

SERIAL STORY

CARIBBEAN CRISIS

BY EATON K. GOLDTHWAITE

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CHAPTER I

IT was a little past noon when the mailboat reached Abas Island and Bill Talcott, who had been up since dawn, noticed with amazement the arrival of four visitors. He had no difficulty in spotting the new man Halsey, a rangy, lantern-jawed individual in his forties, and he guessed that the skinny little fellow with the voluminous briefcase would be the company auditor.

But the other two, a mustached character much the worse for the ride across Anegada Passage, and a slender blond girl in plum-colored slacks, were entirely out of place. It was only because the girl was so positive in ordering the transfer of her luggage that Bill Talcott decided she must be a relative of Halsey's who had come along to see him settled in his new home.

"I'm your successor," the rangy man admitted after he had gotten the dock under his feet. "Not surprised you didn't meet us in Saint Thomas. Had no idea it was such a long trip. This is Struthers, the auditor, and Mr. MacDowell."

The girl in the plum-colored slacks was fresh as a zephyr, as coolly unconcerned as a scudding cloud. "I'm June Paterson," she announced, wrinkling her pert nose. "Lowell Byrd's cousin. He cabled that you were expecting to return to the Continent. I've been spending a month with friends in Charlotte Amalie and Lowell's afraid I'll go native. You're to look after me."

"Wh-what?" Bill Talcott gasped. "Aren't you thrilled?" she murmured, lowering her lashes in exaggerated coquetry. And then she swept away to organize the confused scamping of houseboys for luggage.

BILL TALCOTT gaped, wracking his brain to recall Lowell Byrd's cousin. Could this be the kid he'd danced with after the water polo meets at Cornell? Dimly he remembered a lot of arms and legs all wrapped in yards of green silk. It had been a dozen years since he had shared a room with Lowell Byrd in engineering school. Suddenly, because you don't go in for the social niceties after six years on a place like Abas, he became conscious that he had neither shaved nor changed his clothes.

"I suppose you received Winters' cable?" Halsey was saying. "I presume your accounts are in shape for the customary audit?"

The new man's critical eye scanned the tacky, barren contour of the island. Already he was fretting in the closeness of the brass, stifling heat; faring his nostrils at the smell.

"I'm all set," Talcott said. "We'll go up to the house for a drink. You'll be able to get in a swim before lunch if you like."

Halsey hesitated, a half-smile on his lips, and the sweating little auditor cut in. "Thanks for the invitation, Talcott," Struthers said in a thin voice. "But if you don't mind, Halsey and I will get directly to work. If you'll just show us to the office."

Bill Talcott nodded in mild surprise. Such eagerness to buckle down didn't seem just right, not after a 1600-mile steamship ride topped off with a night and a morning on the jolting mailboat. Still, auditors were creatures of habit more than whim, and Struthers seemed set on living up to his role. Shrugging, Talcott pointed to a cluster of galvanized buildings on the ridge and, taking June Paterson and the wobbly MacDowell in hand, he set off along the path to his bungalow.

TALCOTT, frosted glasses appeared, luggage melted from sight, and Talcott relaxed with his guests on the terrace. From comfortable chairs they watched the rustling fronds of royal palms against the trade-wind sky, eyed the antics of a tiny lizard perched on the swaying bough of a flamboyant tree.

June Paterson fidgeted and her eyes glinted hostilely. She expected, "From what Lowell told me I suspected to find you living in a cave. So you're leaving all this to go in the army?"

"I have to take up my commission," he said, and decided that she was horribly spoiled. He didn't think it necessary to tell her that "all this" included operation of a fertilizer plant. Her up-titled nose must have told her that. He didn't tell her, either, that the population of Abas consisted of tough blacks; that she was the first white woman who had set foot there in more than a year.

The recovering MacDowell filled his mouth with ice and grunted. "Say, it's kinda nice here. This one o' the Virgin Islands?" Talcott smiled. "No. You're now in the Netherlands, or what's left of them. It's quite a job to keep track of the minor pawns in the strategy of international chess."

"Holland! Gosh!" Talcott would have liked to ask him his connection with Halsey and Struthers; there hadn't been any MacDowells mentioned in the hectic correspondence with Old Man Winters. But he kept his peace. After six years of same-ness a new face, even a close-mouthed one, was welcome. June Paterson supplied the lack with an endless round of questions about the extraction of nitrates, and they were on a fresh round of drinks when Halsey came up the path.

The new man's jaw was grim and his eyes were both puzzled and appraising. "Struthers wants to see you," Halsey said abruptly. "So soon?" Talcott flushed. "Aren't you fellows in a bit of a

rush?" "I think you'd better go," Halsey said. Again his eyes held swift appraisal, mirroring perhaps incredulous disappointment. Baffled, Talcott got to his feet. Turning to June Paterson he said, "I trust you will excuse me. The boy will get you anything you need."

The ash-blond girl regarded him with a quizzical smile. "Trouble in paradise," she laughed. "Do we dress for dinner?"

"If you wish," he said coldly. Whatever concern he held at the strangeness of Halsey's manner was stifled when he entered the office. In its hot interior, Struthers had surrounded himself with books. The auditor's coat was off and his wet shirt clung to his skinny ribs. His eyes were enormous behind thick-lensed glasses, and he sniffed and said, "Talcott, you appear to be short in your accounts by \$158,000. I suppose you've got some explanation?"

(To Be Continued)

EXTINCTION EXPLAINED

Scientists say that dinosaurs became extinct because "land areas gradually arose, drained the swamps and lowlands, and deprived the dinosaurs of their food supply."

BARS DOOR AFTER HIM

The "trapdoor spider" builds his home in the ground, complete with door, which he closes after him as he goes below to escape his enemies.

THIS CURIOUS WORLD

By William Ferguson



CASEIN

WAS FOUND TO BE VALUABLE IN MAKING PHONOGRAPH RECORDS WHEN A WORKMAN, WHILE EATING LUNCH, FLIPPED A PIECE OF CHEESE AT A FELLOW WORKER AND IT FELL INTO A 'V' OF MATERIALS BEING MIXED FOR RECORDS.

AN AVERAGE SIZED IRISH POTATO CONTAINS ABOUT THREE BILLION CELLS... THAT MANY CELL DIVISIONS BEING REQUIRED TO PRODUCE THE POTATO.



CAN YOU GIVE THREE INSTANCES WHERE HORSES PLAYED IMPORTANT ROLES IN WAR?

ANSWER: The Trojan horse episode, Paul Revere's ride, Sheridan's ride.

NEXT: Is poison ivy something new?

SHADOW STAR

Crossword puzzle grid with clues and answers.

Crossword puzzle grid with a portrait of a woman in the center.



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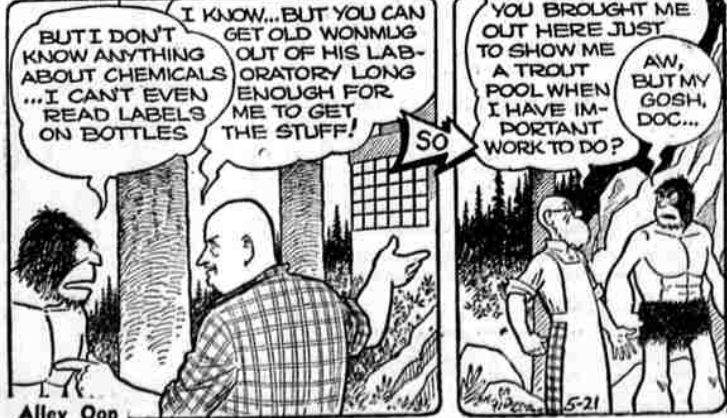
ALONE, THE GIRL WALKS DOWN THE ROAD IN THE SPOTLIGHT OF A HUNDRED LEERING EYES By Crane



Freckles and His Friends By Blosser



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