

MURDER AT MOCKING HOUSE

BY WALTER C. BROWN

Chapter 51
COLLAPSE

"SO THIS man hounded you?" asked Harper. "Forced you back to the city and forced you to continue the affair? He made you meet him in this empty house—in this room? Then he is the one who put the notes in that sand urn on the hearth?"

"Yes. How did you know that?" she asked, surprised.

"You'd be surprised how many persons in this house knew about those secret notes. But why did this man buy a disguise so that he would look like Mr. Dufresne? He was traced that purchase, back in October."

Alice Croyden shuddered. "He turned into a beast, a maniac, once he had me in his clutches. I think at first he got the disguise to avoid detection should he be seen here, but later it pleased him to strut up and down dressed in Pierre's clothes, sneering and cursing at our money and social position. I saw that his madness would bring ruin and disgrace anyway once this house was occupied again."

She squared her shoulders. "I was desperate. It was too much to pay for my folly. I saw plainly that it was simply a question of his death or my ruin—the words trailed off into significant silence."

"Was he blackmailing you?"

"Oh, if it had only been a question of money—but he'd only laugh at me when I tried to buy him off. I began to plan. It had to be carried out here in this house. He would meet me nowhere else. He made me give him a key for the side door."

"He kept his address a secret. He would call me up from pay stations and tell me to look for the note in the urn. I built up my plan, tested every detail, went through every motion a thousand times. The first time there is snow on the ground, I swore to myself, he should die."

"Did this H.D. write those threatening letters to Mr. Dufresne?" Harper interrupted.

"I don't know. I hadn't heard about them until after—it would have been like him, his idea of a joke. I put off the next meeting until the night of my husband's concert. I knew it would be easy to slip away then."

"Weren't you nervous, afraid, when the time came?"

Mrs. Croyden shook her head. "Everything was arranged, rehearsed. I had no need to think, just act. When it got dark enough I slipped out of our house and came over here to put up the rope. Then I went downtown with my husband."

"It was nearly eight o'clock when I drove back. I left my car two blocks away. I tested the rope by reaching the house that way. It worked perfectly."

"Oh, so you came by way of the rope? I hadn't thought of that."

Alice Croyden nodded. "He was waiting in this room. We quarreled again. I think he enjoyed those scenes. It was then that I pounded angrily on the table, standing opposite him down the length of it. He went on calling me ugly names, so I raised my gun and shot him. I was amazed at how easy it had been."

"First I wanted to be sure no one heard the shot. I looked—and there was a policeman just turning in at the gate! The next thing I knew, I was standing with the front door open, telling the policeman that I had shot a burglar. He seemed to recognize me and came in without the least sign of suspicion."

"What brought him to the house?" Harper questioned.

"He said he had seen sparks coming from the chimney, and, knowing that the family was away, came to investigate. He had not heard the shot. I had been stirring up the logs in the fireplace to make a better light in the room."

"The detective felt a pardonable pride in the accuracy of his previous deductions about Officer Hamill's movements and motives on that fatal night."

"It wasn't until the policeman was actually standing here looking at the body that I realized what an error I had made—that I couldn't possibly explain any of the details, my own presence, the seated body, the disguise, the liquor glasses, anything. All this time I had been holding the gun."

"He made a step toward me and I fired—twice. That is the horror of it," she burst out.

Harper nodded understandingly. "That is true of every crime. The victim rides you harder in death

than he did in life. What did you do then?"

"I sat down and forced myself to be calm. It seemed hours, but I suppose it was really only for a few minutes. Then I began to consider how to make it look as though the two men had killed each other. Their position, one at each end of the table, gave me the idea."

"I didn't see how any one would be able to contradict the evidence or even suspect their separate deaths. I thought I had covered up every trace of my presence. Then comes a tiny thing like the marks of my ring to spoil it all."

"When the police got here, the front door was banging," Harper prompted. "Did you leave it that way?"

"Yes, when I was ready to go I opened it and dropped the bolt. I thought the bodies would be discovered quickly and my alibi would hold good."

"You got away safely by going back over the rope, carrying this man's things with you? You went back to Orpheus Hall to listen to your husband's concert?" Is that correct?"

"Yes. I was late and I stayed in the ladies' lounge until the first number was over, then I went to my seat. There were lots of late-comers, so no one paid any attention to me."

"At what point did Joseph Donaghy enter into the picture?" The lines about Mrs. Croyden's mouth deepened. "Extortion and blackmail," she stated crisply. "He had become suspicious that something secret was going on in this house. He watched and waited until he finally caught a glimpse of us. The disguise misled him into thinking that I was meeting Mr. Dufresne."

"You had to buy his silence then?"

"Yesterday he came to me and demanded money. I gave him all I had in my purse. He was insolent and demanded that I get more and bring it to him last night. In desperation I promised—and I kept my promise!" she concluded grimly.

For a few moments there was dead silence, then a racking sob, and the woman, overcome by the flood of memory, stood swaying. With a dull thud the hidden gun slid down inside the coat, bounced as it struck, then lay flat and still on the rug."

Mrs. Croyden caught her breath with an audible gasp, but the detective made no move to spring for the weapon. Instead, he looked somberly at the woman. "Now I understand," he announced, rising slowly. "You never meant to run away."

As Mrs. Croyden made a quick, but belated, movement toward the gun he kicked it across the floor. "Don't touch that," he warned. He backed toward the wall and pressed the service button.

"What are you doing?" Alice Croyden cried, and he noted the tenseness, the tightly coiled physical mechanism of her body.

Harper came over and stood facing her. "That was an interesting recital, Mrs. Croyden, but you haven't fooled me one bit. You had no intention of fleeing, in spite of your words and your gun. You wanted to confess. You wanted to be arrested for these murders!"

"What do you mean?" she stammered, wide-eyed.

"That was a fine story you told, but it was not the truth!"

She stared at him, stricken numb. There was a discreet rap at the door. Keeping one eye on that statue-like figure of despair, Harper turned the key in the lock and opened the door part way. "Andrews, get Detective Lafferty at the garage and tell him to come here as quickly as he can."

The detective closed the door again. Mrs. Croyden held her place. Only her eyes moved, following his movements. "I did it," she repeated. "I'll swear to it. You can't prove that I didn't do it!"

Harper looked at her steadily. "That's quite true, Mrs. Croyden. If you swear to it I'll have trouble proving otherwise. But I know you didn't do the actual killing. Those marks on the table were not made on the night of the murder, because that ring was not in this room then, nor the wearer of the ring. I've had a suspicion that some one was coming into this room in my absence and looking over the evidence as it accumulated. When you included those ring marks in your story, I knew you were not the actual murderer."

"Tomorrow, the case takes another dramatic turn."

FORD TRAVELING SCHOOL IS HELD AT GATES GARAGE

A modern adaptation of the "little red schoolhouse"—this time in the form of a traveling school for motor car mechanics—rolled into Medford Thursday. It was housed in a trim Ford V-8 sedan delivery truck, equipped for mechanical demonstrations of the proper methods of servicing Ford cars of all types.

Ford dealers and mechanics from all southern Oregon points were in Medford last week attending this novel Ford school which was conducted in the showroom and shop of the C. E. Gates Auto company here.

The "school on wheels," which is under the direction of the Richmond branch of the Ford Motor company, is similar in theory to many new traveling schools which "carry" the school to the student. The school truck is equipped with tools of every description to illustrate the most modern methods of motor car servicing employed by Ford dealers.

Thirty-two such traveling schools, one in each Ford branch territory in the United States, have been inaugurated by the Ford Motor company for the benefit of Ford owners. Classes which are being conducted daily in all parts of the country are under the direction of a factory representative charged with the task of visiting Ford dealers for the purpose of instructing their mechan-

15 YEARS IN PEN FOR ATTACKING YOUNG GIRL

PORTLAND, June 30.—(AP)—Floyd Cochrane, 26, a baker, was today sentenced to 15 years in prison on his plea of guilty to a charge of criminal attack on a 19-year old girl on April 12. Cochrane met the young woman at a dance hall. He promised to take her home but instead drove her to a beer parlor and then to the country where the alleged attack occurred.

WASHINGTON, June 30.—(AP)—President Roosevelt has appointed L. Wilson, of Montana, to be assistant secretary of agriculture.

BUSINESS TAKING RAGGED UPTREND

NEW YORK, June 30.—(AP)—The Dun & Bradstreet weekly trade review said today that while the "trade tide undoubtedly is ebbing from the standpoint of sales and earnings," a gradual but irregular uptrend is noticeable in practically all major lines. "It cannot be denied," asserted the review, "that crucial points lie in the path which business must follow during the next six months, but with the assurance given by the president that nothing is to be allowed to interrupt the recovery movement, the overcoming of timidity and the questioning of the present excessive caution may result in a sudden forging ahead in the next few weeks."

ALLOT \$695,000 OREGON'S RELIEF

WASHINGTON, June 30.—(AP)—State allotments for July announced today by the relief administration included:

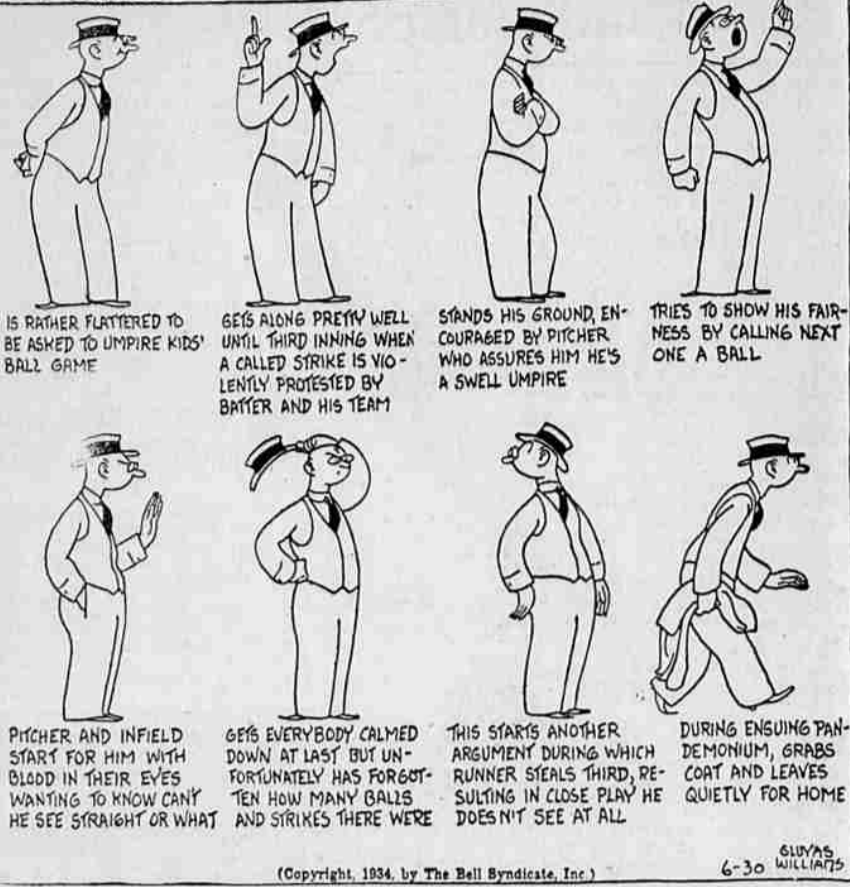
Oregon: Relief, \$600,000; drought, \$75,000; transient, \$19,000; research, \$1,700; total, \$695,700.

Idaho: Relief, \$25,000; drought, \$250,000; transient, \$6,000; total, \$506,000.

Washington: Relief, \$1,250,000; transient, \$37,000; research, \$5,725; miscellaneous, \$100,000; total, \$1,392,725.

THE UMPIRE

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



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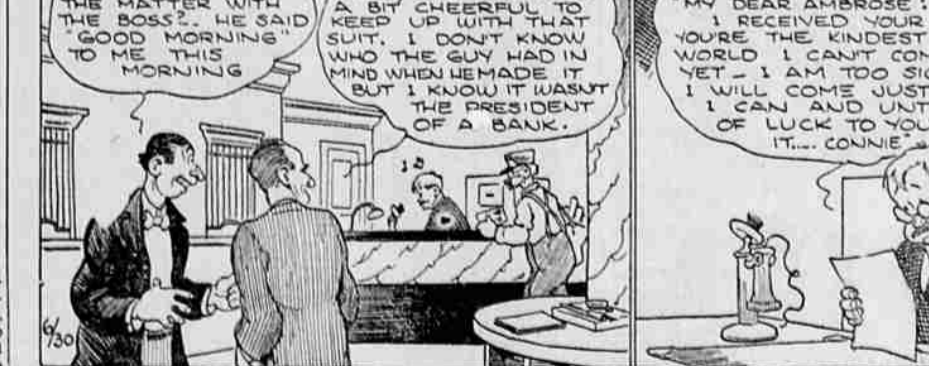
TAILSPIN TOMMY—Another Chapter To Be Written!



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Not Entirely Mistaken



THE NEBBES—What Now?



BRINGING UP FATHER



CAMPFIRE PERMIT NEEDED JULY 1ST IS PROCLAMATION

SALEM, June 30.—(AP)—Effective July 1, it will be necessary for all campers who intend to build fires at other than designated camp grounds to secure campfire permits before entering any national forest in the state, with the exception of the Pisgah, it was announced today by proclamation of Governor Julius L. Meier.

Campers must refrain from smoking except on surfaced highways and carry tools suitable for fire fighting, consisting of shovels, axe and bucket, the proclamation stated.

Areas coming under the same regulation but outside the National For-

ests include all privately owned timber land adjacent to the Ochoco, Deschutes and Malheur National forests, and in southern Oregon applies to the land lying north of Butte and Trail creeks northeast of Medford, the area south of Kerby and southwest of Ashland.

The watershed of the north fork of the Santiam, the area extending from the north fork of the Molalla river to the little north fork of the Santiam, the Mud creek area of the Mt. Hood National forest and some smaller areas in Lane and Deschutes counties have been closed to all forms of entry except under permits.

Relative to the closures State Forester Lynn Cronmiller stated that although June rains had relieved the fire hazard somewhat, the precipitation had been less than usual, and a day or two of warm weather would make the hazard acute. During the past few weeks some 25 fires have been reported.

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