

MURDER at PIRATE'S HEAD

By ISABEL WAITT W-N-U RELEASE

THE STORY SO FAR: Judy Jason, who is telling the story, receives an anonymous letter enclosing \$800 and asking her to bid for an abandoned church to be auctioned the next day. She finds, in an old chest, the body of a man identified as Roddy Lane. The body disappears a few hours later. A fish shed burns, apparently killing an old man named Brown who is supposed to have lived there. Judy finds Roddy Lane's diamond in the handbag she left at the church the day of the auction. Lily Kendall is found dead, with Hugh Norcross's scarf wrapped around her neck. The guests have reassured themselves that Roddy Lane is not on the "Head." Now continue with Judy's story.

CHAPTER XIV

"You can breathe easy. He isn't there. We hunted from attic to cellar. No sign of anything—food, I mean. Just his open suitcase, with the clothes the way I told you when I climbed up and looked in the window that time with the Rev. De Witt. There's a bird. He's stopped splitting the atmosphere lately."

Just then a cowbell, shaken vigorously by an angry hand, made us turn to see my Aunt Nella at the rear steps.

"Comin' right along, m'dear!" yelled Uncle Wylie.

"Me, too. Not that I could eat." Potter stared miserably at the sea. "You might as well have the picture, Judy. She'll never want it, now. It's a poor time to speak of it, but I was tickled silly at the commission to paint her portrait. Not that I'm very good at it," he added modestly. "I'll leave the painting outside your door, shall I?"

Outside my door! Would he sneak in and grab that \$500?

I thanked Mr. Potter for the painting, wondering, as he walked swiftly toward the cowbell. But the others were coming down the drive, so we waited for them, Mr. Quincy and I. Hugh was in the lead.

"Just as Quade said—nothing there. However he knew it." He took the chair from me. "Let me do that, Judy. You look tired to death."

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"Not a chance. The trailer's been searched. I still have the keys."

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I explained about the painting he was leaving outside my door. When we reached the inn my aunt beckoned me with a ladle.

"Go up and look," Victor whispered, "or shall I?"

"You go. I've got to help serve," I answered.

Albion Potter was coming down the stairs. "Hope you like it—in spite of everything," he smiled at me, and passed on into the dining room.

Victor started up and I hurried out to my scolding auntie, trying to make up for my absence by telling her the news. I thought the cucumber dishes looked stinky and was slicing another when she made me cut my finger with:

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He came presently and sat down opposite me. "Money's there," he whispered. "Painting's wet. Had to scrub the stuff off my hands. That's why I was so long."

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He came presently and sat down opposite me. "Money's there," he whispered. "Painting's wet. Had to scrub the stuff off my hands. That's why I was so long."

Bessie Norcross was absent. Didn't want any lunch, she'd told Aunt Nella. She was going to take a sleeping powder and lock herself in her room. Would Mrs. Gerry please so inform her brother?

Mrs. Gerry did. "Took poor Miss Kendall's death awful hard. She was bawling her eyes out. Kep' saying, 'Hughie never done it!' As if any one'd think you did!"

Several spoons were halted in mid-air. Several pairs of eyes, I saw, shot suspicious glances at poor Hugh, trying to eat his chowder with a fork.

"There are plenty of policemen, shall we say, Mrs. Gerry, who might not be so lenient with Norcross as you are," squeaked Mr. Quincy. His eyes no longer twinkled; they glittered.

Hugh's chair scraped backward, but he pulled it up again without a word when the minister added: "Let him who is without evil cast the

first stone. Personally, and without recrimination, I think it looks bad for all of us." For a moment I liked the pompous De Witt.

"Did you look in the tent?" Aunt Nella asked. "I've got a feelin' Roddy's around here somewhere, hidin'."

Uncle Wylie, for the first time, was eating his repast with the guests. Nothing short of murder could have made him bring in his dinner from the kitchen, but there he was at a rear table.

"Don't be ridic'ulous, Nella. Looked in the tent every time I passed it today. Hunted all over our barn. Only place I ain't been is Mr. Quade's trailer." He bit off a healthful chunk of bread. "Could Lane conceal himself in one of your cubbyholes?" he asked Victor.

"Not a chance. The trailer's been searched. I still have the keys."

The minister turned around in his chair. "Boathouse was locked, too, wasn't it? Yet somebody's been there. Is it likely Lane would scuttle his own boats? Much as I despised him, I can't but hope he just left the Head in a natural way. The fire was an accident, which burned a poor old deaf man."

"And Miss Kendall?" Albion Potter was still bitter, apparently about his lost commission to do her portrait.

"Accident, too? Fell into the Pirate's Mouth."

Hugh flung down his napkin. "Nice of you, De Witt, but it won't go. Not

there. However he knew it." He took the chair from me. "Let me do that, Judy. You look tired to death."

"Never felt better in my life, but I could go for some of that chowder."

Victor asked, "Your uncle get back O. K.?"

I inclined my head. "Gone in to dinner. Auntie's furious. Better all hurry up. Whatever she's got ready she hates to have it get cold."

"Where's friend Potter?" De Witt asked quietly.

"Gone on ahead. Feels pretty badly about losing his commissions. Miss-Miss Kendall gave him two, you know, but this good Boy Scout made up for one of 'em. Wouldn't let me pay for the church."

"Lovely to hang up in the kiddies' bedroom some day, Judy, and tell 'em bedtime stories about what happened there," Hugh said.

Nobody was amused. Everybody was in the doldrums. What dinner party could be gay with a charred corpse to the right and a bruised or strangled one to the left?

"Why didn't he wait for us?" Victor said, half to himself.

I explained about the painting he was leaving outside my door. When we reached the inn my aunt beckoned me with a ladle.

"Go up and look," Victor whispered, "or shall I?"

"You go. I've got to help serve," I answered.

Albion Potter was coming down the stairs. "Hope you like it—in spite of everything," he smiled at me, and passed on into the dining room.

Victor started up and I hurried out to my scolding auntie, trying to make up for my absence by telling her the news. I thought the cucumber dishes looked stinky and was slicing another when she made me cut my finger with:

"Thank goodness, there won't be any more beads to sweep up!" Which just goes to show how a round of murders will make a person callous.

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Thaddeus Quincy chuckled, and soon a nervous ripple ran around the tables.

Uncle Wylie rose to help me with the trays. "Don't mind Mrs. Gerry," he half-whispered. "She gets uppity when her puddin' sauce is lumpy."

At that we all laughed aloud, and Uncle joined in. It wasn't decent. It wasn't seemly, but we couldn't help it. Our nerves were at the breaking point.

The minister sobered us down again. "Judy, is the rest of the money you received still where you left it?"

I glanced at Victor. "Yes," I said. "It's all there."

"Doesn't it occur to you Miss Kendall, for reasons unknown to us now, might have sent it? She apparently had plenty of this world's goods, in a small way, of course, judging by her clothes, and her offer to Potter here of \$50 for a portrait, on top of the bid of twenty-five for the church. And, as I recall, she was the one who wanted to search the basement. Acted strange about the Pirate's Mouth investigation, too. Lay down on the rock, remember—after Mr. Quade said there was nothing there."

"Would she bid against herself?" I asked. "She was the one who bid me up to three hundred at the auction. Why? If she knew she was certain to have use of the church through me, anyway?"

Just then I thought I heard a step on the stairs.

I held my breath and listened. Yes, the old stair creaked. Lightly, to be sure; but someone was walking up or down. The other guests didn't appear to notice. They were probably too busy eating.

Victor was saying, "The thing to do now—"

"Excuse me," I said, and hurried into the hallway and looked up the stairs. I caught a swish of a woman's skirts and presently a door closed. Bessie Norcross, of course! Maybe her sleeping medicine hadn't worked yet. She'd started to come down to luncheon, and finding the crew had not yet finished, retreated. That was it. I retreated, too, relieved. Victor and the minister were having some sort of a pow-wow over what to do next.

I glanced at the dining-room clock. Why, it still lacked three minutes to 11! What a day! Already I'd lived a hundred years.

"How long would it take you to get one of those boats fit to cross the gap under where the bridge was?" Victor asked Uncle Wylie.

"The cove, you mean. Gap's too tricky for us Headers. Wouldn't take long if I had some help gettin' her down."

"But why don't the authorities turn up?" Potter ventured. "Even a fool milkman would report an accident, wouldn't he?"

"Mebbe he did. But it's dinner-time," Aunt Nella interposed. "If you knew Pirate Headers the way we do, you'd know they wouldn't miss their vittles, come murder or the Day of Judgment."

"She's right that time," my uncle said. "But there'll be a sailboat or somep'n along before I could patch up The Eleanor. Whyn't you all just take it easy till someone turns up? Fixed me a megaphone, but don't see as I'll need it now. Wind's turned. Carry what we say across." He finished his last morsel of cottage pudding, folded his napkin neatly and offered, "I'll go set by the bridge and wait. Shall I?"

Trust Uncle Wylie to choose "to set" instead of repairing a leaky bottom!

"We'll come along and join you, Gerry," the minister said. "Want me to push your chair, Mr. Quincy?"

"No, thanks," returned Mr. Quincy coldly. "I'll keep away from cliffs and broken bridges till the police get here."

"I move we go have another look at Mr. Quade's trailer," Hugh said. "I'm remembering a few things besides the scarf," he added darkly. "Go with me, Potter!"

Albion shrugged. "Oh, I might as well. Nothing to paint—now. I wish to heaven the police would come, so a body could settle down again." Reluctantly he followed the leader, as per usual.

Hugh stopped by my chair. "Judy, if my sister should come down while we're gone, tell her everything's all right, will you?"

"Of course, Hugh."

He smiled at me wanly. "Darn the whole business. I told Bessie she was a fool to come here. Old memories! Couldn't she have settled them at some other resort—Hyannis or Nantucket? No, she was anxious to see if she was cured of her affection for that—that bounder. Well, she's got her—" He muttered something that sounded like bellyful, and immediately added, "Pardon me, Judy. I don't know what I'm saying." And went out with Potter.

Victor was having a word with Uncle Wylie at the foot of the front steps, and Aunt Nella was corraling me to help her.

"Dishes, Judy. Please!"

"You bet, Auntie. Feel terribly guilty, but—" And I gave her all the dirt while we hustled through.

(TO BE CONTINUED)