

# Week-end MURDER

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX (Continued)

By the time Tom came they were all in the hall, talking, laughing, and the center of the little group, rallying the Belgian on his desertion of her, playing up to Marvin's evident exultation in his superior tennis skill, deferring to the gulf finality of Mr. Statlander's analysis of the science of the game.

Then I appeared, smiling apologetic. Would he go on through with it? What had he been doing up in the garage all this time?

"All ready, De Vos. Sorry. Hop in!"

The little blue roadster seemed so stanch, so unromantic, so much a part of the day's life. At the wheel Tom flung her a smile to which she gaily responded—head up, pulse beating.

The Belgian stepped in with one single, adroit movement; the door slammed. She stood watching until the little whirl of the blue turned the corner of the road and disappeared into the dusk.

In the rather blank pause that followed, Rosie appeared with the tiled coffee table. "On the terrace, ma'am?" Linda heard herself assent mechanically.

Then the shrill ring of the telephone came and she motioned the others toward the lawn. "Go on out," she said. "I'll be right along."

But when they had gone and she dared pick up the instrument she was trembling so violently that she had to drop down on the bench in the hallway and steady her arm against the wall.

"Yes?" she said. "Yes? . . . Yes!—yes, they have started. . . ."

A click in her ear—the connection was broken.

She hung up the receiver and wiped her hands fastidiously with the little chiffon handkerchief which she found matted into a ball in one of them. Then she rose and went out on the terrace.

The little group awaited her around the coffee table by the low chair she liked. They were smoking and chattering, but all started to rise as she came near.

"Don't get up!" Her voice sounded strangely far away to her ears. She felt as if an aeon had passed since dinner had been added. "I'll pour your coffee in a moment."

She sank into the chair and smiled a little unsteadily. "I must tell you what's happened. I think—it's all right now—"

She saw their looks of polite, mystified interest. Only Shaughnessy sat alert and anxious.

"That was—police headquarters that rang up. When Tom went to the garage he telephoned them to verify it." She saw the mystification changed to shocked surprise.

"Excuse me—I'm going at it backward—I haven't time to take it in myself. They've started out to meet Tom and Mr. De Vos."

"He—he'll have to miss his dinner at the White House Inn. He's going to be—arrested—for murdering Cousin Amos."

Shaughnessy, watching her, had sprung forward none too quickly. For this time she had fainted in real earnest.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

"I suppose if I leave you two young idiots alone you'll talk all night." Kathleen Averill, standing in the doorway, surveyed her son and his wife with marked disfavor.

Tom looked away guiltily and Linda, sitting up in bed, smiled disarmingly.

"We will," she said. "But, Kathleen, don't you see I've got to? It's the one thing I need. I'll burst if I don't."

"And you'll be sick if you do. Well—I've nothing to say about it. Tom won't be turned out and once you get him alone hasn't the backbone of a jellyfish."

"Backbone! I wish you'd seen him," cried Linda indignantly, "going off all by himself with that terrible man!"

"Don't!" Under her delicate, becoming rouge, Linda's cheeks turned white. "I shan't sleep a wink tonight and you're a—monster if you do."

"All the more reason—"

"There's no reason in you—either of you." Ashamed of her momentary weakness, Mrs. Averill spoke sharply.

"It was a crazy thing to do and it's a wonder you're both alive to tell the tale. Now don't argue with me. Rosie's fixed me a shake-down in the nursery and if you have hysterics or any of the things you should have after such an experience, bang on the bathroom wall and I'll wake right away."

"That is, if I'm asleep," she added hastily, "which I doubt I shall be. Good night!"

And she firmly closed the door behind her, leaving neither of them at all misled as to her real anxiety and affection.

"She's a lamb, isn't she?" commented Linda, settling herself luxuriously among the cushions. "But, oh, Tommy—I thought I never would have you all to myself! Now, for heaven's sake, talk. I'm frantic to know all about it."

"Are you sure you ought?"

"Don't be an absolute goat! Do you want me just to curl up and die?"

"Heaven forbid!" He still found it difficult to do anything but look at her rather hungrily. "Where shall I start?"

"At the beginning. That is, we went downstairs and that Statlander man caught you and you went off to the garage."

"What I don't see, Tom, is how you knew—because I found out while you were gone—and you thought it was poor Marvin."

"Poor Marvin—poor me! I was having fits talking tennis to that man and thinking you'd got the goods on him somehow and that I had to leave you and drive De Vos to the Stoners. How did you find out, Binks?"

"One of those 'little things,' Statlander was rambling on and suddenly he said something about the nursery. I was wool-gathering, but I made him repeat what he said and in that humorous, careful way he went over it again."

"About how curious it was that when I collapsed in Cousin Amos' room, Mr. De Vos appeared from the other end of the hall—our end. I never did know how he got on the subject."

"That hit me, Tom, just like a real blow. I couldn't get my breath. There it was—the small thing we'd been waiting for. I thought I must get to you—and then dinner was ready and Marvin came down and Mr. Statlander had a sudden fit of manners and went off to get you."

"I was so full of excitement and suspense I thought I'd pop! While you, poor dear—"

"OH, I had Marvin picked for the guilty one, all right. I was afraid to look at you and all the time you were waiting to set me right if I did!"

"That meal was ghastly. I kept waiting to hear his step—in the hall and when I did and he came and stood behind me—! But then, Tom, something hit you. You started to get up perfectly cheerfully and naturally—"

"Binks—it came over me and I nearly gave the whole show away right there. He stood there smiling, with his eyes sort of droopy—you know—and a little mocking, somehow, as if he knew something I didn't."

"I see now he has looked that way all the time, but I just put it down to his cool, superior foreign ways—"

"But, Tom, what—?"

"Oh—his white shirt front. Binks."

"That was it—what I saw from the raft, the 'something' I couldn't locate. As soon as I saw him there it came back to me in a flash. I saw him just the way I did then, only not so far away."

"You see, Marvin had been in undershirt and trousers and Statlander in a terrycloth bathrobe, but De Vos hadn't undressed that night. He had his coat off and a long, dark robe on, but from the raft I caught that splash of white—horseshoe shape—"

"It stood out from the black rest of him. In daylight it just looked wrong. But I never could place it."

"He didn't undress? But—"

"Yes. He must have lied to you. You told me that when he talked about it with you he said he undressed and sat and dozed in the big chair by the window—"

\*\*\*\*\*

"WAIT a moment, Tom. He didn't quite say that—but I did have that impression." She hugged her knees and bent her head on them in concentrated effort to bring back the exact words.

"He said, 'I made myself comfortable in the chair by the window and dozed off there—' That was it, Tom. I misled you. When he said 'made myself comfortable,' I took it for granted he meant he undressed and reclined to you that way. I'm awfully sorry!"

"That was perfectly natural. I'd have gone on the same assumption. I suppose he took off his dress coat and put on the bathrobe."

"Now that I think about it, I remember something else that should have told me a lot. When he joined us in Cousin Amos' room he had a very long robe on and it was drawn close across his chest—lapped way over. Of course that hid the white shirt front and made him look entirely different."

"How—how did he take it?"

"Involuntarily Linda shivered violently and immediately his hand was laid over hers.

"Don't talk about that, Binks. Don't think about it!"

"I can't help thinking, she pleaded, 'So its better to talk!'"

"Well—badly—"

"He was—violent?"

"Clear off his nut. I told you it'd be all a bunch of us could do to manage whoever it turned out to be, when the tables were turned."

"They sent four men—thought I was crazy when I called, but somehow I put it over and we needed every man of them. It wasn't a pretty scene."

"I suppose he killed Bunty?"

"He laughed at it. He sneered at me—for caring about a fat old dog, I suppose. He was a maniac, Binks. Yes, he went out that night and prowled about—"

\*\*\*\*\*

"SUFFERED from insomnia. Another thing I forgot. When we met in the city at the office early in the week, he spoke of it—said he always slept badly in hotels."

"It was just an illusion and I forgot all about it. Added to this blazing heat—this sort of spell always strikes a European as direct from hell—he probably was all keyed up from at least two and perhaps three or four nights without sleep. The first night he went out and roamed around—and Bunty suffered for it."

"You can imagine she'd be right on the job with an unknown prowling about after midnight, poor, spunky little puss! Then the next night after the row at the club and the dance, he came back to that hot room—it was the worst night of all, you know—and knew he hadn't a chance in the world to sleep."

"So he just made himself comfortable and probably sat there brooding over the quarrel and the insult he endured from Cousin Amos, and full of morbid, half-insane thoughts—"

"And the door went rork-rork-rork—"

"His window was parallel with that door and he could hear it louder than any one else."

"She sighed. 'Well—Tom—we did it. Thank heaven it's over!'"

"But by a very narrow margin," he added soberly. "The chance remark of Statlander and my impression of the shirt front."

"If he'd kept his head and just laughed at the idea—"

"We'd have proved it but it would have been a long, hard fight. This way, Binks, his family'll hush it up somehow, and I'll be bound he'll put quietly away and it never will come to trial. Surely we won't push it."

"Speaking of Mr. Statlander—"

Linda's impish grin was, in a moment, as dauntless as ever. "You're not very complimentary about your senior, are you, darling?"

"Well, he is an old fool. He's made more trouble, unnecessary trouble—"

"Have you talked it over with him?"

"Lord, yes. We've all hashed and re-hashed. After you pulled the faint—don't be peevish, honey, you had plenty of provocation and nobody blamed you!—Shaughnessy turned you over to Rosie and she called up mother, and the two of them bundled you off."

"Meanwhile our Irish friend had the time of his young life—a grand yarn to tell and an audience that was pored over with excitement."

"When I got back—dog-tired, disheveled and sick with worry about you—they all fell on me like wolves to the end of the story."

(To Be Concluded)

Last year, for the first time in the history of the United States, the number of immigrants returning to their native land exceeded those entering this country.

## OUR BOARDING HOUSE

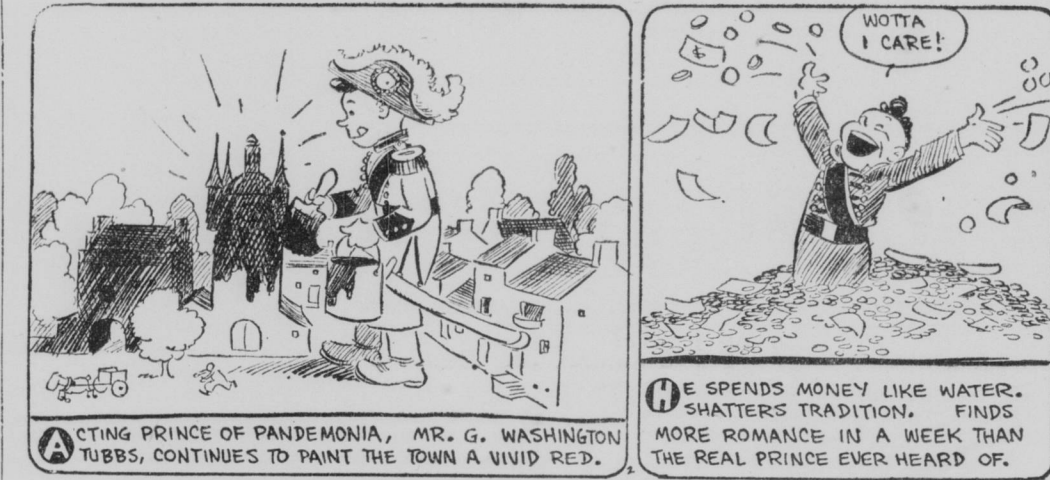
—By Ahern



## FRECKLES AND HIS FRIENDS



## WASHINGTON TUBBS II



## SALESMAN SAM



## BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



## TARZAN THE UNTAMED



## OUT OUR WAY

—By Williams



—By Blosser

—By Crane

—By Small

—By Martin

—By Edgar Rice Burroughs