

DEATH WRITES THE LAST EDITION

By Adeline McElfresh

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CHAPTER I

A NASTY mixture of rain and snow was driving across Midvale as Pat Cleveland hurried along the treacherous sidewalk toward the neat brick building that housed the Midvale Express, the leading—and only—newspaper in the sleepy southern Indiana town. The sky was a leaden, November gray that seemed to hang so low that it shut Midvale away into a calm little world of its own. Only the north wind that blew in across the river was bitter.

Pat shivered involuntarily as she opened the office door and a gust of wind ushered her inside. "Let's hibernate, Elinor," she called gaily to the pretty blond girl who was a clerk in the circulation department. "Brrrr!"

But Elinor Roberts did not smile back. There was an excited, frightened look in her eyes. She beckoned to Pat.

"You look positively scared stiff, Elinor. What's wrong?"

Elinor looked more frightened than ever. Her blue eyes were wide and dark as Dave Elson, the star graduate of the Express staff, came in. He was carrying a bundle of papers under his arm.

"Dead!" she finally repeated dumbly. "Murdered!"

Elinor nodded. She fumbled for her handkerchief as tears beaded her eyelashes.

Pat Cleveland didn't say any more. She couldn't—not about Joe Parker, her editor, the best friend she had ever had. She turned quickly and went to her own desk in the news room.

She didn't want to be in the front office when other members of the staff came in, didn't want them to see the pain that burned in her eyes. Maybe, after a little while, after they had had the same shock and felt the same pain, it wouldn't be so bad.

Joe Parker was an institution in Midvale. He had owned the Express for half a century, had carved for it a place of respect in the community that few papers have. But it wouldn't be the same, ever again, either the Express or Midvale. Not to Pat, nor to the countless other persons to whom the elderly editor had given a hand during his years of service.

Perhaps, Pat thought stonily, perhaps not even to Dave Elson, the star graduate of the Express staff. But no, she scolded herself, Dave Elson would be too engrossed in his own affairs to bother about what was happening in Midvale. Midvale was no longer "home" to the rangy young man who, after writing several successful books, had left his swanky New York friends to go into government work. Pat bit her lips . . . remembering.

"THAT'S all the police know right now, Patricia," Clem Evans, the Express sports editor, told Pat when he came in fifteen minutes later from the police station. "Joe was at his desk, writing something on that junk heap he calls a typewriter. The housekeeper's room is right over his study and she says she heard no unusual noises. She woke up around midnight and saw the light in his study was still on—she could see it shining out on the lawn—and she called down that it was time he was getting some sleep. When he didn't answer, she went down." Clem paused. "Joe was all slumped over. There was a knife in his back."

The sports writer ran a rough hand through his graying hair. His eyes were suspiciously moist. He walked over to the window and stood looking out, his hands boring into his pockets so the girl would not see the tight-clenched fists.

Pat was almost glad when her telephone rang a minute later and Josephine Billingsley informed her in a stilted voice that she had a party that "just must be in the paper this afternoon." Pat knew, of course, that the cranky spinster expected to pick up some inside news on the murder, but that was beside the point. Joe Parker would want the paper to go on—he had proved that time and time again.

Pat thanked Miss Billingsley and hung up before the other woman had a chance to question her. She rolled a sheet of copy paper into

her typewriter. "Miss Josephine Billingsley," she wrote, "entertained the members of her Sunday school class at a delightful pre-Thanksgiving party Tuesday night. The house was decorated with . . ."

Suddenly she stopped typing. She turned toward Clem Evans, who was still standing at the window.

"Clem. Oh, Clem," she repeated when he didn't answer, "what was Mr. Parker working on?"

Evans turned. He shook his head, puzzled.

"Nobody knows, Patricia. It was gone."

"If we only knew," she murmured, half to herself. "I wonder . . . Clem, let's look in his desk. We might find something."

"We can't now, Patricia," he remonstrated. "Regardless of what's happened, we have a paper to put out."

Pat turned back to her typewriter and the story about Miss Billingsley's party.

"I just thought—"

"Right after we go to press," the sports editor promised, "we'll have a look-see. But you know Joe Parker. He'd want the Express out on schedule."

The girl swallowed hard. She could hear the linotypes out in the composing room and there was something reassuring in their clatter. Something to hold onto in a world suddenly gone topsy-turvy.

PRESS time came and nothing had happened. Clem had been over to the police station again. There was despair in his voice when he told Pat about it. Chief Blair was stumped. He had been over the house with a fine-toothed comb, but there was nothing.

"Everything under control, Patricia. Embroidery looks like applique."

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tricia?" Clem asked, glancing over her shoulder at the two-column head she was writing.

"Yep, this is the last headline." A short time later Pat was searching Parker's desk, some-thing that, apparently, had not occurred to the police, while Clem Evans scanned the front page for mistakes.

There were packets of letters, clippings, mats and feature services, sample columns that had been sent to the paper, and loose papers that seemed to be nothing but an indescribable mess. Pat tossed aside the mats, features and columns. They didn't interest her, but the letters and miscellaneous papers did.

"Ready, Clem? I have things half-way sorted out."

The sports editor pulled his chair over to the desk. Pat handed

him a pile of letters and slips of paper that felt a little guilty," she confessed, "but if we should find something . . ."

She left the sentence hanging in mid-air. There was no need to finish it, for Clem Evans understood. He just nodded.

"You did a good job today, Patricia. Parker would be proud of you."

"Thank you, Clem." She smiled, still going through the papers. But the smile faded quickly as she stared at the letter she had just slid from its envelope.

"Clem!" she breathed. "Clem, look here!"

(To Be Continued)

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Out Our Way

By J. R. Williams



BORN THIRTY YEARS TOO SOON

Our Boarding House

With Major Hoople



HURRY BACK, RUBE!

SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO. advertisement for coupon books.

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(To Be Continued)

THIS CURIOUS WORLD

By William Ferguson



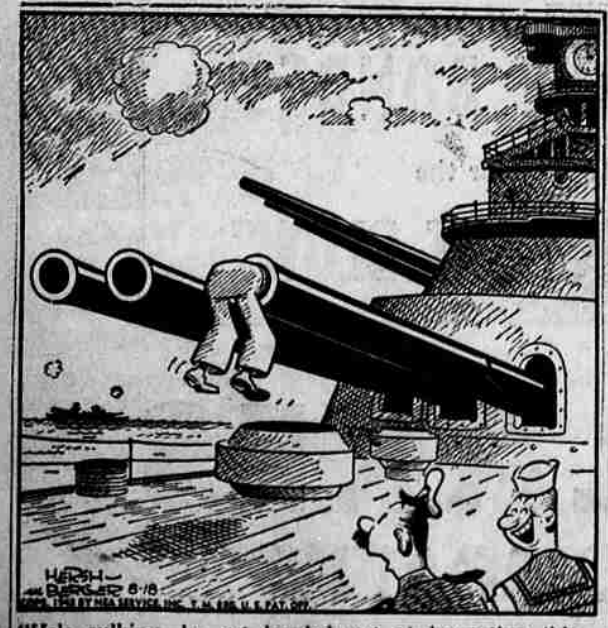
DENVER, COLORADO, HAD TOO MANY SQUIRRELS; MONTROSE, COLORADO, WANTED MORE! . . . DENVER IS EXPORTING HER EXCESS.



NOVELIST

HORIZONTAL	Answer to Previous Puzzle	27 Paid notices
1 Pictured novel-	BARBARASTIDANWYCK	29 Half an em
14 Operatic solo	RRITROTIDEAARI	31 Iron (symbol)
15 Bay window	OIL EST RAW BEL	33 Grain
16 Is sick	ASEA EAGER TRET	35 Long fish
17 Pounds (abbr.)	DETERRES TRAPS	36 Novel
18 Light brown	STRIP BEANS	37 Mineral rock
19 Dined	INTO ROAM	38 Virginia (abbr.)
20 Titanium (symbol)	SNAGS ASPEN	39 Leo
21 Drinks slowly	SEALSIC LOAM	40 Matched pieces
22 Become weary	NAPSIC BARBARA	41 Intone
23 Music note	ATE COO	42 Provided
24 Exist (abbr.)	REARLOW STANWYCK	43 Noise
25 Charged atom	EDITORS	44 Finish
26 Office of Price Administration (abbr.)		49 Accomplishes
27 One of his best-known books is		50 Sodium carbonate
28 Requires		51 Father
29 He has written many		52 Technical (abbr.)
30 Glide		54 Frozen water
31 Age		56 Writing tool
32 Id est (abbr.)		58 Also
33 Part of fish		59 Pennsylvania (abbr.)
34 Us		60 Exist
35 Periods (symbol)		61 Symbol for acetyl
36 Half a quart		62 Tungsten (symbol)
37 North Dakota		64 Doctor (abbr.)
		65 Like

FUNNY BUSINESS



He's sulking—he got hauled out at inspection this morning!

Red Ryder

By Fred Harmon



Red Ryder

Freckles and His Friends

By Blosser



Freckles and His Friends

Wash Tubbs

By Cran



Wash Tubbs

Boots and Her Buddies

By V. T. Hamlin



Boots and Her Buddies

Allep Oop

By Martin



Allep Oop

Little Orphan Annie

By Harold Gray



Little Orphan Annie