Murder at MOCKING HOUSE

BY WALTER C. BROWN

SYNOPSIS: Sergeant Harper just has told Pierre Dufresne and Mrs. Dufresne that one or the other is guilty of the murder of two men in the Dufresne house two days before. And now he is shocked by the fact that Donaghy the Dufresne chauffeur, has been found dead with a note beside him saying he was committing suicide and had been the murderer himself. He tells where a mysterious piece of rope and other articles may be found.

Chapter 48

METHOD OF ESCAPE

HARPER went on digging out the contents of the tire. Out came a worn pair of man's suede gloves, a leather wallet with the gold initials "H. D." stamped inside, a key case holding three keys, a pocket handkerchief with the initial "D" in one corner, a thin gold watch with a link chain, a cigarette lighter, and a man's signet ring with the same initials intertwined.

Dusting off his hands, he took stock of the collection. The use of that thin, tough rope with its ringed ends came readily to his mind. He looked through the snow-trimmed panes toward the big house. That baffling escape from the scene of the crime had been a simple affair after all, once one had a glimpse of the modus operandi. He put down the rope and went over to the finger-print man. "How does it stack up?" he asked.

The man looked up. "They're smeary," he replied, "and there's not a perfect print on the gun, but there's no doubt about them, checking, if that's what you mean."

Harper approached the police surgeon. "Find anything, Doc?"

The Coroner's man shook his head. "Not a thing. It's a good, clean suicide," he concluded with callous humor, "everything according to Hoyle."

Harper made a cursory examination of the other rooms, then gathered up the articles retrieved from the old tire, wrapped them in a towel, beckoned to O'Connell, and left the garage.

Sending the policeman ahead with the bundle, Harper made a complete circuit of the walls of the main house, with occasional digressions over the snow-covered grounds. When he had finished he understood exactly the use which had been made of that brownish yellow rope with its ringed ends. He was just about to re-enter the house when he saw Lafferty's spare figure hastening in at the gate. The tall detective was greatly excited over this latest development and plied Harper with questions as they proceeded to the breakfast-room, where O'Connell had put the recovered evidence on display.

Lafferty seized on the skein of rope at once. "Hello, what's this?" he queried.

"You are holding in your hands the answer to the great puzzle—how did the murderer get away without leaving any traces in the snow? With five minutes' practice you or I or any one could do it as well."

He pointed through the window. "You know the small porch on this side of the house? Well, there's a sturdy iron hook driven into the wall right by the porch. And do you see that tree, just on the other side of the boundary wall? Another hook was driven into that.

"The rings on each end of the rope hooked on to those, leaving the rope seven or eight feet above the ground. This miraculous escape was made by the murderer going along that rope, hand over hand, with the feet drawn up clear of the snow."

The big detective plumped down in a chair. "Well, I'll be damned!" he exclaimed.

"It certainly was a neat stunt," Harper resumed. "Not nearly as hard as it sounds. A man of Donaghy's build and vigor would find it child's play."

"BUT wait a minute," Lafferty interrupted, "what happened to the rope afterward? It wasn't there when we took charge. When was it put up and who took it down?"

"The hooks could have been driven in any time, but I think it was all done recently. The rope was strung across late that afternoon, after dusk, before the snow was heavy on the ground. After the murders the killer swung over the porch rail, went hand over hand until he reached the boundary wall, then swung himself clear over the top and dropped in the adjoining grounds."

"But how was the rope removed?" Lafferty persisted.

"Oh, that was easy. The end hooked to the tree was taken down, and by sharply twitching the line upward and snaking it at the same time the end at the porch slid off the [illegible] a quick jerk brought it [illegible] back over the wall, much like cracking a long whip.

"However, the jerk wasn't quite quick enough, and the free end of the rope dropped into the snow momentarily. Do you remember that odd gash we found in the snow when we were checking up the footprints? There was our clue, but we couldn't make anything of it."

Lafferty became pensive. "That's all right as far as it goes, but it doesn't clear up everything. What about Mr. Dufresne—and Mrs. Dufresne—the ambush—the crank letters—the phoney alibis?"

Harper put the articles back in the bundle. "We'll clear all that up later," he said. "There must be a fantastic kind of misunderstanding between some of the persons in this house. Bring Andrews and the Whitmores in here, will you?"

In a few moments they all filed in, and Harper invited them to be seated. They looked at Sergeant Harper expectantly.

"You know what has happened," he began; "there's no need to go into that. Now, which one of you was the last to see Joseph Donaghy alive?"

There was a rapid interchange of questioning glances, then Andrews spoke up. "I believe that I was."

Harper looked at them. "We'll consider it settled, then, that Andrews was the last to see Joseph Donaghy alive. He left the house about six o'clock. Did any of you see a light in his room during the night?"

THERE was no answer. Harper leaned back in his chair. "Tell me about the discovery of the body."

Mrs. Whitmore took up the tale. "We are the first up in the morning," she explained. "I came downstairs a few minutes after seven this morning and John soon after that. There are a number of things that need doing right away, regulating the thermostat and things like that. At a quarter to eight I rang the garage on the house 'phone."

"Was that usual?" Harper interrupted.

"Oh, yes. We always get Joseph up that way. He has to get out of bed to answer the 'phone, and I let it ring till he answers."

"How long did you ring this morning?"

"Quite a while. Then I got angry at him and hung up. When John came up from the cellar I told him to go across and get him up."

Placid John Whitmore nodded sagely to this account. The detective turned to him. "Tell us your part."

"I went out to the garage," Whitmore began, "never dreaming what I was going to run into—"

"Were there any footprints in the snow when you went there?"

"No, sir."

"Was the door locked?".

"Of course. I had taken the key from the rack in the kitchen. I went upstairs and walked right into Joe's room. When I saw what was on the bed I guess I just stood there dumbfounded."

"Did you move the body? Or touch anything in the room?"

"Oh, no, sir," John answered hastily. "I felt queer all over, sort of faint. I must have run down the steps and back to the house." It was Mrs. Whitmore's turn to nod confirmation.

"I was there when Whitmore came back, Sergeant," O'Connell broke in. "He looked like he'd just seen a ghost. As soon as I understood what had happened I ran out to the garage. There were only two tracks in the snow, Whitmore's going and coming back. I looked around the room, saw the letter in the typewriter and read it, then I came back here and called you up. That's the whole story, Sergeant."

Harper exhibited the skein of brownish rope with the metal rings on the ends. "Can any of you identify this piece of rope? Do you have any rope like this in the house?"

The three servants passed the coil from hand to hand. Mrs. Whitmore spoke for them. "We never had rope like this in the house. We use the ordinary wash-line kind. I never saw rope like that before."

The detective addressed his next question to the Whitmores. "Did you see Donaghy up here the day of the murders? I have reason to believe that he came here then, probably late in the afternoon."

Both John and Martha shook their heads emphatically.

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Tomorrow, Harper finds a flaw in Donaghy's "confession."

ALBANY FIRE CHIEF HURT WHILE FISHING

PORTLAND, June 27.—(AP)—Oliver Butts, Albany fire chief, was making a rapid recovery in a hospital here today from injuries he suffered when he fell from a 25-foot cliff overhanging the Deschutes river near Maupin. He was on a fishing trip. He received arm and rib injuries. Hospital attendants here today said his condition was "fine."

OBERLIN, O., June 27.—(AP)—Dr. S. Parkes Cadman of Brooklyn, N. Y., today was elected honorary moderator of the general council of Congregational and Christian church, and the Rev. Dr. Jay T. Stocking of St. Louis was elected moderator.

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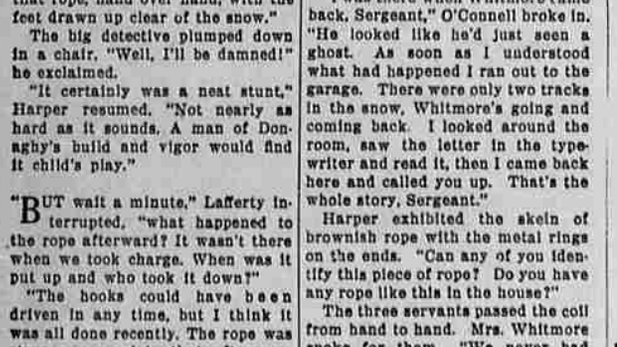


VACATION BIBLE CLASS OF ZION EVANGELICAL IS CLOSED WITH PICNIC

Daily Vacation Bible school of Zion Evangelical Lutheran church closed with a program of unusual merit, demonstrating its work last Sunday morning, and a picnic Monday afternoon in Lithia park, greatly enjoyed by the many boys and girls, who had attended the school and mothers and teachers.

After a few happy hours in the park, as about to spread out the picnic dinner, shortly before 5 p. m., a rain storm came up, and all crowded into the cars and Mr. Simpson's truck and returned to Zion church, Medford, where another happy time was had enjoying the picnic dinner, and a special ice cream treat from the school.

All attending the service last Sunday morning enjoyed the program greatly, especially the dramatization of Queen Esther presented by 20 members of the school; the drama, as given, having been written and directed by Miss Irene Brewold and Martin G. Kabele. The primary grades also gave an interesting demonstration, under the direction of Mrs. E. Jaqua, how Bible stories are taught by dramatizations by the children, by having them present the story of the finding of the child, Moses, by a cast chosen at the time for presentation of the drama in the service.

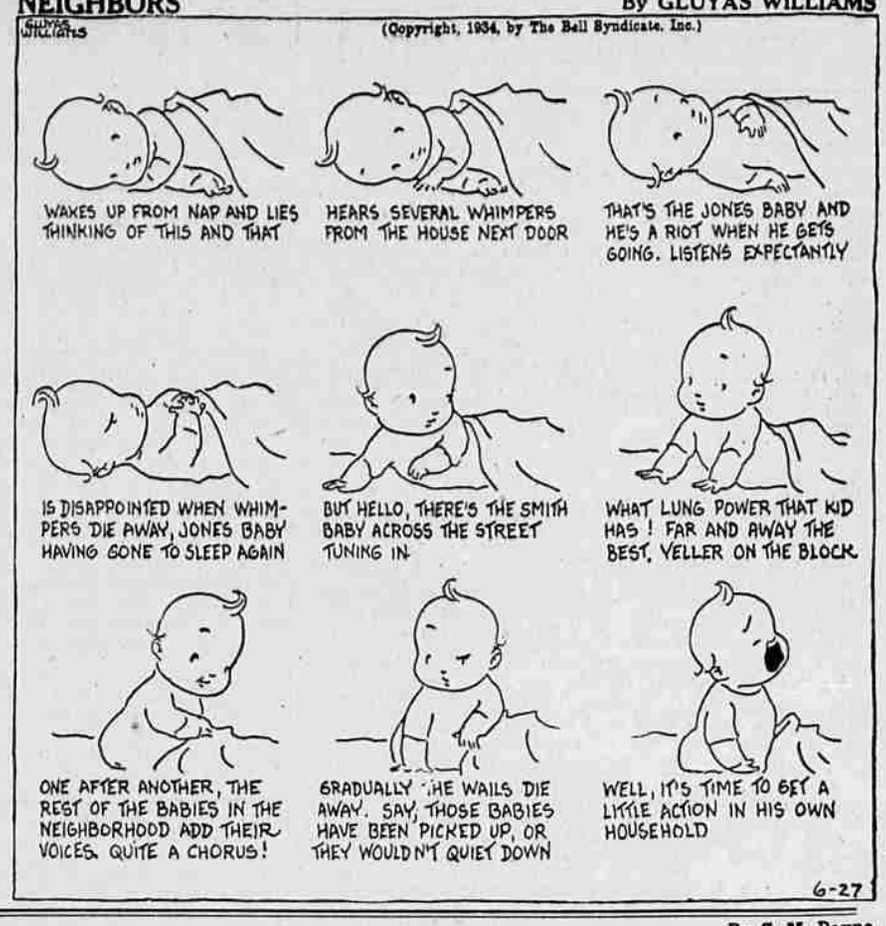
Cast for the dramatization of "Queen Esther."

Queen Esther—Verna Paulson.
The King—Earl Fichtner.
Haman, the chief Counsellor—Paul Nichols.
Mordecai—Leigh Campbell.
Princes—Billy Frederick, Robert Campbell, Richard Frederick, Chester Cole, Johnny Shea.
Ladies — Audrey Bousaum, Lucille Baird, Dorothy Stubblefield, Phyllis Cleven, Isabelle Ganfield, Doris Bedford, Margaret Ash.
Chamberlains—David Dawson, Ann Persons, Thomas Kroschel, Howard Renner.
Peasant women — Phyllis Cleven, Dorothy Stubblefield, Doris Bedford.
The Crier—Howard Renner.
The four scenes:
1 Throne Room.
2. Castle Gate and Throne Room.
3. Castle Gate.
4. Throne Room.

PLANT PEST BATTLE UNDER NEW BUREAU

WASHINGTON, June 27.—(AP)—The bureaus of entomology and plant quarantine in the department of agriculture will be merged July 1.

The new organization will take over from the bureau of plant industry control and eradication work on plant pests and diseases.



S'MATTER POP— By C. M. Payne

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Let's Do It Over Again! By Hal Forrest

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Dave Jones Goes Down By Edwin Alger

THE NEBBS—From the Long Ago By Sol Hess

BRINGING UP FATHER By George McManus