

MURDER AT MOCKING HOUSE

BY WALTER C. BROWN

SYNOPSIS: Accused almost in desperation by his inability to solve the mystery of the murderer who shot a policeman and a stranger in Pierre Dufresne's house, Sergeant Harper suddenly finds the trail of Ellen Becker, the maid who left the Dufresnes about the time the series of mysterious events began which preceded the tragedy. Harper and his assistant, Lafferty, are talking to Ellen's aunt.

Chapter 42 BECKER TALKS

WERE from Police Headquarters," said Harper. "Are you Mrs. Sutton? Well, Mrs. Sutton, we happen to know that Miss Becker is at home. It would be much wiser if she saw us. Much wiser."

To assist Mrs. Sutton make the correct decision Lafferty casually put a sturdy foot across the sill.

"Oh, all right, come in. She's upstairs. I thought you were bill collectors. There's some mistake, though, Ellen has been home for months, looking after me."

"If there has been a mistake, we can soon put it straight. Will you ask her to come down, please?"

The detectives were ushered into a dark, stuffy parlor that probably had its twilight atmosphere even on the brightest days. They heard the elderly woman's slow tread as she mounted the stairs.

"There's something in it," Lafferty whispered. "Did you notice her face when she found out who we were?"

Harper nodded. A lighter step was coming down the staircase. Then the curtains rustled and Miss Ellen Becker faced them.

"Miss Becker?"

"Yes. What do you want, please?"

"We are from Police Headquarters. I am Sergeant Harper of the Homicide Bureau. I am in charge of the murder case at Mr. Pierre Dufresne's house. You've heard about that?"

"Yes," echoed Miss Becker. "I read about it in the papers today."

"We came to ask you some questions about your period of service there. Why did you leave Mr. Dufresne's employment last November?"

"My aunt was very sick and needed constant looking after, so I gave notice and came home. I haven't been near Mr. Dufresne's house since."

Harper looked at her. "Still taking care of your aunt?"

Ellen's face darkened. "She's well now, but jobs are hard to get."

"If you left Mr. Dufresne's of your own accord, why don't you apply for your old job? They haven't hired any one in your place."

"I'd rather get a job where I can live at home."

"Miss Becker," Harper continued, "you deny, then, that you have been advised to go into hiding for a while?"

The detective's chance shot, based on Harris' report of the telephone messages, certainly struck home. "Why, er—of course," she stammered, with apparent effort.

"You were not, by any chance, packing to go away when we arrived?"

"No! Where would I be going? I live here." But her voice was still uneasy.

"In that case, you won't mind if we just take a quick look at your room. Jack, see to it!"

LAFFERTY was off like a shot. In a moment there issued loud voices from upstairs and Lafferty came hurrying down again.

"She was packed to go, all right," he accused. "When I rushed up the old lady was stuffing things back in the bureau and closets as fast as she could."

"Ha!" exclaimed Harper, "now the cat's out of the bag. I give you your choice of two things. You can talk to us, or you can come along to Headquarters. There's a car waiting on the corner."

Ellen broke down, quick, frightened sobs shaking her body. "I didn't do anything wrong," she wailed.

Harper answered stonily, "but you are holding back information. Why did you leave the Dufresnes? Because some one found it worth while to get you out of the house?"

Ellen Becker resigned herself to the inevitable and nodded.

Harper leaned forward, tense and eager. "Who has been paying you the hush-money?"

"Mrs. Dufresne!"

Harper leaned back. "Tell us exactly what happened."

"I poked a little deeper in the sand and found a slip of paper, buried down one side. I read it."

"Was the writing that of a man or a woman?" Lafferty asked.

"I couldn't tell. All the words were printed and there was no date and no signature. It said: 'Will expect you at the usual time.' That was all. I took it upstairs and showed it to Mrs. Dufresne. She turned white when she read it. She kept me there nearly an hour, while she walked up and down the room. Finally she suggested that if my aunt was in need of nursing I could go home for a while and she would continue to send me my wages. I did, and she has," was Ellen Becker's terse conclusion.

"Do you realize that was practically blackmail?"

Ellen shook her head. "It was Mrs. Dufresne's idea. I didn't ask her for anything. Why shouldn't I accept it? It was the first time in my life I ever got something for nothing. Nobody's going to die and leave me a million," she said bitterly.

Harper stirred himself. "I think you'd better come along with us to Dufresne's house. We'll have to get to the bottom of this story."

"No—no—please! I can't go back there!"

"So there's more to the story? Out with it—all of it this time!"

Ellen's next statement came only after a visible struggle. "Two days later," she continued, "I found another note in the same place. It was printed, just like the other. It said: 'The same place, and you'd better come this time.' The last part was underlined. While I was looking at this note, with the sand spread out on a paper, Mr. Dufresne walked in."

"He wanted to know what I was doing there and I had to show him this note. He carried on worse than Mrs. Dufresne. He asked me all kinds of questions and talked so wild I was afraid of him."

"I told him I was leaving to take care of my aunt. Then he calmed down all at once, but he made me swear to say nothing about the note to any one. He promised that I wouldn't lose by it."

Harper leaped up. "Well, I'll be damned," he cried, "you've got the nerve to sit there and calmly admit you've been taking money from both of them?"

Ellen turned sullen before his anger. "But what could I do? Hand back his money and tell him I was already being paid to keep quiet? What good would that have done? Besides, I was afraid of him. I was afraid to tell him anything."

"Can't you see that you were spreading dynamite around in that house?" Harper burst out. "For a few paltry dollars you were willing to see a whole household broken up. No wonder you're afraid to go back there and repeat your story. Who warned you to run away—Mr. Dufresne or Mrs. Dufresne?"

"I won't tell, I'm not going to say another word. Ellen's voice grew shrill. "I want to see a lawyer."

"Come on," said Lafferty, "let's trot her down to Headquarters. She'll talk there, whether she wants to or not. By that time she'll need a lawyer!"

The sinister tone pried the girl loose from the last hold on her reticence. "Neither one," she admitted sullenly. "It was Joe Donaghy who called me."

Harper's eyes glittered with renewed interest. "So Joe was in on this? He knows all about these deals?"

"Only about Mrs. Dufresne," Ellen confessed.

"I guess you call yourselves sweethearts," Lafferty sneered. "A fine pair of lovers you are."

"Never mind that now, Jack," Harper interrupted, then, turning to the girl, "What did he tell you over the phone?"

"He said it looked like things might break wide open up there at the house, and that if they did, it would be a good idea for me to be missing."

"You're holding out on us again. You two have been working this game together. We know Donaghy's been bleeding these people, too, because he's sporting a big roll of bills."

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But where, asks Harper tomorrow, does Ellen's evidence lead.

was reported Monday night to be getting along all right. The baby suffered 48 broken bones before birth, at which time both thighs were fractured. She is kept strapped to a board to prevent additional breaks.

DIANAPOLIS, Ind.—(UP)—Caroline Ruby Mercer, who was born a month ago with fifty broken bones,

COMMODITY PRICE LEVELS ADVANCE

WASHINGTON, June 20.—(AP)—An advance of five-tenths of one per cent in wholesale commodity prices during May was reported today by the bureau of labor statistics.

The bureau reported prices were 73.7 per cent of the 1926 average. The present index is at the level of March, 1934, the highest point reached since 1931 when the index figure was 74.8. The bureau's list showed 211 advances, 300 showing no change. Declines were reported on 183 items.

The largest increase was recorded in metals and metal products, which advanced 1 1/2 per cent. In this group agricultural implements were 7 per cent higher.

Foodstuffs rose about 1 1/4 per cent, bringing the present level of the group to 67.1 per cent of the 1926 average which is an increase of nearly 1 1/2 per cent over May of last year.

LEGION LEADER SEEKS GOP SENATE BACKING

OLYMPIA, June 20.—(AP)—Reno Odlin, 37-year-old Olympia banker, native Washingtonian and former state commander of the American Legion, formally announced his candidacy today for the Republican nomination for United States senator.

Representing the younger Republic-

LONGEST SONG TITLE GOING IN NEW MOVIE

HOLLYWOOD.—(UP) A wordy contest among movie song writers over the longest title ended abruptly today when Warners announced it would include in a new production

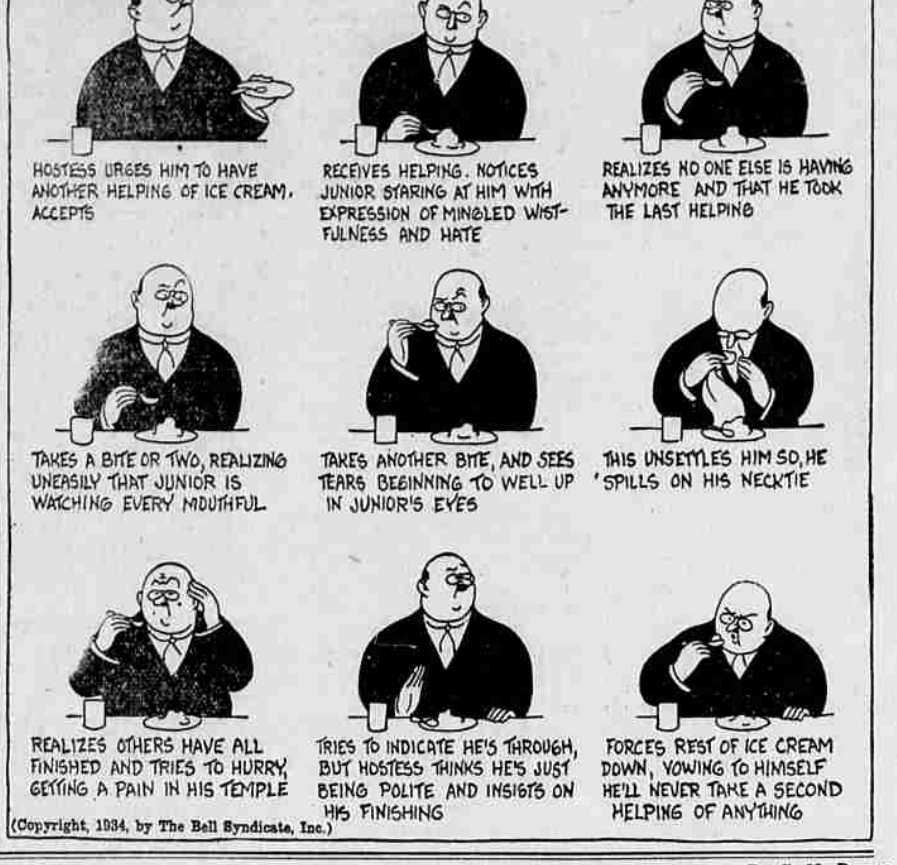
FISH WRESTLING NETS THIRTY-FIVE LB. CARP

KASAS CITY, Kan.—(UP)—Fish wrestling was inaugurated at Big Eleven lake near here today. Bennie Hughes, life-guard, saw a large fish near shore, jumped in and applied a strangle hold. After a rough and tumble wrestling match Hughes tri-umphantly waded ashore. He had a firm headlock on a 35-pound carp.



SECOND HELPING

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



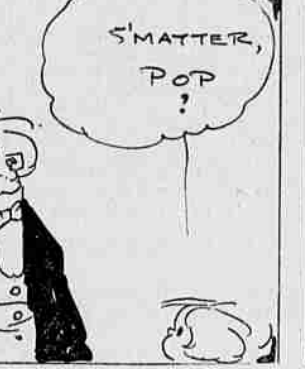
'MATTER POP—



TAILSPIN TOMMY—"Thumbs Down!"



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Alonzo's Promise



THE NEBBS—Good News?



BABY IS BORN WITH FIFTY BROKEN BONES



QUALITY GUM
WRIGLEY'S
SPEARMINT
THE PERFECT GUM
5¢
AND WORTH IT!

BRINGING UP FATHER



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