• SERIAL STORY

'I AM A MURDERER'

BY MORRIS MARKEY

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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—and of the events leading up to it. Cynthia, the Colonel's attractive daughter, has turned down invitations to a dance from Fred West and Henry Prentiss, two attentive friends, in order to entertain Vaughan Dunbar at dinner. Dunbar is a foreign correspondent who appeared unheralded one night with a message from Cynthia's old friend Bill Stewart, and he's been a frequent and welcome visitor in the few ensuing days.

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MR. DUNBAR DINES OUT

CHAPTER X

IT was not, somehow, a completely successful dinner party. Vaughan Dunbar was very subdued indeed. He spent the better part of the time at the table with his near-sighted eyes peering through their rimless spectacles at the plate and the glasses before him, and although he was pleasant enough he seemed, as the horsey folk themselves might have expressed it, a little off the pace of the conversation. He obviously sensed the effect that this was having upon the others, and he felt constrained to apologize.

"I heard the late news before leaving the city," he said. "It was a bit discouraging. So if I appear to be . . ."

Cynthia and Anne hastened to reassure him, saying that of course they understood, and Colonel Merriwether asked what the news had been.

"The Balkan situation," said Vaughan Dunbar. "Nothing conclusive yet, but it looks grave. Very grave."

This served, as might be expected, to cool spirits generally. In deference to their guest, it hardly seemed appropriate to pursue the unhappy subject. And, likewise in deference, it seemed rather improper to stir up such trivialities as the new play, Fred West's admiration of a certain Argentine pony, or the latest tackroom tattles from Broken Hill.

With the dessert, however, Vaughan Dunbar's mood lightened perceptibly. Making a gesture as if to say, "Come now. It is absurd to worry over events half a world away," he told an amusing anecdote about Hermann Goering.

Good humor was quite restored when Cynthia rose and led Anne into the drawing room. Colonel Merriwether showed Dunbar and Fred West into his library. It was customary, at Stone House, for Mitchell Grace to dine with the rest, but the Colonel explained that on this evening his secretary had been held by unexpectedly important work.

WHEN the three men were comfortably seated and supplied with coffee and cigars and brandy, Colonel Merriwether regarded his guest with his usual degree of careful attention before he spoke.

"I hope you will not mind," he said in his distinct, even tones, "if I confess that I had reasons for asking you to join us this evening."

"Quite the contrary," said Vaughan Dunbar.

"In the first place, you remind me quite distinctly of someone I have known. Did your father, or an older brother, ever visit California or the northwest—live there, perhaps?"

Vaughan Dunbar pondered for several moments before replying. Then he said, slowly, "No. My father certainly did not, and I have no older brother. I was thinking of an uncle—my father's brother—who knocked about the world quite a bit. He was killed in South Africa, oh several years ago. Can't say whether he ever visited the west coast. I never met him after I came down from Cambridge."

"Thank you. It was, I suppose, a mistaken impression after all. Now for the second thing. I have some properties in Sweden. Can you tell me anything of the position there? Do you know the attitude of British investors toward their Swedish holdings? And what is Hitler's state of mind in the matter?"

Vaughan Dunbar leaned back and put his coffee cup on the table beside him, and regarded the tip of his cigar.

"I am surely no expert in such affairs myself," he said. "But it chances that I had a chat with Sir Peter Towle just before I left London. Are you acquainted with him?"

"No."

"He has invested somewhat extensively in Swedish mines, and perhaps it will be useful if I pass his opinions on to you."

"I will be greatly obliged."

It can be said positively of Fred West that Swedish mines were the last thing on earth upon which he might seek enlightenment. He finished his coffee. He smoked his cigaret. He did not squirm or fidget because he had learned better. But he was appallingly bored. And the appearance of Mitchell Grace was a huge relief to him.

He watched Mitchell Grace present certain letters for the Colonel's signature. He permitted Grace to reach the door before he spoke. Then he called, as if seized with a sudden idea, "I say, Mitchell. Could I speak to you for a moment?"

Grace waited. Fred asked his host for permission to be excused for a moment or two. And the two young men walked into the big hall.

"Thank God," said Fred West.

"For what?"

"For digging me out of a Swedish iron mine. Were you ever in a Swedish iron mine? No—don't tell me. I never want to know anything more about them."

* * *

THEY went to Grace's office, and the letters were sealed into envelopes and made ready for the post. Fred West lit another cigaret and lounged into a chair and fumbled for a minute with a notion that was in his head.

But the best opening he could contrive was, "That guy gives me a pain."

"I guess you mean Dunbar."

"Who else? He acts like somebody that's just made a down payment on the universe."

"Britishers are like that."

"Not answer enough. This guy squints at you as if you were some especially repulsive worm."

"Listen, Fred." Mitchell Grace's cheeks had turned pink. "I said some pretty rough things about him myself this morning. And incidentally about some other people. I was talking out of turn, and I'm sorry for it. I'm through with setting up as judge and jury on everybody that comes along into this . . ."

"Oh, file it. No need to get worked up. I'm merely saying that there's something out of skew with this bird. I've got a hunch the Colonel doesn't like him a whole lot. It'll suit me all right when he goes on back to—wherever he came from."

"Is he going to the club tonight?"

"Don't know. Are you?"

"If the Colonel doesn't need me. I'm getting on down to mail this stuff now."

Fred West made his reluctant way back to the library. Vaughan Dunbar's low voice still went on and the Colonel looked at him quietly. It was still Swedish mines—plus transport—plus cartels—plus the limitless whims of Mr. Hitler.

Fred West regarded Vaughan Dunbar, and he muttered to himself, "Okay. And I still think you don't belong in this joint."

At length the Colonel nodded, waved a languid hand at Dunbar, and said, "Thank you very much. You have helped my understanding in the matter." Then he said, "Fred, will you give my apologies to the young ladies and ask them to join us here?"

Fred West said, "The pleasure is all mine, Colonel," and moved fast.

(To Be Continued)

HOLD EVERYTHING!

"Are you guys adopting the scorched earth policy?"

There is a deplorable tendency among us Americans to cling overlong to youth. Is anything more ludicrous than the middle-aged woman who tries to act kittenish or the middle-aged man who dresses and acts as college boys are supposed to but seldom do outside the movies?—Dr. Frank H. Ferris, Cleveland pastor.

The Germans donned red army uniforms and civilian clothes and attempted to penetrate blocks occupied by our troops and fire at red army men from behind.—Soviet correspondent on capture of Velikie Luki.

THIS CURIOUS WORLD

By William Ferguson

NEXT: Another aftermath of bombing.

U. S. ADMIRAL

HORIZONTAL

1 Pictured U. S. admiral, ——, Jr.
11 North America (abbr.)
12 Dines.
13 Admit.
14 From.
16 Half an em.
17 Encourage.
18 Interdiction.
19 "Cracker State" (abbr.)
20 Pass.
22 Lesser.
24 Leave out.
26 Over (poet.).
28 Fabulous bird.
29 Monkey.
30 Persian governor.
33 Twisted worsted yarn.
36 Upon.
37 Collar button.
39 Servant.
40 Us.
41 Alkaline solution.
43 Self.
44 Age.
45 Ask alms.
46 Street (abbr.)
47 Toward.
48 Entangle.
51 Pound (abbr.)
53 Rifle.
55 Either.
56 Whirlwind.
57 Cereal grain.
59 South Dakota (abbr.).
60 Period of darkness.
62 Rocks.
64 Circular roof.
65 Singing voice.
10 Ascetic.
11 His headquarters are in —— Zealand.
15 Obese.
21 Negative word
23 At this time.
25 Miaow.
27 Degree.
29 Operatic air.
30 He won victories in the —— Islands.
32 An.
32 Kind of dog.
33 Vehicle.
34 Female sheep.
35 Tales.
38 Perform.
39 Myself.
42 Is (Latin).
45 Morass.
49 Dry.
50 Festival.
51 Missing.
52 Diminish.
54 One who uses.
56 Electrical unit
58 2000 pounds.
61 Proceed.
63 Negative

VERTICAL

1 Decrease.
2 He is one of the U. S. naval —— in the Pacific.
3 Labrador (abbr.).
4 Article.
5 Active.
6 Devastation.
7 Affirm.
8 Land parcel.
9 His planes —— to attack Jap ships.

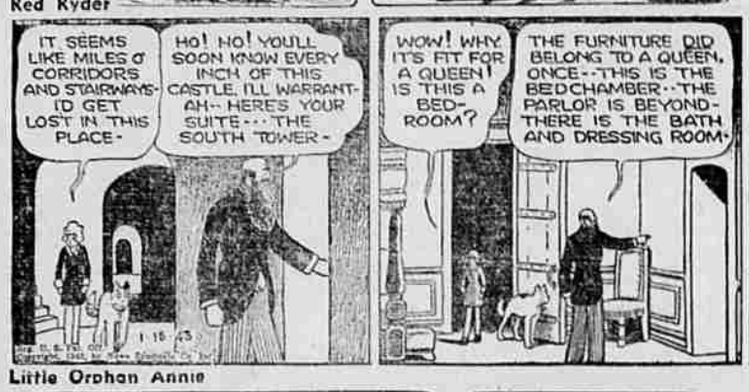
Answer to Previous Puzzle

Out Our Way
By J. R. Williams

Our Boarding House
With Major Hoople

Red Ryder

By Fred Harmon

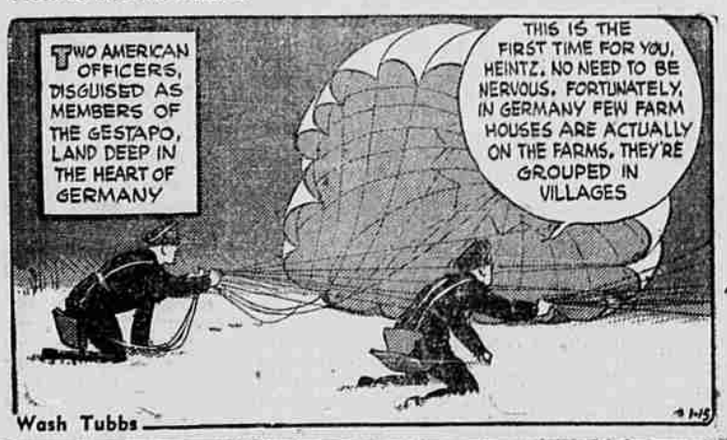


Little Orphan Annie

By Harold Gray

Freckles and His Friends

By Blosser



Wash Tubbs

By Crane

Boots and Her Buddies

By Martin

Alley Oop

By V. T. Hamlin