

MURDER AT MOCKING HOUSE

BY WALTER C. BROWN

SYNOPSIS: The evidence points to the fact that the two men found shot dead in Pierre Dufresne's breakfast room killed each other. Sergeant Harper does not believe that, however, although the only fact that supports his theory so far seems to implicate Mrs. Dufresne herself. The sergeant begins a reconstruction of the crime.

Chapter 20 RECONSTRUCTION

"All right, let's try to reconstruct the whole thing," said Harper. "We've got certain basic facts to serve as foundations and we'll fit them in as we go along. We'll take eight o'clock last night as our starting point. Hamill just made his report from the call box. It was snowing heavily, there was a cold, high wind.

"Hamill walked along on his beat for three blocks. That would bring it to say, ten minutes past eight. He crossed the street above here but halfway over he changed his mind and came down Powhatan Terrace instead. What made him do that? Obviously, something he saw or something he heard.

"From the spot where Hamill turned off it is doubtful that he could have heard any sound from inside this house, even a shot or a scream. If there had been a noise loud enough for him to hear, certainly some of the neighbors would have been up and investigating. We'll have to make inquiries about that."

"Harper jotted down a memorandum, adding other pertinent questions from time to time as he pursued the course of the mystery. "It is much more likely," he continued, "that Hamill saw something. What could it have been? A light in the house? The electric switch had been turned off at the source. The curtains of this one lighted room were drawn close. That fireplace—here's an idea, Jack. Suppose that man stirred up the fire, poked the logs. You know hearth fires don't burn so well on a rainy or snowy night, for a damp chimney chokes off the normal draught.

"A shower of sparks would shoot out the top of the chimney. I've often seen it on winter nights. There would be something to draw Hamill's attention. This is assuming that Hamill knew the house was unoccupied. The whole idea hinges on that. We've got to find out whether he knew the Dufresnes were staying elsewhere.

"That's a neat piece of deduction," Lafferty advised, "but you've overlooked an important point. What Hamill heard was the front door banging about in the wind. That was the sound that led Connally and Hillery here so quickly. "I doubt that," was Harper's rejoinder. "I've not overlooked that banging door. The idea that a heavy door like this one could go on booming from a quarter past eight to nearly ten o'clock without arousing the other residents of Powhatan Terrace is nearly impossible. But there again is something we can inquire about.

"However, be that as it may, we have Officer Hamill coming up the walk. We're safe in assuming that his suspicions were aroused. Now, did he find the door shut and locked or open and banging? It should have been shut and locked. If Hamill found it that way, he knocked or rang the bell."

"Wrong again, Steve," Lafferty objected. "If he were suspicious he'd go first and have a quiet look around the outside of the house. But the footprints in the snow prove that he didn't, he walked straight up to the front door without any detour."

Harper thought that over. "You're right about that, Jack. We're not clear about that door. Assuming that it was locked, from the mere fact that Hamill entered some one must necessarily have opened to him. Here, then, we have our unknown man facing the policeman. That would have been the logical place for any shooting if the fellow had been a homicidal maniac, for instance.

"Instead, they go into the breakfast-room, through an unlighted hall. Why, in Heaven's name? Surely Hamill would have been suspicious and kept his gun in his hand. Our mystery man then sits down in that chair, lights a cigarette, whips out his gun and shoots Hamill in cold blood!

"On the other hand, assuming that the door was unlocked, and possibly banging as Hamill's direct approach might indicate, then he'd probably step inside and, then he'd probably call or whistle to turn on the lights. That resulting in nothing, he'd probably call or whistle to attract attention. Perhaps he noticed the light shining under the breakfast-room door. He would open it and look inside.

"Our stranger is sitting very comfortably at the table, drinking and smoking, very much at home and at ease. Everything is in normal order. The man is in formal dress and bears a startling resemblance to Mr. Dufresne. So, if Hamill recognized him at all, he would mistake him for the master of the house. Certainly there is no reason why Hamill should want to shoot Dufresne, but nevertheless they killed each other with a remarkable unity of purpose. That's a pretty stiff dose of theory to swallow!"

"It sounds crazy to me," Lafferty agreed. "As you say, a door could hardly be banging away for nearly two hours without some of the neighbors doing something about it. On the other hand, doors don't open of themselves and set their locks so that they can't shut again. If Hamill had left the door unwatched behind him, it would have banged shut just once and locked itself."

"Well, like it or not, all our evidence states that the door could not have been touched after the shooting, since both men were dead. We have only to examine the snow to see that Connally and Hillery were the next to enter the house. Considering the shooting as a separate action, we get into another maze.

"Our mystery man must have shot Hamill twice before Hamill fired at him, for Doc Miller assured me that death must have been instantaneous and his position in that chair confirms it. But there we have the dilemma—either our intruder shot Hamill after he himself was shot through the brain, which is surely impossible, or else Hamill fired with extraordinary accuracy after being shot in the breast twice, once through the heart.

"Now in a single exchange of shots there exists a bare mathematical chance for two men to plug each other so neatly, but that third bullet throws it into confusion. It has me guessing and it has Carlin guessing, too."

They sat silent for a few moments and both pairs of eyes were thoughtfully focused on the little row of twisted bullets. The thin wires that held their tags glistened brightly in the pleasant morning sun.

Harper straightened up with determination. "Let's pass on to the unknown man's movements," he suggested. "So far as we know, he was not hiding here in the house all the time. Assuming that he was the writer of the threatening letters to Dufresne, it works out something like this:

"He somehow managed to trail Dufresne when the latter left the city. On the return trip, he must have followed his intended victim until he learned which route he was taking, then passed him and hurried ahead to pick out a good spot for the ambush, where he waited."

"That means he had a car at his disposal," Lafferty interjected. "Yes. After he had fired at Dufresne and the latter made good his escape, he returned to his car and came back to the city by some other road. That would be easy.

"The autopsy has shown that he ate about five o'clock. As this was a cooked meal, he could not have come directly here and foraged for food. By the time he got to this house, say between five-thirty and six, the snow was coming down in earnest, but the fall was still so thin that his tracks were completely covered over later."

"It would not have been safe for him to come sooner," Lafferty said. "Remember, there were painters working on the third floor rooms until four o'clock and the Whitmores did not lock up and go to their rooms over the garage until five."

"We don't know how he got in," Harper resumed, "but there are no marks of forcible entry anywhere and there were neither keys nor burglar tools found in his possession. In fact, so little was found on his person that I've come to the conclusion his pockets were looted or else he is wearing some one else's clothing."

"That's an idea! If he put on a facial disguise to look like Dufresne, perhaps he put on one of Dufresne's suits."

"Exactly. There must be more traces of him in this house than we have found. For instance, it is almost certain that he shaved himself after he got here."

Lafferty whistled. "One up on me there, Steve. That one got past me."

"If you had looked closely at his face, you'd have seen that he was very freshly shaven. Here and there he missed a hair, which no self-respecting barber would have done." (Copyright, 1934, by Walter C. Brown)

The murdered stranger's clothes, tomorrow, tell tales.

GRANT MORE COIN OREGON BRIDGES

PORTLAND, May 25.—(AP)—An additional \$500,000 for the Oregon coast highway bridge system, representing the difference between material prices a year ago, and the current higher prices, will be made available by the federal government to the Oregon highway commission, according to C. C. Hockley, PWA engineer for Oregon.

SEEK NEW NAME FOR LOCAL BEER

A \$10 prize is being offered by the Southern Oregon Brewing company for the best suggestion of a new name for the beer. The beverage is to be known as Pilsener no longer, and the company is anxious for any ideas to be sent to the company. The contest closes at 6 p. m. May 31, and entries must be into the Southern Oregon Brewing company by that time. Those sent by mail must not be postmarked later than May 31. Each contestant will be restricted to the suggestion of five names.

REBEKAHS NAME NEW PRESIDENT

TILLAMOOK, Ore., May 25.—(AP)—Mrs. Grace Christiansen of Portland was elected president of the Oregon Rebekah Assembly here Wednesday at the joint meeting of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and the women's organization.

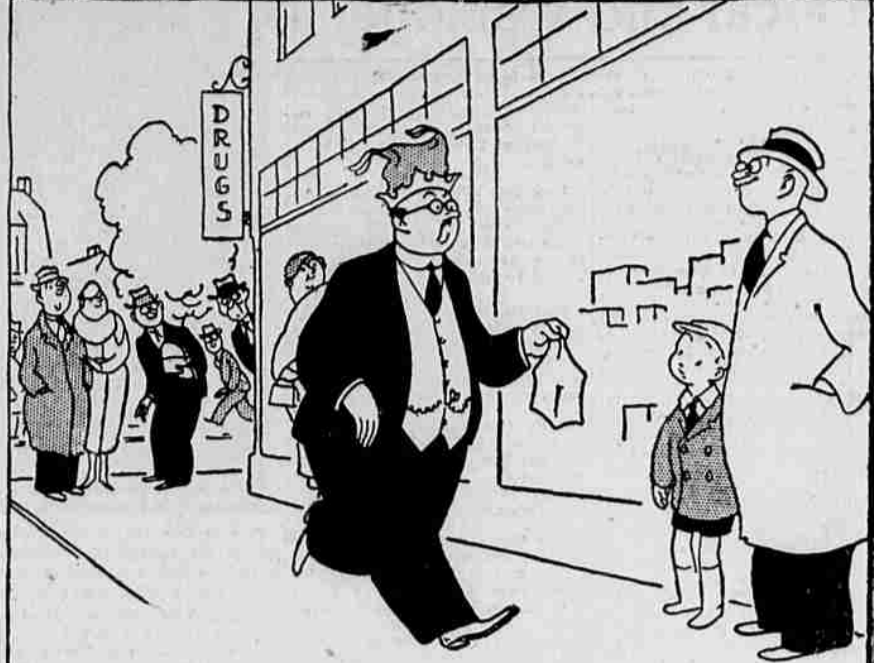
After serving for 3 years consecutively as secretary of the Rebekah assembly, Mrs. Ore L. Cooper of Dallas resigned in favor of Dora Sexton of The Dalles. Nearly 1000 delegates are here for the two conventions. Grand lodge and past grand degrees were conferred on about 400 persons yesterday, and the Rebekah assembly granted about the same number of degrees. Profits from workshops in the Virginia penitentiary at Richmond totaled \$3,993 for a six-month period and the entire amount was spent for the benefit of prisoners.

GIVE IT A WHIRL



THE WORLD AT ITS WORST

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



WONDERING WHAT PEOPLE ARE GRINNING AT, WHEN, TO MEET A SUDDEN CRISIS AT JUNIOR'S BIRTHDAY PARTY, YOU HAVE DASHED DOWN TO THE CORNER DRUG STORE FOR ANOTHER QUART OF ICE CREAM

5-25

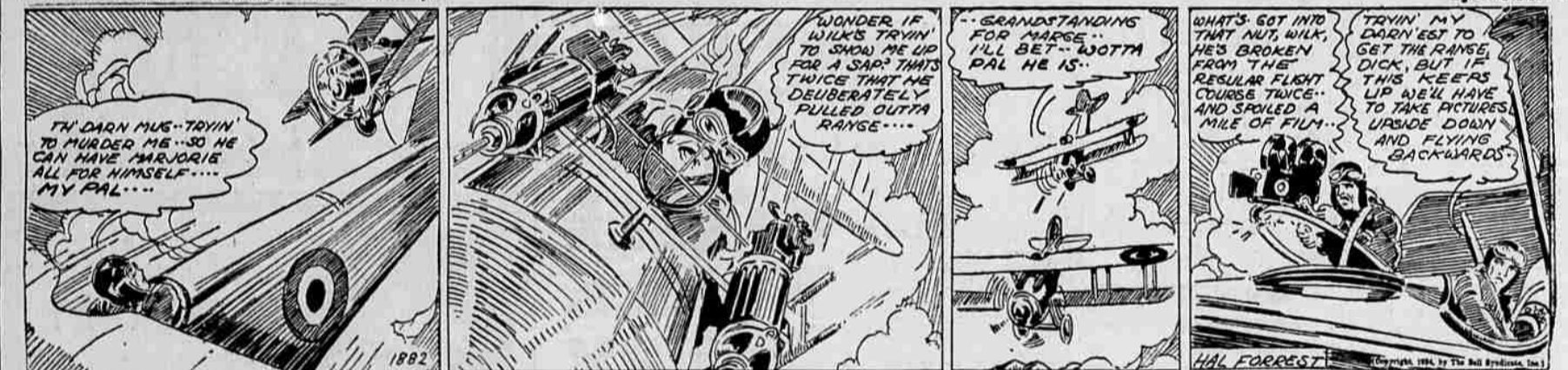
GLUYAS WILLIAMS

S'MATTER POP-



By C. M. Payne

TAILSPIN TOMMY—"Shooting" Under Difficulty!



By Hal Forrest

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Alonzo's Story!



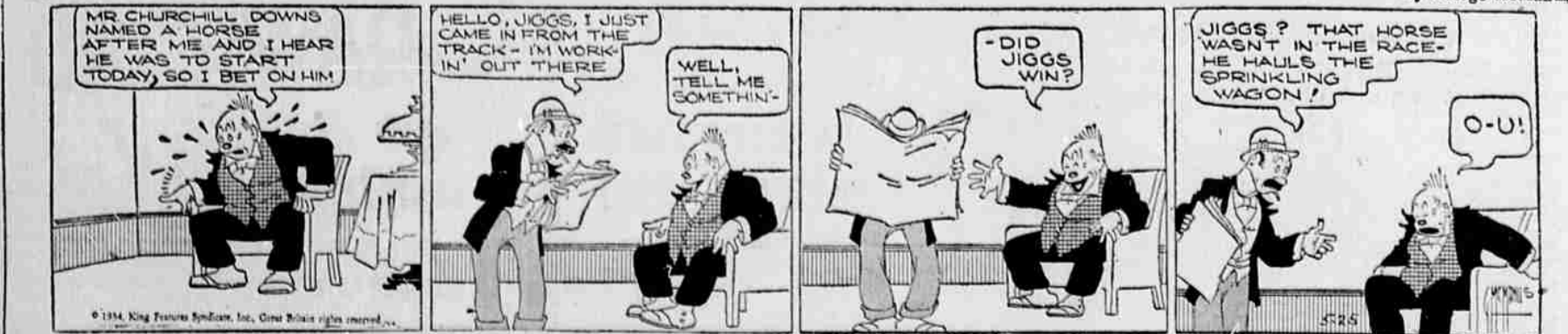
By Edwin Alger

THE NEBS—Who's Who?



By Sol Hess

BRINGING UP FATHER



By George McManus

HELENA, Mont., May 25.—(AP)—William Lefore, 23, formerly of Peewater, Ore., must spend nine years in Montana state prison for a robbery which netted him not more than \$7. Lefore pleaded guilty to a garage robbery in which he got \$60, of which \$55 was recovered when he was arrested.

A Maltese cat in the home of Sheriff O. M. Barnes of Hickory, N. C., adopted a brood of mice and raised them.

Advertisement for Wrigley's Gum, featuring the text 'WRIGLEY'S GUM', 'WRIGLEY'S SPEARMINT', 'THE PERFECT GUM', and 'The Standard of Quality'.