OCTAGON HOUSE

BY PHOEBE ATWOOD TAYLOR

The Story So Far: Asey Mayo, Cape Cod detective, is privately investigating the murder of Marina Lorne, whose husband's post office mural has scandalized Quanomet. She was killed by a left handed blow from her sister's knife. Suspected Pam Frye disappears because an unknown person who smokes Turkish tobacco is trailing her to discover the whereabouts of $50,000 worth of ambergris she found. Agreeable Tim Carr, a boarder at the Frye's Octagon House, is left handed, smokes Turkish tobacco, and hated Marina. Gabby Nettie Hobbs swears Pam is the murderer and is called a liar by Peggy Boone, an artist. Roddy Strutt, whose plane crashed in the square, pays Nettie $5,000 to keep his name out of her story. At the hospital Asey finds Roddy's pilot is still unconscious. However, he sees Jennings, a plumber, who is furious at being caricatured in the mural.

Chapter 18

Five Ring Circus

IT WAS the middle of the afternoon before Asey set about the tedious task of coaxing Syl's truck back to Wellfleet. That excursion to Roddy Strutt's house after he left Jennings and the hospital had turned out to be a complete bust.

The Strutt place was surrounded by a tall, iron spiked fence, and the driveway gates were locked. A Filipino with a squint had ordered him off the entrance, and another Filipino with cauliflower ears had chased him away from the wharf. Both men belonged to the general classification of undesirable companions for dark nights in narrow alleys. Even in broad daylight they were slightly repulsive.

A dogged series of questionings in the neighborhood of the Strutt house had netted him almost nothing. He learned that Roddy's plane was an amphibian, which he hadn't guessed from the wreckage, and he learned that Roddy had spent practically the entire previous day buzzing around in his new toy. By noontime, people had almost ceased to pay any attention to its comings and goings, other than to hope as they heard it pass overhead, that if Roddy was going to crash it in his characteristic fashion, he would crash out to sea.

One man said very definitely that Roddy's plane had left at six-thirty with the plane that was going to New York. He was sure about the time, because the noise of the two planes setting off had interrupted his favorite radio program. And everyone was positive that Roddy was returning from that jaunt when he crashed.

Asey eased the truck around a reverse curve.

If Roddy left at six-thirty, and had not returned until the crash late that night, hours after the murder, why was he paying that hush money to Nettie Hobbs?

And how in the name of common sense could Roddy have landed that plane in the square, anyway, without causing more damage? Roddy was just learning to fly. He had never touched the controls of a plane until the day before. And the descriptions of his first flight were nerve shattering.

But if Roddy Strutt wanted to advertise his homecoming, and to set the time in everyone's mind, he had picked the right place. Everyone Asey had talked with knew of the crash in the square.

Of course it had been a fine moonlight night. There were cars in the square, and possibly some had headlights on. There was an all night lunch cart there which had a couple of flood lights. Even so, it would have taken a far better pilot than Roddy to bring that plane down there without more of a mess. And would Roddy have thought to turn off his engines?

The more he thought about it, the more apparent it became to Asey that Brigham, and not Roddy had brought the plane down, no matter what Roddy said. Brigham must have brought the plane down. And probably with Roddy standing over him, brandishing a monkey wrench. And probably Roddy had returned hours before to Quanomet. And the plane landing was an act, a part of a brain wave of Roddy's to alibi himself. The pilot, Brigham, would clear that up.

'That Stuff'

AT home, Asey was greeted by Jennie Mayo and Dr. Cummings, both of whom talked loudly and steadily in unison on widely separated subjects. Asey sorted out the information.

A delegation of Quanomet's leading citizens had called on him to request his aid in their misfortunes—they put it in the plural, apparently feeling that the murder was not their only problem.

"What you got to report, Doc, from Octagon House?"

It seemed that Hanson was still hunting Pam. The police had found no fingerprints on the knife. Or anywhere else. The crowd was still bothersome.

"You don't mean," Asey said, "that Hanson is still after her?"

"He's a peculiarly one-track minded soul, Asey, more than anything. I wish you'd insert yourself into Octagon House and find—"

"That stuff," Asey said swiftly, before the doctor could present any information. He trusted Jennie implicitly, but even Jennie had her limitations.

"Exactly. For the love of God will, you, Asey? It means so much to the kid. If she does get into hot water, it very conceivably might pay for her extraction."

"I was going to try this afternoon," Asey said, "but I got lost on side issues. After all, it's not goin' to be easy to slide into that house, an' as for removin' things I'd say it was near onto impossible. But I'd feel better if I knew it was there. It's goin' to be a job, Doc. It ain't something you can slip out in your hip pocket."

"There must be some way," Cummings said.

"I think I can get into the place all right." Asey told about his painting the ell of the Woman's Exchange. "A man that putters around with paint brushes or a hammer an' nails, he ain't a suspicious person. But someone that just loiters, he's spotted right away. I can get to Octagon House, but—"

"Oh, before I forget," Jennie said. "Besides the delegation, there was Elliott the Congressman to see you. He said he'd come back. And there was a girl that waited a couple of hours, I guess. She said her name was Boone."

"Dark and quiet, isn't she?" Cummings said. "I know her. She was over at Lornes' and at Octagon House, too. She's an illustrator and she keeps a goat. I treated it once after an overdose of hair mattress. Boone tried to get Hanson to stop long enough to look at the living room windows in Octagon House, to prove to him that Nettie was lying, but Hanson wouldn't pay any attention to her. They nearly came to blows—both of 'em were in a violent rage. And what do you think, Asey? This slays me. Roddy Strutt's offered a reward for the arrest and conviction of the murderer. What do you think of that?"

"He has? Well," Asey said, "I think that Roddy is overdoin' things a mite. How much, do you know?"

'So Much Mildew'

"THE sum varies, depending on who's telling the story. I've heard $1,000, I've heard $5,000. Personally, I don't understand it. I don't understand Roddy's sudden wealth either. I heard that his father had cut his allowance to the bone—and here he is, crashing up new planes in a carefree fashion, and offering rewards—"

"An' scatterin' largesse besides," Asey said. Have you seen him today?"

"Yes, I saw him while he was talking with Hanson. Jack Lorne was weeping with gratitude at the lovely gesture, and Roddy was being Prince Bountiful with a smirk. It was maudlin. Too bad that a really good looking boy like that has to be such a punk. His mother wasn't so bad, but of course the rest of the family are just so much mildew. Hanson said that Roddy said that if nothing happened, he'd raise the reward. I gathered he's about to come into money, but from what source, I couldn't even guess."

"Jennie," Asey said, "if you'll rustle me some food, I think I'll heave that old crate back to Quanomet. This is gettin' interestin', this is."

"D'you think you need to keep up this painting costume and the load of loam?" Cummings asked.

"I've discovered," Asey told him, "that it's easier to listen than to ask questions. Particularly when you ain't got much idea of the questions to ask. Jennie, make me a sandwich while I get some putty. I think I'll putty windows for a livin'—an' say, Doc, what men has Hanson got over there, anyway?"

"Virtually the entire force," Cummings said. "I know only a couple of 'em. The last shakeup scattered most of the bunch we knew. Asey, I'm worried about Pam, and her—er—stuff."

"So'm I," Asey said, "but I don't know what to do about her. As for the stuff, I'll see if I can't ferret it out."

The difference between Quanomet, when he saw it on his return, and Quanomet as he had seen it that morning, was startling enough to make Asey blink.

It had been crowded then, but now it was packed like Times Square on election night.

The regular Saturday afternoon stream of tourists and sightseers and weekenders piled into Quanomet and stayed there, instead of proceeding down the Cape to Provincetown. And the stream showed no signs of abating. If anything, it was growing wider, increased by everyone in the surrounding towns who had a vehicle that was capable of moving.

The place had taken on the general aspect of a five ring circus, with all the added attractions of carnivals, side shows and midways. Professional pitchmen fought tooth and nail for sidewalk space, in violent competition with hot dog and tonic hawkers.

In short, Quanomet lacked only fan dancers.

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Asey's eavesdropping gets even more interestin', tomorrow.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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

Walk of Fame

"Lives of great men all remind us.
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing, leave behind us
Footprints in the sands of time."

A fitting tribute to the Walk of Fame at Rollins college, Winter Park, Florida, would be these words from Longfellow's "Psalm of Life."

Strange as it seems, from a collection of 22 stones donated in 1929 by President Hamilton Holt of Rollins college, the amazing group today has grown to an array of nearly 600 individual stones, each a memorial to some famous person.

All of the presidents of the United States are represented; stones have been gathered from their birthplaces or from towns where they lived. Other great men are similarly represented, some stones coming from locations where they achieved fame.

The Rollins Walk of Fame has become a hobby in which the entire college participates. Faculty members, students, alumni and friends zealously gather stones for the shrine at a rate of about 75 a year.

A strict code of censorship is exercised by the college; many stones are rejected on the grounds that the persons they represent are not of sufficient imporance to be so honored.

Among the many markers is a stone contributed by Admiral Richard E. Byrd, which he obtained from Queen Maud Range, southernmost mountains of the world.

Such historical figures as Caesar, Cleopatra, Cortez, Columbus, Socrates and Rameses II are represented; musicians, artists, authors, poets, statesmen and kings are included. One stone comes from the birthplace of Benito Mussolini at Predoppio, Italy. Another is from Silver Springs, Florida, home of the Seminole Indian chief, Osceola.

The Walk of Fame will never be complete, Rollins officials say, as new stones are constantly being added to the exotic assortment.

Famous Holstein Dies In 16th Year

TACOMA, Wash., June 17. — (AP) — Stellacoom Prilly Ormsby Blossom, one of America's most famous cows, died in her stall in the barns of the Western State hospital, near here, Wednesday, hospital officials announced today. She was a Holstein and was 16 years, nine months old.

Only five days ago she gave birth to her 15th calf. Her lifetime milk production record was 258,209.5 pounds which, according to Albert P. Wertman, hospital herdsman, was the greatest lifetime record ever known.

Toledo Manager Thrifty.

TOLEDO. — (UP) — John N. Edy saves Toledoans money by filling the posts of city manager, safety director and finance director, but his triple official role is not approved by the court of appeals. The city manager has sole authority to name the directors, but the court held that he could not personally perform the duties.

WASHINGTON, June 17 — (AP) — Secretary Wallace declared today if he has his way farmers who put up wheat as collateral for forthcoming wheat loans will have to foot the storage bill.

Hoover Will Take Part In Campaign

PITTSBURGH, June 17.—(AP)—Former President Herbert Hoover said here today that he would take an active part in the fall elections.

Asked during an interview whether he would make addresses in the coming state campaigns for Republican senatorial, gubernatorial and congressional candidates, he replied, smiling:

"I undoubtedly will."

He declined to expand this statement.

Wants Stage Coach.

TAHLEQUAH, Okla.—(UP)—Tahlequah wants a stage coach. The request has gone out all over Oklahoma in letters mailed by Tahlequah's junior chamber of commerce. If the object of search turns up, it will be used on a run from here to Muskogee celebrating the 100th anniversary of Tahlequah postoffice.

Farnsworth Must Serve Pen Term

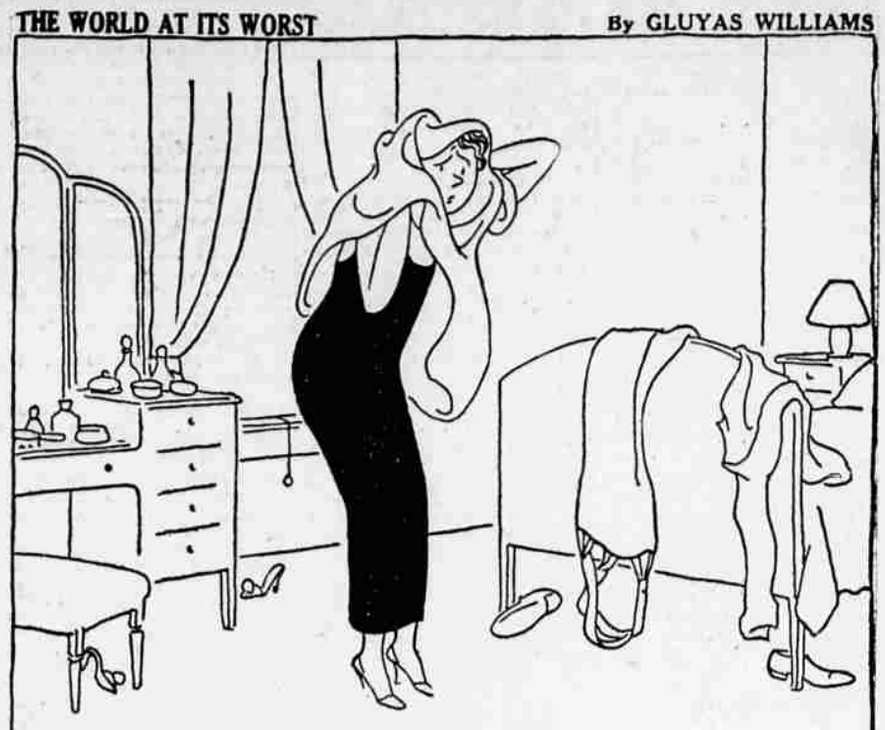
NEW ORLEANS, June 17.—(AP)—The United States fifth circuit court of appeals today upheld the four to 12 year prison term given John S. Farnsworth, former lieutenant commander in the navy, for conspiracy to divulge military secrets to Japan.

Farnsworth, in his appeal sought through habeas corpus action to gain his freedom from the federal penitentiary at Atlanta, Ga. The northern Georgia district court denied his plea.

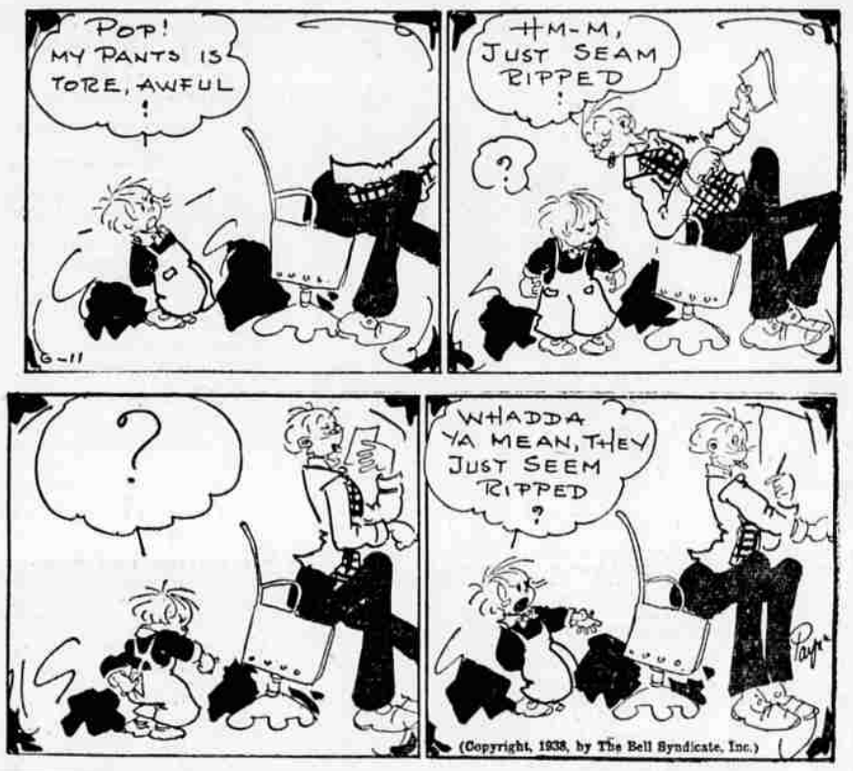
Bear Cub Problem

KLAMATH FALLS, June 17.—(AP)—A year-old bear is the city park board's newest headache. He's overeating his budget, and yet, because he was born in captivity, the commissioners are afraid to turn him loose. They would like to make a trade with some other zoo.

THE WORLD AT ITS WORST — By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



'S MATTER POP — By C. M. PAYNE



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