

I AM A MURDERER

BY MORRIS MARKEY

NEA SERVICE, INC.

THE STORY: This is the story of the perfect crime—the murder of Col. Wesley Hope Merriwether in the library of his Long Island estate...

VICTORY PARTY

CHAPTER IV

THEY gathered that night at Stone House to celebrate the victory of the Whirlwind side and the increment to Cynthia Merriwether's pocketbook...

When he spoke of that appointment, Cynthia gave him a mocking glance and said, "Why don't you go on and bring her to the party?"

Prentiss smiled in his insufferably genial fashion. "It isn't a she at all," he said. "And furthermore, she wouldn't fit in."

"Then help yourself." "Help? A man needs help, all right, when the chickens come home to roost. I can tell you that."

"You're being a little unkind. I suppose you know it." "I don't mean to, Miss Pretty. I simply have to do a rather unpleasant job, and I'd like it over with once and for all."

She laughed. "Don't be seen where Winchell could spy you out. That's little enough to ask, isn't it?"

The party went easily and pleasantly, and quietly. Someone should write his doctor's thesis, one of these days, upon the immense difference between the parties that blossom and flower and die in this world of men.

The fundamental gap lies between the unhappy folk who are determined to enjoy them in spite of everything and the more fortunate lot who know perfectly well that they are out for a delightful and satisfying evening, and settle naturally to the living of it.

AT Stone House, human beings expected good wine and amusing talk and girls of a certain beauty. Also assorted small jokes of a more or less practical nature—never very funny but always entitled to a polite smile—a roulette table for those in such a mood, bridge and swimming and tennis, and the rather specialized pleasure of strolling toward the stables and being patronized by the grooms.

The dual throne, so to speak, was the high-backed oaken chair, behind his broad oaken desk. The desk, in turn, occupied the precise center of his library, and the library was a handsome room with one of its walls made out of French doors. The French doors gave upon the terrace, which was of flagstone, and the terrace (one step down) dominated the lawn.

But the view through the French doors was not confined to terrace and lawn. It commanded, as well, the deeper end of the swimming pool, the stunted lemon trees which guarded the entrance to the tennis courts, and the garden of rose trees which fell away at the left toward the summer house.

It was the Colonel's custom to have upon his desk a humidor of sound cigars, and it was his whim to have also a silver-framed photograph of the horse which had last won admiration in the community of Gull Point. Sometimes a hunter, sometimes a polo mount, sometimes a saddle hack or show animal—but always different, and always the product of Mitchell Grace, man-of-all-talents, who could snap a shaver as readily as he could tactfully dismiss an unwelcome stranger.

Likewise, the Colonel ordinarily required a manservant to be present in the library, with a small portable bar from which drinking matter of sound design (never the silly or the capricious) might be served. Mitchell Grace himself was usually in attendance in this room, watchful of the proprieties.

In dutiful observance of the custom of the country, Cynthia herself, upon the arm of Fred West, strolled at an early hour through the open French windows to wish the gentlemen of the house a good evening. They were followed almost immediately by several others of their own generation, and then by Captain Pugh and Mrs. Pugh. The dance orchestra in the main hall was already playing—in the manner known, quite appropriately, as sweet.

COLONEL MERRIWETHER rose and nodded hospitably to his guests, and shook hands with the men. He waved them toward chairs and settees, and resumed his own chair, and beckoned the manservant into action.

He said to Cynthia, "I hear that good luck fell your way this afternoon, my dear." "Why, Colonel," she cried, "what a tactless thing to say! It wasn't luck at all. It was good old Fred here, swiping at the ball like a Cecil Smith. Bless you, Fred darling. These marvelous Whirlwinds can take the Clovers any time at all. The champion ship is going to be a canter, isn't it, Fred?"

Fred West blushed. And he said, "We had a lot of breaks." Colonel Merriwether regarded the tip of his cigar. "It stand corrected, Cynthia," he said. He was an unlikely looking man. Unlikely, that is to say, to be the father of Cynthia Merriwether. In contrast with the urgent immediacy of her coloring, her voice, her slightest gesture, his own voice and coloring and gestures were as near as such things may be to total neutrality.

He was neither large nor small, neither light nor dark. His hair was thin brown and his eyes, when he opened the lids wide enough to permit an inspection of them, mottled hazel.

His voice was carefully controlled, and his whole body, including his hands, seemed eternally at rest. Had he evinced either excitement or boredom, even upon the most provocative occasions, people would have been astonished, and only his superbly made clothing, the frame and atmosphere of his Stone House, gave him the slightest distinction from a million other men past the middle of life, hanging stubbornly to the dubious benefits of existence.

He spoke to Fred West. "I am sorry I did not see the game. It must have been quite interesting. I really did not think you had a chance against Prentiss and the Clover side."

"Henry didn't play," Cynthia said. "He had a fall yesterday in a practice game." "Indeed? Nothing serious, I hope."

"Oh, no," Captain Pugh said. "Just an ordinary sprain." Colonel Merriwether regarded Captain Pugh. "I am glad that you came in to see me," he said. "It seemed to me that your mare is a trifle out of condition, and even half a game is rather severe for her. Why don't you give her a rest, and use my gray gelding for a while? He needs the work."

The captain's face reddened by the faintest possible degree. He could never quite get used to the necessity for thrift—or to offers from others to alleviate that necessity. Before this, he had said to his wife, "It annoys me to accept favors from Colonel Merriwether. It annoys me for very particular reasons. But I cannot possibly offend him."

So now he said, "It is very kind of you. I shall be grateful." (To Be Continued)

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By William Ferguson



THE PACIFIC OCEAN OCCUPIES MORE THAN ONE-THIRD OF THE ENTIRE AREA OF THE EARTH, AND COMPRISES ABOUT ONE-HALF OF ITS WATER SURFACE.

QUODDING ODDS



NEXT: Help save our forests.

SILENT-FILM STAR

Table with 4 columns: Answer to Previous Puzzle, HORIZONTAL, VERTICAL, and a list of puzzle answers.

