THE PHONE BOOTH MURDER

by Phoebe Atwood Taylor

Chapter Ten

Body In A Trunk

"WELL," Alfred said judicially, "it would, ma'am, but for the sake of the trunk, I think I'd better get a spade and a shovel and bury it like we planned, tonight. After all, Mrs. Clutterfield, we don't want anyone to find that body in our trunk. Remember that old lady in Bar Harbor, and the trouble we had there. Cost us quite a tidy sum in bribes before we was through, that time, and all because we didn't bury the body proper."

Asey pulled himself together and took a step forward, and then he paused as the front door of the Inn opened and Mrs. Doane emerged to inquire from the top step if Mrs. Clutterfield was all right.

"Quite, thank you," Mrs. Clutterfield told her with icy politeness.

"The clams came, after all," Mrs. Doane said brightly. "You should have stayed here for dinner. I told you I thought they'd come."

"Really?" Mrs. Clutterfield said. "I had an excellent meal at the Country Club, thank you. Very good clams, and no waiting."

She turned suddenly and walked down the steps and got back into the car.

"Aren't you coming in?" Mrs. Doane sounded faintly worried.

"I have changed my mind," Mrs. Clutterfield announced. "I am going to accompany Alfred on an errand. I may be quite late."

Asey didn't jump for the car at once. His plan was to saunter up about the time that Alfred was bundling Mrs. Clutterfield up with the lap robe, and request some explanations before either of them could recover their poise.

But his plan didn't even begin to work out. It never had a chance.

With a speed that Asey never expected from a man of Alfred's wide girth, Alfred adjusted the lap robe, got in front, started the car, and had it rolling around the driveway turntable and out of the Inn grounds almost before Mrs. Doane had the front door shut, and seconds before Asey thought of moving.

"Flat foot!" Asey muttered in disgust. "Ole flat foot, that's what you are!"

There was no excuse for him. But at least, he thought as he crossed from the clump of lilacs to an arbor on the other side of the drive, at least Mrs. Clutterfield's license-plate numbers were engraved for all time on his mind, and there still might be time, when Hanson came, to look into this fantastic business of Mrs. Clutterfield and her man Friday.

From where he stood he could see Mrs. Doane talking to Freddy in the living room, and Asey found himself wondering just what would happen if he were to barge in and demand to be shown the body at once. With almost any other woman, and in almost any other house, his bluff would probably work. But at the thought of the combination of Mrs. Doane and all that maze of ells, Asey shook his head. He had nothing to back up his bluff, and they could deny everything till the cows came home. It would be better to wait for Hanson and see what effect his brass buttons and official manner might produce.

Idea

ASEY leaned against the arbor. To him, the time element was still the most puzzling thing about the removal of that woman's body. If the girl Freddy actually had gone directly downstairs and phoned Hanson when he told her to, and if she had stayed there in the living room until her mother returned, that margin of eight or nine minutes would be sharply reduced to only two or three. The thing, Asey thought, smacked of Thurston and Mulholland and Houdini. A woman was in a box. You saw her in a box. Then, presto! The box was empty and the woman gone.

"Mayo," he said suddenly aloud, "you're a fool! That's what happened here!"

He could see now, as he looked across at the Inn, that the ell in which the telephone booth was located, at the left of the living room, was far wider than the mere width of the booth. It was certainly three times the width of the booth.

Asey grinned with pleasure as he strode across the driveway. The side of the telephone closet opposite the door opened, and he ought to have known as much, even in candlelight and with a body against it. He had a closet at home in Wellfleet, under his front stairs, that could be entered from the hall on one side and from his sitting room on the other. Neither any latch nor hinges had been visible here at the Inn, but another door was the answer. Asey felt sure it had to be.

He went close to the little window in the ell and was reaching up to unhook the screen when the lights conveniently flashed on inside.

Before he ducked down, Asey saw all that he needed to convince him that, for the first time this evening, he had managed to hit the nail on the head.

The telephone booth backed onto a narrow hall, and on the opposite side of that hall was a series of doors, apparently leading into closets, which Asey found himself yearning to explore.

He looked up cautiously to find Mrs. Doane in the hall, removing a dustpan and brush from one of the closets. Then she turned her head and listened to some sound in the house, hurriedly returned the dustpan and brush to their place, and slipped away, leaving the lights on.

A few seconds later, rather to Asey's amazement, Mrs. Hingham slipped into the hall, walked along to the rear door of the phone booth, flipped a latch, and went inside.

Even from the brief glimpse he had of her face, Mrs. Hingham didn't look to Asey like a woman suffering intensely from migraine. She looked to him rather like a woman suffering from intense bad temper.

She looked even angrier when she came out of the phone booth.

Asey looked after her thoughtfully as she flounced up the narrow hall.

He had eliminated Mrs. Hingham from his mental list of people who might have removed the body from the phone booth, but now that he turned the matter over in his mind, it occurred to him that Mrs. Hingham, after sailing out of her room past Jennie and himself, had not appeared again until the conclusion of Mrs. Doanes lecture to her daughter.

Nervous Landlady

MRS. DOANE was tiptoeing back into the hallway now, and a look of irritation crossed her face as a car horn sounded in the driveway. Asey could see how hard she gritted her teeth as she again departed.

He turned and looked expectantly at the headlights of the arriving car. It ought to be Hanson, but it would be all right with him if it turned out to be the overstuffed Mrs. Clutterfield and her nimble-footed yes man. That pair, Asey frankly admitted to himself, were preying on his mind more than Mrs. Hingham, Mrs. Doane, and Washy the Biffer all put together.

But the car which drew up to the front door was a custom-built Porter which he recognized as belonging to Quisset's leading citizen, Judge Houghton, a frequent visitor at the Porter house. His passenger, a tall, bearded man, jumped out after a brief conversation, ran up the steps and into the Inn. At least, Asey thought as the Judge's car swung around the turntable, the Whale Inn possessed one guest who seemed to be normal, without headaches or without a body that required burial.

He felt less sure of that conclusion a moment later when the bearded man came out, walked down the steps, and looked cautiously to the left and right as if he expected something ferocious lurking in the bushes to leap out and jump at him.

Then, staring down at the gravel, the man walked slowly along the driveway.

"Lost somethin'?" Asey inquired as the man passed by him.

With a start, the man looked up located Asey, and smiled.

"Yes, a cigarette lighter," he said. "Last time I lost it, a heavy rain turned it up—I say, I know you! Mayo. Asey Mayo, isn't it? I thought so. I called on you once a couple of summers ago. Remember?"

"I was tryin' to place your beard." Asey made his way around a flower bed and walked over to the man. "First I thought you was Bill Porter's explorer friend. But you're the genealogist, ain't you?"

"That's right. Rankin is the name. Jonathan Rankin." He shook hands with Asey. "I'm pleased you remember me. I remember our chat about the Mayo family, and also your excellent cousin—Jennie, wasn't it? She fed us hot sugar gingerbread and told me more about the Mayos in an hour than I'd learned in six months. What in the world are you doing here, Mayo?"

"Wa-el," Asey drawled a little, "it's sort of an involved story, Mr. Rankin. It's my impression that there's been a murder here, but—"

"What!"

"Uh-huh. But right now," Asey went on dryly, "if you was to ask me for proof, I'd look awful silly."

"What do you mean, man?"

Asey smiled. "I mean we had a body in a phone booth, an' now it ain't."

"You mean it's gone?" Rankin demanded. "Where?"

"It might not seem that way to you," Asey said, "but that's what I'm tryin' to find out right this minute. Look, you're stayin' here, ain't you? Then," he added as Rankin nodded, "will you, for Pete's sakes, tell me somethin' about this setup?"

"The Inn? Oh, it's rather a decent place. I've put up here off and on for five or six years. Tell me, who's been killed?"

"If you asked my Cousin Jennie," Asey said, "she'd tell you I was a woman she seen first alive an' then dead, an' then walkin' past her. But don't let's go into that right now."

To be continued

MESSERSMITH CHOICE AS ENVOY TO MEXICO

Washington, Nov. 28.—(AP)—George S. Messersmith of Delaware, now ambassador to Cuba, was nominated by President Roosevelt today to be ambassador to Mexico.

Messersmith, a career diplomat, would succeed Josephus Daniels, who resigned recently because of his wife's ill health.

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UNWED INFANTICIDE STARTS PRISON TERM

Spokane, Nov. 28.—(AP)—Betty King, 25-year-old unwed mother who confessed the slaying of her baby shortly after birth here early this month, was taken today to the state penitentiary at Walla Walla to start serving a sentence of not more than 20 years.

Also in the party was Everett Marlowe, sentenced to a similar term for first degree assault.

On the Radio Chains

STATIONS:

Chain affiliation and where they are on the dial:
KALE (MBS) 1330, Portland. KEX (NBC-Blue) 1190, Portland. KGA (NBC-Blue & MBS) 1510 Spokane; KGO (NBC-Blue) 810 San Francisco; KGW (NBC-Red) 620, Portland; KJR (NBC-Blue) 1000, Seattle; KNX (CBS) 1050 Los Angeles; KOA (NBC-Red) 850 Denver; KOIN (CBS) 970, Portland; KOMO (NBC-Red) 950, Seattle; KPO (NBC-Red) 680 San Francisco; KSL (CBS) 1160 Salt Lake City.
Time Shown Is PST

Friday.

5:00 p. m.—Kate Smith, KSL; Adventure Stories, KGO, KJR, KEX; Jane Arden, KOMO; Stars of Today, KGW; Eyes of the World, KOIN; Don Winslow of the Navy, KPO.

5:30 p. m.—News of the World, KGO, KJR, KEX; Bill Henry, KNX; Cocktail Hour, KGW; Scattergood Baines, KOIN; November Overcoaters, KOMO.

6:00 p. m.—Secret City, KGO, KEX; What's On Your Mind, KNX, KOIN, KSL; Waltz Time, KPO, KOMO, KGW; Scandinavian Reporter, KJR.

6:30 p. m.—Michael and Kitty, KGO, KJR, KEX; Uncle Walter's Dog House, KPO, KGW, KOMO; First Nighter, KNX, KSL, KOIN.

7:00 p. m.—Hollywood Premiere, KSL, KNX, KOIN; Wings of Destiny, KPO, KOMO, KGW; Fish Finder, KJR.

7:30 p. m.—Al Pearce's Gang, KNX, KSL, KOIN; Grand Central Station, KPO, KGW, KOMO; Weekly Spectator, KGO, KJR; Modern Music, KEX.

8:00 p. m.—Fred Waring, KPO, KOMO, KGW; Romance and Rhythm, KGO, KEX, KJR; Amos 'n' Andy, KNX, KSL, KOIN.

8:15 p. m.—Lanny Ross, KNX, KSL, KOIN; Lum and Abner, KPO, KGW, KOMO; Along the Sidelines, KJR.

8:30 p. m.—Don't Be Personal, KPO, KGW, KOMO; Gang Busters, KGO, KEX, KJR; Playhouse, KNX, KOIN, KSL.

9:00 p. m.—Radio Chatter, KPO, KGW; Pigskin Party, KGO, KJR, KEX; Kate Smith Hour, KNX, KOIN; Along the Sidelines, KJR; Sports, KSL.

9:30 p. m.—Paul Whiteman's Orch., KGO, KJR; Dark Fantasy, KPO; Moonlight Sonta, KEX; Symphony of Music; KGW; November Overcoaters, KOMO.

10:00 p. m.—Hollywood Legion Stadium Fights, KGO, KEX; Reporter News, KPO, KGW, KOMO; News, KNX, KOIN; Seattle Public School Prgm., KSL.

10:30 p. m.—The Land That Never Was, KOMO; Hollywood Legion Stadium Fights, KGO; Dance Orch., KGW; Broadway Bandwagon, KEX; Northwest Bible Institute, KJR; Masterworks of Music, KNX; Bob McGrew's Orch., KOMO; Eight Mysterious Hats, KPO.

11:00 p. m.—Pickard Family, KPO, KGW; This Moving World, KEX; Ken Stevens, KOIN, KSL; News, KGO, KNX; Scandinavian Music, KJR; Reveries, KOMO.

Saturday

5:00 p. m.—Ran Wilde's Orch., KGO, KEX; Music of the Americas, KPO, KOMO, KGW; Sports Story, KNX, KSL; Christmas Seals, KOIN.

5:30 p. m.—Ed Stoker's Orch., KPO, KGW, KOMO; Boy Meets Band, KGO, KEX; Saturday Night News Review, KNX, KSL; News, KOIN.

6:00 p. m.—Your Hit Parade, KSL; Barn Dance, KPO, KGW, KOMO; Message of Israel, KGO, KEX; Who, What, Where and Why, KNX, KOIN; Scandinavian Reporter, KJR.

6:30 p. m.—Frank Black Presents, KJR, KEX; Sports, KOIN, KNX.

7:00 p. m.—Hemisphere Review, KGO, KEX, KJR; Sports Newsreel, KPO, KOMO, KGW.

7:30 p. m.—Grand Ole Opry, KGW, KPO, KOMO; University Explorer, KGO, KEX; Sammy Kaye's Orch., KJR; Hi, Neighbor, KSL; Leon F. Drews, KOIN; American Challenge, KSL.

8:00 p. m.—Bishop and the Gargoyle, KGO, KJR, KEX; Truth or Consequences, KPO, KGW, KOMO; Guy Lombardo's Orch., KOIN, KNX, KSL.

8:30 p. m.—Knickerbocker Playhouse, KPO, KOMO, KGW; Spin and Win, KGO, KJR, KEX; Hobby Lobby, KNX, KOIN, KSL.

9:00 p. m.—News, Design for Dancing, KPO, KGW, KOMO; Your Hit Parade, KNX, KOIN; Serenade, KJR; Sports, KSL.

9:30 p. m.—The Edwards, KGO, KEX; Best of the Week, KPO, KGW, KOMO; News, KSL, KJR.

10:00 p. m.—Two Round Jamboree, KGO, KJR, KEX; Larry Car, KOMO; News, KNX, KOIN, KPO, KGW; Dance Orch., KSL.

10:30 p. m.—Two Round Jamboree, KGO, KJR; Reid Tanner's Orch., KSL; The Quiet Hour, KEX; People's Platform, KNX; The World Today, KOIN; Bob McGrew's Orch., KOMO; Concert Hall, KPO.

11:00 p. m.—Frances Weiner, KPO, KGW; Martha Mears, KSL, KOIN; Carl Ravazza's Orch., KJR, KEX; News, KNX; The Quiet Hour, KEX; Reveries, KOMO.

KEEP 'EM FLYING

Baker, Ore., Nov. 28.—(AP)—An advertisement appeared in the Democrat-Herald, local newspaper, today which is baffling local residents. It reads: "Fat pens, capons, turkeys, fresh fish and oysters. Keep 'em flying!"

NO INSPECTION NEED FOR GIFT HOLLY

Salem, Nov. 28.—(AP)—Persons who want to send Christmas holly in gift boxes will not be subject to department holly inspection regulations, the state department of agriculture said today.

SUBURBAN HEIGHTS

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS

by JOHN HIX

WEIGHTY WRESTLER

According to Nat Fleischer, noted sports authority, Martin Levy, quarter-ton grapper, is an expert swimmer whose vast bulk gives him an advantage over less well padded paddlers. If he tires in the water he merely rolls on his back and floats, restfully reading his paper and smoking his pipe! Once arrested for speeding, Levy's enormity proved an undisguised blessing. After sizing him up, the cop decided to forget the whole thing rather than try to shoehorn the big boy through a cell door! Martin was once employed by a cafe owner to sit in a prominent spot and wolf frankfurters all day—for $5.

SUNDAY: Bad Lucky!

LI'L ABNER—Special Preview!! By AL CAPP

TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Escape! By HAL FORREST

THE NEBBS—The Backspin By SOL HESS