

MURDER AT MOCKING HOUSE

BY WALTER C. BROWN

SYNOPSIS: Urgent Harper believes that the murderer of the stranger and the policeman found dead in Pierre Dufresne's house is Aoki. But he has no case until he can identify the stranger and prove how the murderer escaped without leaving tracks in the snow. Harper and Lafferty are eating luncheon in the Dufresne house.

Chapter 35 MRS. CROYDEN

"THIS luncheon is Mrs. Croyden's kindness, not Dufresne's," Harper explained.

"Lafferty put down his empty cup and looked at his companion meaningfully. 'Well, Mrs. Croyden may be very gracious and I'll go bail that she's certainly not hard to look at, but Bob Johnson told me that she leads her husband a merry chase. And come to think of it, Croyden does have a sort of pained and worried expression. That's what comes of marrying money. When two persons marry, there should only be one bankroll and that should be in the pants' pocket.'

Harper frowned. "Jack, you sound like an old gossip at a tea fight. Mrs. Croyden is the only one in this house who has shown us any co-operation at all. If she hadn't acted as a buffer, we'd probably have come to an open breach with Dufresne before this."

"O.K.," said Lafferty, with an impish twinkle in his eye. "I was only passing on what was told to me. I forgot you have a soft spot for the ladies of the house."

Luncheon over, they lingered at the table, smoking and talking over the amazing feat of the murderer in escaping from the house without leaving a mark in the snow. It was a problem that gnawed and bit at Harper's mind, presenting a bold challenge to his wits and ingenuity. While they were still at it, Mrs. Croyden appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said quickly, as both men rose to their feet. "I had no intention of interrupting you."

"Not at all, Mrs. Croyden," Harper rejoined. "We finished some time ago. Thank you for your kindness. We enjoyed the luncheon very much."

As Mrs. Croyden graciously disavowed the necessity for their thanks, Lafferty left the breakfast room. Mrs. Croyden advanced into the room, glancing at Harper curiously. "How is the case progressing?" she inquired.

Harper shrugged. "Slowly, perhaps," he confessed, "but that's the order of nature."

The bright hair of the lady shone with a rich golden gleam as she crossed the bright shaft of winter sunlight coming through the windows. She glanced curiously at the photographs scattered across Harper's table.

The detective noted her interest and laid out several for her inspection. "Those are the fingerprints of our unnamed victim," he explained, "taken from the liquor glass found on the table. They're greatly enlarged, of course. Here are the ones taken from his gun—not quite as clear, you will notice."

"But how do you tell one from the other?" Mrs. Croyden asked. "Why, the world must be literally covered with fingerprints!"

"No, for not all substances or surfaces will retain a print," he explained. "A smooth, hard, polished surface, like a mirror, or a table top, or polished metal, makes the ideal contact. Let me show you how it's done."

HARPER went to the luncheon table and carefully lifted the goblet of water that stood by his plate. "You see this? To the casual eye it is clear, unmarked glass."

The detective took the insufflator and sprayed the body of the goblet with a dark powder. When it was sufficiently coated he tapped the rim evenly with the dull edge of a knife. The looser grains of fine powder fell and the remaining ones settled more firmly in place. Harper held it at eye level against the light, where three prints of Andrews' fingers were plainly revealed.

Mrs. Croyden stood by the detective's shoulder and looked at the glass. "That's very mysterious, and rather terrifying," she murmured. "But were there any strange fingerprints in this room, besides those of—that man?"

"Not one, I am sorry to say. Other signs of this visit, yes, but no fingerprints."

The lady turned to him with serious mien. "Mr. Harper," she said earnestly, "are you sure that your deductions are correct? Are you positively, absolutely certain there was a third person in this house last night? Otherwise you have made a very serious charge. This is a terrible thing that some-

one in this house is a murderer. Just these few hours has made such a frightful change in every one. I don't pretend to understand police affairs and this one seems hopelessly complicated. It is so far from our custom of every-day living that we all feel there must be some error."

Harper heard the emotional catch in her voice and lowered his gaze from the lifted glass to meet her wide-eyed scrutiny. "Mrs. Croyden," he replied in a voice equally grave, "there is now no room for doubt. We are always loath to believe that any person within our own circle could deliberately take human life. We run against the feeling in every case. But it happens. Last year there were nearly five hundred homicide cases in New York City alone. According to the law of averages, out of every hundred thousand persons now alive about a dozen will die within the next twelve months—murdered!"

The clear, wide eyes clouded. "Please!" she cried. "I hate such statistics. They are so sordid and hopeless. Is there any real hope of a solution, or are we all to go about under a stigma the rest of our lives? This worthless criminal who came into this house to die has more power to harm us now than when he was alive and threatening only one!"

Here was the same wild plea voiced again, even as Dufresne had blazed forth. "Yes, I have been told before that this unknown man's life was worthless, devalued and criminal," Harper countered drily, "and I have also been told that he is an absolute stranger to every one in this house. I find the two statements rather inconsistent."

ALINE CROYDEN turned pale, and her hands clenched as she took a step backward. Fright and terror stared out of her eyes with the realization of the detective's warning. "We have no fear of what you imply," she declared. "If the facts are dealt with honestly and I trust you to do that."

"Thank you," he returned gravely, and looked again at the dark smudges on the goblet, using his magnifying lens through force of habit. That thumb mark, with its double ridge breaking across the central whorl—that was familiar, surely? Then the answer flashed into his mind and such a startled look came over his face that Mrs. Croyden stared from his transformed features to the goblet and back again.

"What is it, Mr. Harper?" she breathed.

The detective flashed her a look as if he had entirely forgotten her presence. "Just a small point, but a curious one," he replied guardedly, placing the goblet far back on his work-table.

"Now Mrs. Croyden, I'd like to ask a few questions, if I may. Will you sit down?"

"First to make our records complete, will you please tell me how you and Mr. Croyden spent last evening, say from six o'clock on? We are required, you know, not to exempt any one in a case like this."

"Well, I think you will be quite satisfied with our alibi. It consists of about two thousand witnesses. Last evening Mr. Croyden and Hugo Paise, the cellist, gave a joint recital at Orpheus Hall."

"We had dinner at the Savoy, rather early, as there had been a last-minute substitution in the program and Richard wanted a little extra time for rehearsal. The concert began at 8:45, and was over about 10:30. We had just reached home and Mr. Croyden was foraging in the refrigerator for a late snack when Mr. Dufresne's call came through."

"Our house is just around the corner, you know, on Cypress Lane. In fact, you can see a corner of the back of it from these very windows."

As Mrs. Croyden raised her arm to indicate the position of the house, the sunlight struck points of fire from an unusually beautiful ring she wore on the same finger with her wedding ring, catching and flashing back the brilliance of two exceptionally fine diamonds, a pure blue-white and a canary stone, both perfectly cut and matched and set diagonally.

The detective returned to his questions. "You were in the audience, of course? In a box seat?"

"Oh, no. That would be the worst possible place to sit. I always choose an aisle seat on the lower floor."

"Do you always attend your husband's recitals, Mrs. Croyden?"

"Of course. I never have missed one. Even when he goes on tour I travel with him."

Dufresne, tomorrow, assails Harper bitterly.

BIG CLAM BAKE PROMISED ELKS THURSDAY NIGHT

Installation of officers will be the occasion for a great salmon bake at the Elks' lodge next Thursday, P. C. Bigham, salmon catcher and chef de luxe, having offered to spread a feed for the brothers after the lodge session.

BEAUTY WINNER GUILTY MURDER

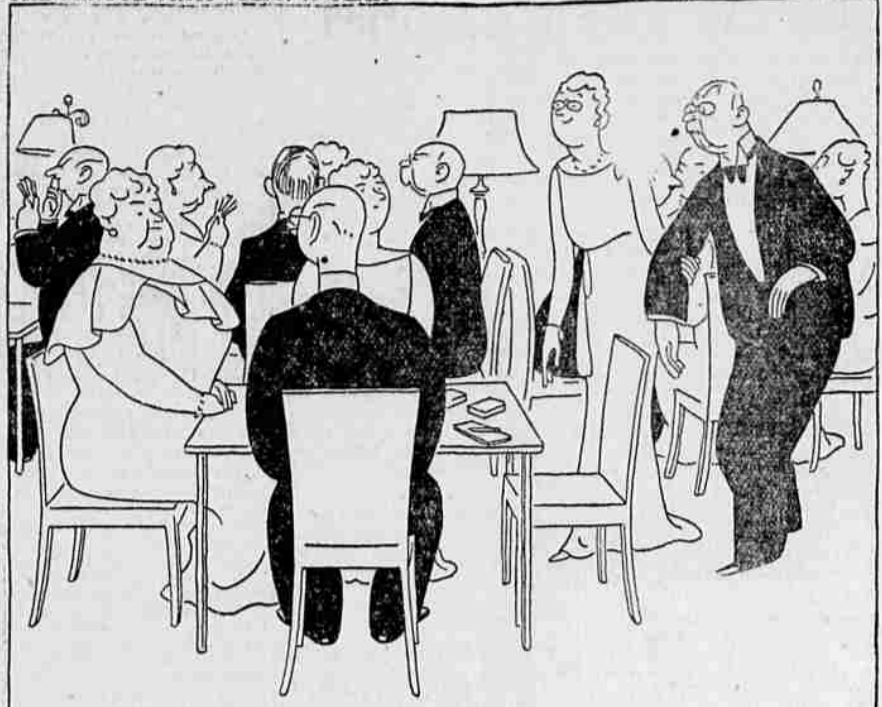
ST. JOHNS, ARIZ., June 11.—(UP)—A jury of cowboys and ranchers today returned a verdict of guilty against Mrs. Dorothea Turley, one-time international beauty contest winner, charged with intent to murder her husband, Ernest Turley, retired naval petty officer on their ranch near here last November following an alleged ouija board and fortune telling seance.

The trial was one of the most sensational of its kind in Arizona history with the daughter of the convicted woman playing the part of the state's chief witness, testifying against her mother.

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THE MINUTE THAT SEEMS A YEAR

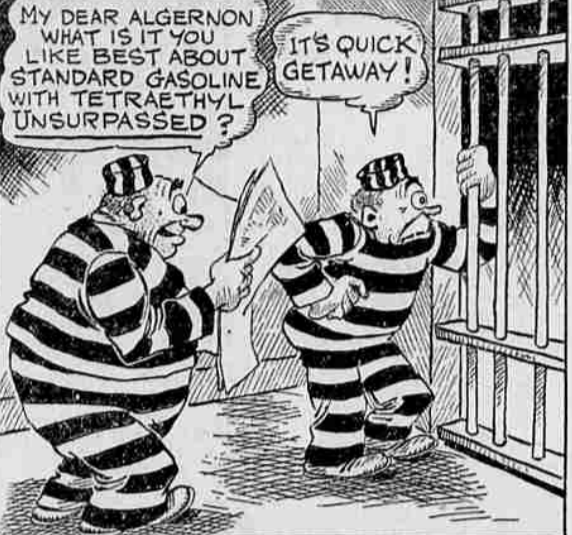
By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



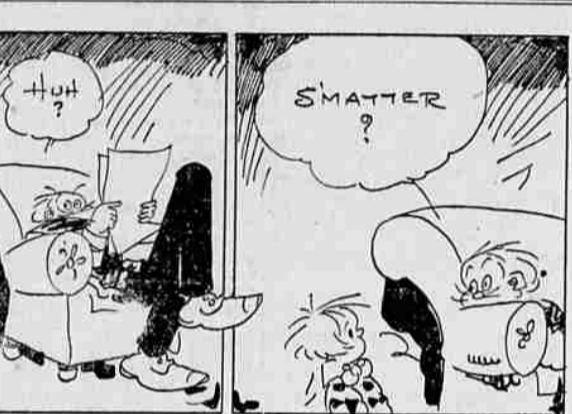
YOU RECOGNIZE IN YOUR PROSPECTIVE PARTNER THE WOMAN WITH WHOM YOU HAD SHARP WORDS OVER A DENTED FENDER IN THE TOWN SQUARE THIS AFTERNOON

GLUYAS WILLIAMS

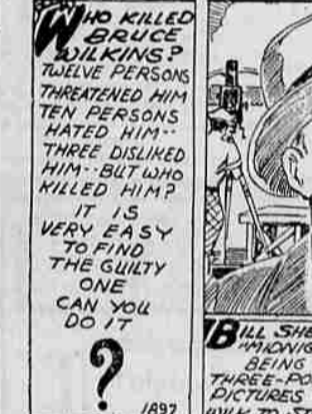
GIVE IT A WHIRL



S'MATTER POP—



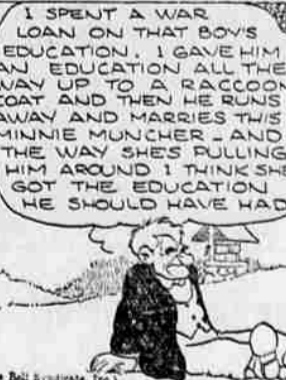
TAILSPIN TOMMY—Who Killed Wilkins?



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Luke Is Startled!



THE NEBBS—To Be or Not to Be



BRINGING UP FATHER



RADIO BALLYHOO FOR PATENT MEDICINE HIT IN MEDICAL CONCLAVE

CLEVELAND, O., June 12.—(AP)—Two resolutions attacking the advertising of drugs and medicines over the radio were presented to the house of delegates of the American Medical Association today.

The Illinois Medical society proposed that all such advertising be discontinued. A New York delegate advocated the creation of a bureau to regulate such advertising. The house of delegates considered the resolutions today for possible action tomorrow.

Radio advertising of patent medi-

cines was deprecated in a report of the bureau of investigation to the house of delegates.

"Much of the patent medicine advertising that goes over the air is reminiscent of the type used by nostrum exploiters before the passage of the national food and drugs act of 1906," the report said.

"Such blatant quackery has aroused the medical profession and even the more intelligent part of the lay public to the need of an extension of the powers of the food and drugs act to cover collateral advertising. Instead of as now, merely the advertising that appears on or in a trade package."

All kinds of legal blanks for sale for rent, no hunting, no trespassing and other cards for sale at Commercial Printing Dept. of Mail Tribune.

WINDOW GLASS—We sell window glass and will replace your broken windows reasonably. Trowbridge Cabinet Works.