

Murder at Bridge

By ANNE AUSTIN.

SYNOPSIS

Murder at bridge: Nita Sprague, later Dexter Sprague, is also murdered when he disappears mysteriously from an important bridge party at the home of Tracy Miles. The police find evidence which points to the fact that Nita and Dexter were partners in blackmail and that Nita has come down to Hamilton to recognize someone in a group picture, since that the six original suspects in Nita's death had opportunity to kill Sprague also.

CHAPTER XXXIX

The telegram which the triumphant chief of the homicide squad passed to Dexter had been filed an hour before the news from the city editor of The York Evening Press:

"Working on your theory of New York gunner responsible murders of Judith Selina and Dexter Sprague, this paper has discovered that Selina woman was seen at night on several times during January, February with 'Swallow Bill Samelli' underwork name for Sam Samelli. Savelli taken for a ride Tuesday, April twenty-second, two days after Selina woman left New York. He was here working on theory Selina slain by own gang after they were tipped off Savelli was double-crossing them. In exchange for this information in your possession? Selina had brother who is known to us have promised revenge 'Swallow Bill Samelli's' murder. Be a sport, Captain."

"Well that puts the lid on it, don't it?" Strawn growled. "I'll send Sergeant Turner to New York on the next back train. Pretty decent of the city editor to wire me this tip. Huh?"

"And are you going to reciprocate by wiring him about the \$10,000 Nita had left here?" Dundee asked.

"Sure! Why not? There's no use that I can see to keep it back any longer, now that no one can have any excuse to think as you've been doing—that it was blackmail paid by a homicidal maniac."

"The?" Dundee began very slowly.

"You really think your case is solved?" I'll make one suggestion: take charge of Lydia Carr and put her in a very safe place."

"Why?" Strawn looked puzzled.

"Because when you publish the fact that Nita and Sprague got \$10,000 for tipping off Savelli's gang that he was double-crossing them, and that Nita willed the money to Lydia, the younger's next and last job would be to get Lydia, since his natural conclusion would be that Lydia had been in on the scheme from the beginning," Dundee explained.

"You're right!" Strawn exclaimed as he reached for the telephone, and called the number of the Miles residence. "I'm going to put it up to her that it will be best for her to be locked up as a material witness, for her own protection."

Five minutes later Strawn restored the receiver to the hook with a bang. "She won't budge. Says she isn't afraid, and the Miles kids need her. Well, it's her own funeral! But I guess you're convinced at last?"

Dundee slowly shook his head. "A very pretty and very satisfactory case, but not exactly watertight," Dundee remarked. "There's just one little thing?"

"What do you mean?"

"Have you forgot the secret shelf behind the guest closet in the Selina house?" Dundee asked.

"I can afford to forget it, since it hasn't a thing to do with the case," Strawn retorted angrily.

"Of course it does not fit into your theory," Dundee agreed, "for 'Swallow-bill Samelli's' avenging brother could not have known of its existence, but there is one thing about that secret shelf and its pivot door which I don't believe you can afford to forget, Captain! I refer to the complete absence of finger-prints on the door and on the shelf itself! Since Nita would have had no earthly reason for carefully wiping off her fingerprints after she removed the papers, it's a dead sure fact that someone else who had to legitimate business to do so, touched that pivoting panel and shelf, and carefully removed all traces that he had done so. And until I find out who that someone was, I, for one, won't consider the case solved."

Fifteen minutes later Dundee was at the district attorney's suite, having put in a call for Sanderson in Chicago over long distance.

"Did you find out anything new when you questioned the crowd this morning?" Penny asked. "Besides the fact that Polly and Clive got married this morning. It's exactly like Polly to make up her mind suddenly, after putting Clive off for a year."

"So it was Polly who held back," Dundee said to himself. Aloud: "No, I didn't learn much new, Penny. But there were one or two things that came out. For instance, I got Drake to admit to me, in private, that Nita did give him an explanation as to where she got the \$10,000."

"Yes," Penny prompted eagerly.

"Drake says," Dundee answered dryly, "that Nita told him it was 'back alimony' which she had succeeded in collecting from her former husband."

"Poof!" scoffed Penny. "She just said that to satisfy John's curiosity. After all, it was the most plausible explanation of how a grass-widow got hold of a lot of money."

"So plausible that Mr. Drake may have thought of it himself," Dundee reflected slyly. Aloud: "Among the other minor things that came out this morning, and which the papers did not report, was the fact that Janet Raymond tried to commit suicide by drinking shoe polish. Fortunately her father discovered what she had done almost as soon as she had swallowed the stuff, and made her take it piece and then sent for the doctor."

"Oh, poor Janet!" Penny groaned.

"She must have been terribly in love with Dexter Sprague, though what she saw in him—"

Dundee made no comment, but continued with his information: "Another minor development was that Tracy Miles admitted he and Flora had quarreled over Sprague after all of you left, and that Flora took two sleeping tablets to make sure of a night's rest."

"She's been awfully unstrung ever since Nita's murder," Penny defended her friend. "She told us all Monday night at Peter's that the doctor had prescribed sleeping medicine. . . . Now you look here," she cried out, "if you think Flora Miles killed Nita and Dexter because she was in love with Dexter and suspected he was in love with Nita—"

"Whoa, Penny!" Dundee checked her. "I'm not thinking exactly that. But I've just remembered something."

"And what's that?"

"Before I answer that question, will you let me do a little theorizing?" Dundee suggested. "Let us suppose that Flora Miles was not in love with Sprague, but that she was being blackmailed by Nita for some scandal Nita had heard. . . . Let us suppose further

that Nita recognized Flora's picture in the group Lois Dunlap showed her, as a portrait of a girl whose story she had heard; that she was able, somehow, to secure incriminating evidence of some sort—letters, let us say. Nita tells Sprague about it and Sprague advises her to blackmail Flora. So Nita comes to Hamilton and blackmails Flora of \$10,000. Not satisfied, Nita demands, the money to be paid to her the day of the bridge luncheon."

"Silly!" Penny scoffed. "The only evidence you have against her, Flora is that she stole the note Dexter had written to Nita."

"That's the crux of the matter, Penny darling!" Dundee assured her. "Flora, seeing Nita receive a letter written on her husband's business stationery, jumps to the conclusion that Nita has carried out her threat to tell Tracy, or that Nita has at least given Tracy a hint of the truth and that Tracy's special messenger note is, let us say, a confirmation of an appointment suggested by Nita. . . . Very well! Flora goes to Nita's bedroom at the first opportunity. Let's suppose Flora has brought the gun and silencer with her, intending to frighten Nita rather than kill her. But having had proof, as she believes, that Nita means business, Flora waits in the closet until Nita comes in and sits down at her dressing table, then steps out and shoots her."

"Her first concern, of course, is to hide the gun and silencer. She remembers Judge Marshall's tale of the secret shelf in the guest closet, and not only hides the gun there but seeks in vain for the incriminating evidence Nita had against her. But she also remembers the note she believes Tracy has written to Nita, and which, if found after Nita's death, may give her away. So she goes to the closet in Nita's bedroom, finds the note, and faints with horror at her pitiable need- less crime when she realizes that 'the note had been written by Sprague and Tracy. Of course she is too ill and panic-stricken to leave the closet until the murder is discovered."

"But you think she was not too panic-stricken to have the presence of mind to retrieve the gun and silencer and walk out with them under the very eyes of the police," Penny scoffed.

"Yes, I think she was!" Dundee admitted. "Let us suppose that Flora confesses to Tracy in their car as they are going to the Country Club. Tracy, loyal to her, decides to help her. He got his opportunity when he came back for Lydia and I left him in the hall while I went into Nita's bedroom to talk to Lydia. Tracy had an opportunity of retrieving the gun from the guest closet then."

"You're crazy!" Penny told him. "I suppose you are going to ask me to believe that Tracy was a big enough fool to leave the gun and silencer where Flora could get hold of it and kill Sprague last night."

"Why not let us suppose that Tracy himself killed Sprague to protect his wife, not only from scandal, but on a charge of murder. Tell me honestly: do you think Tracy Miles loves Flora enough to do that for her?"

Suddenly, inexplicably, Penny began to laugh—not hysterically, but with genuine mirth.

(To be continued.)

Baggage-Room Voyaging

Terry and I have discovered a delightful way to travel! We found it quite by chance yesterday when I went to question the baggage master about a mysteriously delayed crate, and Terry trotted along at my heels. The man was busy when we arrived, so we were left to our own devices for a time. Terry really deserves credit for the idea, since, if he had not almost immediately begun to sniff at the various crates and boxes with his inquisitive fox-terrier nose, I should never have thought of looking around myself. It took me but a few moments to discover that a baggage room is a veritable hemisphere.

The trunks nearest me were evidently unseasoned travelers, bound only for neighboring towns. But over in one corner I spied a steamer trunk, generously tagged. It was toward this venerable globe-trotter that I turned my attention. What a gay collection of labels! Most of them were partially eradicated through time and many voyages, but this made them all the more priceless. I stooped to examine them more closely. Bristol, Toulon, Lugano, Amalfi, Assouan. One, slightly larger than the rest, caught my eye—Srinagar. Suddenly, I saw the haughty Himalayas rise above the green Vale of Kashmir. Srinagar—and the seven bridges over the Jhelum. Gondolas on Dal Lake—the gats of Shalimar.

"You wanted to see me, Miss?" The voice brought me back to the baggage room. Yet the very room was different—now that I knew its possibilities!

Spring Thought

Now—the slow curve of thought Turns upward with the bough. It straightens and is wrought Of blossoms—now,

Shines—and is strange and still, It strains against the sky, Sweet and convulsed of will. To stay—to fly—

Loving the earth, and fond As root-things are, Yet all but off, beyond The last white star;

Not knowing what it seeks— And words, when they come, Are blossoms, and it speaks Like apple or plum.

—David Morton, in Saturday Review of Literature.

Tax Provides Hospital Care
Cambera, Australia.—A poll tax of 12 cents a week, imposed on all adults in this federal capital, provides free treatment for all residents at community hospitals.

Plane Service from Britain

Trans-Canada to Far East!
Britain persists in her progressive conquest of the air. Sir Alan Cobham will soon attempt a non-stop 10,000-mile flight from Great Britain to Australia, re-fueling in the air from tanker planes stationed along the route. These long flights from London and other airdromes in England to the ends of the earth are becoming quite ordinary events in the annals of Imperial Airways Limited. Sir Eric Geddes, just back from an 8,000-mile trip to Cape Town, states that the regular time for this route is to be cut to seven days, with Armstrong Siddeley monoplane. This year the great British-Indian service is to be extended to Australia with outposts to Hong Kong and Tokio. But particularly interesting to the people of this country is Sir Eric's prediction that within two or three years of the latest Imperial Airways Limited will have a regular trans-Atlantic and trans-Canada air service from the British Isles to the Far East. "That," he says, "will take our commercial services right around the world." The airports under construction by way of unemployment relief all across the Dominion will come in handy in connection with this far-flung project.

Troughs For Dogs

London.—If motorists can get a drink of water on the road, why not dogs?
So argued an animals' friend, with the result that it has been decided to provide all the A. A. telephone boxes in England with drinking troughs for dog travelers. As almost every main road and secondary road in the country is provided with these boxes, "Faithful Tray" will be able to "wag his tail and wet his lip" whenever and wherever he chooses.

"New" Sphinx Discovered

Near Second Pyramid
Cairo, Egypt.—A hitherto unknown sphinx was reported to have been unearthed near the Second Pyramid by Prof. Selim Hassan of the Egyptian archaeological department of the University of Cairo.
Twelve Mastabas, ancient Egyptian tombs, also were reported to have been discovered.

Why Stuff Rooms Are Stuff

Sir Leonard Hill, English physiologist and writer on public-health subjects, finds that the so-called "infra-red" rays given off by dark or dull-red sources of heat cause the nostrils to contract and thus interfere with breathing.

He believes that this is the chief reason for the stuffiness that we experience in an overheated room. Says a report of Science Service (Washington):

"In a lecture at the recent Public Health Congress in London, he showed that this effect is not due to a direct action of the heat upon the nostrils, but that it is a reflex effect from the sensory nerves of the skin. He describes the particular heat-rays that give this effect as 'nose-shutters.' Their action is especially marked in persons whose breathing is already partially obstructed—those with a deflected septum of the nose, for example, or a person suffering from catarrh, asthma, or hay fever.

"The effect can be neutralized by fanning the skin of the face with an electric fan, or by the action of certain other rays, which he speaks of as 'nose-openers,' that are given off especially by luminous sources of heat. They may also be absorbed by water vapor, and he suggests that this is the explanation of the efficacy of a bowl of water placed in front of a heater in relieving the stuffiness of a room."

"From experiments made at Bedford College, London, he found that 60 per cent of the persons examined experience difficulty in breathing when exposed to heaters that give off these nose-shutting rays, and that in over 25 per cent of the cases the obstruction to breathing was so marked that it could be demonstrated in records of the respiration made upon a suitable apparatus."

Goiter Takes its Toll

Stock owners are advised to take time by the forelock, and thereby prevent loss by goiter in calves, lambs and pigs, that are due, to be born, during the late winter or spring. This can be done by giving the pregnant animals on your farm, a small quantity of iodine in some form. If you farm in a goiter district, do not delay giving the unborn animals this protection. The calf and lamb crop can be saved from goiter, by giving the pregnant cows and ewes free access to a salt lick that contains potassium iodine, at the rate of one ounce of potassium iodine to each 100 pounds of salt. The little pig crop can be protected by giving the pregnant sow, each day a tablespoonful of a solution, made by dissolving ½ ounce of potassium iodine in two quarts of water. This use of a small quantity of iodine in some form, to prevent goiter in the young animals is necessary in the greater part of the older farming sections of Canada, excepting the sea coast districts.

Keeps Upholstery Clean

Raising the car windows when parking in a busy street is one way of keeping the interior clean which apparently escapes many motorists.

ORANGE PEKOE BLEND

"SALADA" TEA

"Fresh from the Gardens"

What's Wrong Puzzle

There are from fifteen to twenty mistakes in each of the cartoons which will appear weekly on this page. See if you can find them and then compare with list which will be published next week.



Answer to Last Week's Puzzle.
Man has rake for paste brush.
Using soap instead of paste.
Dogs do not eat soap.
Police man has on knickers.
Child is playing with pistol.
Boy should not be walking high fence.
Overalls have lace on bottom.

Figure on sign has button missing from coat.
Boy has no right hand.
Boy has collar and tie backward.
Police man has monkey wrench.
Smoke from chimney going in wrong directions.
Bird eating candy.
Posting of signs prohibited.
Boy has 50 lb. weight in hand.

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