THE PHONE BOOTH MURDER

by Phoebe Atwood Taylor

Chapter One

"Bang It, Asey!"

ASEY MAYO pretended not to hear her, but neither the distant chugging of the eveing freight nor the rattle of hailstones against the truck's throbbing hood nor even his own disinclination to listen could drown out the shrill, persistent stream of orders that issued from his Cousin Jennie.

"Bang it, Asey! Bang it! Take the wrench an' bang it, I tell you! Bang it! We only got fifteen minutes left to get over there! Bang it with the wrench!"

Ignoring her impatient knuckle-rappings on the windshield above his head, Asey continued his slow, gentle adjustment of the rusty nut under his fingers, and the recalcitrant windsheld wiper continued to scrape grudgingly over a triangle half the size of an ice-cream cone.

"Wrench, wrench, wrench!" Jennie shrilled. "Bang it with the wrench—oh, come here, Asey!"

With a weary sigh, Asey straightened up and brushed the accumulated hailstones from the shoulders of his best gray suit. Then, glancing at the winding curves of the Tonset road ahead, he climbed back into the truck.

"See?" Jennie pointed accusingly at the wiper. "Look at it! It don't hardly even waggle now! All your tinkerin's only makin' it worse! I tell you, you got to take the wrench, an' bang at it, like Syl always does. It's quarter to six, Asey, an' we're three miles from Quisset. Bang that wiper an' get along!"

Asey leaned back against the slatted seat and shook his head.

"Jennie, I—"

"It certainly doesn't seem a lot to ask you!" Jennie said hotly. "Just to deliver a few clams on time for your poor Cousin Syl, lyin' home there with his ankle all sprained, worryin' if he's goin' to lose his Inn clam business or not! Six is as late as Mrs. Doane'll wait, an' I had a terrible time persuadin' her to wait at all. Six o'clock, she told me over the phone, or she'll get a new clam man!"

"But Jennie, I—"

"Trouble is," Jennie continued, "you're so busy bein' important these days, bein' a director of Porter Motors an' gettin' your picture taken in Washington with Bill Porter an' all those other engine bigwigs, you don't care a snap for me an' Syl!"

"Now look here," Asey said as she paused for breath. "Ten seconds after Bill Porter left me an' my bag at the door, before my hand touched the knob, you were rushin' me off to deliver Syl's clams. You wouldn't listen to my shiftin' the clams to my roadster an' takin the main road. You insisted on this truck an' this curvin' short cut. You wouldn't believe my warnin' about the hailstorm. Bill an' I drove through!"

"Well, who would?" Jennie retorted. "Who'd expect hail the middle of June? The radio man said drizzle!"

"Whatever he said, hail's what you got," Asey said. "I want to beat this clam dead line, but I don't feel up to pilotin' this vehicle over these curves with two blind crossin's an' three bridges ahead, without seein' more than a half inch of road! An' I cannot make that wiper work!"

"Because you won't bang it! You got to bang it with the wrench!"

"One tap," Asey said, "just one tap, an' that wiper'll break down entirely. Why, it's so near expirin' right now that a cross word'd finish it forev—"

"Oh, give me the wrench!" Jennie said in exasperation. "I'll show you! Give me the wrench, I say! I'll do it!"

"Jennie, if you bust that wiper, we're goin' to stay right here, clams or no clams, till I can see to drive! That wiper can't be banged by any wren—"

"This column's at war, lady! You got to wait."

"Give me that wrench!"

Asey shrugged.

Jennie Bangs It

"VERY well," he said. "Here you are. Bang away to your heart's content. An' I'll promise you this. If you can bang that wiper into wipin', I'll get Syl's clams to Quisset by six, even if I have to fly through the hail with 'em gripped in my bare teeth!"

"You remember that!" Jennie said as she clambered out.

Asey winced as she hacked viciously at the wiper, half expecting the windshield itself to chatter under the force of her blows.

Then he opened his eyes wide as the wiper, after a preliminary, palpitating spasm, began flipping evenly back and forth in clean, sweeping strokes.

"See?" Panting a little, Jennie plumped herself down beside him again. "Now, you get me an' Syl's clams to the Whale Inn, an' hustle up—no, don't you start any more fussin'! You promised!"

"All I said," Asey told her with a chuckle, "was 'Uncle.' I'll try to get you there on time, but don't expect any Superman miracles from this jalopy. An' hang on tight."

Swaying around some of the curves and skidding around others, the truck rumbled along the shore road toward Quisset with an accompanying clamor out of all proportion to its speed.

Asey heaved a sigh of relief when the rutted short cut ended and he swung the truck back onto a tarred highway.

"Next time we set out on any clam deliverin' expeditions," he told Jennie as he relaxed his grip on the wheel, "let's give ourselves a break an' drive somethin' faster an' more flexible than this truck. A steam roller, say. How much time we got left?"

"It's eight of six," Jennie said. "We can just about make it. I knew we could if you'd only put your mind to it—for mercy's sakes, what're you slowin' down for now? If it's that pesky four corners red light, don't waste time stoppin' for it! You sail right through, Asey!"

"I meant to. Only," Asey leaned forward and rubbed the steam from the windshield, "only—here, lean over an' look. Jennie. See those fellers swingin' the red lanterns?"

"What for? What's the matter?"

"Army," Asey said briefly. "They're just startin' to pass."

"One of them columns? One of them long strings of cars an' trucks' an' guns?" Jennie's voice rose in a crescendo of dismay.

"Uh-huh. Golly, Jennie, it's the same outfit that Bill an' I spent an hour passin' a week ago today. See, now those fellers with the lanterns are switchin' the control box lights to red all around. I guess they're goin' to hold up everythin' on all sides. There's the bus from Boston pullin' up to our left. I'll get out an' see what our chances are of cuttin' through."

Turning up his coat collar, Asey walked across to the nearest soldier, who was energetically swinging his red lantern at the bus.

The Army

A MINUTE later he reported back to Jennie.

"Looks like we got to wait till the bitter end. It's a timed problem, an' the column's runnin' late because of the hail, and' they won't let the bus through even though that wouldn't mean stoppin' the column. Huh? If only I had my roadster, Jennie, I could beat it up the West Tonset road an' circle ahead of 'em, but I couldn't ever make it in this truck of Syl's."

"Did you tell that fellow who you was?" Jennie demanded. "Did you tell him your picture was in the paper with the Defense Commission yesterday, an' that you was Cape Cod's detective?"

Asey chuckled. "Nope," he said. "I didn't bring up the Hayseed Sleuth angle, Jennie. We just got to wait. Everybody's got to wait. It's too bad about the clams, but we'll explain to Mrs. Doane how we got thwarted by the Army. She can't carp at that. The Army takes precedence over anybody's clams. So—Jennie, where you goin'? Jennie, come back here an' sit down! Jennie!"

"You leave go of my arm!"

"Jennie, this hail's changin' to rain—look outside. It's already pourin' pitchforks an' gun shovels, an' the only thing you'll get from goin' out an' fussin' at those fellers with the lanterns is a good drenchin'! Now, sit down an' be patient!"

"After all I been through today, with Syl an' his ankle, an' the doctor takin' so long to come, an' tryin' to get someone to deliver these clams, an' then you an' that wiper, no Army," Jennie said with finality, "is goin' to stop me now, not with the Inn almost in sight! I'm goin' to deliver these clams by six!"

With a stride that reflected her belligerent determination, Jennie marched over to the soldier Asey had talked to.

Asey sighed and turned up his coat collar again as snatches of her shrill protests reached him even over the clatter of the passing column. He had no desire to sally forth into the downpour, but when Jennie began to pump her fist up and down in people's faces someone had to step in and curtail her.

He arrived on the scene just in time to hear the soldier's patient answer to her verbal onslaught.

"Lady, for the purposes of this problem, we're theoretically at war, and you can't pass through this column. This column's at war, See?" You got to wait—hey! Hey, you! Lady!"

Frantically swinging his lantern, the soldier alternately yelled and blew his whistle at a small sedan that had crept around the Boston bus and was now slowly edging behind him, in front of Syl's truck.

Under the impetus of the soldier's shouted orders, the sedan was rather reluctantly backed up alongside the bus.

"Women drivers!" the soldier said wearily to Asey. "Women're the worst! Always got something they got to get to. Baby to feed. Cake in the oven. They got to do this, they got to do that! They got to get past! My God, I can't seem to make 'em understand they're smack in the middle of a theoretical Blitzkrieg! They—"

"Young man!" The driver of the sedan, a slight woman whose face was barely visible under her large umbrella, had been politely clearing her throat to get the soldier's attention. Now, apparently realizing the futility of throatclearing in competition with so many varieties of engine noises, she reached across Asey and was tugging at the soldier's raincoat. "Young man, I fully understand—can you hear me? I understand the justice of your stopping cross traffic, but considering that I am driving on the same road, and that my passing this intersection will in no way impede the Army's progress, I feel that you might reconsider and allow me to go through."

To be continued

40 Years in Congress Is Enough for Norris; Veteran Glass to Run

Washington, Nov. 18.—(AP)—One senate veteran, Senator Norris (Ind.-Neb.), announced today he would retire when his present term expired in January, 1943, while another, Senator Glass (D-Va.), said that he would run again next year.

The 83-year-old Glass, who came to the senate 21 years ago, said in an interview that "I expect to run again; I will run if I am still living."

Norris, who will round out 40 years of congressional service with the expiration of his present term, told reporters that "I know now that my ability to work and carry on is decreasing."

"I do not feel," the 80-year-old Nebraskan continued, "that I would not be doing justice to my state or to the nation by trying to hold office after my usefulness has disappeared. A man reaches the age when he is unable to do the work of the senate. I feel that I have reached that period in my life."

Profit in Soupfins Is Proved by Tyro

Port Orford, Ore., Nov. 18.—(AP)—E. Smith of Port Orford heard tales of the big profits to be made in soupfin shark liver fishing until he couldn't stand it any longer. Now he has proof it's true.

Smith went to the Columbia river, bought a boat for $3500 rigged it, returned home, took on Red Nelson as crewman and headed out to sea. Three days later he was back in port with enough liver to pay for the boat and leave a substantial margin of profit for Thanksgiving turkey and Christmas gifts.

An uncharted submarine channel has been located in the Gulf of Mexico by the coast and geodetic survey, department of commerce.

Unprecedented industrial production under the defense program has revived the cooperage industry.

The department of commerce estimates that foreign investments in the United States approximates $9,700,000,000.

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Prospect

Prospect, Nov. 18.—(Spl)—Russell Webber returned from Greenville, Cal., last week, where he has been employed for the past two months, and is scaling logs for the Rogue River Timber company here.

Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Dobbyn left Saturday for Cottage Grove, to visit friends a few days.

Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Kelley motored to Roseburg Saturday, and were accompanied on their return here by the former's mother, Mrs. Frances Kelley, who will be a guest at the Kelley home for the remainder of this month.

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Hart spent Wednesday evening in Medford, where Mr. Hart attended a meeting of the Diamond Lake Improvement Co., and Mrs. Hart visited relatives.

Among those spending Saturday in Medford were Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Dunagan and family, Mr. and Mrs. James Dole, Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Clemens, and daughter, Dorothy, Miss Evelyn Ditsworth, and Mr. and Mrs. Lee Merriman.

Mrs. Hattie Clark, who is employed at Talent, visited here Sunday with her son, George Wayman.

Guests at the Earl Webber and the George Sherman homes over Sunday were Mrs. Harry L. Jagger and son, Lawrence, from Medford, and Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Webber, from Chiloquin.

Mr. and Mrs. Paul Dole moved to Medford, Saturday, where he has employment in one of the sawmills.

Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Lacey visited friends at Central Point over the week-end.

Dorothy Hardin of Ashland is a guest of Miss Elizabeth Cunningham, this week.

STUDENTS PROFIT

Redmond, Ore., Nov. 18.—(AP)—During the recent week Redmond Union high school closed to allow students to assist farmers in the central Oregon potato harvest, 166 students earned a total of $2,397.04, Principal Edgar R. Means said today.

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When George Washington spoke these words the world was a much smaller place. Transportation and communication facilities were such that it took considerably longer for anything to happen than it does today.

But there are certain thoughts that were as true then as they are now. This "preparation for war for the preservation of peace" is one of them. That is why the United States is hurrying to make itself the strongest nation on earth.

Your newspaper plays an important part in the preservation of peace by keeping its readers informed of their country's progress in preparation of war. Under the freedom guaranteed it in the Constitution, the American Press fearlessly voices the sentiments of the American people.

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