

THE PHONE BOOTH MURDER

by Phoebe Atwood Taylor

Chapter 25
No Motive

THIS case, thought Asey, is nothing but possibilities. If Ann Joyce had been pretending to be Miss Olive all day, she ought to have had Miss Olive's car, and the car should be around now. Perhaps, Asey thought, it might have been parked out behind the inn somewhere when he and Jennie came. He hadn't seen any trace of it when he chased the prowler who knocked over the clams, but that didn't mean that the car couldn't have been there. And still might be. If the fog cleared, or if Miss Olive didn't return by daylight, Hanson's men would have to scour around.

But if Ann Joyce had Miss Olive's car, then where was Miss Olive now, and where had she been all day? And where was she keeping herself?

Asey sat up straight on the bench.

Offhand, he never remembered a case where there was so little apparent reason to do away with the two people most involved.

And if there was a death of motives, Asey thought, there was a positive desert of clues. There were no cigarette butts smeared with lipstick, no quarts of chewing gum, or anything else. There weren't even any obviously false clues that you could dangle in anyone's face and demand explanations for.

That, at least, was the way it seemed.

But, of course, there was a motive, Asey told himself. There always was. There had to be.

"What I want," he murmured aloud, "is a few roots!"

He had thought, once that evening, that he had actually landed on a root, until Freddy mentioned that cleaning woman and nipped the root in mid-air.

It was such a simple, logical, sensible root that it appealed to Asey, and neither Cummings nor Hanson nor anyone else had given it a thought. At least, they hadn't mentioned it.

They had all simply taken it for granted that Ann Joyce must have been killed inside that telephone booth.

It never seemed to have occurred to any of them that if it had been so easy for Mrs. Doane to have moved that body from the booth to the porch, it must have been just as easy for someone else to have placed the body there in the first place.

The back door of the booth, that led into the narrow hall, could just as well have been used for an entrance as it had been used by Mrs. Doane for an exit.

While Freddy and Rankin and Lady Boop and everyone else moved around in the living room, the body could have been inserted in the booth from the other side, without any of them being a whit the wiser.

But the presence of the cleaning woman in the dining room knocked all that conjectured pantomime into a couple of cocked hats.

It did even more. It also put an abrupt stop to another thought Asey had been musing with, that Ann Joyce might just possibly have been shot upstairs in the inn and brought down in one of the two elevators Rankin had mentioned. What with so many people wandering around the living room, the elevator in the alcove couldn't under any circumstances have been used.

Quiet Exit

Asey knicked off his pipe. The possibility that Alfred himself might have carried a body into the inn was, on the one hand, too absurd to consider seriously, and, on the other hand, not quite absurd enough to ignore entirely. Alfred was fat. Alfred possessed, as Washy put it, a broad beam. From a distance, any addition to Alfred's broad beam would not be as obvious as it might be in the case of a narrower person. In the dusk of evening, Alfred with a body might not appear visibly encumbered to Washy, in the woods.

Asey couldn't bring himself to consider Lady Boop and Alfred as a pair of murderers, but it might not do any harm to seek out Washy and have a talk with him about Alfred, just in case. Even though Lady Boop was as rich as Croesus, there had been something fishy in her giving Alfred a cool thousand dollars in cash to keep in his wallet for little eventualities like dead goats.

And, although Asey hadn't considered this particular angle of the situation before, he couldn't stake his oath that the goat was the only thing Alfred had buried. And, after all, Miss Olive was still missing.

"If that goat was a red herring," Asey murmured to himself, "I'm going to look one plumb dumb fool!"

He strode over toward the kitchen.

The lights went out before he got there, and as he peered around

the corner, Washy, in a belted Mackinaw and with his little blue knitted cap on his head, sidled out the kitchen door and started down the path.

He didn't exactly run, but he walked so rapidly on tiptoe that the effect was the same, and he held his head down and his shoulders crouched a little, as if he were trying to make himself small.

With a puzzled look on his face, Asey watched for a moment, and then quietly set off down the path after him.

He heard a crackling sound as Washy left the path and skirted the brush pile, and then the soft crunching of his sneakers as he hurried along down another gravel path.

Keeping well behind him, Asey followed him around a small pond, through a pine woods, and down a little sloping hill to the bay shore.

Washy paused for a moment at the edge of the beach grass and then continued more slowly toward the gaunt outlines of a bathhouse that loomed out of the fog.

Waves lapped on the shore beyond, and a bell buoy rang hollowly from Quisset Harbor, and then Asey heard the rattle of keys and the click of a padlock.

Washy swung open the bathhouse door, emerged a moment later with a shovel, and then began to dig industriously in the sand.

After a few moments he stopped, jabbed his shovel upright into the sand, and took something from the pocket of his Mackinaw.

"The Papers"

Asey strolled forward. His hands were in the pockets of his coat, and he almost sauntered up to Washy, but he was ready to meet anything from a frontal attack, and then he began to dig industriously in the sand.

After a few moments he stopped, jabbed his shovel upright into the sand, and took something from the pocket of his Mackinaw.

He held out a flat fifty cigarette tin.

Asey took it with caution. Washy was also a past master of the extended hand and the hearty grip. And when you came to and picked yourself up, you found your arm was broken.

"What's this, Washy?"

"It's them cussed papers. Honest, Asey, I been like to go crazy with them cussed cops stickin' their cussed noses into everything, for fear they'd find 'em an' start askin' my wife—say, you met my wife now, ain't you?"

"Uh-huh."

"Then you know, if they find these papers an' ask her about 'em, I'm a goner! I kept thinkin' I'd be right as soon as Miss Olive come back. But with her away, no one wouldn't ever believe me. Anyhow, now you got 'em," he hooked his arm chummy in Asey's, "an' everything's okay. My, my, it's good to get them cussed things off my mind. I can tell you. Come on back up to the house, Asey, an' let's us talk about the ole days."

Wait up, Asey disengaged himself warily. He still didn't trust Washy even in this mood of benign good humor. "What's all this about papers?"

"Oh, they're in the box. Come on out of this damp an' fog an'—"

"Hold on, Washy! Come back here. What are these papers, and what's the idea of buryin' 'em?"

"I told you!" Washy said impatiently. "I don't want them cussed cops to take 'em to my wife an' ask her any questions about 'em, because then I'd be a goner! So I thought I'd just bury 'em out of the way till Miss Olive come back, because then people'd believe me—say, you don't think nothin' happened to her, do you?"

"I hope not. Washy, stop dancin' around, an' tell me what these papers are!"

"They're just the notes," Washy took Asey's arm again. "She wouldn't never take 'em, you see. She said she trusted me. But I said, 'Miss Olive, with a sum of money like that, you got to have a note.' I told her that ten years ago. So I makes out a note. N'en as I paid her back, I made out other notes. I'd be a goner! So I thought I'd just bury 'em out of the way till Miss Olive come back, because then people'd believe me—say, you don't think nothin' happened to her, do you?"

"I hope not. Washy, stop dancin' around, an' tell me what these papers are!"

"They're just the notes," Washy took Asey's arm again. "She wouldn't never take 'em, you see. She said she trusted me. But I said, 'Miss Olive, with a sum of money like that, you got to have a note.' I told her that ten years ago. So I makes out a note. N'en as I paid her back, I made out other notes. I'd be a goner! So I thought I'd just bury 'em out of the way till Miss Olive come back, because then people'd believe me—say, you don't think nothin' happened to her, do you?"

Meanwhile...

CONCHITA, ALIAS FREDA, ESPIONAGE AGENT FOR THE BARON, HAS BEEN APPREHENDED BY INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS.

MEANWHILE... CONCHITA, ALIAS FREDA, ESPIONAGE AGENT FOR THE BARON, HAS BEEN APPREHENDED BY INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS.

MEANWHILE... CONCHITA, ALIAS FREDA, ESPIONAGE AGENT FOR THE BARON, HAS BEEN APPREHENDED BY INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS.

First Aid Class at SOGE Next Quarter

Southern Oregon College of Education, Ashland, Dec. 17 (Special) A standard Red Cross

first aid class will be conducted by Southern Oregon College of Education beginning with the winter quarter, January 5. The class, taught by Jean F. Eberhart, certified Red Cross instructor in first aid, will carry two hours of standard college credit and will meet weekly for three months. Following this class, there will be offered, beginning the spring term, a class in advanced first aid. The completion of the two courses will lead to a Red Cross instructor's certificate in first aid.

The college is also planning to offer additional evening classes in physical science and zoology. Additional particulars can be received about three classes from the Registrar's office.

Golly!

The biggest selection of Xmas ties in town!

\$1 to \$2.50

Barkors

Store for Men

On the Radio Chains

Chain affiliation and where they are on the dial:

KALE (NBS) 1330, Portland; KEX (NBC-Blue) 1190, Portland; KGA (NBC-Blue & CBS) 1310, Spokane; KGO (NBC-Blue) 810, San Francisco; KGW (NBC-Blue) 620, Portland; KJR (NBC-Blue) 1090, Seattle; KXN (CBS) 1070, Los Angeles; KOA (NBC-Red) 850, Denver; KOIN (CBS) 970, Portland; KOMO (NBC-Red) 950, Seattle; KPO (NBC-Red) 690, San Francisco; KSL (CBS) 1160, Salt Lake City.

Time Shows in PST

Wednesday

8:00 p. m.—Adventure Stories, KGO, KJR; Big Town, KSL; Ken Stevens, KOIN; Jane Arden, KOMO; Adventures in Toyland, KEX; Stars of Today, KGW; Don Winslow of the Navy, KPO.

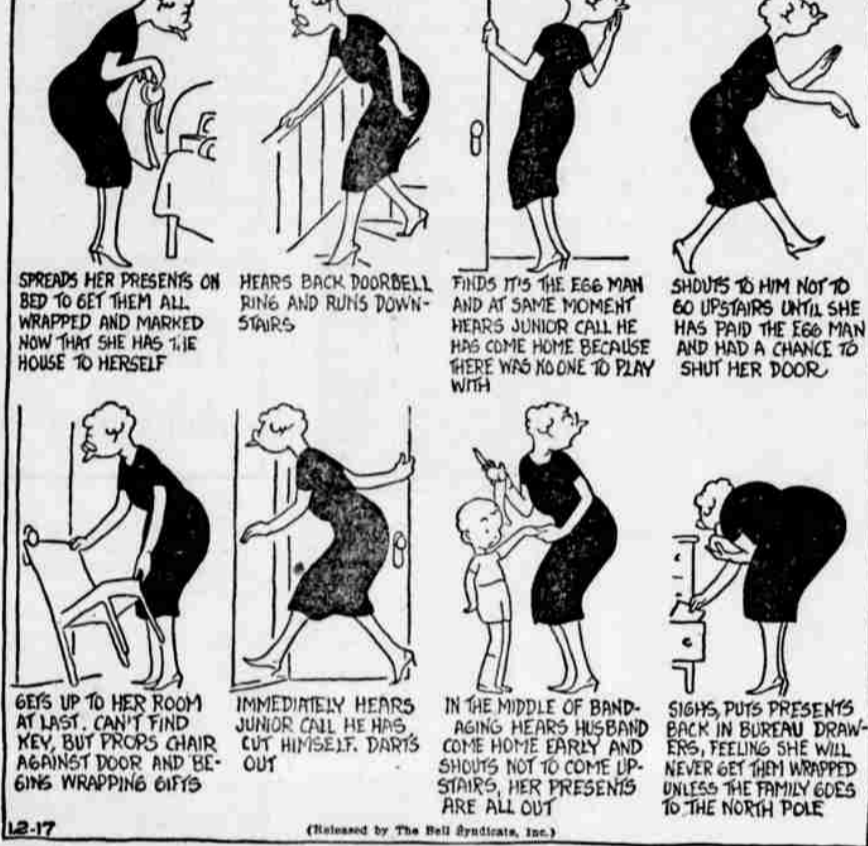
8:30 p. m.—Dr. Christian, KSL; News of the World, KGO, KJR, KEX; Cocktail Hour, KGW; Bill Henry, KXN; Eyes of the World, KOIN; Parsons' Feathers, ASDN, KGO; Waltz Rhythm, KPO.

9:00 p. m.—Fred Allen, KSL; Fred Waring's Orch., KPO, KGW, KOMO; Secret City, KJR; Cinnamon Bear, KEX; Scandinavian Reporter, KJR; Tonight's Best Buys, KXN, KOIN.

9:30 p. m.—Fenthouse Party, KGO, KJR, KEX; Concert by Kalash, KPO;

GIFT WRAPPING

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



L.L. ABNER—Murder Will Out



TAILSPIN TOMMY—Any Delay Now Is Fatal



THE NEBBS—Nothing Doing



STRANGE AS IT SEEMS

by JOHN HIX



RIFLE'S LIFE

Although a rifle may serve its owner for a lifetime, the actual life of the gun itself is shorter than the time it would ordinarily take to load, aim and fire it once! Using, as an example, a model 70 Winchester chambered for the 30-06 cartridge, giving a muzzle velocity of 2,700 F. S. in a 24-inch barrel, the average accurate life of the piece is estimated to be 3,000 shots. The actual time in which the bullet is passing through the barrel for these 3,000 shots would be 2.222 seconds!

Tomorrow: Visible Speech!

By AL CAPP



By HAL FORREST



By SOL HESS

