUST FORGOT YOUR NAME. LUTHER'S MY NAME AND IF YOU NEVER KNOWED IT, WHAT DIFFERENCE WOULD IT MAKE? NO DIFFERENCE—IT COULD BE CALM ONLY THAT I SAVED YOUR LIFE—MAX SAID IF HE HIT YOU THE OTHER DAY, YOU'D HAVE TO GATHER YOU UP IN FIVE STATES BEFORE THEY COULD HAVE A FUNERAL. IS THAT SO? HE WASN'T HANDCUFFED WAS HE? YOU DON'T SAY NOBODY BUT HIM—WHAT ARE YOU STICKIN' YOUR MOUTH IN THIS FOR? WELL, I'LL TELL YOU—I DIDN'T WANT TO SEE TWO REPRESENTATIVE BUSINESS MEN IN A STREET BRAWL—I KNOW IT'S OVER LOVE FOR MISS GRANTLEY—WE DON'T YOU CHALLENGE HIM TO A DUEL? ALL RIGHT—I'LL FIGHT HIM BUT YOU BETTER MAKE IT OVER IN THE CEMETERY SO YOU WON'T NEED NO UNDERTAKER FOR HIM!

BUILDING PROJECT By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

ASKS FATHER HOW HE USE SOME OF THE LUMBER DOWN CELLAR TO BUILD A HUT BACK OF THE GARAGE. GLAD TO HAVE HIM BUSY, FATHER CONSENTS. MAKES HALF A DOZEN TRIPS, CARRYING LUMBER OUT TO YARD. RETURNS TO ASK FATHER HOW HE USE JUST A FEW OF HIS GOOD TOOLS FROM THE WORK BENCH. CARRIES OUT ARMFUL OF TOOLS OF EVERY CONCEIVABLE VARIETY. COMES IN AND ASKS MAY HE HAVE THE OLD CHAIR FROM THE ATTIC TO PUT IN HIS HUT WHEN IT'S FINISHED. GETS CHAIR AND ALSO A DISCARDED PICTURE AND A BROKEN MIRROR. PILES EVERYTHING IN MIDDLE OF BACK LAWN, AND GOES OFF TO PLAY CATCH WITH EDDIE SELZER.

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S'MATTER POP By C. M. PAYNE

YEH, IF YOU HAD A TAIL, I'D CALL YOU A MONKEY. OH-H, BUT I HAVE GOTTA TAIL, POP. NAW. YES, ON MY SHIRT. LOOK!

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By HAL FORREST

SCIENTISTS BEGIN SUMMER STUDIES AT CRATER LAKE

CRATER LAKE (Sp.)—Park Naturalist John E. Doerr, Jr., has announced members of the 1937 naturalist staff here to carry on a summer program of research, guided field trips and other services. The men are trained in different fields of natural science and will continue activities begun in previous years. Geologic research will be undertaken by Wayne Kutzner, geology professor, San Jose State Teachers' College, Calif., in collaboration with Loren F. Miller, Santa Cruz, Calif., high school science instructor. The two men will work closely with Doerr. Dr. Arthur D. Hasler, Yorktown, Va., limnologist, trained in fresh water biology, will study Crater lake fish life, including food sources, propagation, age, abundance and other problems. Dr. Hasler, formerly with the U. S. bureau of fisheries, is recognized as an authority in his line of work. Wildlife aspects of the park will claim the attention of Dr. Ralph Heutsli, professor of zoology at the University of Oregon for the past 13 years. He will study habits of all birds and mammals in the park. Valdo Osmond of the Piedmont, Cal., high school, is interested in park biological research. An accomplished musician, he will assist in the presentation of community house programs. He will also assist in the preparation of Crater lake nature notes and special scientific papers. Dr. Elmer I. Applegate, acting curator of the Dudley Herbarium of Stanford university, will continue his

NEW TOURIST TRAILS ARE BEING DEVELOPED BY CCC AT LAVA BEDS

LAVA BEDS, Calif.—(Sp.)—Development and construction of two self-guided trails in Captain Jack's stronghold or historical area of this national monument have been placed underway, David H. Canfield, superintendent, announced today. When completed, these trails will permit visitors to explore the area through their own efforts, gaining a general understanding of the Modoc Indian war fought here in 1872-73. A short trail, six-tenths of a mile long, passes by a number of interesting points such as Captain Jack's headquarters, Indian entrenchments, council area and caves where Indian families made their homes. Explanatory information will be placed on signs at different points of the stronghold. A long trail of 1 1/2 miles covers the entire battleground, including corrals, where Indians kept stock for food, first lines of defense, communication trenches and a string of crude fortifications constructed by soldiers during the war. This work is being accomplished by coolies of the Lava Beds camp, which is carrying on a general improvement program in the monument. Use Mail Tribune 7847 242.

By EDWIN ALGER

HERB HOOKEM! HIYA, PAL! WELL, IF IT AIN'T LEM PILLINGS HIMSELF, IN PERSON, AND NOT A MOVIN' PITCHER! WHATCHA DOIN' ROUND HIGGINS' THIS TIME O' NIGHT? THOUGHT I'D SELL OLD HETTY ANOTHER BILL OF GOODS, LEM—SHE JUST SURPRISED US BY MAKING A BIG PAYMENT ON THE LAST BATCH.

By SOL HESS

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