

SERIAL STORY

Murder on the Boardwalk

BY ELINORE COWAN STONE

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Yesterday, Chandra traps Wilmet, identifies him as Mrs. Talbert's missing nephew. He accuses Wilmet of stealing his silver dagger, declares that both Mrs. Talbert and her nephew had had visions. The fragments of glasses found in the wheel chair may identify Wilmet as the murderer.

CHAPTER XVIII

MR. WILMET had sprung to his feet.

"But this is preposterous!" he cried. "Why—why, I was the one who brought you here! If I—"

"Because, Inspector"—Chandra's voice was a gentle purr—"another trait Earl Talbert shared with his aunt, Inspector, was the delusion that, single-handed, he could outwit the world. But now—"

—the clairvoyant stood, suddenly very tall, it seemed to Christine, over the blustering little man—"he is going to tell the whole story."

"You are going to tell us, my friend, how gloating over the trick by which you robbed your aunt 12 years ago, you persuaded yourself that you were sufficiently the 'master mind' for a much more daring crime. . . . I doubt if you intended murder in the beginning. But probably, after you had drugged Mrs. Talbert and taken what you supposed to be valuable bonds, you realized that she had recognized you—"

"I didn't!" Mr. Wilmet's round face was white and drenched with sweat. "I—why, I never heard of the woman before last night. . . . Inspector, he's trying to—"

for God's sake, don't let him do this!"

He was covering before the clairvoyant as he might before an evil genius.

For without any of the trappings or stage-setting of his craft, Chandra was again the Oriental mystic Christine had seen that other night; his voice was the purring, hypnotic voice of the seer; his blazing yellow eyes held Mr. Wilmet's eyes as if in a snare.

"TELL them," he commanded, "how, before you had drugged your aunt into helplessness, you forced her to write those letters. Tell them how, after you had held her in her own car while you made sure Jasper had obeyed her orders, you drove her, by night, to her own abandoned home, and hid her there while you rifled the house for anything you might find that could help to point suspicion to someone else. . . ."

"Tell them that you even felt safe in leaving her alone there, drugged as she was, because you remembered her prejudice against the police, and you knew that Jasper would respect her orders."

"Perhaps, at first, you considered killing your aunt there in her empty house; but it was necessary to your infantile exhibitionism to do the thing in a really spectacular way, and you had more ideas than you knew what to do with. . . . Tell them how, after you had entered the house with Mrs. Talbert's own key—"

"But how could I?" Mr. Wilmet's cry was shrill with triumph. "Why, she didn't have a key."

Jasper broke a shocked silence. "He's right, Inspector," he murmured. "Mrs. Talbert hadn't taken her key with her."

Christine, watching as if in a fantastic nightmare, saw the little man freeze as he understood how much he had told in those five words; then leap to his feet and dash blindly, straight into the arms of two uniformed men who had appeared in the doorway.

"Get his keys," the inspector ordered.

When one of the officers handed the ring to him, he passed it to Jasper, a silent question in the gesture.

"Yes, sir," Jasper almost whispered. "The middle one."

"All right. Take him to the bureau. . . . Well—even Inspector Parsons looked white and shaken as his subordinates led the hysterical man away—"I've seen a third degree or two; but at least policemen don't hit mugs over the head with black magic. . . . And now, suppose you tell me how you know all this."

"BECAUSE, sir"—Jasper spoke—"after I—left your office last night, I thought it best to have a look at the house. I'd kept one key, because I felt that as soon as I could, I must go back. . . . But someone had been there before me. Everything was turned upside down."

"Much as we found it when we went out early this morning," the inspector nodded. "Perhaps you'll understand now why I was so much interested in your keys, Yardley. That story you told about absent-mindedly taking a key from a strange car and putting it into your pocket sounded pretty feeble. . . . Anything taken, Jasper?"

"Mrs. Talbert's will, sir—I suppose it was he sent that to the newspapers; and a pair of Mrs. Talbert's shoes—"

"The ones," the inspector explained, "that her nephew put on to make that fine trail to the booth. One of my men found them buried deep in the sand where Yardley told us about having seen Wilmet pottering around the evening before. Until now, I wasn't entirely sure Mr. Yardley hadn't put them there himself."

"Well"—the inspector looked almost satisfied—"now we only need those faked bonds."

From a tangle of images, one started out clean-lined in Christine's tired memory.

"I think that if you pried up the top of that stone bench at the back of the booth," she said, "you might find something underneath."

When she explained about that

first morning—her heel sinking into soft concrete, Mr. Wilmet's voluble explanations—the inspector went to the telephone and gave an order. "Altogether," he said, turning back, "that bird used up enough ideas in one murder to last a good, honest crook a lifetime. . . . But the thing that puzzled me worst he apparently hadn't had a finger in. . . . You wondered how I knew that those bonds were your cousin's, Miss Thorenson, I found something among them that you missed."

HE took a folded paper from his pocket and handed it to Christine. It was a short note in Cousin Emma's hand. "My dear Christine," it said. "If anything should happen to prevent our visit, Jasper will hand you these. Take good care of them, for the bonds are non-registered; so, of course, anyone could use them. They are yours, as most of what I possess will be in the end. Affectionately yours, Emma Talbert."

"This morning," the inspector said, "I'd have sold my soul to know who really wrote that."

The telephone rang, and he hurried to answer. "He has! Good work!" they heard him say. "I'll be right up. . . . Well," he hung up, "Miss Thorenson was right about that bench. Mr. Earl Talbert has shot the works in his confession. I guess that cleans up the slate."

"Not entirely," Chandra extended a hand. "I'd like my glasses."

"Your—what?"

"I was sure," Chandra explained evenly, "that he'd lost his spares somewhere—even if it

wasn't in my studio—or he would not have been wearing a pair of sun-glasses with ordinary lenses." "You mean," the inspector said after a blank silence, "that you hypnotized that poor nut with your own spectacle case?" "Something like that," Chandra admitted. Then he murmured with a strange, tired smile—Christine recognized the quotation—"But there was something in it—tricks and all."

(THE END)



Already a dancing star and diving champ, Mary Howard came to Hollywood to hoof in films. When acting contracts came her way, she got her teeth straightened and gave her legs a rest. After several minor roles, she appears as Ann Rutledge to Raymond Massey's "Abe Lincoln in Illinois."

OUT OUR WAY BY J. R. WILLIAMS



RED RYDER



OUR BOARDING HOUSE With MAJOR HOOPLE



BY FRED HARMAN



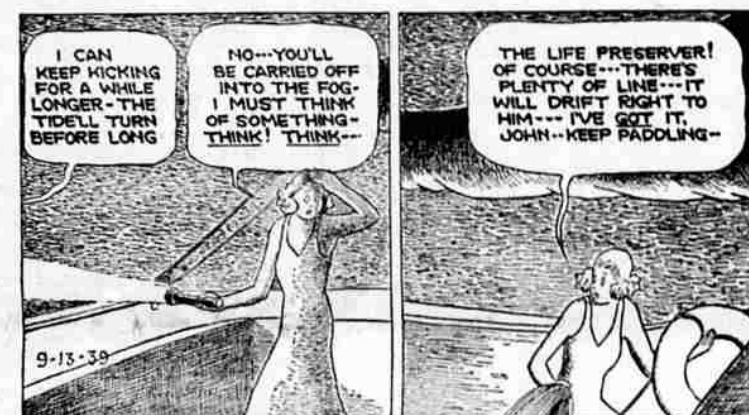
BY HAROLD GRAY

FLAPPER FANNY By Sylvia



"Isn't this swell, Fan? The band master says I don't hafta practice at school—I can do it here."

LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE



FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



BY BLOSSER

EMINENT SCIENTIST

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for horizontal and vertical words.

WASH TUBBS



BY CRANE

BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



BY MARTIN

ALLEY OOP



BY V. T. HAMLIN

