

The UNKNOWN BLOND

By Laura Lou BROOKMAN

BEGIN HERE TODAY
DAVID BANNISTER undertakes to find out who killed TRACY KING, orchestra leader.

In his hotel apartment, Bannister is an author and former newspaper man. He works on the murder case with GAINES, star reporter on the Post.

Among those suspected are JULIET FRANCE, blond and pretty and known to have visited King shortly before his death; HERMAN SCHULACH who wrote King a threatening letter; and JOE PARROTT, down-and-out vaudeville actor. It is also known that MELVINA HOLLISTER, middle-aged spinster, had quarreled with King recently.

AL DRUGAN, friend of King's, is found dead in a wrecked automobile.

Bannister persuades the police chief to let Juliet come to his aunt's home, ostensibly as a guest, on the ground that the girl believes herself free they can learn more about her.

Parrott is located in St. Louis and a detective is sent to bring him to Tremont. Bannister gets out the old wedding picture he found in King's bedroom, wraps it, addresses it and drops it in a mail box.

CHAPTER XXXI

BANNISTER met Gaines in the corridor outside the detectives' quarters. He asked, "Are they here yet?"

"Got here 30 minutes ago," Gaines told him. "I was looking for you. McNeal's going to let us know as soon as we can see him."

They went into the detective bureau office. Fleming was there and another reporter. Fleming said, "I hope this isn't going to take very long. I've got to get away from here."

A buzzer sounded then and the man at the desk arose. He went to the door of McNeal's office and a moment later returned.

"You can go in now," he said, motioning with his head. The four newspaper men filed into the adjoining room.

Two men stood almost in the center of the room. One of them was slender with stooped shoulders. He had dark eyes that were round and very bright, like small, shining buttons. The man's face was yellow and lined. There was nothing about the face that suggested youth, yet he might have been young. Anywhere from 35 to 40. His clothing hung loosely and was wrinkled. One arm he kept close to his side. There was a hand about the wrist, fastened by a chain to the wrist of the man who stood beside him.

McNeal said, "Well, Parrott, here are some newspaper men to see you. Boys, this is Joe Parrott."

The man with the stooped shoulders said nothing. His sullen lips twitched faintly.

Gaines stepped forward. "How're you," he said easily. "My name's Gaines—of the Post. Have a cigarette?"

Parrott accepted the cigarette, held it to the lighted match that Gaines provided. "Thanks," he said, but there was no gratitude in his expression.

"Won't you tell me all about it?" Gaines went on.

"I ain't got nothin' to say," the words were muttered, half-inaudible.

"Oh, but you must have! You're in a jam here and we want your side of the story."

"I ain't got nothin' to say!" Parrott repeated belligerently, "except that I didn't do nothin'. They've got no right to keep me here. They got no right to do it!"

"Well, then," said Gaines, "let's hear about it."

But that, apparently, was not Parrott's idea. His lips set in their sullen line again and did not open.

THE room was quiet for several moments. Then Fleming ventured a question. "Do you admit you were here in Tremont a week ago, the night Tracy King was murdered?" he asked.

Still no answer.

"Well," said McNeal from his desk, "you've seen him, boys, I guess there's no use wasting any more time. Take him back to his cell, Joe."

The man whose wrist was attached to Parrott's turned. "Put out that cigaret," he ordered.

Parrott dropped the cigaret to the floor and Gaines stepped forward, crushing it under his boot.

"So long," he said cheerily. "It was just before Parrott reached the door that he looked back. His eyes were on Gaines and Fleming. "Listen, you wise guys!" he said, "I'll tell you this much. They ain't goin' to keep me here! I got friends, see? I ain't goin' to stay in no jail. I got friends that will get me out of here. I ain't done nothin' and they can't prove nothin' and I ain't goin' to stay here—!"

The detective had his hand on the door and with a jerk opened it. "That'll do," he said. "Come on. Step on it."

Then the door swung shut. Gaines gave a low whistle. "Sweet customer," he said to McNeal. "Sweet, gentle customer!"

"We're used to them," the captain growled. His voice sounded weary.

"What's the dope on him?" Fleming wanted to know.

"We're holding him," McNeal told them, "for questioning. We know he was here the night Tracy King was killed. At least we know he was here at 8 o'clock that night. I've got witnesses to prove it. We've got the stenographic record of Drugan's story that Parrott had made trouble for King. We've also got something else I'd rather not say anything about just now—"

THE reporters urged but it was of no avail. McNeal refused to say any more. Bannister noticed again how lined the detective captain looked. Well, a strain such as he had been under for the past week was enough to make any one look that way.

"Drop in again late this afternoon," McNeal told them in parting. "I may have something for you."

"A confession!" Gaines's grin as he said it was implicit. Three times McNeal had predicted a confession and each prediction had failed.

"No, not a confession. Now get out of here!"

Bannister left the building and walked across town. He stopped at the Evening Post office and chatted for half an hour with Jim Paxton. They talked about the murder and affairs at Washington and the fallen art of boxing, and then Bannister departed.

He ran into two friends he had known years before and had to go some quick thinking to avoid a dinner invitation. It was nearly 5 o'clock when he reached headquarters again.

Nothing had happened in his absence. They were still "working" on Joe Parrott. Whatever the announcement McNeal had expected to make may have been, it was not forthcoming.

At 5:15 Bannister decided to walk home. He enjoyed walking; besides the street cars would be crowded. He set out with long, swinging strides. It had been a warm day for November but now the sun was out of sight and the air growing colder. Bannister walked more rapidly and presently felt the glow that comes from exercise.

He wondered if Juliet France would play for him again tonight. Bannister could still see her at the piano, her head bent forward slightly, listening to the notes. He could see the white, slender fingers moving over the keyboard. A few bars of the waltz she had played sang themselves through his brain. Yes, he hoped she would play this evening. He would like nothing better than to sit back and listen to such music.

TWIN furrows appeared in Bannister's forehead. He was remembering that the girl who had played like that, the girl whose voice had been so eager when she talked of books and plays and authors was the same girl who had gone to Tracy King's apartment with a revolver in her handbag.

He remembered (and this made the furrows deeper) that she was the same girl who had sworn she did not know Tracy King—until police had confronted her with the fact that Denise Lang had seen them together. Then she had admitted the truth. Oh, Joe! Bannister thought, with reddening cheeks, of the story she had told him about going to the orchestra leader's rooms to ask for a job. It was not her deception that cut so deeply—it was the fact that he had believed it.

How could such a girl—how could she have drifted into a love affair with Tracy King? The thought was distasteful. Juliet France didn't seem cheap. And yet, what other explanation was there?

Of course Denise Lang had succumbed to King's wooing, but that was different. Denise was a headstrong child. He doubted, moreover, if she knew the difference between a sonnet and a samovar. He reached a corner and turned. The cold wind rushed at him, almost taking his breath away. He had left the downtown buildings behind and there was nothing now to break the wind. The houses on either side of the street were low, set well back in wide lawns. Bannister began to regret his decision to walk home. He had a dozen blocks to go yet. There was nothing to do but pull his hat down more firmly, turn up his coat collar and plunge ahead.

He covered two blocks, three and then four. It was so dark now that he scarcely noticed the neighborhood through which he was passing. He met a small boy with a dog on a leash. Otherwise the street was deserted. He encountered no one else until he turned a corner two blocks from his aunt's home. Then, just ahead, he saw a small, green-clad figure. He recognized her instantly.

(To Be Continued)

Two million birds could be produced in six years from one pair of house wrens, if all eggs hatched and all offspring bred and produced normally.

Yosemite Falls are the highest of all waterfalls, including all its cascades, the water drops nearly half a mile.

Lake Titicaca, between Peru and Bolivia, lies 12,500 feet above sea level, yet is navigated by steamships.

Flapper Fanny Says

"What's the dope on him?" Fleming wanted to know.

"We're holding him," McNeal told them, "for questioning. We know he was here the night Tracy King was killed. At least we know he was here at 8 o'clock that night. I've got witnesses to prove it. We've got the stenographic record of Drugan's story that Parrott had made trouble for King. We've also got something else I'd rather not say anything about just now—"

THE reporters urged but it was of no avail. McNeal refused to say any more. Bannister noticed again how lined the detective captain looked. Well, a strain such as he had been under for the past week was enough to make any one look that way.

Big-eyed girls are often the prettiest in sight.



GLADYS PARKER

OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. Williams OUR BOARDING HOUSE

By Ahern



SALESMAN SAM

By Small



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES

By Martin



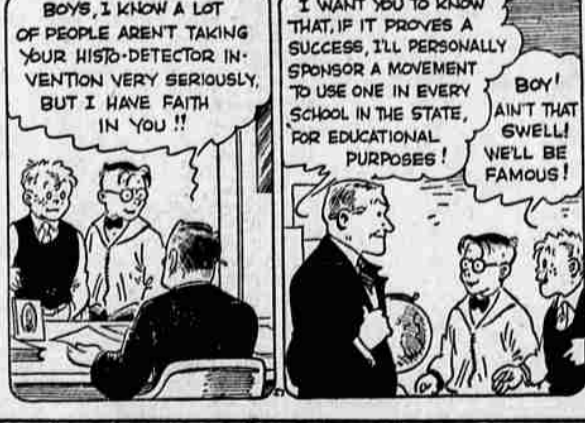
WASH TUBS

By Crane



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS

By Blosser



THE NEWFANGLES—MOM'N POP

By Cowan

