

DEATH AT THE SWITCH

RICHARD HOUGHTON

SYNOPSIS

Henry Potter seeks shelter from a rainstorm at long-closed Wildwood lodge, in whose big basement a model railroad club is operating its elaborate train system. A few minutes later John Ives, member of the club, is found shot to death in the train dispatcher's tiny room. The next day, accompanied by a stranger named John Jones, whom Henry suspects is a policeman assigned to the job of shadowing him, Henry goes to Ives' house and learns that the dead man left a letter foretelling his own death. Mrs. Willett, Ives' housekeeper, suggests that they call another meeting of the model railroad club. She says Ives will come back from death to point out his murderer. Henry enters the basement club-room for the special meeting that night. A flower-banked coffin rests on the table.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Henry stepped back involuntarily, as other members of the club must have done before him when they saw the coffin, but the strong hand of a policeman clamped on his arm and gently but firmly propelled him inside. The door behind him shut.

"This—this is your doing!" Henry accused John Jones.

The big man raised his eyebrows. "Why pick on me?"

"You were at the undertaker's this afternoon!"

Marcia put in indignantly, "I think it's shameful! What would the poor man's family say about such a thing?"

"It's downright sacrilegious!" declared Stanley King. His usually ruddy face was pasty as his big hands were trembling as he tried to light a cigarette.

"No smoking here!" ordered Police Chief Williams. He was a short, chunky man, but he dominated the tall baker.

"Why did you bring us here?" demanded Professor Bisbee. "Surely you don't expect us to hold a meeting of our club . . ."

"Frankly," confessed the chief, "one reason for asking you to come here was to study your reactions."

Sue Blake sobbed, "How horrible!"

Laurence Harkness clenched his fists, but kept them at his sides. His face was strained. "You have no right to subject these women to this!"

"I wish to remind you," the chief told them, "that you came here of your own free will. No one made you come. We merely announced a meeting of your club."

Spinnelli's usually oily voice had a bite in it. "How could we refuse? How could any one of us leave now without looking guilty?"

Mrs. Willett's father asked, "How did Ives' body get here of its own free will? Heh heh!"

The chief chose to ignore the questions. "I am also reminding you that you do not have to talk."

"Then Ay don't talk!" declared Hans Svenson firmly.

The chief stabbed him with narrowed eyes. "That's an interesting reaction. Those who have nothing to hide will naturally co-operate willingly."

"By golly!" exclaimed Hans. "You mean Ay hide something?"

"No, but why don't you want to talk?"

Hans could think of no immediate answer. Professor Bisbee answered for him. "It's because a clever questioner can make even an innocent man look guilty! You police are trying to make something too sensational out of this. John Ives killed himself!"

"That's another interesting reaction," the chief told him austacally. "Why do you insist it was suicide?"

"Because the only moment when a gunshot might have gone unheard—the moment that the two trains crashed in this room—was when Ives was alone in the other room."

John Jones was listening intently. "Your argument makes sense, all right, provided you can prove that the bullet which killed him was not fired from this room."

The professor turned on him snappishly. "Of course it wasn't. There were no holes in the walls. We know the door between the rooms was shut."

Stanley King pointed to the ventilator in the lower part of the door, just visible under the long train shelf that circled the room. "Couldn't a bullet have passed the whirling blades of that fan, like machine gun bullets pass between the blades of an airplane propeller?"

Spinnelli was sarcastic. "What murderer would take such a chance, firing through the whirling blades of a fan? And what victim would lie down on the floor to be caced, iring through the whirling blades of a fan? And what victim would lie down on the floor to be shot that way—through the back of the head?"

The police chief waved the idea aside. "We know from the position of the body that Ives fell out of his seat at the control panel after he was shot. And because he had been sitting at the control panel the bullet was fired by someone who stood against the wall directly behind him. We have examined the wall. We know it is part of the solid concrete foundations of the lodge, and that behind it is solid earth. There is no other answer but that the murderer stood behind Ives and shot, then carried the gun out of the room and disposed of it. That is another proof it was not suicide, despite what some of you think. There was no weapon in the room."

Professor Bisbee swallowed.

The chief continued. "Can you all account for your actions while Ives was in that other room? San you swear he was alone all the time? Obviously you can't. He couldn't have been alone. And you were watching the trains. That is—most of you were watching the trains. Someone slipped into that other room!"

"That's impossible!" asserted Hans, shaking his head.

Henry, too remembering that he was watching everything with the interest of a newcomer to model-railroading at the time of Ives' death, thought the chief's suggestion impossible.

"We reach the inescapable conclusion," continued the chief, "that Ives was murdered by one of the persons in this room tonight—excluding, of course, Mrs. Willett and her father, who were not here last night."

Mrs. Willett, who had remained beside the coffin with one hand resting lightly on it, spoke up for the first time. "Why don't we ask the murdered man?"

"Oh!" cried Marcia. "What a horrible idea!"

Susan shrieked, "Don't open that! I'll faint!"

Chief Williams nodded to Mrs. Willett. "You think Ives could give

us the answer? He was a Spiritist, wasn't he?"

Her deep black eyes seemed to swell in her white face. "Yes. He believed he could come back from death."

The other two women shrank toward each other.

"That's nonsense!" breathed King.

"Don't be frightened, Susan," Laurence comforted her. "Nothing will happen. They wouldn't dare . . ."

"Fantastic as it seems," said the chief, addressing the entire group, "we have given the idea serious consideration. A great many people would say it possible, so we have arranged . . ."

"I protest!" cried Professor Bisbee. "You're going back to the Middle Ages and the trial by fire!"

The chief smiled. "On the contrary our trial will use modernity—so modern that we admit it may prove nothing. We hope, though, that it will point the direction of our search for the killer of John Ives."

"If you please—station yourselves at intervals along the main circle of track. All but you, Hans. I want you to start one of the trains running around the circle."

To Be Continued

ROSEHILL SCHOOL OPENING DATE SET

Principal H. M. Wells Announces August 21 for Beginning of Term

ROSEHILL, July 30.—According to an announcement made this week by H. M. Wells, principal, the Rosehill High school will open on Thursday, August 21. The preschool clinic was held here yesterday.

It is expected that the new gymnasium will be completed by September 15. This is a W. P. A. project, with the community and county sharing in contributions.

Members of the High school faculty are Mr. Wells, Mrs. Verna T. Denning, Mrs. Elizabeth Vick of Colerain, Miss Mildred Stany of Reidsville, Miss Lucille Pittman of Macclesfield, Misses Jessie Moore and Elizabeth Fforlaw and Mrs. Louise W. Fussell and Mrs. J. M. Barden, of Rosehill.

Morehead City Skipper Hurt in Boat Accident

SOUTHPORT, July 30.—Captain Cicero Guthrie of Morehead City, master of the menhaden boat, Lynhaven, sustained a broken leg and was badly bruised about the chest and side when he was knocked from the top of the vessel by a swinging bailer early this week.

The vessel had about completed taking aboard a large catch of fish, the seas were rough and the loading bailer got out of control. The vessel is working here for the Lewlyn Phillips factory.

U.S. Bomber Plant To Employ Women

Plans Announced by Consolidated for Training of 400 in Plane Production

SAN DIEGO, Calif., July 30.—The Consolidated Aircraft Corp. announced today it would train and employ 400 women for bomber manufacture in response to a request from Sidney Hillman, co-director of the Office of Production Management.

Maj. R. H. Fleet, Consolidated president, said the women would be trained in lighter mechanical operations.

"We have been planning this move for some time," Major Fleet added. "Now that through the expansion of the aircraft industry the demands upon man power have become so much greater, we must look ahead to the point of planning for any possible emergency which might hazard the production of the all necessary bombers."

Fleet said one of the possible emergencies would be all out United States participation in the war through which many men employees would be lost to the armed forces.

Two Bicycle Thefts Reported to Police

Two bicycles were stolen yesterday afternoon in Wilmington, police reported.

The bicycles were parked near First and Chestnut streets by Edgar Collins, 711 Castle street, and Ernest Bowden, 1210 Lovelace alley, and were stolen, police stated, while the boys were attending a show.

The complaints on the loss of the bicycles were made separately.

DAILY CROSSWORD

- ACROSS**
- Grate
 - Dull pain
 - Kingly
 - Comical
 - Elephant's tusk
 - Seaweed
 - Bright star
 - Snow
 - vehicle
 - Comparative suffix
 - Exclamation
 - Meadow
 - Music note
 - Body of water
 - Fresh
 - Froth
 - Not working
 - Cleanse
 - A crack
 - Male
 - red deer
 - Exhibition
 - Fortify
 - Comrade
 - Masculine nickname
 - Gone by
 - Music note
 - Sun god
 - Festival
 - Snare
 - Constellation
 - Part of checkbook (pl.)
 - Wear away
 - Bird of prey
 - To prune
 - Scottish-Gaelic

DOWN

- To venerate
- Eager
- Mother of Isaac

27. Not in Asia

28. River in Asia

29. Silk fabric

30. Vehicle

31. Young cow

32. Music note

33. Italian river

34. Fit for tillage

35. Slip away

36. Stone with crystal-lined cavities

37. Oil of rose petals

38. Enemy

39. Goes astray

40. Floor coverings

41. Masculine nickname

42. Perceive

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CRYPTOQUOTE—A cryptogram quotation

EMV CRNV CVL JNVFC. EMV GVHH

EMVQ OVGPAV—CVLBUVL

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: DEEDS ARE FORGOTTEN BUT THEIR RESULTS REMAIN—OVID.

OUT OUR WAY

By J. R. Williams

WHAT'S THIS SERGEANT? DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE FINGER PRINTS AT CHECK NOW?

NO, I THOUGHT YOU WAS ANOTHER FUR CAP AN' A FATIGUE SUIT!

BORN THIRTY YEARS TOO SOON

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

HELLO! IT'S ONE OF THE MISSING LINKS! WHERE'S THE OTHER GOPHER?

DID YOU FIND HARRY THE HALF-BREED'S PILE OF GOLD, OR WAS HE ONLY SAVING WALNUTS?

WELL, DON'T STAND THERE LIKE THREE MUGGS ON A TOTEM POLE! GIMME WATER, IF YOU AIN'T GOT BRANDY AN' SOMEBODY CALL THE WATER! I COULD WOLF THE ASTRAKHAN COLLAR OFF AN OVERCOAT! IS THAT BIG TURKEY BUZZARD HATCHED OUTA HERE YET?

No, THE MAJOR IS STILL UNDER THE TABLE

LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE

Through The Dark O' Night

BUT WHY CAN'T WE HAVE A LIGHT? IT'S SO DARK HERE, DADDY!

THE 'CHIEF' CAN SEE IN THE DARK— AND DON'T CALL ME 'DADDY'!

ER— I MEANT TO SAY "PROFESSOR"— BUT IT IS AWFUL DARK!

THE CHIEF WILL FIND THE TRAIL ALL RIGHT— THE CABIN IS JUST AHEAD--

HA! HERE WE ARE NOW— AS SOON AS WE GET IN WE'LL START A FIRE— COLD AT NIGHT UP HERE IN THE MOUNTAINS—

UGH! YOU STAY HERE— ME GO IN— HAVE LOOK FIRST—

GOOD IDEA, CHIEF— ANNIE AND I WILL WAIT HERE ON THE PORCH—

GEE! PUN— ER— TH' CHIEF! NO REAL INDIAN COULD MOVE ANY QUIETER THAN THAT GUY. I'LL BETCHA—

WASH TUBBS

Cut-Rate Squabs

By Roy Crane

SO I MARRIED CAROL FOR HER MONEY, DID I?

FIGHT! FIGHT! PEE-WEE!

ATTABOY! PEE-WEE!

OH LOOK! A BLACK EYE! HE AND CAROL MUST BE HAVING TROUBLE ALREADY!

WELL, SHE'S LIVED WITH HIM A WEEK— THAT'S MOREN I COULD STAND

MY WIFE'S FATHER IS COMING TO DINNER, AN' I WANT THREE EXTRA NICE SQUABS. HOW MUCH ARE THEY?

\$2.10, AND I'LL THROW IN A PIECE OF BEEF STEAK FOR YOUR EYE

SEE WIZ! I LOST PART OF MY MONEY DURN' TH' FIGHT. LISTEN, MISTER, HAVEN'T YOU ANY SQUABS FOR \$1.65?

WELL, YES, BUT I WON'T GUARANTEE THEY'LL MELT IN YOUR MOUTH

GASOLINE ALLEY

One Step At A Time

BUT ARE YOU SURE YOU HAVE THE RIGHT GIRL? A LIFETIME A LONG STRETCH YOU KNOW.

THERE HAS NEVER BEEN ANYBODY, REALLY, BUT— NINA, UNCLE WALT.

IT IS PERFECTLY RIGHT FOR YOU TO BE THINKING OF YOUR FUTURE, SKEEZIN', BUT GO SLOWLY— DON'T DO ANYTHING RASH.

I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, WED NEVER RUN AWAY AND GET MARRIED.

BUT AS MAN TO MAN, I'LL TELL YOU A DEEP SECRET— NINA AND I ARE ENGAGED TO BE ENGAGED!

CONGRATULATIONS, SON. AND MAN TO MAN, IT WILL BE KEPT A DEEP SECRET.

THANKS, UNCLE WALT. SOME DAY WE'RE GOING TO BE ENGAGED.

THE GUMPS

Hair To Millions

ANOTHER PRECIOUS HAIR THIS MORNING!

SCORE: A GOLDEN DOZEN!!

GREAT GUNS! HAVE I BEEN DUMB! GOOD OLD OPPORTUNITY MAKING KINDLY WOOD OUT OF MY DOOR, AND I NEVER EVEN TUMBLED TO IT!

WE GOT A BILLION DOLLAR PROPOSITION, IF MY MAGIC STEAM WILL GROW HAIR ON MY BEARD, WHY WON'T IT DO THE SAME FOR MILLIONS OF OTHER BALD-HEADED MEN?!

THEY'LL BE GLAD TO FORK OVER 5 BUCKS A JAR FOR THIS SURE CLURE! THEN I'LL USE SOME OF THE PROFIT TO ESTABLISH THOUSANDS OF BARBER SHOPS AND MAKE DOUGH COMING AND GOING!

A NEW ERA IN THE LIFE AND FORTUNES OF ANDY GUMP HAS DAWNED!

BRICK BRADFORD

By William Ritt and Clarence Gray

"IMPAK'S SHIP," AKKA TELLS BRICK AND JUNE WAS HURLED UP A MOUNTING STREAM OF SURGING, WARM WATER—

"THE FRIGHTENED VOYAGERS HUDDLED FOR SAFETY IN IMPAK'S LITTLE WATER-PROOF CABIN"

"THE HEAT GREW INTOLERABLE! ALL IN THE CABIN LAY UNCONSCIOUS AS THE SHIP—

"—SUDDENLY PLUNGED INTO DAYLIGHT AND CRASHED ON A MOUNTAINSIDE!"