

# MURDER AT MOCKING HOUSE

BY WALTER C. BROWN

**SYNOPSIS:** Sergeant Harper has found the scoundrel who killed one of the two men found murdered in Pierre Dufresne's house. It proves that the stranger and the policeman did not kill each other, but it does not indicate who the murderer was. Harper sees the investigation must not overlook the possibility that a servant may have had a hand in the killing.

## Chapter 22 THE ACCUSATION

LAFFERTY lit a cigarette and blew the smoke upward at a sharp angle. "Quit your hemming and hawing, Steve. You can make the pluck any time you please. You might as well make up your mind about it and have it over."

Harper looked amused. "So you've got it all figured out?"

"Sure. If you really want the killer, just march up the stairs, walk down the hall, and enter the first door on the left."

"Mrs. Dufresne?"

"Exactly. I know it. You know it. Dufresne knows it, too. He tried to cover up for her by hiding the gun. That's why he's been playing cat and mouse with us, afraid we'd turn up something that would upset the apple-cart. Which is just what happened."

"You're wrong, Jack," Harper said quietly. "This thing is a lot more intricate than that theory of yours allows for. In fact, I'm just beginning to realize what a Gordian knot we have on our hands."

"That's a very apt figure of speech. Maybe you remember what happened to the Gordian knot?"

"Yes. Alexander couldn't unravel it, as there were no ends showing, so he sliced it with his sword."

"Correct. It's advice you to take the tip from Alexander. You've got your eight suspects, but if you look them over carefully you'll see how the number dwindles. I take it that you are not trying to pin it on Mrs. Croymen or her pianist husband? Besides, they're really just visitors here."

"Dufresne and Andrews were shut up in the Austerlitz under heavy guard at the time. Donaghy was on duty there, too, and it isn't likely he had a chance to leave the place. Anyway, his statements are easily checked. The Whitmores were near the spot, true enough, but they didn't leave their rooms after dark last night. The snow proves that."

"What does that leave us? One person, and only one—Mrs. Dufresne, visiting at Mrs. Oreginton Morlock's."

"See what we have there. She developed a headache and didn't come down to dinner. Headaches, you know, require seclusion. A standard alibi. Then a mysterious outbreak of fire in the Morlock garage. Wasn't that a perfect opportunity for getting away for a while, unseen, unnoticed?"

"By the luckiest of fukes, we have Howard Doyle's evidence, otherwise we'd be completely in the dark. I make the flat assertion that Mrs. Dufresne left Mrs. Morlock's, walked the mile or so to this house to keep her rendezvous and killed the man she came here to meet! And here's my bit of evidence for that."

Lafferty paused dramatically, then brought forth a shapeless bundle, swathed in crumpled tissue paper, which he stripped away. A stained, warped pair of high-heeled shoes stood revealed. "These are the shoes Mrs. Dufresne wore last night," he explained. "They were on their way to the trash-bin this morning, via John Whitmore, when I rescued them."

SERGEANT HARPER picked up the once-daintily slippers, their narrow brocaded sides now soiled beyond repair. They were still soggy to the touch.

"I suppose," Lafferty jeered, as Harper thoughtfully set them aside by the door, "that she got them in that condition just stepping into the car at Mrs. Morlock's with Doyle and coming in here from the curb to the front door, on a shoveled path, too. That lady went for a jaunt through the snow last night and she came here!"

Harper paused in the charging of his pipe, the battle-scarred companion of many a lonely vigil over knotty problems. "Does Mrs. Dufresne strike you as the sort of woman who would carry on a clandestine affair, let alone stoop to murder?" he demanded.

Lafferty snorted. "Stevie, old boy, years and years ago I gave up trying to figure out women by looking at them. Sister Alline and Sister Sylvia may be very sedate and dignified wives, but in their debutante days, as the Bartell girls, they were a pair of pretty high steppers. I can tell you. Old Man Bartell left each of them more money than was good for them and they had a free head

and no one to answer to. I've heard plenty about them."

"Been doing some tabloid archeology on the side?" mocked Harper.

"No, but I was talking to Bob Johnson. That lad covered the social whirl when he first broke in with the Daily Ledger and he's got a memory like a filing cabinet. According to him, the Bartell girls had the polite circles of their day standing on their collective ears."

"Incidentally, it might interest you to know that in those days our good host, Mr. Pierre Dufresne, was pushing little Alline. The engagement was rumored unofficially several times and there was plenty of buzzing and whispering when he and married Sister Sylvia instead."

"To hear you talking, one would think that Mrs. Dufresne and Mrs. Croymen were now a couple of dowagers."

"That was all of ten years ago," Lafferty answered, "and ten years can make a lot of changes, but you never can tell when the old fire will flare up again. That happens often enough. Remember that Sylvia Bartell married a man considerably older than herself, while her sister—well, I take Croymen for one of those artistic chaps, all nerves and temperament, charming as an acquaintance, but damn hard to live with. Certainly Mrs. Dufresne is still far removed from an age where one could say, 'This woman is past the time for love affairs.'"

Harper looked amused as he held a match to his pipe. "Very well put," he acknowledged, "although the implications are some what libelous. But listen, you old social philosopher, do you know of any man who would connive at hiding his wife's guilt?"

"There's such a thing as pride, Steve, and it takes some queer turns. Many a man has brazened down the world in a case like that and taken his own measures in private—later."

"No, I don't believe you're on the right track at all. There are plenty of gaps in your structure. What of this alleged lover, for instance? He was here in the city, buying his disguise, while Mrs. Dufresne was still at her summer home. That doesn't sound much like a clandestine affair."

"Granted, but remember that the Dufresne summer home is on an island. Not much chance for secret meetings there unless the third party came as a guest. I think those two conceived the idea of writing crank letters to Dufresne. After a due interval he was to be bumped off. Then Mrs. Dufresne would be free and the police would be busily hunting around for some down-at-the-heels homicidal maniac who never really existed. It's a clever scheme."

"I see. Having decided to dismember herself of the husband she no longer wanted, Mrs. Dufresne, in a fit of absent-mindedness, killed her lover instead. Very clever, Jack, very clever."

Lafferty smiled sourly. "Just the same, old boy, I'm holding to my theory till you can produce a better one," he stated. "Everybody but Mrs. Dufresne has an alibi for the time in question. Why don't you challenge her with it?"

Harper shrugged. "You know the situation, Dr. Ulrich has forbidden her to talk. What would be the use of trying to hold a vital interview like that when she can stop and think and write down the answers at her leisure? Since you're so set on your theory, I'll delegate to you the job of visiting the Morlock house. You can check up all you want, but don't let the cat out of the bag. Mrs. Morlock is a relative of Mrs. Dufresne and if she finds out that we suspect anything it won't take long for it to get back to this house. Go to it! Here's your chance to show me up."

"That's not the idea, Steve, and you know it. Of course, there's an alternate theory, built on the same base. Has that occurred to you?"

Harper took a long pull at his pipe. "I'm full of theories," he replied. "With little encouragement I could build up a case against almost any of the eight you picked out. But who is involved in your alternate theory?"

"Pierre Dufresne himself. Perhaps he discovered this affair and killed his rival. I'm convinced the elementary motives in my theory are right, whatever the individual moves may have been."

The Sergeant's glance sharpened. "I've been toying with some such idea," he stated slowly.

Tomorrow, Harper works out a fresh theory.

# HOOVER PRAISES 'NEW' PLATFORM PENNED BY G. O. P.

## Titular Head Urges Party Leaders to Give Due Representation to Youth—Principles Hearten, Word

WASHINGTON, June 8.—(AP)—Senator Charles L. McNary of Oregon, Republican leader of the senate, is not overly impressed with the selection of Henry P. Fletcher of Pennsylvania as the new Republican national chairman.

"A good man," Senator McNary said of Fletcher, "but not a brilliant selection." He had hoped for the selection, he said, of "an equally good man farther to the west, possessing sane and modern views."

Several other western Republicans expressed disappointment.

CHICAGO, June 8.—(AP)—Herbert Hoover, former president, today sent a telegram to the Republican national committee, as it greeted its new chairman, Henry P. Fletcher, and praised the new "platform" adopted yesterday.

The titular head of the party, although not taking an active part in the committee's meeting, Hoover urged the Republican leaders to give "due representation to youth."

He congratulated Fletcher, to whom he addressed his message, and also

the committee, on Fletcher's selection as chairman, terming the Pennsylvania "most experienced and courageous."

"The firm declaration by the committee of Republican principles and purposes will hearten not only Republicans but the whole country," Mr. Hoover said.

"For even those who disagree with us will realize the vital importance of scrutiny and constructive debate of all proposals, and opposition to those which will hurt the progress and welfare of the country."

"In order to accomplish this service to the nation vigorous party organization is essential and it is indeed imperative to the proper functioning of all popular government."

Fletcher, elected yesterday as chairman of the national committee to succeed Everett Sanders of Indiana, met with the committee and Republican congressional leaders to plan the fall campaign.

Fletcher met the committee members today and told them the country must "put on the breaks."

Authorities say it is better to take in an "alley cat" than a Siamese kitten of unknown heredity, because of the breed's unreliable dispositions.

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# THE WORLD AT ITS WORST

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



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# S'MATTER POP—



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# TAILSPIN TOMMY—Some More Suspects!

WHO KILLED BRUCE WILKINS? THERE ARE SOME MORE PEOPLE WHO DID NOT LIKE THE EX-WAR ACE



HERE IS A CHANCE TO TEST YOUR ABILITY AS A SLEUTH!

WHO DO YOU THINK IS THE GUILTY ONE? 1894

HARRY SWENBERGEN, THE BUSINESS MANAGER OF ADVENTURE PICTURES, COOP LOUIE BLOODGILT, PRESIDENT OF THE FILM COMPANY, OFFERED HIM \$10,000 TO SET RID OF WILKINS!

VIOLA CRISP, MYSTERIOUS MADAME X WHO TOOK WILKINS TO 'BIG BOY' IF YOU THINK YOU CAN TWO-TIME ME YOU'RE TERRIBLY MISTAKEN...

WILSON HEMMINGS, ASSIST. SMT. DIRECTOR, WHO MADE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT—"WILKINS, I'D LIKE TO TAKE YOU OUTSIDE OF THIS LOT AND SMACK YOU DOWN..."

# BEN WEBSTER'S SCARER—Cap'n Ike's Discovery

S-S-S-S-S-T! SHIFTY! FETCH A LANTERN QUICK AN' GO BELOW!



AYE, AYE, SIR—

HOLD IT STEADY WHILE I TAKE OUT THESE PEGS—THE BIT OF CARPET WE LAID IN THEIR CABIN COVERS MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE, EH SHIFTY?

WELL, TWEEN US, SHIFTY, WE'VE GOT TWO GOOD EYES-- QUICK NOW! OPEN THAT CHEST--HERE, TRY THESE KEYS ON THAT LOCK!

IT'S A TOY, CAP'N! IKE, A BOY'S TOY, THAT'S ALL--

IT'S A SHIP'S MODEL, YOU FOOL, AN' IT'S--IT'S--IT'S THE SUNKEN TREASURE SHIP, YUCATAN!

# THE NEBBS—Lonesome and Alone

HERE WE HAVE POOR, LONESOME, HEARTSICK LEM LOOKING FOR HIS WIFE WHO LEFT THE HOTEL WITHOUT LEAVING A FORWARDING ADDRESS



I'VE BEEN HANGING AROUND HERE FOR TWO DAYS AND MINNIE HASN'T SHOWN UP-- SHE CAN'T BE VERY ANXIOUS TO HEAR FROM ME!

HE'S BEEN HANGING AROUND WAITING FOR HIS WIFE TO COME IN BUT SHE CALLS ME UP AND I DELIVER HER MAIL-- SHE'S WORKING OVER AT JIMMY MORSE'S RESTAURANT-- SHALL I TELL HIM?

TELL HIM NOTHING WHEN HE LIVED HERE, HE NEVER SPOKE TO US UNLESS IT WAS NECESSARY AND THEN HE ACTED LIKE HE WAS HEARING FAVORS UPON US

OH, I'D JUST GIVE A LOT IF I DIDN'T CARE-- I'D LIKE TO STEP RIGHT OUT OF THE PICTURE BUT I CAN'T STAND THOSE LONG NIGHTS-- I MAY BE A GO-GETTING HOUND IN SOME THINGS BUT I'M THE MATRIMONIAL MONGREL OF THE WORLD.

# BRINGING UP FATHER

I SENT THAT FRESH DUDE DOWN TO ORYAN'S CAFE TO COLLECT A BILL!



I'M SORRY, MR. JIGGS--

DID YOU GET ME MONEY?

NO-- SOME OF THOSE LOAFERS GOT VERY IMPERTINENT!

WELL?

SO I HAD TO LICK FOUR OR FIVE OF THEM. I'LL GO BACK AGAIN, HOWEVER

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WRIGLEY'S GUM  
WRIGLEY'S SPEARMINT  
THE PERFECT GUM  
SWEETENS THE BREATH  
The Standard of Quality