

THE ARMY POST MURDERS

By Virginia Hanson

The Characters
Katherine Cornish, myself, visiting Elizabeth on a mid-western Army post.
Elizabeth, Colonel Wright's daughter.
Adam Drew, a friend.

Yesterday I put Charlie's gun in my suitcase. Elizabeth has no sibi for the time of the murder.

Chapter Nine

Discomposed

ELIZABETH looked startled at sight of me.

"Why, Katherine! I—I saw the car, but I didn't—I didn't expect you..."

She was as nearly discomposed as I had ever seen her; and more than that, she seemed grief-stricken, as if something very dear had been snatched from her—something she could never have again.

I don't think I have ever felt so low down and contemptible. I knew she could not have heard me. When I asked the telephone operator if there had been an eleven o'clock call I had spoken softly, and Elizabeth had evidently just come in. But in her presence the thoughts I had been reluctantly entertaining seemed monstrous. There was something clean and honorable in the very air that surrounded her.

I rushed into speech.

"I was looking for you. Something dreadful has happened."

The natural color faded from her cheeks and she reached a hand behind her to the open door, as if for support. But she did not speak until I had finished. And then I saw there was a kind of death in her eyes.

"We must go," she said in a strangled voice and led the way from the house.

I wanted to ask her where she had been and why she had come back; but I could not find words. She had drawn about herself, like a cloak, an austere reserve that I did not know how to penetrate.

Her car was parked behind Charlie's at the curb. While we stood for a moment undecided on the sidewalk beside them, a big government ambulance rolled hurriedly by on its way to the hospital. Doc Moore's car was following it closely.

"I'm going to the hospital," said Elizabeth suddenly. "Maybe—maybe she isn't dead..."

I thought there was a prayer in the words.

She looked at her empty hands. "My keys," she murmured and ran back into the house.

It seemed to me she was gone for a long time. I had started after her, vaguely uneasy, when she came out, her hands still empty.

"Where can they be? I always put them on the card tray."

"Perhaps they're still in the car."

No, I make a point of taking them out. Why, so they are. That's odd!

The starter whirled.

"I'll go back to the club," I said hurriedly. I could not face the thought of the hospital. And Charlie had been alone long enough.

If Elizabeth answered me I did not hear her. Her little car jumped backward, halted, leaped ahead with the double-jointed action of a jack rabbit and bounded away toward the hospital.

Elizabeth was methodical, as I knew from my own observation. At least twice that day I had seen her carefully put those car keys on the silver tray provided for calling cards just inside the door of the front hall. Tonight, I was positive, she did not have them when I saw her in the doorway.

What, then, had upset her, before she saw me, before I told her of the shooting? What had made her forget the little ritual of the car keys?

I turned the roadster and drove back slowly, very slowly, breathing the clean air that a little breeze was beginning to stir, thinking determinedly of nothing but the painfully sweet memories invoked by once more driving Charlie's car with only the stars above me.

I Heard The Shot

I ENTERED as I had left, by the side door. The library was still in semidarkness, but Charlie was gone. My heart sank at the discovery. I had expected him to sleep for hours. Where had he gone? And what was I to do now?

As I came in I had seen that most of the party were grouped together on the veranda, drawn there, no doubt, by the arrival, earlier, of the ambulance; and held there by an obscure desire to keep as far as possible from the scene of the crime.

But Mrs. Flower was alone on the dance floor, walking slowly along, head bent above her harem veil like a submissive houri following her master.

I watched her in a sort of fascination until she looked up and saw me.

what we might find—a scrap of paper, blood, the empty shell. . . . You know, I heard that shot. It wasn't a bit like the noise a balloon makes."

"Where did it come from?" I asked quickly.

She stopped and looked at me uncertainly.

"Maybe I oughtn't to tell what I know until I'm asked. Officially, I mean. . . . But you won't talk."

She leaned closer, confidentially. "I couldn't swear, you understand, because I was dancing, and those colored lights make me just a wee bit dizzy—I'm almost certain it's my heart. That's what I tell people when they say how well I'm looking—you know heart patients always look healthy."

She came to a full stop and beamed at me as she had made everything quite clear.

"But the shot?" I asked helplessly.

"Well, as I was telling you, it was just after I saw Mrs. Orpington go out on the veranda. She's a little impetuous, you know; and she can't bear not to be first in everything. She was so provoked with her partner for stepping on her balloon, and I think he must have said something, for she just turned right around and left him. He didn't go out on the veranda after her, which, I think was very wise, don't you?"

My chance of learning anything of value seemed a forlorn one, but I persisted.

"And right after that you heard the shot?"

"And, you see, I'd just been looking at Mrs. Orpington, so it isn't likely I could be mistaken about the direction, as my husband says. Not that I think she did it, goodness knows, even if she is quick on the trigger and crazy about Barney, because where could she carry a gun with that costume?"

Ominous Black Bead

SHE had resumed her measured pacing, scrutinizing the floor carefully as she went. I fell into step beside her.

"But you think the sound came from the veranda?"

"Oh, I don't know. I dare say I was mistaken about the whole thing," she said with maddening inconsistency. There were so many balloons popping—do you know, mine was the only one left—except Anne's, of course. I told Mr. Shaw I really should have the prize, since all the rest are eliminated. But he said he didn't know anything about it—that was Mr. Nelson's job, awarding the prize. But he's gone—Barney, I mean. I think he's fainted, or something. I saw Major Drew helping him to a car. So I expect I'll just have to wait until he's feeling better. . . . I wonder what the prize is? Mr. Shaw didn't seem to know."

This was a little too much for me. I murmured some excuse and crossed the floor toward the front entrance. There was a subdued murmur from the veranda, but no voice greeted me and I felt suddenly like an intruder.

I turned back, a little aimlessly, and surveyed the room.

Suppose the shot had not come from outside the building? Suppose, in the semidarkness, someone had fired from the edge of the floor? There would have been the smell of burnt powder. Or was there a smoldering powder now?

I sniffed hopefully, and it seemed to me I could detect faint, remaining traces of the acid stench, but it was too late to locate its possible source. Had I noticed anything earlier, when I fled across the dance floor after Adam? I could not remember, but someone else would.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that Mrs. Flower had been right in thinking the shot had come from outside, or from the vicinity of the entrance. Suppose the bullet had lodged in one of the narrow pillars that supported the balcony. . . .

Idly I inspected the row nearest me, crossed the floor and scanned the pillars on either side of the deserted stage. And on one of them, at about the level of my shoulder, I found the bullet.

To say that I was surprised would be an understatement. I had been following a train of thought. The possibility of its leading to anything had been so remote that I could hardly believe my eyes. But there was no doubting the bullet's reality. It had plowed through a corner of the pillar, splintering the wood on the other side—an ominous black bead, half exposed by the torn timber. And as nearly as I could judge its path, it had come from the direction of the front door.

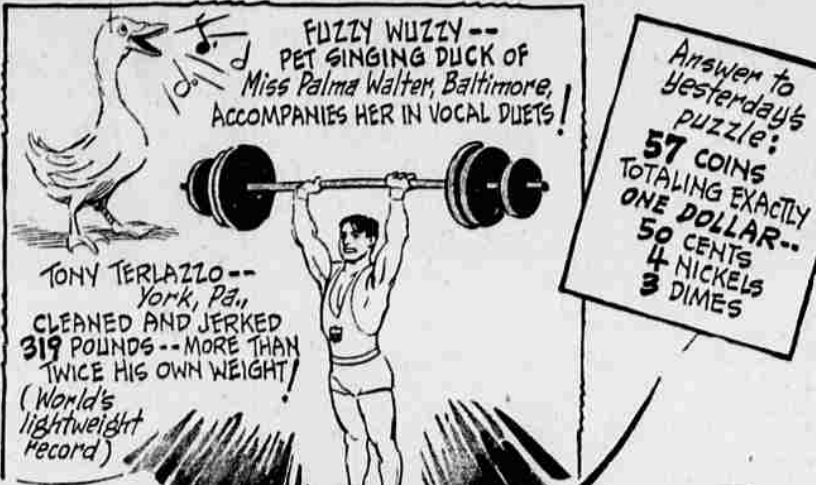
Mrs. Flower had been examining the willow chairs that were grouped into a sort of lounge on either side of the front door. Now she approached, eyeing me intently. I moved to meet her, making an effort to hide the excitement that was making my heart pound. I had no intention of sharing my discovery with her. That was for Adam's eyes alone.

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Tomorrow: Adam Investigates.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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The Lost Horizon
Far away in the mountain fastness of China lives a strange tribe which for nearly three centuries had no contact with the outer world. Completely isolated during the entire Manchu dynasty, the band originally numbered about 300, but today there are several thousand members of these people of the valley.

Chung Cheng, last Ming emperor.
Old Li took over the throne of China in 1644, but one of China's generals solicited support of the Manchurians in the north and drove Li from the Peking throne, setting up the Manchu dynasty.

A band of some 300 of Li's soldiers, left without a leader, "holed up" in an almost inaccessible mountain valley about 75 miles from Peking and waited for things to quiet down. On offering to surrender, they were forced to remain in their valley refuge for as long as the Manchus reigned over China.

There, with their families and meager tools, they remained military prisoners for nearly three centuries, adjusting themselves to their condition as best they could.

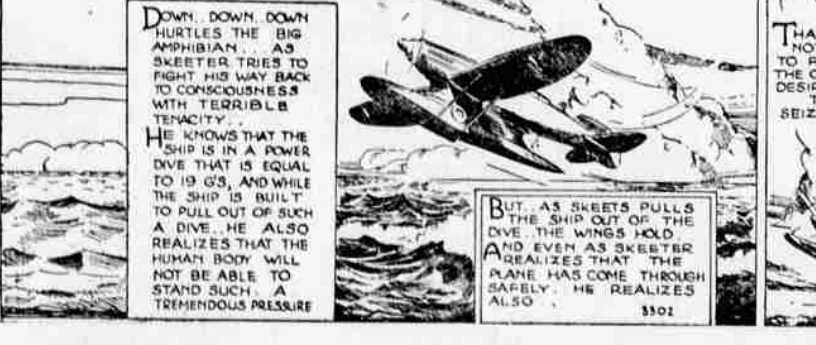
In 1911, with the downfall of the Manchus, they were once more granted their freedom, but most of the tribe chose to remain in their mountain home. Other Chinese have even joined them in their mountain colony.

Merrill Rancher Will Raise Bison
KIAMATH FALLS, Dec. 9.—(AP)—C. V. Barton, Merrill rancher who got two buffalo cows and a bull bison for \$50 at a Portland zoo clearance sale, has returned home with his new stock and announces he plans to try raising them.

The buffalo are currently domiciled in Barton's barn, but the stockman says he intends to turn them out to graze with his black Angus cattle in Poe valley next spring.

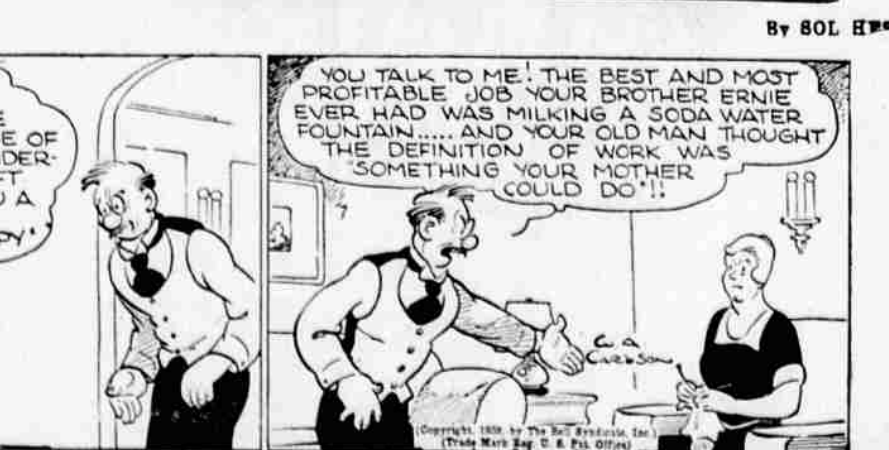
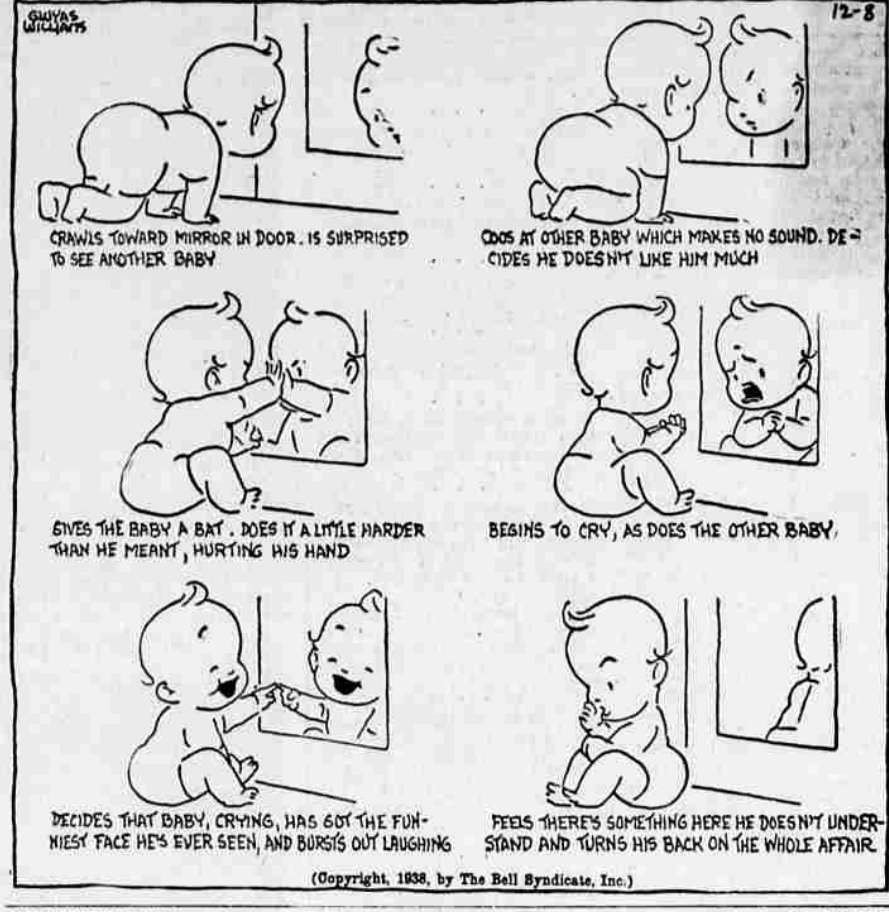
\$1000 Cow Added To Portland Herd
PORTLAND, Dec. 9.—(AP)—The dairy herd of Ernest McIlvenna had another choice number today. Brampton Vallant Lulu, 6-year-old cow from the Isle of Jersey, valued at \$1000.

McIlvenna's entries won grand championships at the Pacific International Livestock exposition for the last three years. His dairy farm is on the outskirts of Portland.



MYSTERY

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



AMERICA SCREWS LID ON MILITARY SECRETS AS PROGRAM SPEEDED

WASHINGTON, Dec. 9.—(AP)—The army and navy are quietly tightening the lid on military secrets, in preparation for the speeding up of the administration's national defense program.

New rules to safeguard forts, warships and planes, indications of a closer tab on aliens in aircraft plants, and a recent hint by President Roosevelt more funds would be sought from congress to combat spies gave evidence today of increased caution.

Military circles heard regulations were nearing completion to keep unauthorized map makers and photog-

rappers away from army posts, naval vessels and aircraft. Congress authorized the step early this year.

Some aliens on whom suspicion rested have been discharged in recent months or transferred from plants making warplanes for the army and navy, informed persons said. They added, however, there has been nothing approaching a general "purge."

Since 1926 aliens have been able to work on military aircraft orders only by official permission. Now such permits are more difficult to obtain and are issued for only a few months at a time.

Congress has included in most appropriation bills a provision salaries paid out of the appropriations be given only to American citizens or to persons who had filed citizenship papers.

Creemen Injured In Rail Disaster
AUSTIN, Tex., Dec. 8.—(AP)—Four creemen were injured, three of them