OCTAGON HOUSE

BY PHOEBE ATWOOD TAYLOR

Chapter 49

'Is It All Real?'

A FLOCK of shots rang out. Hanson bumped into Asey at the doorway.

"We had to shoot, Asey!" he said breathlessly. "We had to! She went for the Carrs—she'd got it out of the well, and into the barrow, and she was just making for your roadster when the Carrs came back. And without a second's warning, she pulled that gun and shot at Tim—we had to shoot her!"

"How's Tim?"

"She just winged him, but—well, we got her," Hanson said.

Asey pushed past Hanson outdoors.

Timothy, gripping his shoulder, was sitting on the running board of the little coupe. Beyond, in the grass, lay Peg Boone.

"Is it all real?" Tim asked blankly, "is it all real? Is it—was it Peg?"

Asey nodded. "We had to let her know where it was to get her. We just meant for her to—to hang herself, as you might say. We—"

"Well, you certainly did," Mrs. Carr, hugging Emma to her bosom, peered out of the coupe. "You certainly did. Asey, what's in that barrow, that she was wheeling? Whatever made her go for Tim like that? Why, she—she went for him! Like—like Emma went for the bird! Whatever did she have in that barrow?"

"You can come out now, Gran," Tim said. "I wish you would, my arm needs fixing—what is that stuff, Asey?"

"That stuff in the barrow," Asey said, "that is ambergris."

Half an hour later, Cummings spread a final piece of adhesive on Timothy's arm, and leaned down to put the roll back in his bag.

"That," he said, "that'll hold you, I guess. Now just you keep quiet, and—"

"Keep quiet nothing," Tim said. "Asey, explanations are tedious, but you'd best begin. How did you know it was her? How did you know it was a woman?"

"I went back to the beginnin'," Asey said, "an' it come over me that first off, it was sort of a fem'nine touch to pin that note back on the door for Pam, after takin' the knife. An' it was a fem'nine temper. An' she smoked cig'rettes—an' she liked your Turkish best. An' she's an athletic sort. I thought so when she vaulted the barbed wire barricade the other day."

"How?" Mrs. Carr said. "Why? I don't—somehow, I can't get this through my head."

"She was up in Roddy's plane," Asey said. "She seen that lump after Marina did. Brigham remembered her. She was over there that day—only no one remembered till we started askin'. She was—"

"Unobtrusive," Tim said, "but there. Everywhere. Well, I got that much, didn't I, Pam? I said she was all over the place. So she saw the ambergris from the plane—"

"But Marina had taken the beach wagon, when she got to land," Asey said. "Peg didn't have any way of gettin' out there. From what we have been able to discover, she took her car out around the other side of the point, as far as she could, and then she walked. But the stuff was gone. I s'pose she seen the tire tracks, an' done her own figurin' as to what Marina wanted Roddy's beach wagon for. She got her car an' come back here, an' took Pam's knife—"

Marina's Pet Spot

"WHY didn't she take the ambergris right away, after Sister and I came back?" Pam demanded.

"You was here, Nettie was here—she begun to do some figurin'. We know she was at that party where Roddy and Marina were."

"What part did Roddy play, exactly?" Tim asked.

"First off, Marina got him to say he'd play holdup, and take the ambergris from her and Pam. He came over here to do that. An' he found Marina dead, an' beat it—"

"Why didn't *he* take the ambergris?" Mrs. Carr demanded.

"He didn't, because he didn't know how valuable it was," Asey said. "Not till later, when he looked into the matter through encyclopedias an' his grandfather's book on whalin'. That had a nice lot about ambergris. So Roddy come over, ingratiatin' himself by offerin' rewards, an' he must of seen Aaron take it to the barn. Later, he took it out an' dumped it in the well."

"Well," Tim said, "Stop at the well—I never heard of an octagonal well! How would Roddy know?"

"It was one of Marina's pet spots," Asey said. "Pam says she often showed it to people. That's how he knew about it. He dumped it in before the barn burned. That same night, Peg went for Jack's drawin's while we was all huntin' the troopers. The mural was done from her drawin's you know. Marina swiped 'em—"

"What?" Tim said. "You mean, like she swiped my old drawings—didn't Lorne know? He really didn't?"

"He really didn't," Asey said. "Peggy Boone didn't know, either, not until she seen the whole mural when the post office was opened. The—what d'you call it? The design of it was hers. An' add that to the ambergris—"

"And Marina's taking Jack away from her in the first place," Pam said. "I think I see—"

"Nettie brought that point up," Asey said. "About Jack an' Peg. Well, she got out some time after three, Peg did, Saturday night, an' painted out the mural with red lead. From Aaron's stock. Got out the tree, same as you did, Pam, that same night. That afternoon, she'd snatched Elliott's gold key to the post office from the kid playin' with it. We got him out of bed, an' he said it might of been a woman in pants. She wears dungarees all the time."

"But why didn't she take the ambergris at once?" Pam said.

"Gimme time," Asey said. "She had the same trouble you did—transportation. You'd fixed the garage doors, an' Marina had the car key. That meant she had to take the ambergris out, through the side door. We'll have to guess a lot. Like maybe she went to that party where Marina was, to try to get the car key. That'd of been the simpler way. Her car ain't much more'n a wreck. An' she knew if she started with the ambergris, she had to keep on goin'. Anyway when she come here, she had to kill Marina to get the stuff. An' Roddy was around. You see, he thought that Nettie seen him, that's why he paid her hush money. Actually, Peg seen him, but she wasn't sure who it was. That's why she went to Nettie that day I overheard 'em, to find out if Nettie seen her. Then she realized later, it must of been Roddy. That's why he got menaced. She begun to dope out his part in the ambergris. That's why finally she killed him."

But how did you know? How can you prove—"

That Littlest Cat

"THERE'S always clews," Asey said, "if you can find 'em to fit. In Roddy's car was a yellow glass bead. Didn't mean anythin' to me till I got to thinkin' about the clocks here, an' that littlest cat, with the little beady eyes. You see, Peggy Boone didn't like clocks—she's the first woman I've seen for a long time that ain't got a white strip around her wrist, from wearin' a watch. She didn't like the ticking of clocks and watches. She didn't have one. But when she set out to kill Roddy, she knew she needed a time check. So she took that smallest cat along—that was durin' the time that she was presumably gettin' her car from the garage. She got it. She timed it beautifully. Took Hanson some time to follow her moves, this mornin'. But she left the little glass bead from the clock in the roadster, when she started it."

"But the mural—why was that ruined?"

Asey smiled. "Everyone was sore," he said, "at the way they was pictured in that thing. What they was made to look like. When I looked at the pictures of it a while ago, I thought I'd been barkin' up the wrong tree. Peg Boone was an Indian girl. Lorne hadn't distorted her any."

"She was skinning some sort of animal," Pam said.

"Yup. An' she was skinnin' it with a knife," Asey said, "held in her left hand. See what I mean? There you are, anyway. That's how things happened. Marina took Jack from her, Marina swiped her drawings, Marina got the ambergris first."

"Her left hand!" Pam said. "Why, I never thought of that—but why didn't we think of her?"

"Why should we at first?" Asey said. "She was so solicitous about you—why not? You pointed to the ambergris! When she come back to get that, after killin' Marina an' all, you'd taken it, you see. But the minute she found you didn't know, she stopped bein' solicitous. Hanson, I see O'Malley an' Shorty gettin' out of that car an' Jennings is here—I'm goin' down to avert some murders!"

The two troopers and Jennings were carrying on what seemed to be a first-class rough and tumble when he got out on the lawn.

"Come on!" Asey said. "Snap out of it—"

"Okay," Shorty said. "I suppose it ain't dignified—say it's the first time we seen him since Company B disbanded—"

Asey went back to the house and started up the stairs just as the clocks struck eleven. The noise died away, and he heard voices drifting down from Aaron's room.

"Asey," Pam said, "is marvelous—"

"All his work," Hanson said. "All of it!"

"Naturally," Cummings told them. "Naturally, Asey is a—"

Asey hesitated.

Toots, the parrot, was staring at him from his cage.

"Ah," Toots said, speaking for the first and only time in his life, "ah, brains! Brains, brains, brains, brains, brains!"

"Ain't it," Asey said, "the truth?"

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THE END

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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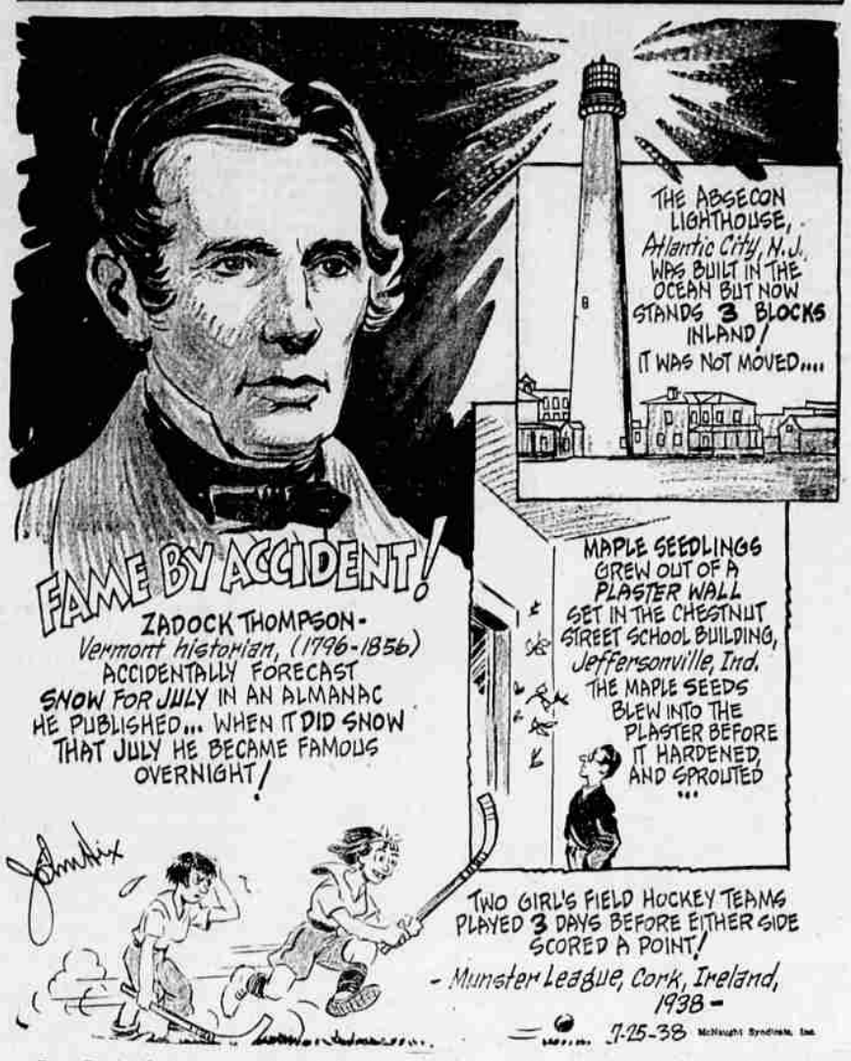

Fame By Accident

It took a snow storm in July to start Zadock Thompson, noted Vermont naturalist and historian, on his road to success.

In 1819 he began publishing an almanac to earn his way through the University of Vermont. His almanac was read casually by the stolid Vermont farmers, and for a time Thompson had a hard time making his publication realize a profit.

One day while delivering copy for his almanac to the printer, he was informed that he had omitted a weather prediction for a day in July. Absently he replied, "Snow about this time."

When the copies were off the press Thompson was horrified to read such a disastrous forecast. Obviously his almanac was doomed to be ridiculed out of circulation. Jokes were made of the strange prediction until the fatal day arrived when—strange as it seems—it did snow!

Thompson's almanac was the talk of the state. Demands increased for copies of it. Surely, a man who could make such a prediction was a true prophet. His reputation was established.

Thompson took advantage of this quirk of fate to continue his studies and his writings, and later published an excellent history of Vermont.

Inland Lighthouse

Years ago the Absecon Lighthouse, Atlantic City, New Jersey, was built far out in the Atlantic Ocean. Yet today, strange as it seems, the lighthouse stands three blocks inland!

The structure did not change its position—rather, the water retreated due to a geologic change, leaving the lighthouse high and dry.

Tomorrow: The cow that pumps with her horns.

PRESIDENT SENDS ROSES TO QUEEN

BUCHAREST, July 25.—(AP)—Red roses from President Roosevelt were placed on the catafalque of Queen Marie Saturday as a line of mourners continued through Cotroceni palace for a glimpse of the body before the burial Sunday.

A card attached to the flowers which were arranged in the form of a crown bore the president's name.

Maria, dowager queen of Yugoslavia, arrived at the station. She was weeping and was comforted by King Carol.

The Duke and Duchess of Kent of England, arriving later, were welcomed by Carol and other members of the royal family.

Wather.

Northern California: Fair tonight and Tuesday but fog and mist along coast; little change in temperature; gentle northwest wind off coast.

Oregon: Generally fair tonight and Tuesday but fog on the coast; slightly cooler interior of northwest portion Tuesday; moderate northwest wind off coast.

MYSTERY DEEPENS IN STRANGE END OF MILL FOREMAN

VANCOUVER, Wash., July 25.-(AP)-The strange death of Forrest C. Burrill, 39-year-old lumber factory superintendent, assumed new puzzling circumstances for investigating officers today when a sea captain virtually killed a theory that the man might have been en route to see him when his automobile plunged into the Columbia river last June 8.

In the belief that Burrill, when his automobile plunged off a dock here, was driving to see Capt. G. H. Swansson of the freighter, Nabeana, Chief Deputy Sheriff R. E. Brady interviewed him. Brady had been informed that Burrill and the captain were old friends but Swansson did not remember Burrill, although he said he might have known him years ago when Burrill was at Longview, Wash.

The captain confirmed the fact that the Nabeana was tied up here the night of June 8 but he said he had gone ashore while the vessel was being fumigated.

Burrill, who left a Portland party and never was seen alive again, was missing for six weeks before dock employes noticed his car in the river here last Wednesday. Friends and relatives have been unable to advance any reason for his death beyond the fact that he drove onto the dock for some reason and misjudged a narrow road which swerves landward near the end of the dock.

See Mail Tribune Want Ads.

HELP WITH THE TRUNK By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

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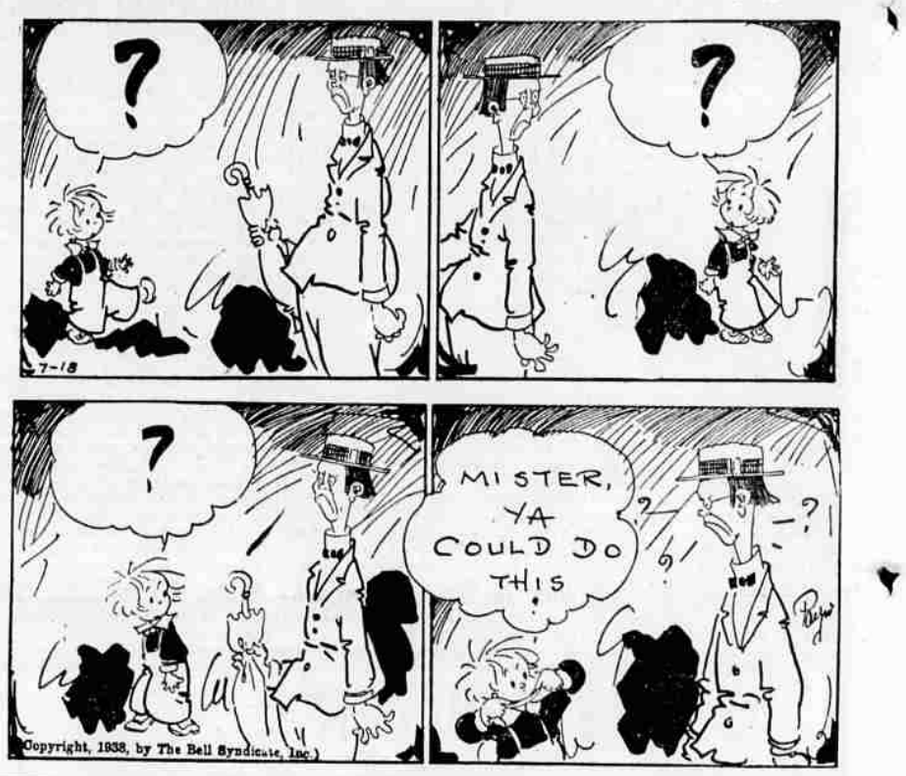
S'MATTER POP By C. M. PAYNE



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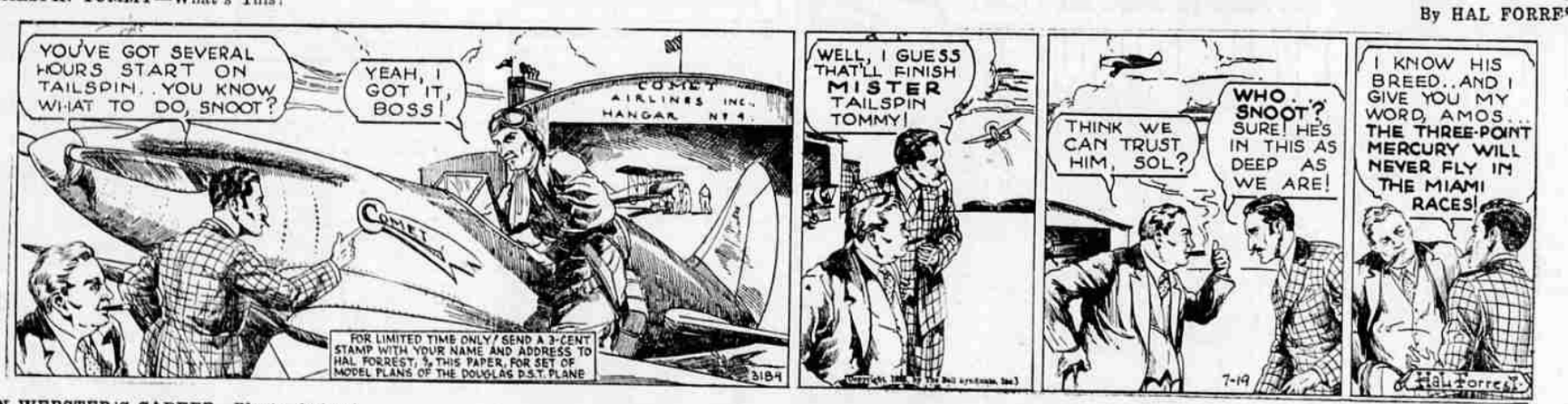
TAILSPIN TOMMY—What's This? By HAL FORREST



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THE NEBBS—Love in Bloom By SOL HESS