

'I AM A MURDERER'

BY MORRIS MARKEY

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

LIFE STORY

CHAPTER XI
THERE are caprices of human behavior which do not readily give themselves to capture within a neat, explanatory phrase...

Vaughan Dunbar, naturally, remained silent. And Cynthia glanced at him. Cynthia said, "Go on, Anne, Fred. We might come over after a while. Anyway, I'll telephone the steward in an hour, so you will know whether to expect us."

Whereupon, Fred West and his cousin Anne and a young Mitchell Grace trooped out of the room and got themselves into a motor car and went off to the dancing. Colonel Merriwether finished his cigar, watching the two who sat in the room with him and talking very little. He seemed uncommonly preoccupied.

But now he lingered at his desk, looking at the letter in the dull light as if he might have something more to say, but could not quite make up his mind to say it. Which unusual behavior made Cynthia glance sharply at him and say, "You're feeling all right, aren't you, Colonel?"

"What? Oh, yes. Of course." Then he said, "Good night. Good night." And he went slowly out of the room.

Cynthia said to Vaughan Dunbar, "Let's walk down by the pool."

WITH his customary deliberation, he arose and followed her out through the French doors and across the terrace, and sat down with her on the bench beside the dark rectangle of water. The scent of the roses was everywhere, and the air was so still that they could catch fragments of music from the orchestra at the club, a mile away. Vaughan Dunbar waited for Cynthia to speak.

She frowned a little. "The Colonel seems a little bothered about something tonight."

Dunbar waited a moment, and then said, "You are very fond of him, aren't you?"

"The Colonel? Why, what a perfectly ridiculous question." "It only struck me—of course, I'm being frightfully rude—that he is always the Colonel to you. A trifle formal..."

She did not answer for a moment. Then she looked at him in the darkness. "It's queer for you to say that," she murmured.

"Oh, sorry—I—" "No, no. I mean—well, it was sort of queer."

"I'll try not to be stupid." "You see—well—I never put eyes on the Colonel until the gurgling days were long past. And I hadn't thought about that in years, until tonight."

"Is it a very private story?" "I suppose not. No, of course it isn't. It was this way. Her words now came in a sudden rush, her hands clasped in her lap and her face looking out across the water toward the gardens."

"I was born at San Luis Obispo, in California, on a big ranch there, and my mother died before I knew her. At least I know this is a strange thing to say—at least, that's what they told me. Isn't it curious that you have to depend upon somebody's account of it in a terribly important thing like that? Anyway, the first things I can remember were about the ranch, and a grand old darling of a nurse, having that kind of wonderful time only a little child can have."

"Then, when I was 10, just before Christmas, a lawyer and some other people came and said I must go off to school to a convent in the foothills of the High Sierras. So that's what I did. Cried my eyes out, poor me..."

SHE laughed, but not quite gaily. "It wasn't bad, though, when I got used to it. Then, when I was about 15, the Mother Superior called me to the reception room, and there, of all the people in the world, was the Colonel. The Mother Superior said, 'My child, this is your father, Colonel Merriwether.' And so I naturally started calling him Colonel Merriwether, and then just Colonel."

"Did he take you away then?" Vaughan Dunbar asked. His voice was quiet indeed. "No months later. We went to San Francisco and then to Hawaii, and I had the most marvelous time you ever heard of in your life. And then we went to New Orleans and New York, and then we moved out here and it has all been like Cinderella ever since."

"Cinderella? Yes. But—you will forgive me, Cynthia—it is a little sad, too." "Great heavens! You haven't got the idea I'm sorry for myself?" "Impossible!" He chuckled softly, and touched her hand for a

moment. "But tell me, where was the Colonel all those years? Say, now! That's not the least bit of my business, is it?"

"None whatever." She laughed. "But I began the story, didn't I? The thrilling story of a maiden's life, in five reels and no intermission."

"The truth is, Mr. Vaughan Dunbar, that I was never curious enough to ask the Colonel and he never bothered to tell me. Oh, yes he did, too. He said he had been traveling, with a great deal of important work to do, and he was sorry that his affairs had made him neglect me in such a shameful way. None of that mattered to me, of course. I was started off in a new world and I could have everything I wanted. A spoiled brat—that's what I was, and what I am now. Mr. Dunbar, you're looking smack into the face of a spoiled brat. Deplorable, isn't it?"

"The face? I should use quite another word than deplorable."

"You do go on so, don't you?" He patted her hand again. "But tell me—see, you have stirred my interest a great deal—did you never hear anything more of your mother? Who she was and where she came from and what she looked like?"

Cynthia said, very quietly, "I never heard anything of her. By the time I was old enough to ask the nurse questions, the nurse was gone. Nobody else seemed to know anything."

"You never made inquiries of—the Colonel?" She shook her head. And then her tone changed sharply. "Why in the world am I telling you all this? That's what I would like to know. Oh, I see!" She was almost bitter for an instant. "The

great journalist! That's what gets you the secrets of the great statesmen, isn't it? That ability to make people fold up their souls and hand them over to you. I should have remembered." (To Be Continued)

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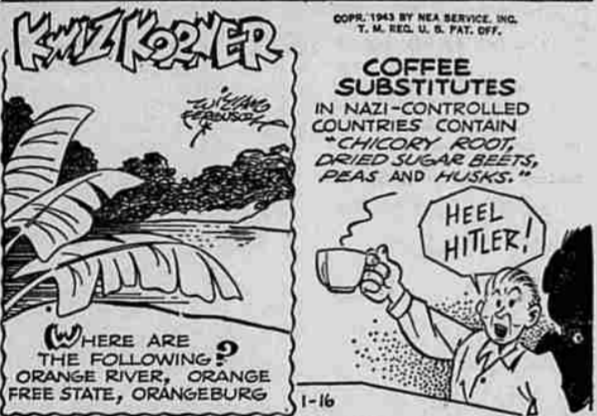


Our Boarding House With Major Hoople



By Fred Harmon

THIS CURIOUS WORLD By William Ferguson



ANSWER: Orange river, in South Africa; Orange Free State, in Union of South Africa; Oranburg, a city in South Carolina.

AIR SQUADRON INSIGNE

Crossword puzzle grid with clues and answers. Clues include: 1. Depicted in the insignia of the U. S. Navy Air Force, 14. Mountain nymph, 15. Soine, 16. Not tight, 17. Friendly goblins of Scandinavian folklore, 19. Blunt, 20. Obtained, 21. Articulate, 25. Mood (Sent.), 26. Any, 27. It is borne on the wings of the squadron's planes, 31. Always, 32. Genus of moles, 33. Very swift, 35. Sloth, 36. Symbol for tellurium, 37. Native Infanteria (abbr.), 38. Suffix.

Word search puzzle grid with clues and answers. Clues include: 1. Light two-letter word, 2. Constellation, 3. Remainder, 4. Dance step, 5. Dutch city, 6. Upon (abbr.), 7. Symbol for selenium, 8. Quart (abbr.), 9. Church vestment, 10. Dowry, 11. Overthrow, 12. Or else (music), 13. Indigent, 14. Garter, 15. Players of organs, 16. Beverage, 17. Symbol for thallium, 18. Auricle, 19. Music note, 20. Extreme, 21. Kind of poem (pl.), 22. Yes (Sp.), 23. Twitching, 24. Tunisian ruler, 25. Preposition, 26. Weight of India, 27. Agricultural caste Indian, 28. Diplomatic agreements, 29. Forbear, 30. Long grain (abbr.), 31. Ireland, 32. Make an edging, 33. Yale, 34. Lubricant, 35. Measure, 36. Half an em, 37. Near.



Little Orphan Annie



Freckles and His Friends



Wash Tubbs



Boots and Her Buddies



Alley Oop



By Harold Gray



By Blosser



By Crane



By Martin



By V. T. Hamlin