

SERIAL STORY

MURDER INCOGNITO

BY NORMAN KAHL

Copyright, 1940, NEA Service, Inc.

CHAPTER I

IT was nothing you could put your hands on. The soft, pleasant breezes of the summer night that floated through Martin Saylor's spacious drawing room had nothing to do with it. It was the way you feel when you're alone on a dark night and you know that someone is reaching out to strangle you. Only when you turn around, there's nobody there.

Dale Appleby felt it, too. He lay slumped on his spine, in one of the overstuffed chairs near the fireplace. Even with his chest sunken, his head propped forward by the back of the chair, his body showed the sturdy, virile contour of an athlete. His blond hair was cut high at the temples, and the tightly drawn skin of his cheeks, the gently twitching muscles in his face, gave him a patrician air.

"It's no use, Rhoda," Dale said softly. "I just went over the whole matter again with Saylor in his study. I stay broke until he feels like turning over the money. And my mother's will is air-tight."

"It ought to be a good will," Rhoda Waters said. "He wrote it. Your stepfather may be rotten—but he's a good lawyer."

"Good enough to keep me a pauper—and there's not one blessed thing I can do about it." Rhoda's eyes brightened and her lips curved into a tiny smile.

"Yes, there is. There's one way." "What?" "Murder him."

DALE'S head snapped up and his eyes fastened on Rhoda, but he didn't seem to hear her. "I there a clause in your mother's will that gives you the money automatically if your beloved stepfather dies?"

Dale laughed uneasily. "There is, my love. But the suggestion coming from you startled me a bit."

Rhoda rested her elbows on her knees and propped her chin with the palms of her hands. "Oh, Dale... what's the use? You know why he won't let you have the money. He hates me... he doesn't want you to marry me."

Dale lit a cigarette and flicked tobacco particles from his white mess jacket. "You know that's not the real reason, darling. It's an excuse. He's greedy and cruel." He nodded toward the man and woman sitting near the broad French windows across the room. "They're his victims, too. So is George Barbour, who's in Saylor's den right now. This whole affair tonight—asking all of us to dinner and torturing us with his hostile courtesy—it's all part of the whole ugly scheme. Saylor can't just exact his pound of flesh. He's got to watch his victims writhe in agony."

Dale was thinking of his mother then—of the way she, too, had fallen into the clutches of the man who now sat in her house meting out his punishment. Dale's mother had married Martin Saylor three years after her first husband died. She died four years later, when Dale was 20. Saylor had drawn her last testament and, under his influence, she had specified that Saylor was to hold Dale's legacy until her son became 21—or until, in Saylor's opinion, Dale was responsible enough to handle his own fortune.

Rhoda reached over and took a cigarette from the coffee table before her. "I suppose I ought to tell you, Dale—I saw Saylor the other day. He asked me to come over. He told me you would never get any of the money as long as you went around with me. He called me a—gold digger."

Color rushed into Dale's cheeks. "Why, the contemptible!" He stopped abruptly. The other couple was standing over them. Dale sprang to his feet until the blond woman seated herself on the far end of the divan.

"I wish he'd get it over with—whatever he wants," Hazel Leighton said. "I'm getting jittery." She couldn't have been much older than 30. She was still pretty, but her excessive make-up and the dull platinum of her hair made her seem somewhat older.

Winlow Mardell remained standing. The corner of his mouth curled up to meet one end of his thin mustache. He placed one hand on Hazel's shoulder. "You know what he wants. It's the payoff, isn't it? Uncle Martin wants to Welch—and I'm betting he gets away with it."

Hazel flared. "I wouldn't talk about Welch, if I were you. You're not here to play chess with the Old Master. If the grapevine has it straight, there's a little matter of some gambling..."

"That's my business," said Mardell coldly. "Mine and Saylor's. We'll manage to settle..."

MARDELL stopped short. In the broad, arched doorway on the south side of the room stood two men, almost exactly the same height. George Barbour smiled.

Saylor said. "We've settled lots of things." Rhoda sprang to her feet. "Why do you have to do this to us? Why do you have to torture us? Can't you just get it over with?" "There's no need to get hysterical," Saylor said coldly. Dale had risen with Rhoda and had thrown a protective arm around her quivering shoulders. "She's not hysterical. She's just telling you what all of us are thinking. Why don't you get on with your bloody business?"

Saylor's piercing eyes were leveled on Dale for a moment. Suddenly his jaw clenched tightly. "Very well—you asked for it." He turned to Hazel Leighton. "I've a long distance call to make. It should take about 10 minutes. I'll see you after that." He wheeled and walked briskly out of the room. From where Rhoda was still standing, she could see him walk across the reception hall and shut the wide oaken door of his study behind him.

GEORGE BARBOUR had slumped into his chair. His teeth clenched an unlighted cigar. Hazel Leighton kept consulting her wrist watch. After a while she sprang to her feet. "I'm going in. He can't keep me waiting. Twenty minutes have passed—it's 9:30 now." She strode out of the room.

Mardell's eyes followed her. "And the condemned woman marched into the death chamber with a look of defiance on her face," he intoned.

Dale frowned. "I don't think you're very funny tonight, Mardell. Apparently you don't quite grasp—" A scream cut him short. For a moment no one stirred. No one was quite sure what it was. Across the hallway, Rhoda could see Hazel clinging to the opened doorway of the study.

"It's Hazel," she gasped. Dale was on his feet. He dashed across the broad drawing room with the others on his heels. At the entrance to Saylor's den, Hazel stood, unsupported now, her face looking grotesquely ashen. "What's the matter?" Dale asked. "What happened?" And then he saw. They all saw. The men stood, rooted to the floor, and gaped. Rhoda sought Dale's hand and clung to it feverishly.

In the middle of the dimly lighted study lay Martin Saylor, his leg crumpled up beneath him, his face pressed flat against the sand-colored rug. Next to the inert body, a widening pool of blood caught the faint rays of the desk lamp in one corner and glistened gruesomely.

(To Be Continued)

SIGNED AND SEALED

KANSAS CITY, (P)—A couple appeared before James A. Kilmer, deputy recorder of deeds, for a marriage license but before she accepted it the bride said firmly: "My husband has to sign this oath before we get a license and I wish you—authorities—would witness it."

The oath: "I do hereby promise my wife I won't go out at night after we are married. I will not play cards. . . I will only call on women when accompanied by my wife. I will not drink any more than my wife allows. I will let her be boss in every way."

The groom signed.

THIS CURIOUS WORLD

A FILM OF OIL SMOOTHS STORMY WATERS BECAUSE IT REDUCES THE FRICTION OF THE WIND.

IN THE 14 CENTURY, BRIDES TOSSED A GARTER TO THEIR FRIENDS, INSTEAD OF A BRIDAL BOUQUET!

ANSWER: It contracts the length of the pendulum and causes the clock to run faster.

INVENTOR

HORIZONTAL Answer to Previous Puzzle

1, 5 Pictured American inventor.

8 Nomadic Persian race.

9 Pest.

11 To impart energy.

13 Musical note.

17 Fine river mud.

18 Polishes.

20 To prepare for publication.

21 Destruction.

22 Particle.

23 Pertinent.

24 Half an cm.

25 He lived in the United States.

27 Gaiter.

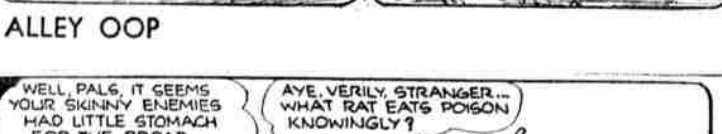
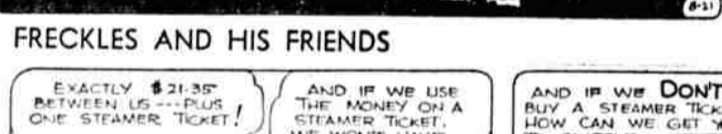
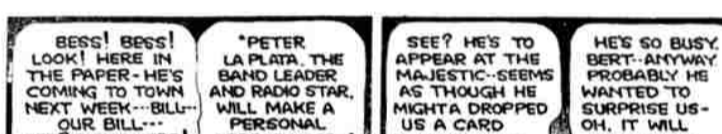
28 Drunkards.

OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. WILLIAMS



RED RYDER



OUR BOARDING HOUSE

With MAJOR HOOPLE



LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE

