

OCTAGON HOUSE

BY PHOEBE ATWOOD TAYLOR

The Story So Far: Asey Mayo, Cape Cod detective, is investigating the murder of Marina Lorne, whose husband's post office mural has aroused Quannomet. She was killed by a left handed blow from her sister's knife. Suspected Pam Frye disappears after hiding \$50,000 worth of ambergris she found. Asey learns that someone smoking Turkish tobacco was troubling Pam to learn where she hid it, Freddy Strutt's plans to crash is a suspicious alibi; and agreeable Tim Carr, a boarder at Octagon House, is left handed, smokes Turkish tobacco, and hated Marina. Asey overhears Tim's grandmother ask him, "Where did the girl put it?" And also discovers that their movie alibi is a bluff. He talks with Pam's father.

Chapter 21

Queer House, Queer People

"HAVE you any ideas what Pam found on the beach yesterday afternoon?" Asey asked.

Aaron Frye drew in his breath sharply.

"There is only one thing," he said. "That Pam hunts on a beach. Did she—ah, I think I see. Yes, I see. And somehow Marina entered into it."

He took the information, Asey thought, with superhuman calm.

"You don't need to tell me any more," Frye said. "Pam found the 'Stuff.' Asey interrupted swiftly.

"That might be best. Stuff, I've always hoped that Pam might find some, she wanted to so badly. But I feared the consequences. I've a notion, which time has not proved to be wrong, that sudden wealth is a rather awful thing."

Asey nodded. "What's goin' on in Quannomet right now is a swell example of quick money," he said. "Look—what I want to know is where can the stuff be? Where could Pam have put it? Here, I mean."

"Nowhere in this house," Frye said promptly. "The police combed this place last night, hunting for Pam. They would have been sure to have uncovered it. And—"

"An' these boarders of yours," Asey said. "Where were they last night, an' yesterday evenin'?"

I thought that you three went to a clambake an' the movies."

"We did go to a clambake, and then Tim parked the car up in the square, and we set off for the theater," Frye said. "But I got sidetracked. Main Street was dotted with antimural groups, and some of the discussions interested me. I told the Carrs I'd drop into the movies later, but I never got there. Some of the talk was violent. Pam and I had already talked over this ugly undercurrent—"

"She told me."

"Did she? Well, I listened, and when I heard one eager hand planning to burn the post office, and to tar and feather Jack Lorne as a side issue, I decided to still rapidly home and warn Jack. In fact, I thought of suggesting that he and Marina might possibly be happier if they took a brief vacation elsewhere. I foresaw difficulties, for I knew they were broke again. Jack had been around in the morning, trying to borrow from me. He—"

"Any special problems?" Asey asked. "Or was it more in the line of general brokenness?"

"Look—Marina's usual. She had a talent for bills. Anyway, as I came out of the woods behind the house here, I saw the crowd, and the Carrs. I joined them, and the police assumed I'd seen with them to the movies. The Carrs—they're very quick witted—they rather led the police to believe that—what did you say, something about the Carrs?"

"Go on," Asey told him.

Due For A Shock

"WELL, I saw no reason for disillusioning the police, under the circumstances. I had nothing to do with the murder, but if it hadn't been for the Carrs, I should have been dragged into it. I know I'm really very grateful to our boarders for giving me that alibi, although I suppose it's quite wrong on my part. They're charming people, Timothy and his grandmother."

"Uh-huh," Asey said. "Now, you come home by way of the woods, out back. I don't suppose you happened to bump into anyone lurking around here? I'm sure you didn't, because if anyone was lurking, they'd take care not to be bumped. But did you notice anything that didn't seem to be quite as usual?"

"Nothing but that elaborate roadster of Roddy Strutt's, parked near the entrance to the old foot path. But I didn't see Roddy. Aaron got up and walked over to the window. "I don't suppose you could fix that window lock, could you?" he asked. "I spent last night sitting beside the phone here, hoping that Pam might call, and—oh, probably it was my nerves, but I thought I heard someone outside. It wasn't the police, and I couldn't see anyone—"

"Have they tapped your phone?" Asey asked.

"I wouldn't know. They apparently haven't given up the hope of getting Pam, through me. But they're not as adhesive about the

ideas as they were last night. Oh—here are Mrs. Carr and Tim. I'm sure they'll want to see you."

"I want," Asey said fully, "to see them, too. But you let me choose the time. An' while I dally with this window lock, will you keep your eyes on the Carr family, an' tell me where they walk to?"

"They're just strolling around," Frye said. "Why are you interested in—"

"It's their intense charm," Asey said. "It's got me. Will you watch 'em, while I fix your window lock?"

He was a little annoyed when Aaron Frye, a few minutes later went out and joined the Carrs in their walk. That was, of course one way to find out the Carr family's destination, but he doubted if it would be the same destination they originally had in mind.

In one sense, Asey thought, it didn't matter very much if the Carrs were contemplating any dirty work, their plans were due for a rude shock. Timothy and his grandmother were very shortly going to be put through a wringer and he intended to apply the handle with considerable force.

And Aaron Frye was going to come in for a bit of wringing, too. That nose of indecisive absent mindedness was going to be chased right square out of the picture. He could be decisive enough when he wanted to.

Frye must have known, Asey thought, about the ambergris. He must have known, he did know. Any man whose nervous system reacted to loose window catches would have reacted with considerable violence to news like Pam's finding her long-sought-for ambergris. But Frye hadn't even asked how much she found. He hadn't even displayed ordinary curiosity. He'd taken the information as casually as though ambergris grew luxuriantly on the trees outside Octagon House, and it was his custom to pluck great hunks of it every morning before breakfast.

Not The Only Odd Thing

FRYE was an odd duck anyway. Asey thought as he finished with the window. He'd once been some sort of college professor—Bill Porter always called him "Doctor," and so did lots of other people. But why a college professor should choose to bury himself in a place like Quannomet, Asey couldn't imagine. People said he had come for his health, which was very possibly true. And Pam had attributed his lack of interest in breeding winners to her sister's actions. Perhaps Marina's going-on had done something to Frye's pride and ambition.

Perhaps, Asey thrust the screw driver back in his pocket. Perhaps, anyway. Frye was odd, and he wasn't the only odd thing in the mess, either. And it was high time, Asey decided, that he personally got down to work. What-ever painting, outwitting and tinkering around he did in the future, he would do as Asey Mayo. He'd diddled long enough.

Squaring his shoulders, Asey started for the back porch. When he came through the strange circular hallway with Aaron Frye, he had not noticed anything but its shape in the dim light. But now as he stepped out of the study, he stopped short and stared at the clocks lining the walls, and wondered how he had missed them before.

There were 12 angular sides to that hall, not counting the doors to the kitchen, the dining room, the study, and the parlor, and every available inch was covered with clocks, or shelves with clocks on them. Asey had never seen so many clocks in such a limited space—and no one, he thought, ever saw so many queer clocks anywhere, outside of a bad dream.

There were clock like cats whose eyes moved. Clocks like cats whose eyes didn't move. There were clocks like dogs whose tails moved. Clocks with ship pendulums that swooned grotesquely over painted waves. Clocks with moon faces, clocks with human faces. Clocks—any number of them. And one whole wall was devoted to a collection of frying pans, clocks, of all sizes.

Asey blinked. They were enough to make a man blink. They were enough to drive a man crazy.

"Fuh," he murmured. "I wonder how many cartons of span an oatmeal was bought to get them things originally. It's certain sure that no one bought 'em for themselves alone—ow!"

The hour struck, and for the next five minutes there was pandemonium in the hallway. Asey erred his teeth. No wonder things happened in Octagon House. It just wasn't sane.

He found the back porch deserted. The trooper with the tired voice had gone. There was no sign of Aaron Frye, or of the Carrs.

He walked around to the front of the house. To his surprise, not a single person lingered behind the barred wire barricade. A lone trooper, sitting on an overturned bucket, munched a hot dog and sipped orangeade from a paper container.

"What happened?" Asey asked.

"I wouldn't know. They apparently haven't given up the hope of getting Pam, through me. But they're not as adhesive about the

information, tomorrow.

Jack Lorne contributes startling information, tomorrow.

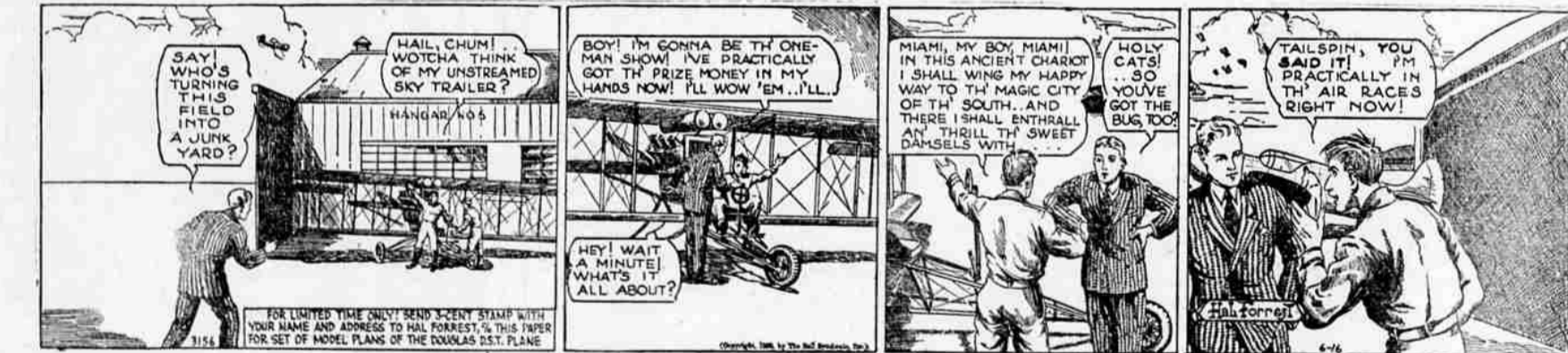
STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



'D D' STANDS FOR youthful child-star Deanna Durbin (right) and for French actress Danielle Darrieux, introduced to each other on film lot by their mutual director, Henry Koster.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Skeeter Gets the Bug!



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—The Jumping Jippent!

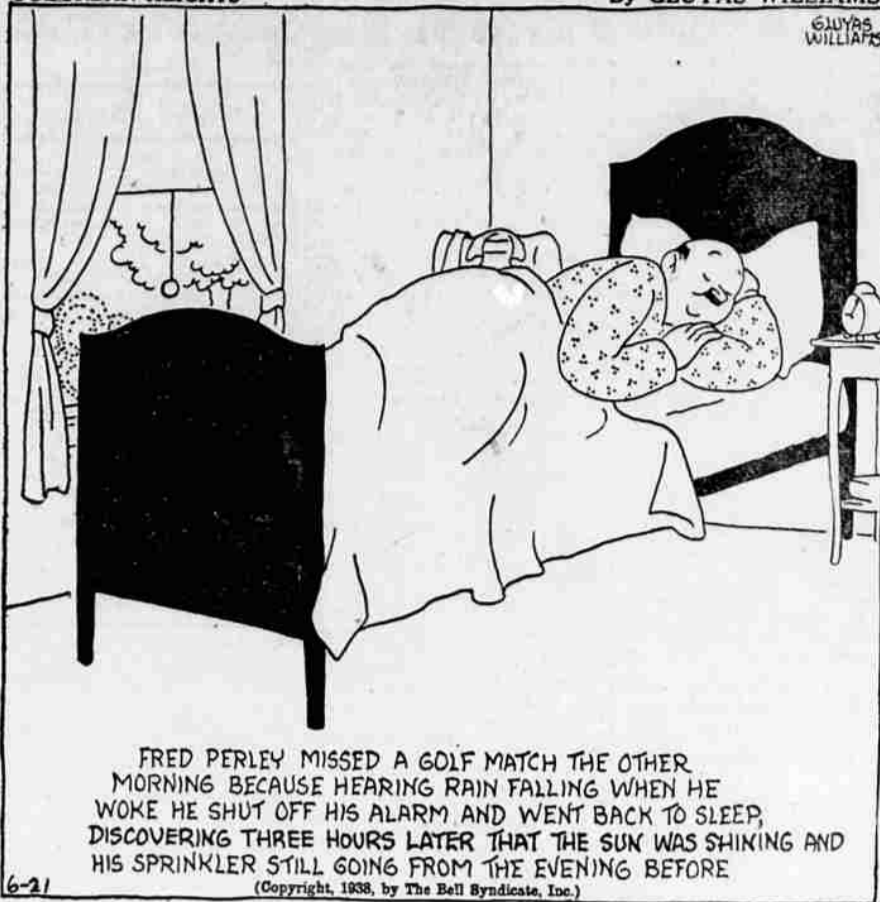


THE NEBBS—Always Something!



SUBURBAN HEIGHTS

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



8 MATTER POI

By C M PAYNE



University Opens Summer Session

EUGENE, June 21.—(AP)—The annual summer session at the University of Oregon opened officially here Monday morning with registration of both graduate and undergraduate students. The registrar's office announced that 365 students had already completed registration by noon. The number was a substantial increase over the same period for 1937. It was stated.

The summer session, which covers a six weeks period, attracts numerous students from other states as well as Oregon school teachers and university students who wish to earn additional credits.

Pipe Springs national monument in northern Arizona preserves an old stone fort established in 1889 in order of Brigham Young to protect Mormon cattle ranch from marauding Indians.

Whitney Shines On Prison Ball Team

OSBURNING, N. Y., June 21.—(AP)—Wearing gray trousers, a gray sweater and white shirt, Richard Whitney, former president of the New York stock exchange, played first base for the Sing Sing prison school baseball team yesterday.

Guards said he made two hits in three times at bat, fielded well and was fast at running the bases. As an undergraduate at Harvard university, Whitney played varsity baseball and football.

He was sent to Sing Sing for grand larceny.

Couple Married 75 Years
MILLAND, Sussex, Eng. (UP)—Mr. and Mrs. James West, aged 78 and 81, have celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary here. They are Milland's oldest inhabitants, having lived there all their lives and were farmers for 30 years.