

# MURDER AT MOCKING HOUSE

BY WALTER C. BROWN

**SYNOPSIS:** There are many tangled threads about the hanging murder of a policeman and a stranger in Pierre Dufresne's house. One of them, the disappearance of a mysterious .45 calibre revolver, seems to lead to Dufresne himself, Sergeant Harper to the more suspicious because Dufresne is too anxious to stop the investigation and get the police out of his house. Dufresne has called in Harper's superior officers.

but the latter appeared as non-plussed as the others. "This is utter nonsense," he cried. "It cannot be. The bullet that killed this maniac came from the policeman's gun. It was found right here in the room."

The detective held up the steel jacket. "Why was this bullet hidden away so carefully?" He stroked the roll of carpet by the table. "Why does this carpet have a bullet hole through it? We tested our theory of concealed murder by hunting for concealed evidence—and we found it. And we're going to find more of it!"

## CHAPTER 26 PEACEMAKERS

"SERGEANT," the Director began in his booming voice. "Mr. Dufresne has asked me to see what can be done to expedite this inquiry. Of course," he continued quickly, "it has never been my policy to interfere arbitrarily with any man in my Department, as you know, Harper, but Mr. Dufresne is an old friend of mine and I want to be as accommodating as I can, especially in view of Mrs. Dufresne's misdeed."

"I think it would be inadvisable to move from the scene of the crime under present conditions," Harper replied, quietly but firmly.

"But why, in Heaven's name?" cried Dufresne. "Am not I the one most concerned? There will be no more threatening letters, no more shots from hiding. I don't care who he was or what he was, it is enough to know that he will not trouble us again. He was undoubtedly a homicidal maniac."

"What makes you think so?" Harper challenged.

Dufresne stared in surprise. "What else can we think? You have every characteristic of a violent homicidal mania."

"Apparently, yes, and of the most virulent type," agreed Harper. "But you forget that we have no proof whatever that the man who was killed last night was the same one who wrote the threatening letters and shot at you yesterday."

Dufresne broke in excitedly. "Sergeant, you are deliberately manufacturing difficulties. To call such a train of events a coincidence is to stretch a remote possibility until it snaps of its own thinness." He snorted his scorn of such an idea.

Captain Macklin had been taking in this verbal tit tentatively. From the first he had sensed some underlying current of hostility between Dufresne and the detective. He injected himself smoothly into the conversation. "Harper, have you any direct evidence that this man was not the one who wrote the crank letters?"

"Captain Macklin, I would prefer to make my report privately."

"Come, now, Sergeant," Connors boomed. "There's no need to take that line. There seems to be a little friction between you and Mr. Dufresne. We don't want anything like that."

"Gentlemen," said Dufresne with great dignity. "My wife needs peace and quiet since the shock she had last night. She is the innocent victim of bungling methods."

"Mr. Dufresne," Harper snapped, his temper rising. "You will please remember that I had nothing to do with Mrs. Dufresne's mishap."

"I am not blaming you, Harper. There was nothing personal in my complaint, but the fact still remains."

"Let's not get side-tracked," Macklin resumed. "Is there any such evidence, Harper?"

"Of course there isn't," Dufresne interrupted again. "What happened in this room last night is plain to be seen. There is no need to twist it into still more fantastic shapes nor in trying to rationalize a madman's actions."

DIRECTOR CONNORS waved his big, blunt cigar in the air. "Yes, Harper, if you've got anything substantial to build on, let's hear about it."

Harper drew himself up stiffly. "Very well, Director, I have been reluctant to part with this information for fear it would hamper my further work in this case. Maniac or not," he answered impressively, "this man was murdered, not by Officer Hamill, but by a third person who was here in this room! This same unknown person also killed Hamill! The scene was fixed, the evidence tampered with so that it would look as if the two men had killed each other. At first this was only a theory, a suspicion of mine, but now I positively know it to be a fact."

"You have the proof?" Captain Macklin asked with restrained tenacity.

For reply the detective briefly recounted the doubts he and Carlin had shared concerning the wound in the murdered man's head and how it had led to the recovery of the original .45 bullet and the roll of carpet with the telltale bullet hole.

Harper had been keeping a wary eye on Dufresne during his recital.

"But these are not proofs," Dufresne continued. "A stray bullet, a hole in some old carpet."

"There are traces. The substitution of bullets is one. It is true there are no fingerprints but this criminal was too astute for that. No doubt he wore gloves. The murderer sat in this room with his victim. They even drank together and perhaps it was at that moment the killer chose to fire. After the murder the extra glass was washed, dried, and put back in the cabinet. But we have found the glass with traces of its recent use still in the bottom."

"The murderer's first thought was to melt down the bullet by holding it in the flames of the log fire with these tongs. A systematic effort was made to hide the victim's identity—a ring was forced from his finger, an emblem from his coat lapel, whatever papers, keys or other articles he had were ripped from his pockets. Even the labels were ripped from his own clothes. None of these things has come to light in the house—we assume that the murderer carried them away."

"THAT is all guess-work, Harper," Dufresne rebutted. "If there was a third person, as you insist, how did he escape from this house after the crime? I'll admit fingerprints can be wiped away but you can't wipe away tracks in the snow."

"I can't answer that question, yet," the detective replied. "I don't know how it was done, but I know that it happened. We had men murdered in locked and sealed rooms and the solution turned out to be quite simple. If the murderer planned a way to escape without leaving tracks in the snow I'll find how it was done before I'm through."

Harper looked directly at his commanding officers. "I have other evidence that cannot be divulged in this house without seriously injuring our chances of success."

Dufresne sneered openly. "It's fortunate I was under your own police guard last night, Harper, or you would crown this brilliant fantasy of yours by accusing me of being the master mind behind this affair."

Harper's face reddened at the insulting tone which barred these words. He stepped forward so that he stood face to face with Dufresne. "Those two men were murdered," he repeated, "and I am sure that at least one person in this house could identify the man who masqueraded in your likeness. I'll go even further. I believe that you, Mr. Dufresne, are helping to shield that person from us and that is a dangerous game to play."

The master of the house threw back his head and laughed tauntingly. "Now I know you're crazy!"

"Mr. Dufresne," Harper purred, "a little while ago you told me that you had only one gun in your possession—an automatic."

"Yes."

"Perhaps you'd be interested to know that you own another weapon, a revolver of large caliber. This was usually kept in the upper right-hand drawer of the highboy in your dressing-room. Early this morning that revolver was still in its place. It has since disappeared. Can you tell us anything about that?"

Dufresne looked at him out of a face suddenly sobered. "I own no such revolver," he stated firmly.

"Your butler, Andrews, says that you do."

"Ring for him. We'll soon get to the bottom of that," Dufresne replied, sharply.

They waited in an uneasy silence until the butler made his appearance. Andrews stood looking from one to another inquiringly under his jutting white eyebrows.

"Andrews, what in the devil have you been saying to the police? Go on, Harper, you started this."

Harper faced the old man. "A little while ago you told me that Mr. Dufresne kept a revolver in a drawer of the highboy in his room. Mr. Dufresne denies that."

Andrews lifted his head. "I never saw such a revolver," was his calm statement.

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Tomorrow, Sergeant Harper defies Dufresne.

## OUT OUR WAY



HEROES ARE MADE—NOT BORN.

## By J. R. Williams THE NEWFANGLES



## One Use for It!

## JOE PALOOKA



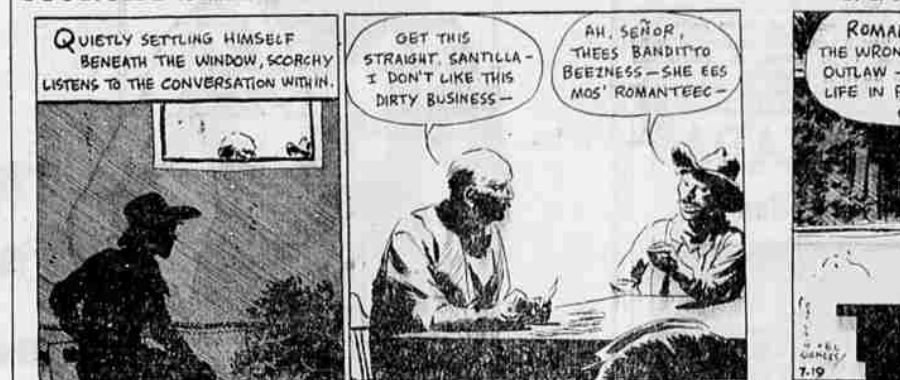
## OLLY OF THE MOVIES by Ollendorff



## —But Foreigners Don't Understand Our Slang!



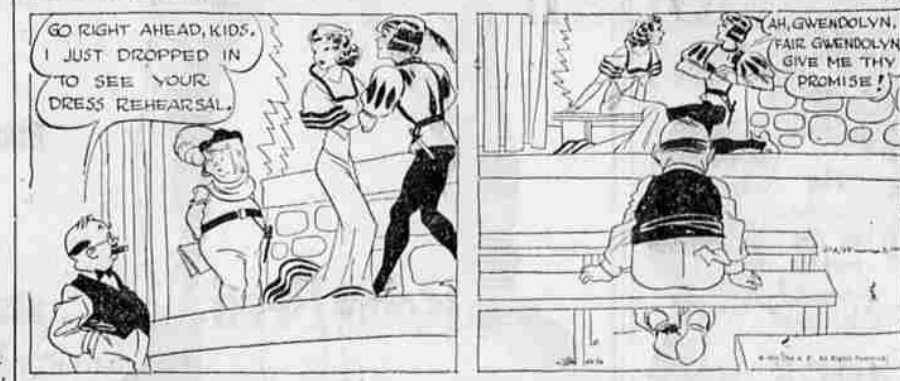
## SCORCHY SMITH



## Fletcher's Views



## DIANA DANE



## Dramatic Critic



## THE DILLYS



## The Missing Tree



Editor Hall of the Jacksonville Miner sometimes refers to his town as "Jville." We dare him to insert the "ay."

Her bid for fame with a loaf of bread nearly 24 feet long reminds us that Walla Walla has always been a good place for a long loaf.

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