

The Leading Lady

By GERALDINE BONNER

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WNU Service

What human being does not love a mystery story? Especially one of those affairs in which a puzzling crime suddenly disrupts the lives of a group of people who have been going along in a normal way. All at once a deed of malevolence is committed which turns their placid little world topsy turvy. No one knows the perpetrator of the crime, but circumstances are such that any one of the individuals, honest singers, members of the group may come under suspicion. New angles of the affair and new mysteries develop, and a period of the most wracking suspense exists for all.

In this case there is no super-detective with his mind and his chemicals, his snaring devices and his methods of deduction to trap the criminal and, by the very completeness of the case against him, force him to a confession. No one but a few confused civilians and a couple of fair-haired girls are offered as the writer, working in different directions and by the variance of their theories obstructing rather than aiding a solution. It was one of those crimes which seemed likely to remain a mystery unless some accident occurred to clear it up. The defendent did clear up one of the strangest accidents ever written into a mystery plot, and so terrifying in its effects that it brought a voluntary and quite unexpected confession from the guilty party.

Geraldine Bonner has written many clever stories and established herself as a master of thrill fiction.

PROLOGUE

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One of the morning trains that tap the little towns along the sound ran into the Grand Central depot. The passengers, few in number—for it was midsummer and people were going out of town, not coming in—filed straggling up the long platform to the exit. One of them was a girl, fair and young, with those distinctive attributes of good looks and style that drew men's eyes to her face and women's to her clothes.

People watched her, noting the lithe grace of her movements, her delicate slimness, the froth of blonde hair that curled out under the brim of her hat. She appeared oblivious to the interests she aroused and this indifference had once been natural, for to be looked at and admired had been her normal right and become a stale experience. Now it was assumed, an armor under which she sought protection, hid herself from morbid curiosity and eagerly observing eyes. To be pointed out as Sybil Saunders, the actress, was a very different thing from being pointed out as Sybil Saunders, the fiancee of James Dallas of the Dallas-Parkinson case.

The Dallas-Parkinson case had been a sensation three months back. James Dallas, a well known actor, had killed Homer Parkinson during a quarrel in a men's club, and fled before the horrified onlookers could collect their senses. Dallas, a man of excellent character, had had many friends who claimed mitigating circumstances. Parkinson, drunk and brutal, had provoked the assault. But the Parkinson clan, new-rich oil people, breathing vengeance, had risen to the cause of their kinsman, poured out money in an effort to bring the fugitive to justice, and offered a reward of ten thousand dollars for his arrest. Of course Sybil Saunders had figured in the investigation, she was the betrothed of the murderer, their marriage had been at hand. She had gone through hours of questioning, relentless grilling, and had steadily maintained her ignorance of Dallas' whereabouts; from the night of his disappearance she had heard nothing from him and knew nothing of him. The Parkisons did not believe her statement, the police were uncertain.

Her taxi rolled out into the sweltering heat, incandescent streets roaring under the blinding glare of the sun. Her destination was the office of Stroud and Walberg, theatrical managers. Mr. Walberg offered her a friendly hand and a chair. Mr. Walberg, a kindly Hebrew, was kindlier than ever to this particular visitor. He was sorry for her—as he in his profession was not—and wanted to help her along and here was his proposal:

A committee of ladies, a high society bunch summering up in Maine, wanted to give a play for charity. Thomas N. Driscoll, the spool-cotton magnate who was in California, had offered them his place up there—Gulf Island was the name—for an outdoor performance. The ladies had wanted a classic which Mr. Walberg opined was all right, seeing the show was for charity, and people could stand being bored for a worthy object. "Twelfth Night" was the play they had selected.

The ladies had placed the matter in Mr. Walberg's hands, and he had at once thought of Sybil Saunders for Viola. She was, in his opinion, the ideal person. Compensation was not so munificent, but then Miss Saunders was not yet in the star cast, and all expenses would be covered, including a week at Gulf Island.

She had no need for further persuasion for Miss Saunders accepted at once. She was grateful to him and said so and looked as if she meant it. So, in a glow of mutual satisfaction, they walked to the door. Mr. Walberg telling over such members of the cast as had already been engaged: Sylvanus Grey for the Duke, Isabel Cornell for Marla, John Gordon Trevor for Sir Toby—no one could beat him, had the old English tradition—and Anne Tracy for Olivia. At that name Miss Saunders had exclaimed in evident pleasure. Anne Tracy would be perfect, and it would be so lovely having her: they were such friends.

"And I'm going to give you my best director, Hugh Bassett. If with you and him they don't pull off a success the Maine public's dumber than I thought."

Her business accomplished, Miss Saunders went home. She lived in one of those mid-town blocks of old brownstone houses divided into flats. Letting herself in with a latchkey she as-

cended the two flights at a rapid run, unlocked her door and entered upon the hot empty quietude of her own domain. She threw her hat on a chair, and falling upon the divan opened the paper that she had carried since she left the Grand Central station.

She folded the pages back at the personal column and settled over it, bent, motionless, her eyes traveling down its length. Suddenly she stopped, focused on a paragraph. She took a pad and pencil from the desk, drew a small table up to the divan, spread the newspaper on it, and copied the paragraph onto the pad. It ran as follows:

"Sister Carrie:

"Edmund stoney broke but Albert able to help him. Think we ought to chip in. Can a date be arranged for discussing his affairs?

"Sam and Lewis."

She studied it for some time, the pencil suspended. Then it descended, crossing out letter after letter, till three



Now He Had Grown Bolder, Telling Her Where He Was.

words remained—"Edmonton, Alberta, Canada." The signature she guessed as the name he went by.

She burned the written paper, grinding it to powder in the ash tray. The newspaper she threw into the wastebasket where Luella, the muttato woman who "did up" for her, would find it in the morning. She felt certain Luella was paid to watch her. But she had continued to keep the evilest creature, fearful that her dismissals would make them more than ever wary, strengthen their suspicion that Sybil Saunders was in communication with her lover.

The deadly danger of it was cold at her heart. She had heard directly from him once, a letter the day after he had fled; the only one that even he, reckless in his despair, had dared to send. In that he had told her to watch the personal column in a certain paper and had given her the names by which she could identify the paragraphs. She had watched and twice found the veiled message and twice waited in sickening fear for discovery. It had not happened. Now he had grown bolder, telling her where he was—it was as if his hand beckoned her to come. She could write to him at last, do it this evening and take it out after dark. Lying very still, her hands clasped behind her head, she ran over in her mind letter boxes, post offices where she might mail it. Were the ones in crowded districts or those in secluded byways, the safest? It was like walking through grasses where live wires were hidden.

A ring at the bell made her leap to her feet with wild visions of detection.

But it was only Anne Tracy, come in to see if she was back from her visit on the sound. It was a comfort to see Anne, she always acted as if things were just as they had been and never asked disturbing questions.

She was Sybil's best friend, was to have been her bridesmaid. But she knew no more of Sybil's secrets since Jim Dallas had disappeared than anyone else. And she never sought to know—that was why the friendship had ended.

She had a great deal to talk about, but chiefly the "Twelfth Night" affair. Anne was immensely pleased that Sybil had agreed to play. She did not say this—she avoided any allusions to Sybil's recent conducting of her life—but her enthusiasm about it was irresistible. It warmed the sad-eyed girl into interest; the Viola costume was brought from its cupboard, the golden wig tried on. When Anne took her departure late in the day, she felt much relieved about her friend—she was "coming back," coming alive again.

Anne occupied another little flat on another of the mid-town streets in another of the brownstone houses. Hers was one room larger, for her brother, Joe Tracy, lived with her when not pursuing his profession on the road. There were hiatuses in Joe's pursuit during which he inhabited a small bedroom in the rear and caused Anne a great deal of worry and expense. Joe apparently did not worry, certainly not about the expense. Absence of work were on his temper not because Anne had to carry the flat alone, but because he had no spending money.

They said it was his temper that stood in his way. Something did, for he was an excellent actor with that power of transforming himself into an empty receptacle to be filled by the character he portrayed. But directors who had had experience of him, talked about his "natural meanness" and shook their heads. People who tried to be sympathetic with Anne about him got little satisfaction. All the most persistent ever extracted was an admission that Joe was "difficult." Hugh Bassett had boosted and helped and lectured him. And not for love of Joe, for in his heart Bassett thought him a pretty hopeless proposition.

That evening, alone in her parlor, Anne was thinking about him. He had no engagement and no expectation of one, and it was not wise to leave him alone in the flat without occupation. She went to the window and leaned out. The air rose from the street, breathless and dead, the heated exhalation of walls and pavements baked all day by the merciless sun. To leave Joe to this while she was basking in the delights of Gull Island—apart from anything he might do—it wasn't fair. And then suddenly the expression of her face changed and she drew in from the widow. Hugh Bassett was coming down the street.

The bell rang, she pushed the button and presently he was at the door saying he was passing and thought he'd drop in for a minute. He was a big thick-set man with a quiet reposeful quality unshaken even by the heat. He had dropped in a great deal this summer and as the droppings in became more frequent Anne's outside engagements became less. They always simulated a mutual surprise, giving them time to get over that somewhat breathless moment of meeting.

They achieved it rather better than usual tonight for their minds were full of the same subject. Bassett had come to impart the good news about Sybil, and Anne had seen her and heard all about it. Finally when they had thrashed out all the matters of first importance Bassett said:

"Did you tell her that Walberg wanted Aleck Stokes for the Duke?"

"No, I didn't say a word about it. What was the use? It would only have upset her and you'd put a stop to it."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Fraud Practiced on Devotees of Buddha

When the Oriental wishes to produce pearl images of Buddha, after inserting his wooden wedge, he carefully forced the mantle for a little way from its attachment to the inner bottom edge of the mussel shell. Then he took a number of small images of Buddha stamped in tin, upon the under side of which he placed some sticky substance—probably a bit of beeswax—and, after carefully lifting the edge of the mantle he inserted them and fixed them row upon row on the inside of the shell.

All that was necessary now was to return the mussel to the pool, where it would shortly repair the injury done to the edge of the mantle and overcome the irritation produced by the irregular surface of the tin images and the cook and I will dress them."—Progressive Grocer.

Goshawks Are Fighters

Sportsmen tell tales of goshawks that illustrate their ferocity and boldness. Charles D. Lanier of Greenwich, Conn., relates an experience he had while shooting in the Carolinas some years ago. A blue heron lit near his ducking blind. Almost immediately it was attacked by a goshawk. The hawk fastened its talons in the heron's back and refused to leave its prey on the approach of Mr. Lanier. Both birds were dispatched by the aid of a stick, the goshawk bristling and showing flight to the last.

Hang Pictures Carefully

Pictures carefully chosen and correctly hung do much to bring interest and charm to the home. If one has a particularly beautiful painting or etching, it should receive the place of prominence. Its hanging should be invisible, as cords and fasteners detract from the artistic value of the picture itself. Small pictures may be grouped successfully, but always should be placed against a wall-space where they will not appear to be overcrowded. If a picture has strong color apparel, hang it where there will be nothing to contrast unfavorably with the color emphasized.

Book Once Popular

The "Anatomy of Melancholy," the famous work of Robert Burton, which was published in 1621, under the pseudonym of Democritus Junior, went through eight editions within a half-century after its publication.

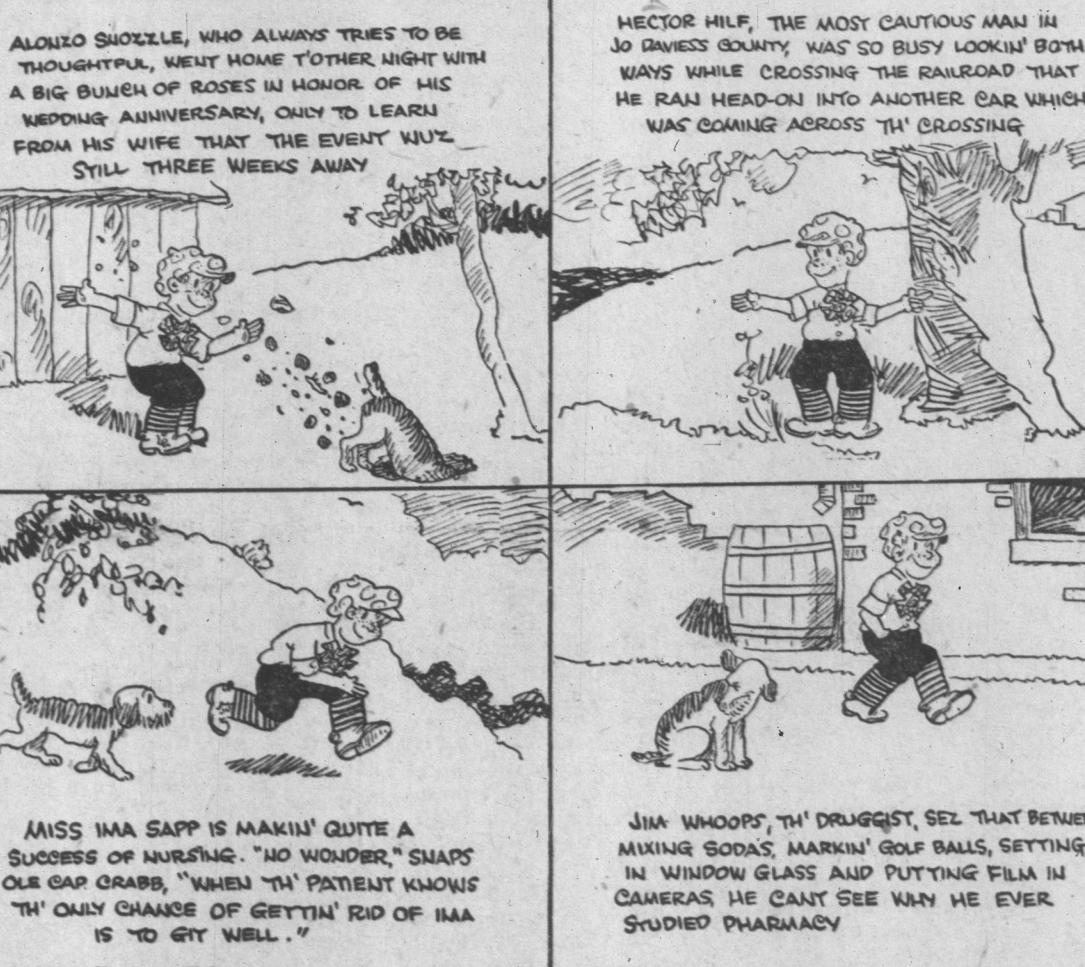
OUR COMIC SECTION

Along the Concrete



MICKIE, THE PRINTER'S DEVIL

Town Topics

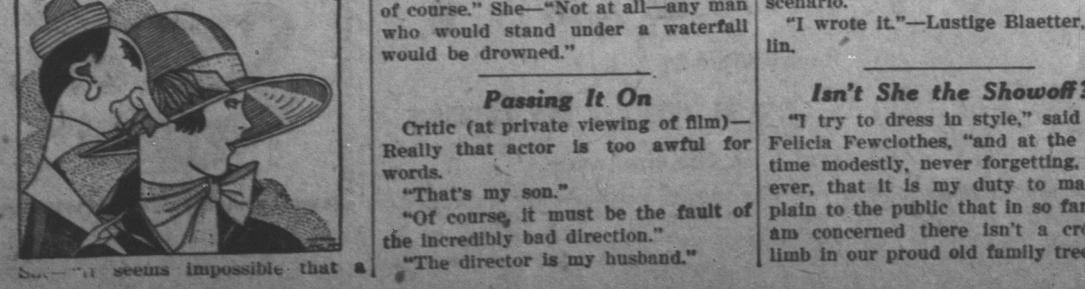


THE FEATHERHEADS

Some Folks Never Learn



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Char H. Fletcher.

He's Been Told

"What is a dictator?" "It's easy to tell you're not married."—Stockholm Kasper.

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One Thing in His Favor

"Will you marry me?" "You haven't a chance. But I rather admire your taste."

Women, Why Suffer Needlessly?

Indianapolis, Ind.—"When I arrived at middle life I was in very poor health and soon decided to try Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription, because so many women had told me of the wonderful benefit they had received from it. I am now glad to recommend it myself because it was a wonderful benefit to me. From girlhood to middle life the 'Favorite Prescription' is a woman's friend."—Mrs. Mattie Galladay, 806 E. New York St.

Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription is sold by all dealers, in liquid or tablet form; or, send 10 cents for trial package of tablets to Dr. Pierce's Invalids' Hotel, 665 Main St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Among Scientists

"What is that distinguished-looking man's business?" "Grave robber," answered Miss Cayenne.

"His looks belie his trade."

"Not at all. He confines himself exclusively to Egyptian tombs."—Washington Star.

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Misjudged

Housewife—I gave you a piece of pie last week and you've been sending your friends here ever since.

Tramp—No, pardon, lady—my enemies.—Sydney Bulletin.