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Inez Schneider Whitney

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Accidental Tourist

By — Inez Schneider Whitney

Serious

Arthur Miles dead? Shot by Etta Parker? Everyone in the little Western Oklahoma town, Wheeler, was horrified. Arthur's daughters and Etta had gone to school together and were still good friends.

Arthur was in his fifties, a good husband and father who never did an unkind thing to anyone. He was the night marshall and in the daytime worked as a butcher for Bud Parker, Etta's husband. The store used to be Parker's General Store; but when Jeff Parker turned it over to his boys, Bud and Ken, they put up a new sign—PARKER BROS. The big building was on Main Street. Ken took over the drygoods side, and Bud managed the other side that had the meat market and groceries.

Bud and Ken were enterprising young men and were not afraid to work. Ken married first; his wife was Marie, daughter of Mr. Washington, owner of the flour mill. She was a very attractive brunette, but there was no foolishness about her. She pitched right in and helped Ken with the store, and it would have been hard for him to do without her help.

Etta, a ravishing blue-eyed blonde and daughter of the village blacksmith, married Bud. Bud and Etta soon had two lovely children—a boy and a girl. Etta never helped Bud much at the store; she was too busy at home.

The pioneer town of Wheeler was only twenty-five years old. It sprang up overnight when the railroad extended farther west in Oklahoma. The town began to grow, and Parker Bros. Store prospered. Bud and Etta were one of the few couples in town who soon had a modern home. They began taking trips, and Etta had part-time help to do housework

and stay with the children when their parents went out in the evening.

When drummers came to town bringing their latest styles, Bud let Etta pick out anything she wanted, which was plenty. She looked very stylish for someone living in a Western Oklahoma pioneer town. Many people said that luck came her way when she married Bud.

Bud and Etta's closest friends were a circle of young married couples. They went on picnics, had dinners at their homes, and played cards. Then a new attraction came along.

Seven miles south of Wheeler, there was a beautiful spring. It gurgled along a shallow channel until it reached the edge of a hundred-foot cliff. It trickled over the edge and then gained momentum as it fell. By the time it hit the bottom, it was a beautiful white falls which still bore the name the Indians gave it—"Falling Waters."

Falling Waters was on a farm owned by a Mr. Billingsley. People came all the time asking the owner if they could fish or have picnics for free, and it was difficult for him to refuse them. There wasn't much farmland, so Mr. Billingsley decided to turn his place into a recreation park. He built a swimming pool and sold lots for cottages. His masterpiece was the dance pavilion, a structure of about a hundred feet long and fifty feet wide. It had a big entrance door and windows all the way around that could be opened in the summer. Dances, soon an important part of the social life of these young couples, were held every Saturday night.

As time passed, it was rumored that the dances were getting a little wild—too much drinking. Despite Prohibition, bootleg liquor was plentiful everywhere.

The minister at the little Southern Methodist Church preached about it almost every Sunday. He called the swimming pool the "dippin' hole" and said, "The women who wear these immodest bathing suits and the

people who cavort around at the dances down there are goin' straight to Hell."

It was about this time that Bud suddenly moved out and left Etta and the children. No one knew why, but he had always had an eye for pretty girls. Some people thought that Bud got tired of Etta having such an easy life and never once helping him in the store. He provided for her and the children even after he left, but it wasn't the same. Etta missed the good times she and Bud had had with the other couples. She was violently jealous when she heard that Bud was going out with other women.

One evening her friend Audrey phoned. "Bud has that same girl with him that he brought here last week, and they've just gone into Ken's house."

The news was more than Etta could stand, and she started drinking. After a few drinks,

In a few minutes, Arthur was lifting the latch on the gate at the end of the walk in front of Etta's home. He was sure that she would listen to him.

Just then she fired another shot.

He called out..."Etta, honey. It's Arthur. Bring me that gun."

She turned, pointed the gun in his direction, and pulled the trigger.

Arthur fell to the ground and lay motionless.

Etta ran down the walk and dropping down beside him called, "Arthur! Arthur!" When he didn't answer, she screamed, "Help! Help! Somebody come quick! Something's wrong with Arthur!"

The police came and took Etta to the county jail. Her trial began a few weeks later. The courtroom was packed every day, and a crowd was always waiting outside hoping

someone would leave so a few more could squeeze in. The trial lasted almost three weeks. Etta was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to fifty years.

A year later Etta was pardoned

by the governor. It was thought that an uncle, active in politics, probably used his influence. She moved away and was never seen in Wheeler again. What a tragedy! She wasn't a murderess at heart—only a young woman feeling deserted and unloved by her husband, striking out against what she considered to be fate. ✽

"After a few drinks, she went to the master bedroom, opened a drawer, and took out a six-shooter."

she went to the master bedroom, opened a drawer, and took out a six-shooter. Bud had thought when he put it there that they needed it for protection, but he hadn't taken it with him when he moved out.

Etta went out on the front porch and started shooting in the direction of Ken's house down at the end of the block across the street.

When the shots kept coming, Ken called Arthur at his home. "Arthur, you're the town marshal. You better get up here. Etta is really on a tear. She keeps shooting toward our house; I'm afraid someone is going to get hurt."

"Don't worry, Ken. I can settle her down. I'm on my way."

Design by Scott Voigt