

Murder at MOCKING HOUSE

BY WALTER C. BROWN

SYNOPSIS: Investigation of the murder of two men in Pierre Dufresne's house has turned up much information, but no means of identifying one of the men or determining how the murderer escaped without leaving tracks in the snow. And when Sergeant Harper's assistant, Detective Lafferty, fires a test shot from the murder gun in the basement, Dufresne remains perfectly calm, while both Mr. and Mrs. Croysden are startled badly. The detectives are discussing some threatening letters received by Dufresne.

Chapter 37

BATTLE OF WITS

"Who knows?" asked Harper. "If the dead man wrote the letters, that will be all, but just a minute ago you were ready to pin it on Andrews. He's still very much alive and quite capable of writing letters if he wants to. Besides that, there may be a genuine Mr. X hiding in the woodpile. It's at least possible that these threatening letters had nothing whatever to do with last night's affair."

Lafferty snorted. "Sure, and maybe there weren't any murders here last night. For Heaven's sake, let's pinch somebody, then listen to them arguing themselves out of it. It would save a lot of wear and tear on us."

They grinned amiably at each other, but Harper went right on with

place must have been more like a hotel than a private house."

"By the way, Steve, what kind of reactions did you get when I fired the test bullet in the cellar?"

"Oh, so you picked that spot on purpose?" asked Harper, overhead, and I thought you were holding a seance, so I let go. You never can tell what may come from a surprise."

"Well, you nearly scared the Croysdens to death, but Dufresne never batted an eyelash. It gave me a good opening to break the news about finding the gun. I predicted the bullets would check up, and they have. While I tackle Andrews again you'd better hop over to Mrs. Morlock's and see what you can gather there, but be smooth about it."

Lafferty rose. "Don't worry about that, but I'll bring back the bacon just the same. And don't you be too gentle with Andrews. It's about time we sat down on somebody and sat down hard. We've been doing all the talking up to now. Let's give the others a chance."

After the detective had gone Harper gathered the letters into one pile. He rang for Andrews, and when the butler made his appearance he walked over and closed the door with an air of deliberation that was not lost on Andrews.



"There is proof that there was such a plot."

his analysis. "The next point is the fact that each letter is on a different color of paper, yellow, gray, blue, light green, and so on. A good quality paper, too, though a little soiled and faded."

"It looks like a set of sample papers," Lafferty suggested.

Harper nodded. "I think you're right. It is also my idea that they were written by a man of considerably higher intelligence than their contents indicate. Printing the words is a dodge used by persons who are afraid that even a disguised handwriting may trip them up. This writer was shrewd enough not to overplay his hand by the usual error of weird spelling."

Lafferty set forth a new angle. "How do we know Dufresne turned in all the letters he received? This business has some of the earmarks of blackmail or a shake-down stunt. Maybe he just turned in selected letters and, when there was a chance, settled the whole business in his own way."

"It wouldn't be out of character, I agree, but there's no hint of hush money or blackmail anywhere. There is just that same monotonous threat to kill running through the eight letters. The last is practically the same as the first. If the writer wasn't crazy, what was his game?"

"Perhaps there was more than one in the plot and they got to scrapping among themselves, with the results we know. There are too many queer kinks in this case to charge anything off to coincidence. There must be a reason for all these odd things."

"This is what I can't get straightened out," Harper confessed. "Dufresne denies knowledge of any anonymity, public or private, that would aim at his life, in spite of the peculiar hints he gave out at our first interview. But crank letters are one-man affairs, and this case involves so many people."

"For instance, there is the dead man, and the killer who somehow escaped from the house and that mysterious person who hid behind the wall and watched, it did not come any nearer to the house. Altogether too many performers for that bunch of tight little allis we've had handed to us. Last night this

"Have a chair, Andrews. We've a bit of talking to do, you and I." Silently the white-haired man did as he was bidden, losing none of his poise, evincing no nervousness or surprise. Each man sensed the antagonist in the other as they measured each other with grave, level glances.

"Andrews, do you keep a diary?" "No, sir." This unexpected inquiry aroused no more curiosity than a query about the weather.

"How is your memory for dates, Andrews?"

"Not as good as it used to be, sir. As I grow older I find one day very much like another. That is, until very recently," he amended, with sly irony.

"Try to cast your memory back. Does November 19th of last year bring anything to mind? Or October 10th?"

The level eyes remained locked, the butler's without the slightest flicker of interest at mention of the significant dates, the key numbers of the early stages of this mystery.

"November 19th? October 10th? I'm afraid not, unless you can give me a further hint."

Harper abandoned that line of inquiry to thrust the photograph of the dead man in front of Andrews. "Do you still insist that you never saw this man before?" he snapped.

"Not to my knowledge, sir, and certainly never in this house."

"Andrews, you are devoted to your master, and it is difficult to believe that you would be party to a plot to harm him. But there is proof that there was such a plot, hatched right here in this house—"

"With all due respect to you, sir, I don't believe it."

"Then how do you explain your thumbprint on this anonymous letter to Mr. Dufresne?"

"For the first time Andrews' aplomb deserted him. His jaw dropped open and the lines of his face seemed to deepen.

"You are wrong," he rasped. "I swear to God I never touched that paper."

"Copyright, 1934, by Walter C. Brown. Tomorrow, Andrews supplies some interesting information."

"That is if he assured, while sitting in Seat B, Tier 7, Section 23, at an afternoon performance of Barnum & Bailey's three-ring circus should be struck on the left temple by a dull pickle thrown by malice aforethought by a man on a flying trapeze suspended on a seven-eighths inch hemp rope with a two-inch white oak cross bar, and should die within eight seconds after the pickle left the hand of the trapeze artist."

"Then, in that case, the beneficiary should be entitled to one-half of one per cent of the one-tenth of the one-third of the principal sum, if any, provided for the first six months fatalities but should the pickle bounce off the temple of the assured and fall on the lady in front of the assured and soil her white satin waist, then no liability of any nature shall attach to the company."

"I believe if you will add this clause to the terms of your policy you will have an air-tight contract for the company."

PART TIME FARM NOT ALL 'GRAVY' IS STATE WARNING

SALEM, Ore. (UP)—Following receipt of numerous inquiries regarding subsistence or part-time farming, the department of agriculture today issued estimates as to the average amount of land desirable in different cases.

The most practical type of subsistence farming is that practiced by employed men or families who raise part of their food in their spare time, the department estimated. Families attempting to make entire livings on marginal lands are likely to encounter many difficulties, it was said.

About one acre of good land was held sufficient for an employed or part-time employed family. That would give space for keeping poultry and raising as much garden produce as time probably would permit.

If a family wishes to keep a cow, purchasing necessary winter feed, an additional two acres of good pasture land should be provided, officials said.

"Men employed only part time or short hours, and who have large families and small incomes may find it economical to keep a milk cow, some milk goats and some pigs and raise the necessary feed in addition to having a garden and keeping poultry. This plan necessitates the use of horse or mechanical power and should be tried only after experience and careful consideration."

Department officials cautioned that

GLANDERS EPIDEMIC THREATENS CANADA

MONTREAL (UP)—Glanders, a disease which strikes down horses in the same manner as "galloping tu-

berculosis" hits human beings, is threatening the lives of scores of valuable horses here.

The disease has brought death by execution to many horses in the rural districts of the province during the last few months. Now, it is reported to be spreading to cities.

Dominion and provincial sanitary experts are busy carrying out tests on horses throughout the city. The lives of many valuable thoroughbred and prize winning stock depends on the outcome of the tests.

Phone 542 We'll haul away your refuse City Sanitary Service



GIVE IT A WHIRL
COME ON FOLKS! GIVE IT A WHIRL!! A WINNAH EVERY TIME

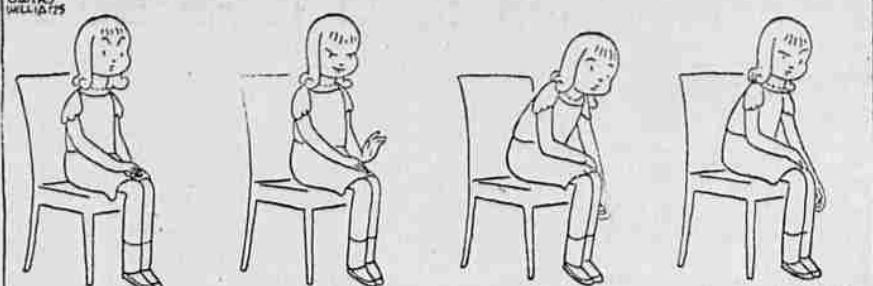
AH! GIVE IT A WHIRL - DON'T THAT MAKE YOU THINK OF STANDARD GASOLINE WITH TETRAETHYL UNSURPASSED?

YEH! ONLY YOU'RE NOT GAMBLING WHEN YOU BUY STANDARD GASOLINE

Men employed only part time or short hours, and who have large families and small incomes may find it economical to keep a milk cow, some milk goats and some pigs and raise the necessary feed in addition to having a garden and keeping poultry. This plan necessitates the use of horse or mechanical power and should be tried only after experience and careful consideration."

PUBLIC SPEAKING

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

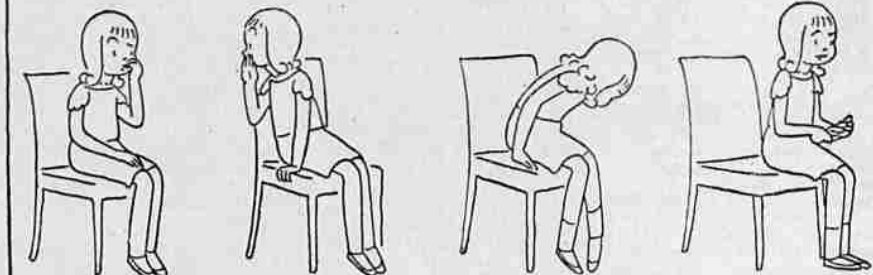


SITS DOWN ON CHAIR WITH OTHER PUPILS WHO ARE GOING TO RECITE PIECES. FEELS TERRIFIED

FEELS BETTER ON SPOTTING PARENTS IN FRONT ROW

RUNS OVER LINES OF HER PIECE, ABSENT-MINDEDLY SCRATCHING LEG WHICH TICKLES

SEES PARENT'S SIGNALING ANXIOUSLY, AT LAST REALIZING THEY MEAN TO STOP SCRATCHING



BECOMES AWARE THAT HER MIND HAS GONE BLANK ON THE SECOND LINE OF HER PIECE

WHISPERS FRANTICALLY TO THE TEACHER IN THE WINGS WHO READS THE LINE OFF TO HER

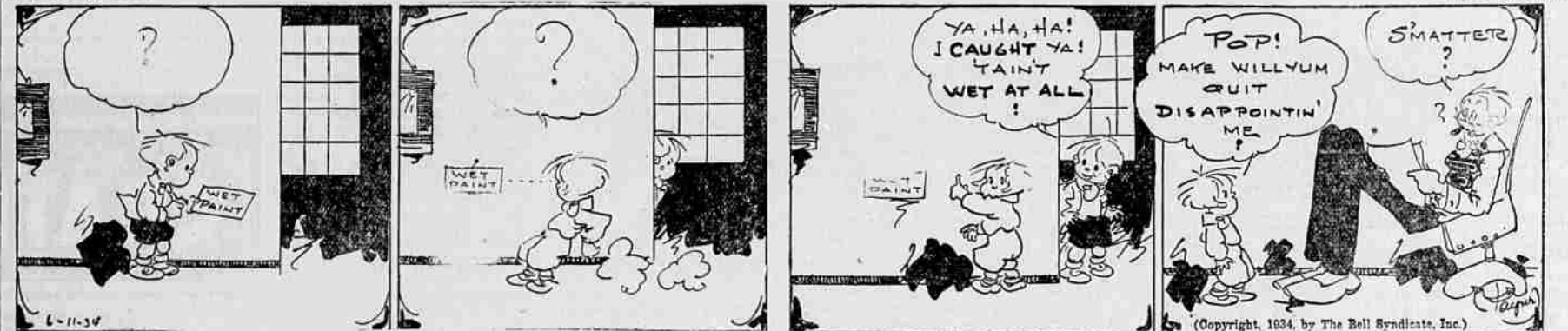
SUDDENLY REALIZES SHE HAS LOST HER HANDKERCHIEF, WRIGGLES ROUND, LOOKING FOR IT, FINDS AT LAST SHE'S SITTING ON IT

REALIZES IT'S HER TURN NEXT, PERCHES ON EDGE OF CHAIR, TWISTING HANDS, ANXIOUS TO GET IT OVER WITH

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S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. Payne



TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Mystery Becomes Complicated

By Hal Forrest



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Luke Receives Support!

By Edwin Alger



THE NEBBS—Minnie, Where Art Thou?

By Sol Hess



BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



LEGAL WIZARDS FRAME TRICKY INSURANCE FOR FLY-BY-NIGHT FIRMS

SALEM, Ore. (UP)—Insurance Commissioner A. H. Averill today cited an analysis of an accident policy issued by an unauthorized Hollywood, Cal. firm as typical of those by companies not licensed to do business in Oregon.

The purchaser of the policy, after studying its provisions, wrote, in part, to the company as follows: "After a careful analysis of the terms of this marvelous product of the brain of some legal wizard, I can think of but one instance where the beneficiary has a chance."