

Love Without Music

Helen Welshimer

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN
When Linda opened the door in to the outer room of the Bagley Models' agency, where she had her desk, she expected to see Clarabell Ackerman working at her desk. A desk she had been occupying while Linda was getting something to eat.

Clarabell was at the desk. But she was not working. She never would work again.

Her body slumped over the desk and her arms hung limp at her sides. The green eyeshade was shattered and her face was half covered with red blood. Fresh blood. Linda realized in that first moment of panic.

She wanted to run. To scream even louder. But some instinct drew her nearer. Maybe Clarabell wasn't dead. Maybe if she called here, there would be a sign of life.

"Clarabell! Clarabell!" She was so near that body now that she could see the blood on her clothes. And she could see the bullet hole in the girl's head.

Shot! Clarabell had been shot while she stooped over to work. That second spot on her blouse must be another wound. But who would kill her? Poor, simple, unexciting Clarabell Ackerman, who had telephoned for a milk shake only five or ten minutes before.

Why, this just had happened! Maybe the murderer was somewhere near. She shivered and turned back to the door. She must get help. But where? The elevator operator was down on the first floor and it would be a long time until he could get the signal and come up. Usually he stood at the entrance at night and only occasionally turned his head to see if there were only daytime, when all the elevators shut up and down, instead of night with just one operator on hand.

With a trembling hand she reached for the telephone. She must get the police, Caroline, Mr. Bagley.

Then two things happened. A man's voice had been talking on the radio. Now it stopped and a woman's came on. Mina Nevins. Yes, that was the role Mina was playing. So Clarabell had died to the intonations of a voice she worshipped, never knowing about the woman who had the voice.

But the other disturbance was so startling that she let the telephone slip to the floor and roll away.

Distinctly, clearly, subtly she caught the odor of the perfume that Mina Nevins used. Suddenly it seemed to be everywhere. She was being upset, excited, she whispered to herself that perfume was in her mind and tragedy had brought it back, that was all.

She ran, then, down the hall. She heard steps and paused, aghast. The murderer! But where could she hide? Where could she go?

There was another corridor, not so wide, and darker, leading away. She ran down that hall, faster and faster, though it seemed to her that her legs were weak and filled with water. Oh, this was a nightmare, one of the kind of dreams where you tried to run but your legs wouldn't work.

Then she was aware of heavy steps coming after her, running. But she had reached the end of the narrow hall and there was a no place to go. She tried a door which said "Exit," but it was locked. She tried another which led to someone's dark office, but it did not open.

At last, she covered against the wall, waiting.

There were two people coming. One of them called and she recognized the voice. It was Joe, the elevator boy. Quietly she slipped to the ground, her legs refusing to support her further.

She did not faint, though, and when the men had helped her up she looked at the other one. It was the night watchman.

"Oh, I was hoping, you were around!" she panted. "I was so afraid. It's Clarabell — I went in, and she's dead. . . ." Her voice died away, as she remembered the white face, blood spattered, under the broken green lamp shade that had protected the girl's eyes.

"We know," Joe said. "I was bringing Mr. Parrish here up when we heard a scream. We went down the hall and saw it, then we saw someone running and followed. We thought we had the crook."

Linda explained her actions and went downstairs with the elevator operator while the watchman summoned the police. She waited with the elevator man until police officers, detectives and the coroner came. In the midst of the hurrying arrivals, Mr. Bagley appeared and she told her story again.

At last she was taken to the room where the dead girl lay across the desk. Nothing had been changed. Some of the detectives were examining the blood through pieces of glass. The men wore gloves and Linda noticed that they touched nothing.

"She hasn't been dead long or the blood wouldn't be red," the commissioner said.

Someone else was sprinkling powder on the desk in a quest for fingerprints.

"Dragon's blood powder," Mr. Bagley explained to Linda. "It will show up any marks."

"Humph!" the man snorted. "Whoever was here was mighty smart. No prints around except what must belong to Miss Ackerman and maybe Miss Avery. You sat here first, you say?"

"Yes," she said it briefly. "Then she wanted to use my desk."

"Sorry, miss, but we better get you fingerprinted, too. Will help us to distinguish if there should be a third party around."

Some of the men were fingerprinting Clarabell and Linda looked away. It was dreadful to see those limp hands raised and the fingers pressed against the blotter.

Some of the detectives went away. Some more came and with them some reporters.

"Miss Avery, you were alone here all evening with Miss Ackerman?" the commissioner of police asked.

"Oh yes, ever since Mr. Bagley left."

The man turned to Joe, the elevator boy. "Joe, you said you heard a scream and saw Miss Avery running. Any chance it was not Miss Avery's scream you have heard?" He paused and asked in a softer, beguiling voice. "Could it have belonged to the dead girl?"

Joe shifted from one foot to another. "I don't know, sir. I never heard any of them scream before. But Miss Avery wouldn't do it. She just wouldn't."

Linda sprang to her feet, her eyes black with anger. "You mean you think I did this? That you want to pin it on me?"

"There, there, Miss Avery. No one wants to pin anything on anyone. We just want to find the guilty party. This girl was murdered and someone did it."

"But I didn't. I just came in. Joe brought me back and the sandwich shop people saw me a few minutes ago. I won't be treated like a criminal!"

Wasn't Ronnie's show ever closing? Wouldn't he ever come? Or hadn't anyone called him, she wondered wildly. Her hair was loose and the curls were tumbling around her face and she knew the pink linen frock, so crisp that morning, was crushed and tired looking now.

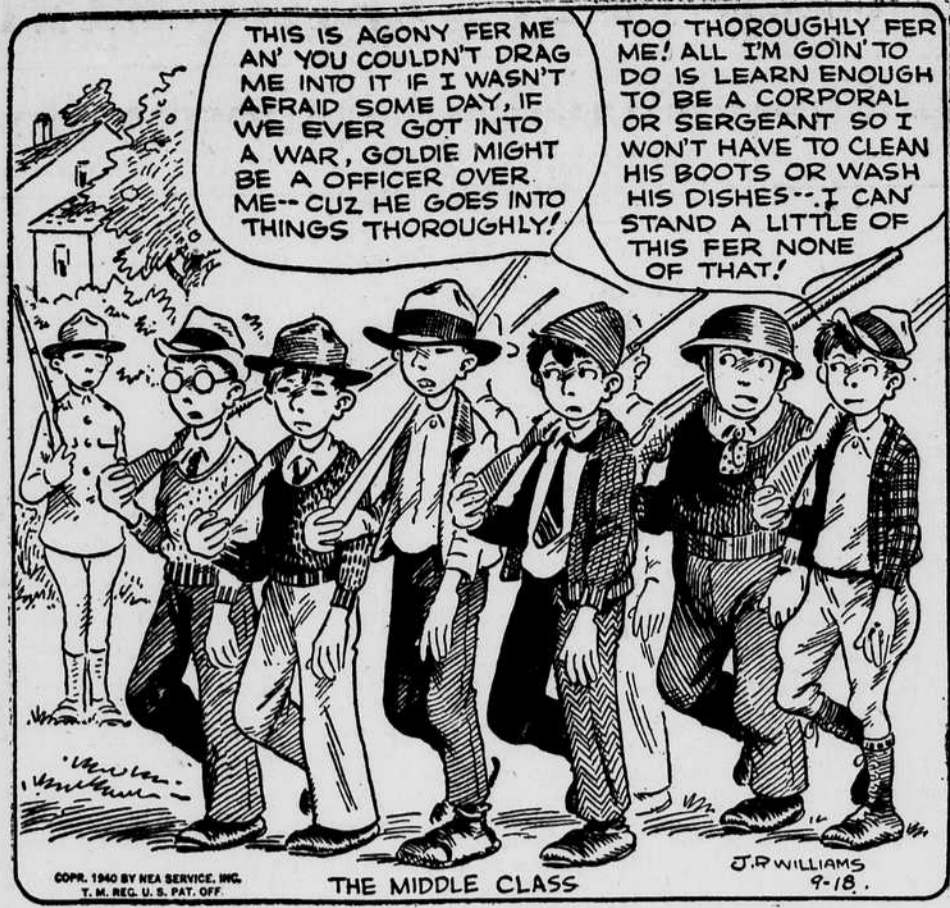
"Did Miss Ackerman have any enemies?" somebody important in detective circles asked.

The commissioner went on, disregarding the interruption. "Miss Avery, could it have been that that shot, two shots, were intended for you? The green eyeshade would hide your face, this girl is about your build, and the room is in shadow. It's a quite possible mis-

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OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. Williams



OUR BOARDING HOUSE . . . with . . . Major Hoople



LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE



Stranger In The House



THIS CURIOUS WORLD

By William Ferguson

EAGLES FREQUENTLY ARE ACCUSED OF CARRYING OFF LARGE CHILDREN! IN RECENT TESTS, A GOLDEN EAGLE COULD FLY ONLY 14 YARDS WHEN TOSSED FROM A HEIGHT CARRYING AN 8 LB. WEIGHT.

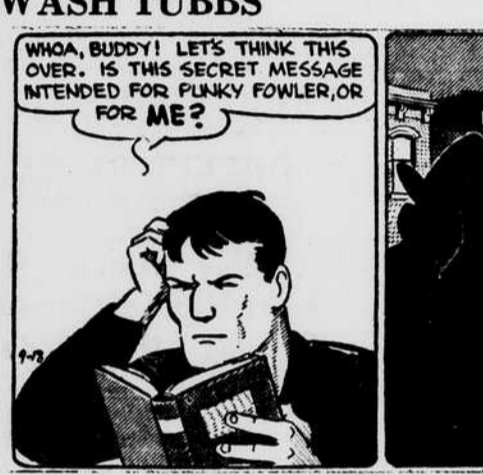
LEONARDO DA VINCI WAS LEFT-HANDED AND WROTE FROM RIGHT TO LEFT.

ANSWER: Baily's Beads, a phenomenon seen during solar eclipses; Giant's Causeway, a basaltic formation in Ireland; Cleopatra's Needles, Egyptian obelisks, one now in London and one in New York.

WASH TUBBS



A Good Resolution



GASOLINE ALLEY



The Boss Says Says He



THE GUMPS



BRICK BRADFORD--Seeks the Diamond Doll



THE BOAT THAT FLEW



Love's Labors



Love's Labors



Love's Labors



Love's Labors

