

Casual Slaughters

By VIRGINIA HANSON

...SANDRA, Julia indignantly insists that Jeff would never harm Sandra. The morning after the party Kay finds Sandra murdered. Jeff is put under arrest.

Chapter 31

Evil Spirit

JULIA parked in front of her house, got out and took my overnight case from the open rumble seat.

"It wasn't Jeff," she said stubbornly, and led the way up the walk.

Mimi, looking pale and frightened, met us at the door.

"Thank Heaven you're here, Kay," she said fervently. "I wouldn't have had an easy moment with you alone over there. Something is terribly wrong on this post. I don't know what it is, but I feel it—something like an evil spirit roving about a house—something that doesn't belong here. An evil invasion—"

Julia was staring at her.

"Do you by any chance think these murders are supernatural?"

"Of course not, Julia. Don't be silly. What I mean is that we're all quiet, peace-loving people, we army people—"

"Contradiction in terms, old dear. But go on, I know what you mean."

"I haven't been part of it very long myself, I know," Mimi went on with dignity. "But it was one of the first things I noticed when I married you, alone over there. I imagine the life must have been in these religious communities. The army lives to itself, too, has its own community of interest and little reason for contact with the outside world. We have our own inside quarrels, but aside from that we live together in comparative peace and harmony. This is like something that has crept in. You understand what I mean, don't you, Kay?"

"Yes, I understand."

"I understood something else, too: that Sandra's death was particularly frightening because it had struck almost within the charmed circle. And because, say what she would, suspicion logically pointed to the few members of the garrison who had known Sandra well. What had the chaplain said? 'Murder is an intimate thing.'"

I remembered, with a little chill, the way opinion had turned against me, the outsider, when murder had struck at Fort Havens. They banded together, these army people. They stood back to back when there was trouble; and it was too bad for the stranger within their gates.

After they had taken me to the guest room—the room Sandra had occupied until her marriage—and left me to make myself at home, I reviewed the strangers, realizing that, except for myself, there were only two—Gerald and Felicia. Could either of them be the creeping evil that Mimi had so chillingly suggested?

Gerald, when he had found himself in sole command of the building, had carried me into Felicia's rooms and brought me to with the good old-fashioned remedy of plenty of cold water, externally applied. I had recovered enough to tell him the trouble when I awoke, looking scared, put in an appearance. Gerald sent him for Felicia, who was somewhere in the kitchen regions in the opposite wing of the building.

They had looked after me, Felicia and Gerald; Gerald himself attending to the unpleasant business of making sure that Sandra was past help, then sending for the doctor and the commanding officer. I have said that it was late when I rose. The officers who lived in the building had gone to duty. There were only the three of us, the three outsiders, left with murder.

Felicia, when she heard the news, had looked as ghastly as I felt. Genuine horror is difficult to fake. Looking back on it now, I felt sure she had been unutterably shocked. But Gerald?

Gerald was no longer the posturing idiot. His eyes were cold and wary, his manner business-like. The clowning was a mask that he took off, and without it he seemed far more ruthless. I was suddenly afraid of him.

"Like A Wax Model"

HE was in my room what seemed a long time before he came to telephone, but he came back to Felicia and me to wait for the doctor and Colonel Pennant.

"Odd that you heard nothing in the night," he said in the clipped, dispassionate accent that belonged to the strange, manner. His eyes, revealing nothing, regarded me.

"But I did," I told him, surprised. "There was someone moving about in my sitting room. I thought it was Sandra."

"At what time?"

"I don't know. I had been asleep, I don't know how long. And I went to sleep again. I didn't think to look at my watch."

He stood up abruptly. There were voices in the corridor. "Wait here—I'll be back."

After he had joined those men in the hall, Felicia opened the door a crack and applied herself frankly to peeping and eavesdropping.

"Jeff's here," she whispered once. "He looks like a wax model of himself. . . . They've got the post photographer taking pictures. And later, 'they're taking her away. Oh, the poor kid! I heard Doc Jones say she's been dead at least eight hours.'"

Captain Jones came presently and took my pulse, said I was all right but to lie still for a while. Colonel Pennant came in, looking pretty grim, announced that Mimi would call me up and, with a glance at Felicia, that he would question me later, at his quarters.

I did not see Jeff, and I was glad.

After they had all departed Gerald came back and asked me if I felt well enough to go to my room. I got up shakily and followed him. I think Felicia would have liked to come, too, but something in Gerald's manner must have discouraged her, for she remained where she was.

There was an armed enlisted man in front of my door.

"Miss Cornish has to get some of her things," Gerald told him. "Colonel Pennant said it would be all right."

I looked at him suspiciously. Colonel Pennant had said no such thing. But the enlisted man stepped aside and let us go in.

"Now," said Gerald. "I want you to look the place over carefully and tell me if there's anything missing. Anything at all—no matter how small."

I must have spent at least half an hour examining that room, going through the drawer of my worktable, looking through a stack of manuscripts and correspondence, but I couldn't see that there was anything gone, or even out of place, and I told him so.

"Where is it?"

"I suppose she took it away with her."

I don't know just when I began to resent his questions, or to want to get out of that room where I was closed up with him. There was the memory of that dreadful form in front of the door. There was fear in the room and Gerald was a stranger.

"I must dress and pack a few things," I said, trying not to let him see that his company was beginning to frighten me. "If you'll wait outside?"

"I'll wait here in the sitting room," he said, and I had to be content with that.

Gerald? I lay on the bed in the Pennant's guest room and remembered the shrinking fear I had felt, shut in with him in that room, when the murder had been done. And I wondered if he was the evil invader—the creeping intruder who, if Mimi was right, had brought murder to Fort Michigan.

But what of Mimi herself? Mimi, who took long solitary drives at night; Mimi, whose car had returned to the barge an hour before Ivan's body was found there; Mimi, whose past, to me at least, was shrouded in mystery. And what, if you came to that, of Julia, who had said only last night of Sandra: "I could kill her."

My head began to ache. I closed my eyes and slept uneasily, harried by confused, racing dreams, until lunch.

Colonel Pennant telephoned that he was too busy to come home. I heard Julia taking the message as I came downstairs. Then she asked him if she could see Jeff. He must have said yes, for as soon as we rose from a scarcely tasted lunch she proposed that I go with her to the hospital, to the post surgeon.

Mimi had been summoned to the kitchen by the cook. We were alone for a moment.

"Dan said he'd leave word for us to be admitted," Julia went on, "but he insisted someone had to go with me. I'd rather it was you than Mimi. And Dan said to tell you he'll be home at four, and he'd like to question you then."

I didn't want to see Jeff. I hate the sight of death and of its grief-stricken survivors. But I understood that Julia would talk to him more freely in my presence than in Mimi's, so I consented.

But Jeff was not grief-stricken. Felicia had said he was like a wax figure of himself, and he did look white and stiff. But in his deep-set, rather unexpressive eyes, I could see only bewildered horror and resentment—no anguish.

To be continued

On the Radio Chains

STATIONS Where to Find Them on the Dial: KEX, 1160, Portland; KFI, 640, Los Angeles; KGA, 1470, Spokane; KGO, 790, San Francisco; KGW, 120, Portland; KJH, 970, Seattle; KNL, 1050, Los Angeles; KQA, 830, Denver; KOIN, 940, Portland; KOMO, 920, Seattle; KPO, 630, San Francisco; KSL, 1130, Salt Lake.

Tuesday

8:00—Marimba Band, KPO, KGW; Exposition Band, KGO, KEX; News, KOIN; Helen Menken, KNX; Sports, KSL.

8:15—Atom and Dimars, KOIN; Salute, KSL.

8:30—Kent's Orch., KOIN; Musical Revue, KPO, KFI, KGW; Fun With the Revuers, KGO, KEX, KJR; Court of Missing Heirs, KNX, KSL.

8:00—News, KGA, KEX; Dorsey's Orch., KPO, KGW; Aloha Land, KGO; Miller's Orch., KNX, KSL, KOIN.

8:30—Easy Aces, KGO, KGA, KEX; KJR; Dog House, KPO, KFI, KGW; War News, KNX, KSL, KOIN.

8:45—Sports Huddle, KNX, KOIN; Four Chummen, KSL; Tracer of Lost Persons, KGO, KGA, KEX, KJR.

7:00—Amce and Andy, KNX, KSL, KOIN; Information Please, KGO, KGA, KEX, KJR; Fred Waring, KPO, KFI, KGW.

7:15—Lance Ross, KNX, KSL, KOIN; Dance Orch., KGW; Exposition Speaks, KPO.

7:30—Ted Lewis, KGO, KEX, KJR; Johnny Pressa, KPO, KFI, KGW; Dance Orch., KNX, KSL, KOIN.

8:00—We, the People, KNX, KSL.

WHEELER CHALLENGES WILLKIE TO OUTLINE CONSCRIPTION STAND

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Head Federal Employes

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5,000 Trout Killed By Colorado Bolt

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"ALL CLEAR"

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STRANGE AS IT SEEMS

By JOHN HIX

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BELLE MARTELL—Los Angeles, IS THE WORLD'S ONLY WOMAN BOXING PROMOTER! SHE ALSO HAS ACTED AS TIMEKEEPER, ANNOUNCER AND REFEREE...

THE PENNSYLVANIA TURNPIKE—AMERICA'S FIRST SUPERHIGHWAY, FOLLOWS THE RIGHT-OF-WAY OF AN ABANDONED RAILROAD! COSTING \$70,050,000, IT STRETCHES 160 MILES WITH NO CROSSROADS...

THREE BLIND MICE!—CAUGHT IN ONE TRAP AT THE SAME TIME BY CAPT. JOHN BURKLAND—Portland, Ore.



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SUPER-HIGHWAY

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Strange as it seems, 4 1/2 miles of the seven tunnels were in place when construction began. The turnpike utilizes much of the right-of-way of the old South Penn railway, started but never finished by Andrew Carnegie and associates.

TOMORROW: Shadow of the Swastika

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TAILSPIN TOMMY—Hans Brinkerlin Makes A Prophecy!

By HAL FORREST

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