

The Leading Lady

By GERALDINE BONNER

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What human being does not love a mystery story? Especially one of those affairs in which a puzzling crime suddenly disturbs 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 apparently honest, sincere, 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 mathematics, his chemicals, his measuring 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 fairly astute law officers, both of the latter working in different directions and by the variance of their theories abstracting rather than making a solution. It was one of those crimes which seemed likely to remain a mystery unless some accident occurred to clear it up. And the accident did occur; 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

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—were struggling 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 slowness, 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 fiancée 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 Parkinsons 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 kinder than ever to this particular visitor. He was sorry for her—as in his profession was not—and wanted to help her along and here was his proposition:

A committee of ladies, a high society bunch summing 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—Gull 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 Gull Island.

It 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 Maria, 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."

ended 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 mulatto 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 evil-eyed creature, fearful that her dismissal 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 detec-

tives. 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 held.

They 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 all 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 wore 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 window—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 forces 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 by coating them with nacre. So after a few months, a year or more, when these mussels were taken from the pools, killed and opened, the images would be found fixed to the inside of the shells just as they were placed,

but now nicely coated with shining, pearly nacre—miraculous manifestations of the Great Buddha, and as such highly prized by devout worshippers.

Why Grocers Get Gray

"Have you any nice young grocers?" inquired a frustrated young bride, who had intended to ask for chickens. "Why—why, yes," was the astonished reply at the other end of the wire. "Well," said the bride, "I'm dressed." "Dressed?" said the grocer, more astonished than ever. "Well, no," was the reply, after a moment's reflection. "I believe you may send them undressed. My husband is coming home early, and he can bring their neckties and the cook will dress them."—Progressive Grocer.

Goshawks Are Fighters

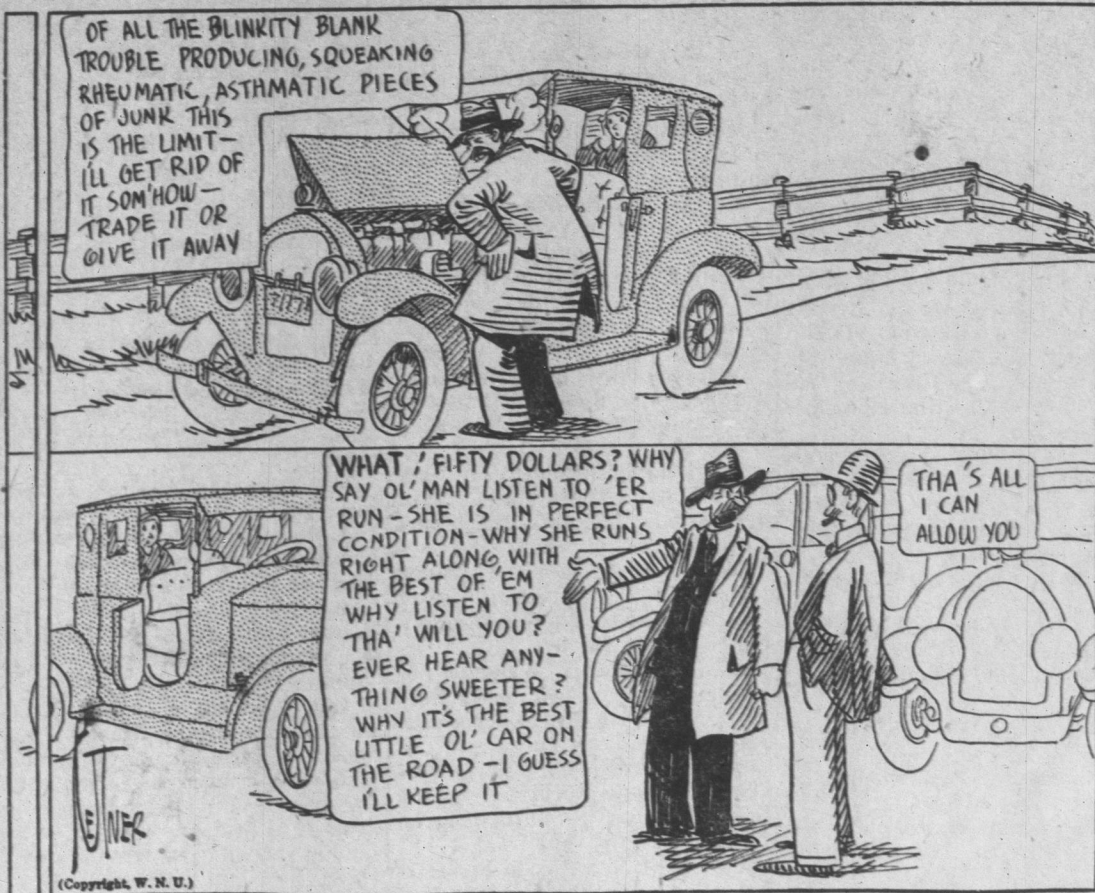
Sportsmen tell tales of goshawks that illustrate their ferocity and boldness. Charles D. Lanier of Greenwich, Conn., relates an experience he had while shooting in the Carolinas some years ago. A blue heron lit near his ducking blind. Almost immediately it was attacked by a goshawk. The hawk fastened 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 fight to the last.

Book Once Popular

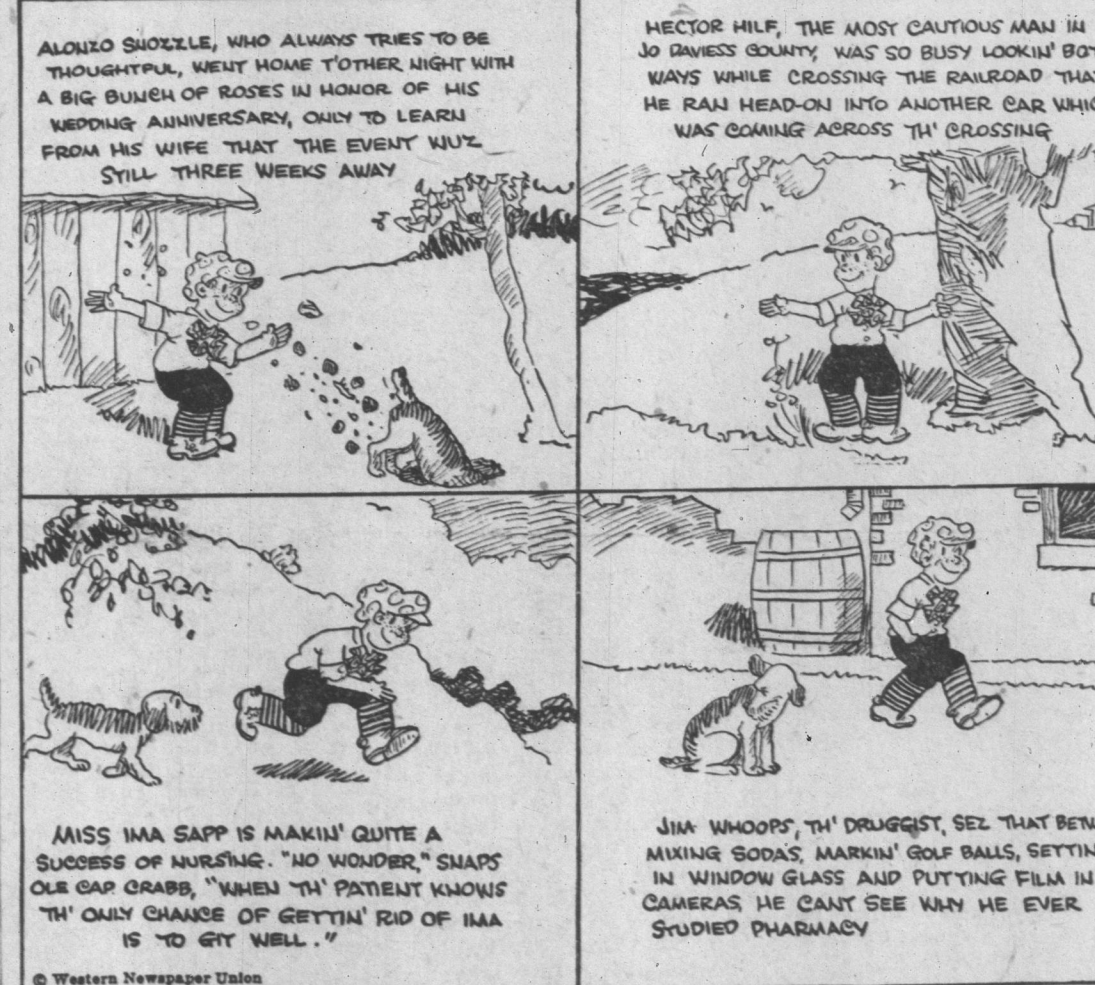
The "Anatomy of Melancholy," the famous work of Robert Burton, which was published in 1621, under the pseudonym of Democritus Junior, went through eight editions within a half-century after its publication.

OUR COMIC SECTION

Along the Concrete



MICKIE, THE PRINTER'S DEVIL



THE FEATHERHEADS



A DROP OF WATER



Passing It On

Critic (at private viewing of film)—Really that actor is too awful for words.

"That's my son."

"Of course, it must be the fault of the incredibly bad direction."

"The director is my husband."

Isn't She the Showoff?

"I try to dress in style," said Miss Felicia Fewclothes, "and at the same time modestly, never forgetting, however, that it is my duty to make it plain to the public that in so far as I am concerned there isn't a crooked limb in our proud old family tree."

CHILDREN CRY FOR "CASTORIA"

Especially Prepared for Infants and Children of All Ages

Mother! Fletcher's Castoria has been in use for over 30 years to relieve babies and children of Constipation, Flatulency, Wind Colic and Diarrhea; allaying Feverishness arising therefrom, and, by regulating the Stomach and Bowels, aids the assimilation of Food; giving natural sleep without opiates.

The genuine bears signature of

Chas. H. Fletcher.

He's Been Told

"What is a dictator?"

"It's easy to tell you're not married."—Stockholm Kasper.

DEMAND "BAYER" ASPIRIN

Take Tablets Without Fear If You See the Safety "Bayer Cross."

Warning! Unless you see the name "Bayer" on package or on tablets you are not getting the genuine Bayer Aspirin proved safe by millions and prescribed by physicians for 26 years. Say "Bayer" when you buy Aspirin. Imitations may prove dangerous.—Adv.

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 benefits 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.

Bell-Ans Really Sure Relief

Thousands of Testimonials From Doctors, Nurses and Dentists Say So.

For correcting over-acidity and quickly relieving belching, gas, sick headache, heartburn, nausea, biliousness and other digestive disorders, BELL-ANS has been proved of great value for the past thirty years. Not a laxative but a tested Sure Relief for Indigestion. Perfectly harmless and pleasant to take. Send for free samples to: Bell & Co., Inc., Orangeburg, N. Y.—Adv.

Misjudged

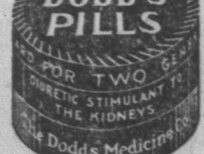
Housewife—I gave you a piece of pie last week and you've been sending your friends here ever since.

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

To insure glistening white table linens, use Russ Bleaching Blue for your laundry. It never disappoints. At all good grocers.—Adv.

It is foolish to fear that what you cannot avoid.—Syrus.

Apothecaries deal in scruples, but it may be different with lawyers.



DIURETIC STIMULANT TO THE KIDNEYS

Mrs. Julia Browning, of Mulberry Grove, Ill., wrote us as follows: "For eight months I suffered with rheumatism and inflammation of the bladder. I had a swelling of the joints, stiffness in the joints and cramps in the muscles. There was a sandy deposit in the urine. My head and back ached. I was tired and nervous and could not sleep, and became exhausted with the least exertion. Nothing seemed to do me any good until I saw your ad in the paper. Dodd's Pills have done me what helped me. I have taken three boxes in all and am greatly benefited. I have got others to use them." Buy a box today, 50 cents at your drug store or the Dodd's Medicine Co., 701 Main St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Enjoy GOOD HEALTH

and a Vigorous Old Age



Nature's Remedy

Increases the Pep and Vigor by relieving Auto-Intoxication A SAFE, DEPENDABLE LAXATIVE