



HART FAILURE

by Tom Thursday

(Author of "A Jay Down South In Dixie")

Strange and wonderful are the Tote Board figures when Misdemeanor Murphy, a medium, and a spirit jockey run a parlay for Honest Mike Homicide.

WHEN SNOW starts flying around New York, Chicago or Loose Angeles, I begin to see the palm trees and sunshine and likewise the hotel prices in Miami, which are very cold, indeed. So it happens that just around the time Hialeah is about to open, for a little horse scampering hither and yon about the track, I am ensconced in the *Hotel Holdup*, which is owned and operated by at least six descendants of Jesse James.

It is just after Xmas and I have nothing to do and am having a pretty good time with this and maybe that, until who comes down Flagler Street but Misdemeanor Murphy. He is dressed in a complete set of tropical clothing and also has a shave and haircut. The shave and haircut is practically a disguise for Murphy because he likes to wear his hair and whiskers long, especially when his pockets are loaded with his other dirty shirt and pair of socks.

"This is a very great pleasure," says Misdemeanor, "seeing you in Miami because I may show you my new system for beating the nags at the tracks."

"Well, now," I say, "before I listen further to your kind proposition I would like to know whether or not you are out on parole or about to become a

guest of the police."

Murphy has a very annoying habit of being in gambling joints when the cops come around to see what kind of symphony concert is taking place, but when they note that the music is coming from the crap tables and chuck-a-luck outfits, why, they haul in both the patrons and the management. Misdemeanor is usually the first to be hauled by the coppers because he is the type who is always trying to rush out the door first, forgetting that he will always be welcomed by at least three dicks standing there on guard.

"Ha ha, what I have always liked about you is your sense of humor but," says Misdemeanor, "you should not talk so loud account a personality like me cannot afford to let everybody know that he has been around and about."

We walk into the lobby of the *Hotel Holdup* and sit between a pair of bathing cuties, who have come to Miami to see what they can spear in the form of a rich playboy or even an old one.

"You will now kindly state the proposition," I say, "and if it is not highly honorable I will not consider same."

"Listen," says Murphy, "what would you say if I told you I found a psychic professor who can go into a trance and come out with a pair of winners

running the same afternoon?"

Well," I say, "this is quite unusual, and I might listen to more about the matter."

"Where will you be around 8 o'clock tonight?"

"I will just be coming out of police headquarters," I say, "as I always like to make a call on my old friend, Chief Headley. If you want to, you can either meet me in the chief's office or in front of the station."

"Look," says Murphy, "I never care for cops and such dumps as police stations because I am a taxpayer and the cops have not treated me with respect and gentility. So you will please meet me at *Sloppy Sweeney's Select Cafeteria* on North Miami Avenue and I will buy dinner and maybe a beaker of ginger ale. After that I will take you out to meet Professor Alabazum Hart, who will amaze you with his horse selections, direct from the other world."

Well, I am very curious about this horse matter, so I meet Murphy at 8 bells and take a looker at the greasy menu but all I can see are ten kinds of hamburger, six kinds of hot frankos, and I doubt that there is any kind of good coffee.

"What is this," I say, "a garbage can?"

"Please," says Murphy, alarm in his face, "not so loud because this institution is owned and operated by my friend, and patron of the arts, Honest Mike Homicide. And did you not observe the nice gent who is about to serve us?"

"You mean the one with the pushed-in-puss and pair of bullet holes in his left cheek?"

"Please," says Murphy, "do you want to offend Bullet-Proof Schwartz who is practically in charge of this institution, along with Mr. .38-Calibre McGoogan, both highly respected secretaries of Honest Mike Homicide?"

I point toward the back where I see a door with a small window, and ask, "Could there be a bookie joint back there and are they just selling this swill as cover up?"

"Please, *please*," begs Murphy, "you will make the boys think that you have no respect for the institution and they may get sore up and ask us to depart, as they do not desire dissatisfied customers."

I take a nibble at my hamburger, and wonder how old the porcupine was they got the meat from, and then I take a swallow of the coffee and now I know what they do with all the old coffee grounds other people toss into the sink. Then Murphy says he is ready to take me out to see Professor

Alabazum Hart.

WE HAIL a passing taxi and this guy starts the meter at 65 cents, figuring we own a fifty percent interest in Fort Knox and then Misdemeanor gives the professor's address in the northwest section. I call Murphy's attention to the 65 cents on the meter before we even get rolling, and he says, "You are too fussy. This is one of Honest Mike Homicide's cabs and he wants all his drivers to make an honest buck."

Well, the driver takes us on a sightseeing tour around Miami, via Georgia and South Carolina, and finally parks in front of the professor's chateau. There is a sign on the front lawn, reading, *Prof. Alabazum Hart, Trance medium. Problems of luck, love and business solved.*

Murphy leads me into a big room and there seems to be some kind of meeting going and it is quite dark, except at the front where the professor sits with a spotlight shining on his hairless head. There are about ten people sitting around and they have paid two bucks for the privilege and I am about to ask a few questions, but Murphy says, "Sh-hh. The professor is about to go into a trance and contact one of his spirit guides in the next world."

"Which next world could this be?" I ask, as I am not up to date on next worlds, as I believe in one world at a time.

"Shut up," says Misdemeanor; "do you want to get the spirits sore up at you?"

Pretty soon the professor announced that he has contacted the spirit guide he was paging, some mug named Chief Running Nose, and then he asks the chief a lot of questions the customers want answered. When all the questions are answered, the lights go on and the customers file out happy.

Then Murphy introduced me to the professor and then the medium says, "Good friends, I have excellent news for you. I was able to penetrate the ectoplasm early this morning and contacted my racetrack spirit guide, Kentucky Derby McGoon."

"That is very swell," says Murphy, "and what does Kentucky Derby McGoon have to say?"

"His track information is very fine and select," says the professor. "In fact, he informs me that two horses will run at Hialeah tomorrow and they can't lose."

"This will please Honest Mike Homicide very highly," says Misdemeanor. "What can the name of

the two nags be?"

"One is *Racket Buster*," says the professor, "and the second is *Cement Jacket*. The first runs in the second and the other goes in the fifth."

"Who may be this Kentucky Derby McGoon?" I ask.

"Why," says the professor, "he is a dead jockey who happens to fall off his horse while riding the favorite in the Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs back in 1889."

Well, this information is very amazing to me although I am willing to lay 100 to 1 that Kentucky Derby McGoon is probably shot off his nag for trying to throw the race.

Murphy thanks the professor for his inside information and then we go back to the *Hotel Holdup* and sit in the lobby and discuss a little of this and a little of that.

"I notice," I say, "that you do not pay Professor Alabazum Hart for his remarkable inside information."

"Well, now," says Murphy, "this is strictly a fifty-fifty deal and although I put up the moola, which I get from Honest Mike Homicide, I give the professor half of all the winnings, and Honest Mike gives me ten percent of the take."

"How many winners has the professor picked so far?" I ask.

"We have just started the system," says Murphy, "and the professor has picked three winners in a row, one last Tuesday and two Thursday and the two he just give us tonight will make five winners in a row."

"This," I say, "is most astounding and I am wondering what the track officials and the police will think of such peculiar business."

"You will please do not mention police and who cares what the track officials think?" says Misdemeanor. "Besides, they do not know about it and keep your trap shut because I am going to let you make some small bets and get a piece of dough for yourself."

The next afternoon Murphy calls for me and takes me to *Sloppy Sweeney's Select Cafeteria* and we have a bite of ptomaine poisoning and then Misdemeanor gets up and whispers, "You will now follow me to the back and I will get you inside."

We walk to the rear and Murphy raps three times on the door and the little window slides back and a guy with a mush like he has personally tested the latest in atom bombs says,

"Who's duh mug wit yuh?"

"He's okay, Rudolph," winks Murphy. "An old palsy-walsy from Perth Amboy, New Joisey."

He opens the door and we walk into a big room and it is crowded with ladies and gents with a pencil in one hand and a scratch sheet in the other. The reason they call them scratch sheets is because the information is lousy and itchy and only suckers buy them.

"Well, now," says Murphy, "do you desire to make a wager on the professor's two selections?"

"I am not a gambling man," I say, "although I have been married four times and all my wives were 100-to-1 shots to win alimony, but I do not care for hoss races because sometimes the jockeys just go for the ride. So I will just watch you lose Honest Mike Homicide's dough on the professor's selections."

Well, although all the handicappers and touts give *Racket Buster* and *Cement Jacket* a chance to finish when the racing season is over, and nobody in the joint gives them a play, Misdemeanor puts \$100 on each to win. Both hangtails are pegged at 10-to-1 and it means that Murphy is hoping to win one grand on each nag and that is very easy cabbage to get without any labor.

AT THE START of the second race, *Racket Buster* does not wish to leave the starting gate and a hoss named *Shapely Form*, the favorite, starts out like a four-alarm fire and is about halfway around the track before the other nags get the idea that they can also play in the game.

"Well," I say to Misdemeanor, "maybe Kentucky Derby McGoon failed to have a heart-to-oats talk with *Racket Buster* because maybe the Western Union does not have any wire service in the next world."

"This is indeed very disappointing and unusual," says Murphy, "as the professor has not failed to have all his other selections leap from the starting gate and keep leaping until they hit the finish line. Yes, this is all very peculiar."

Just then the announcer states that *Shapely Form* is getting tired and maybe hungry and she stops to look at the nice green grass along the edge of the enclosure. Then a nag named *Almshouse Al* takes the lead and is having a good time until he reaches the three-quarters. Soon the announcer remarks, "*Racket Buster* is coming along, coming along; *Racket Buster* is now just two lengths behind

Almshouse Al; and *Shapely Form* is out of the running; it is now *Racket Buster* neck and neck with *Shapely Form*; *Racket Buster* now in the lead; and-d the winnah by two lengths is *Racket Buster!*!”

Well, this is very remarkable and even Murphy is surprised himself while the other patrons begin to tear up their tickets and their hair at the same time.

“See? See?” says Murphy. “What did I tell you? If you had just bet a buck you would have won back that tenner I borrey from you five years ago and then we would of been even, and I am glad that you do not cash that check I give you in payment because, although there is money in that bank none of it belongs to me.”

The fifth race comes up and Misdemeanor puts another century on *Cement Jacket* and the horse is in no hurry to work up a sweat in the first half of the race. He kicks up the dirt in the face of *Empty Pockets*, the favorite and after the first half he hits the finish line six lengths in the lead.

Murphy now has two grand and I am beginning to believe that Professor Alabazum Hart is considerable psychic and trance medium. In fact, he is not only medium but he is very well done, and I am beginning to think I am a sappo for not risking a bob or two, as I can use some extra spinach account the prices in Miami would bust the International Bank.

“Well, now,” says Murphy, “what do you think of Professor Hart and his spirit guide, Kentucky Derby McGoon?”

“I wish to state,” I say, “that I consider it a very great miracle and I would like to have a little personal chat with Kentucky Derby McGoon because his information is certainly out of this world.”

Next night we pay another visit to Professor Alabazum Hart and he says he has succeeded again in getting through the ectoplasm and has contacted Kentucky Derby McGoon and that the departed jockey told him that *Mouthpiece* will cop the fifth the next day and that *City Clink* will breeze through the seventh.

So the following afternoon we are back in the bookie joint in rear of *Sloppy Sweeney’s Select Cafeteria* and who do we see when we enter but Felony Jones. Now, this Felony Jones is a personality that is in and out of the sports world and he will think no more of throwing a fight or a wrestling match than he will of wearing his socks for two weeks without even taking them off.

And what is real disastrous is that Jones is a very personal enemy of Misdemeanor Murphy and when Murphy sees Felony he runs to the doorman, and says, “I wish to enquire how that burglar and bum got in here?”

“Why,” says the doorman, “he is very highly recommended by the cop on the corner and he also has a letter of introduction from a guy named Robert E. Lee.”

“Forgery,” snaps Misdemeanor, “and do you not know that Robert E. Lee is a very great general during the War between the States?”

“Is there maybe something wrong with the gent?” asked the doorman.

“There is nothing wrong,” says Murphy, “that half a hour in the electric chair would not cure and Honest Mike Homicide will be greatly outraged when he hears that Felony Jones has stunk up his genteel institution.”

Felony has been studying a scratch sheet and looks up just as Murphy is yakyaking with the doorman, seeing me he comes up with a very large smile.

“Well, well, well!” says Felony. “If it isn’t my old palsy-walsy! It’s swell to see you again!”

“I am happy to see you out of the clink,” I say, “but if it is a touch you are aiming at, why, you have the wrong target.”

“You misjudge me, old palsy,” says Jones. “I am loaded with loot, having just sold my champeen wrestler to a syndicate of suckers. By the way, palsy, what do you like in the fifth and seventh race?”

I am about to tell him about *Mouthpiece* and *City Clink* but I do not think Misdemeanor Murphy will like it and in fact Murphy overhears Felony mention the fifth and seventh and gives me a severe kick in the shins.

“I do not gamble on horses,” I say, “especially when they have any jockeys on their backs because some jockeys ain’t as dumb as the horses.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” says Jones, “I have practically made up my mind to play *Mouthpiece* in the fifth and *City Clink* in the seventh. Well, be seeing you around, palsy.”

At the mention of the two nags Murphy opens his mush and is unable to close it for a few moments.

Then he says, “What is this? What is this, now?”

“Well,” I say, “I do not know but maybe Felony

Jones has a private wire to Kentucky Derby McGoon and got the same info that Professor Hart gave you."

"You will please not josh me," says Misdemeanor, "because how can Felony contact Kentucky Derby McGoon when he is not in this world?"

"You will have to ask the professor," I say, "as I do not have any truck with spirits in any world, including this one."

WELL, BOTH *Mouthpiece* and *City Jail* cop the jack in the fifth and seventh and Felony Jones, who has bet a sawbuck on each, is very happy and he comes over to me and Murphy, and remarks, "Well, well, well! This is a remarkable piece of luck and it is the first time I ever believe in spirits."

"What is this you are yapping about?" demands Murphy. Before replying, Felony holds his nose at an angle at Murphy, then says, "Although I do not care to hold converse with low personalities I will state that I am in touch with my personal handicapper, who is now in the next world. Good afternoon, gentlemen."

Misdemeanor is very stunned at all this and he wonders if jockey Kentucky Derby McGoon has crossed him with the double-X and he also wonders if the inside information is leaking out all over the universe.

So that night when we call on Professor Alabazum Hart, Murphy demands to know what is going on in the spirit world and is very upset about the matter.

The professor seems very nervous and says, "Gentlemen, I cannot tell you what is actually going on but I do not think any other spirit medium can contact Kentucky Derby Jones because," says the professor, "he is my own private and personal guide."

"Well, it is very coincidental," says Murphy, "and Honest Mike Homicide does not desire any coincidentals. So now you will please go and see what Kentucky Derby McGoon has hot for tomorrow's races."

The professor takes another high dive into a trance and when he comes back he says that he has only one horse. *Strip Teaser*, running in the second.

"She should be at least 50-to-1," says the professor.

We drive back to town and halfway I note

another taxi passing us and if my eyes are not worse than a blind mule's, then who do I see in the back seat but Felony Jones. I'm about to pass this interesting news on to Misdemeanor Murphy but decide that it may not help his ulcers and besides the ulcers maybe Professor Alabazum Hart has nothing to do with Felony Jones.

Well, we are in the bookie joint the next afternoon and just before the second race starts Felony Jones comes in and he is dressed in the latest in Palm Beach sports attire and also swings a beautiful Malacca cane. This sight adds two more ulcers to Murphy's stomach and he is about to bust the cane over the noggin of Felony when I inform him that the Miami police would frown upon such actions, especially in a bookie joint, which is not even supposed to be open and is strictly against the law.

Felony gives me a very nice hello and ignores Murphy like he had just been sentenced to Sing Sing for 678 years. Then the wire service loud speaker states that the second race is about to begin. Murphy has one grand on the nose of *Strip Teaser* but when she comes in, which seems about a week later, Murphy is very irked and upset about the matter.

"I do not understand it," says Murphy. "Nope; I do not understand it."

Just then Felony walks near and he is counting large sums of greenish cabbage, mostly in tens and twenties. He gives me a very broad and pleasant smile, then says, "Although I am doing okay I should have put at least one grand on *Galloping Ghost* because my contact in the spirit world informs me that he can't lose. Well, leave us not be too hoggish, I always say. Good afternoon, gentlemen."

When Jones walks out of the joint, Murphy says, "Now I *know* there is someting phony going on in the next world and I will call up Honest Mike Homicide and get his advice."

He goes to the phone and has some chitchat with Honest Mike who is at his palatial winter home on Palm Island, which is between Miami and Miami Beach. Then he hangs up and says to me, "Honest Mike is very enraged about the matter and he is coming with us tonight and we are calling on Professor Alabazum Hart, along with Honest Mike's two very private secretaries, Bullet-Proof Schwartz and .38-Calibre McGoon."

"I hope it will be a very friendly visit," I say,

“because I like old Professor Hart and would not want him to become a visitor to the next world, along with Kentucky Derby McGoon.”

“Well, now,” says Murphy, “it is my own personal view of the matter that Felony Jones has no doubt hypnotized the professor and making the professor give us bum tips, while giving the good ones to Felony Jones.”

“This is, indeed, a strange situation,” I say, “but how can Felony Jones hypnotize anything, even a tomcat on the back fence?”

“You do not understand me,” says Misdemeanor. “I mean that when Felony Jones goes in for hypnotizing he uses a blackjack or a pair of six-shooters because that is the way he does all his hypnotizing.”

THAT NIGHT a big black and practically handmade limousine parks in front of the hotel and Bullet-Proof Schwartz is driving, while .38-Calibre McGoogan is playing the part of footman. McGoogan opens the door and Honest Mike steps out like he is King of Arabia and then we have a little chatter and after that we all get in the car and drive to Professor Alabazum Hart’s house.

As we enter, it is all dark and the professor is having a séance with a widow who would like to know why her husband, Henry, died and left all his moola to a show girl that the wife never knew about.

“Sit down and be quiet,” Murphy whispers to all. “You should not disturb the spirits as they are very sensitive and do not like any horsing around.”

“What’s spirits?” demands Bullet-Proof Schwartz, as the only spirits Bullet-Proof contacts comes out of booze bottles.

Finally the professor comes out of his trance and tells the poor widow that her Henry was blackmailed by the show girl and had to give her some dough to keep her mush shut. And then he tells her to see a lawyer as the guide will have nothing to do with show girls whatsoever.

The professor spots us and says, “Good evening to you all, kind friends. I am happy you came because I have a sad confession to make. But before I make this confession I must ask you to give me full body protection from a very dangerous character.”

“Continue,” says Honest Mike Homicide. “And if this character is who I think he is, I wish to state now that he will be swimming in the middle of the

Gulf Stream with a flock of sailfish and sharks.”

“Well, gentlemen,” says the professor, “a few days ago a man came to me and says his name is Reginald Hawksworth—”

“Aha,” says Honest Mike, “that is the name Felony Jones used when he is arrested for safe-cracking in Brooklyn three years ago. Continue.”

“This person knocks on my door around daylight and has a gun in his hand and says if I do not do as he tells me he will see that I die. In fact, he says he will shoot my head off. Now, as you know, gentlemen, no one cares to have his head shot off, and so I asked him what he wanted. I invited him in and he informed me that he hears that I am giving good horse tips, direct from the other world, to a lot of cheap bums, especially a man named Honest Mike Homicide?”

“Continue!” says Honest Mike. Then he turns to Bullet-Proof Schwartz and says, “You will please make a note that Felony Jones is found at the bottom of the Gulf Stream not later than daylight today!”

“This dreadful person made me give you the wrong tip on *Strip Teaser*,” goes on the professor, “when the real information from Kentucky Derby McGoon was on *Gallop Ghost*. So you can well see, gentlemen, that I am entirely innocent of any wrongdoing, and I hope you give me protection against this dangerous character.”

“Do not worry,” says Honest Mike, “you will not be troubled any longer with Felony Jones because he is no friend of mine and when a personality is no friend of mine he is no longer a living, breathing citizen of the United States.”

Honest Mike wipes some sweat from his brow, and continues, “Now, professor, you will please have yourself a trance and see what Kentucky Derby McGoon has running at Hialeah tomorrow.”

A few minutes later, the professor returns from his trip to the next world, and says, “I have contacted Kentucky Derby McGoon and he has informed me that the winner of the sixth race will be *Sheriff’s Orders*.”

The name gives Honest Mike Homicide and his two secretaries a bad case of high blood pressure and he snaps, “To hell with *Sheriff’s Orders* as the name does not appeal to me in the least.”

When I am back in the hotel lobby, alone with Misdemeanor Murphy, I say, “I think there is something very fishy about how professor Alabazum Hart can pick winners from the next

world.”

“Confidentially,” says Murphy, “he don’t and he can’t because he ain’t no medium in the first place because I knew him up in Saratoga when he was touting the nags under the name of Joe the Picker.”

“You will please give me some more information,” I say, “as I find this all very interesting.”

“Well,” says Murphy, “Joe the Picker is so lousy that he has to leave Saratoga and when he lands in Miami he takes up the trance medium

racket. I tell Honest Mike Homicide that he can contact a jockey in the next world who can pick one winner after the other, and that’s how I get Honest Mike to put up some moola. When Joe the Picker has some luck and picks a few winners right off the bat, Honest Mike thinks he has discovered a goldmine.”

“Well,” I say, “this is quite novel but how does this Professor Alabazum Hart pick so many winners?”

“Ever hear of the stuff called dumb luck?” asks Murphy. “Well, that is how he does it.”

THE END