

# OVERNIGHT GUEST

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

THE STORY THUS FAR: Adam Bruce, FBI operator, on a trip to his old home, ran into his previous boss, Inspector Tope, and Mrs. Tope. He sent them out to an auto camp operated by Bee Dewain. Later that night Tope phoned Bruce, asking him to come out to Dewain's at once and to bring State Trooper Quill. The Tope had been rented the highway cottage, where they found the body of a man, with hands and feet bound. He had been murdered and placed under the bed of the Faraway cottage. Quill went after the district attorney and a medical officer, while the Tope and Bruce discussed the case from what clues and facts they could find.

## CHAPTER IV

Cumberland nodded. "How long's he been dead, Doc?" Doctor Medford had already made some examination. "Twenty-four hours, anyway," he said. "Probably more." He stripped off those bands of black tape that half-concealed the dead man's countenance. "Anybody know who he is?" he asked.

They came to look; they saw an old small man, with eyes twisted slightly upward at the corners, a nose thick at the bridge and narrowing to a point which drooped above the upper lip. Chin small, retiring; a mouth framed in deep-lined lines; gray, sparse, wiry hair; a gray stubble on cheek and chin. They looked, but no one spoke.

Then Cumberland said wistfully: "I kind of wish Joe was here; but Quill said you didn't want anyone else to know about this right away, Inspector." And he asked: "What's your idea?"

"Well, Mat, maybe you'd better send for Joe."

Cumberland wiped his mouth with his hand. "I don't know as Joe could outdo you, on a thing like this," he admitted.

"He's welcome to try," Tope insisted cheerfully. "But here's the way I see it: We can't trail all the folks that might have done this; but whoever put him here is waiting, somewhere, for the excitement to start. They're in the dark."

"Well, so are we!"

"But we're this much ahead of them," Tope argued. "We know the body's been found, and they don't. Mat, if it was me, I'd keep the whole thing quiet, long as I could."

"That'd be hard, to keep this quiet. Some one's bound to find out."

Young Adam spoke. "I think you'd do well to let Tope run this, Mat," he urged. "Of course, I've no standing unless it turns out this was an inter-state job; but if I had any say, I'd want Tope in it." And he added: "As for keeping it quiet, Amasa Dewain doesn't talk much; and his housekeeper's away. We can carry the body up there tonight, let Doctor Medford do the autopsy up there. Then tomorrow night we can move it to town."

Cumberland nodded. "We could do it that way," he agreed. "Tope, what do you say? Will you take it on?"

The Inspector looked toward Mrs. Tope, standing by the fire. "We're on a sort of honeymoon," he reflected. "But I don't know. I don't get stirred up often, but I'm kind of mad tonight. This looks to me like a sneaking, cruel business. I'd like to nail the man that did it."

"I know," Cumberland assented heavily. "It hits me that way too." And he reflected: "Joe won't like your being in it; but he'll have to stand it. If you'll take it, you can lose the whole job."

So Tope agreed and made his dispositions. He sent Quill to awaken Amasa Dewain and enlist his cooperation. Adam and Doctor Medford improvised a stretcher for the removal of the body. Mat Cumberland asked:

"Anything I can be doing to-night?"

Tope shook his head. "Have Quill stay at Amasa's and keep his eyes open," he decided. "Adam will come back and spend the night here in case anyone comes around. Doctor Medford can do the autopsy at the farm tomorrow morning. You and I will get a good night's sleep, and I'll meet you there about nine o'clock. That's about all."

And a little later, the Inspector and Mrs. Tope said good night. But once they were out of doors, she grasped his arm with fingers like steel. She whispered:

"I know him."

He stared at her. "Know who? The dead man?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you say so? Who is he?"

"I wasn't sure you'd want to tell them, yet. It's Mr. Ledford."

The name for a moment woke no memory in him. "Ledford?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes, the head of New England utilities," she insisted. "I saw him once at a stockholders' meeting when I worked on Wall Street. That's he, dead back there."

Mrs. Tope's identification of the dead man as Ledford seemed at first to Tope impossible of belief. "It can't be," he protested. "Or there'd have been a noise about it before now."

"Not necessarily!" she insisted. "If he was kidnapped, his family may have been warned to keep quiet; or perhaps his business associates are planning how to support

his stocks when the news comes out. But it is certainly Mr. Ledford. Aren't you going to tell Mr. Cumberland?"

"Not tonight," Tope decided, boldly. "Even if it's true, I want a chance to think, before this hullabaloo starts."

"Will you tell Adam?"

"Adam's got a secret of his own," the old man replied. "I'll keep this to trade with him, by and by."

Tope that night lay not long awake; but he roused at dawn, and he began to wonder by what route the dead man had been brought to Faraway. He got up and dressed with quiet haste, and left Mrs. Tope asleep, and walked up the brookside toward Faraway, where Adam Bruce was still asleep; but he did not disturb the young man. Yonder on the knoll, half concealed by intervening shrubbery, one of the other cabins was visible. It seemed the nearest to Faraway; and assuming for the moment that those who



"I found this," Tope pointed to the footprint.

brought the dead man here had lodged in that cabin, Tope began to search the ground between.

He found two things. He found, on a slanting ledge, a scratch which might have been made by a nail in someone's heel; but the scratch was broader than the nail would readily have made, and Tope reflected that some men have set into the heels of their shoes a small triangular plate to retard the wear. Such a plate might have made that scratch.

And he found a woman's footprint! The small French heel had sunk to a depth of a quarter-inch or so, leaving its imprint plain. Tope stooped to look more closely; and then Adam Bruce came up the slope to join him. It was still early; but the sun had risen and now laid level lanes through the trees. Adam lifted his hand in silent greeting.

"Found anything?"

"I found this," Tope pointed to the footprint. "I judge whoever brought him here lodged in this cabin."

"This is named 'Little Bear,'" Adam told him. "If they did, Bee will remember them."

Tope hesitated. "Well, later," he decided. "You keep out of sight for now, go up to Dewain's farm, wait there. Doctor Medford will be doing the autopsy there this morning. We'll come up." He added: "Now, let's go up on the knoll and see if there are tire tracks in the drive."

But as they came around to the drive in front of Little Bear, Tope forgot his present search. Whitlock and Beal had been put, the night before, in the cabin toward the road. Tope saw that their car was gone; and he strode that way, Adam upon his heels. They came to the cabin and Tope threw open the door.

The beds were in disorder, but the place was empty. Whitlock and Beal were no longer here.

Tope shook his head in self-reproach. "I'm getting old," he said. "I ought to have anticipated that. Too late now. All right, son. I'll see you at the farm."

So Adam departed, and Tope returned to Cascade and found Mrs. Tope dressing. "I see you found something," she remarked. "You're fairly licking your chops."

He told her about the woman's footprint, the mark where a man's shoe had scraped across the ledge, and he added: "Whitlock and Beal have skipped. They must have left mighty early!" He fell into a thoughtful silence, and she left him undisturbed, till presently the breakfast bell summoned them down to the Mill.

Bee Dewain, fresh as dawn, greeted them cheerfully. "Rest well?"

"I never do, the first night in a strange place," Mrs. Tope admitted. "But I will tonight. We've decided to stay on awhile, so Mr. Tope can try the fishing."

Mrs. Murrell, entering in time to hear this last word, said volubly:

"Well, now, Mrs. Tope, I call that sensible. Isaac, he's always wanting to move on and move on. Some people say it's hard on the twins, not going to school; but Isaac gives them their lessons right along." She laughed proudly. "Donnie does all Willie's lessons, if we don't watch him. Their handwriting's so much alike you can't tell the difference."

"They write alike?" Mrs. Tope echoed in polite indifference. "They look exactly alike, of course; but I didn't know twins wrote alike, too."

"Yes, they do," Mrs. Murrell insisted. "I asked a doctor once, and he told me—"

But Bee interrupted her. People were apt to interrupt Mrs. Murrell. "Mr. Tope, Earl Priddy tells me your friend Adam Bruce came back last night."

"So?" Tope echoed. "Why, he told us in Middleford that he was taking the midnight train. Must've changed his mind."

Bee laughed. "Adam's always an uncertain quantity. He must be sleeping late. I'll have Mrs. Priddy keep some coffee hot for him!"

After breakfast, Tope and Mrs. Tope returned to Cascade. Tope rummaged boots and fishing garb out of the rumble of the car and put them on. "We'll make fishing an excuse," he explained. "We'll drive away out of sight, and get to Amasa Dewain's without the folks here knowing."

She nodded, and presently they came out to the car. Tope brave in rubber boots and an old felt hat adorned with flies stuck in the band and crown. Earl Priddy, passing by along the drive, paused to ask in an interested tone: "Goin' fishin'?" Tope admitted this. "Git you any worms?" Tope shook his head. "I'll dig you some, fust chance I git," Priddy promised. "Fellow come through her last summer, hired me to take him fishing. Englishman, he was. And a great one for fies! Man, he could handle 'em, too."

Tope was always willing to listen. He had heard, sometimes, surprisingly useful things. "Don't see many Englishmen here, I expect," he suggested at random.

"Well, some!" Priddy declared. "Fellow come here Friday night late—I guess he was English by the way he talked. Had that kind of a deaf man's voice that they have. I can tell 'em fur as I can hear 'em. He had a woman with him! Miss Dewain wouldn't have took 'em in, if she'd been up, case they wa'n't respectable; but she'd gone to bed, and I ain't so particular. I put 'em in Little Bear. They lit out before I was up in the morning."

Tope nodded indifferently, and he got into the car. When they approached Amasa Dewain's farmhouse, they saw Adam on the porch. "Cumberland and the doctor are inside," he reported. "Want to go in?" Tope said: "I'm wondering how long that man has been dead. Earl Priddy just told me that a man and a woman came late Friday night and stayed in Little Bear, and left early in the morning."

Bruce's eyes lighted, but before he could speak, Mat Cumberland came out of the house; and when he saw Tope, he drew from his pocket something wrapped in a handkerchief.

"You'll want to see these things, Inspector," he suggested. "They were in the pocket of those overalls. Ever see a knife like that before?"

The knife was of a peculiar design. It bore on one side a graduated scale marked off not only in inches but in centimeters. Tope opened the blade to see the maker's name—a Sheffield firm. "English," he remarked thoughtfully; and he picked up the other article, a thing like a little metal fan, with leaves of differing lengths and thicknesses. "What's that?" Cumberland asked.

"That's a gauge to test valve-clearances. Mechanics use them, on cars and airplanes."

A car came toward them along the road from the highway. Bee Dewain whirled into the yard and alighted, full of surprised questions. "What's happened?" she demanded. "What are you all doing here?" No one spoke; and she turned to Adam. "Earl told me you came back last night. Why?"

Adam said laughingly: "Couldn't bear to go away without seeing you again."

She colored angrily. "Don't treat me like a child! Why doesn't some one say something?"

Mrs. Tope spoke. "I'll tell you, Miss Dewain." And she made the matter briefly clear. She turned pale, but her head did not droop.

"I see," she said through stiff lips. "That's terrible, isn't it?" She caught Adam's eye. "This was why you came back?" she guessed. "I suppose Mr. Tope telephoned you?"

"Yes."

Doctor Medford spoke. "Know him, Miss Dewain?"

"No. No, but—"

"But what?"

"He has something on his hair," said Bee. "Some sort of musky-smelling stuff. I've smelled it before." And she cried suddenly: "I remember!"

"Where?" Tope asked sharply.

"Friday night. Or rather, Saturday morning," she answered. "Some people stayed Friday night in Little Bear, and left before daylight."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL Lesson

By HAROLD L. LUNDQUIST, D. D.  
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Released by Western Newspaper Union.

### Lesson for December 23

Lesson subjects and Scripture texts selected and approved by International Council of Religious Education; used by permission.

### THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS TO THE WORLD

LESSON TEXT: Luke 2:1-14.  
GOLDEN TEXT: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to ward men.—Luke 2:14.

Christmas again! Yes, and it's going to be a joyful Christmas this year, isn't it? Let's not miss a single bit of the joy and gladness of the season. Let's observe all the precious customs and traditions. Let's share in the pleasantness and the laughter. Some may have to do it with a sense of sadness hidden in their hearts, but even they will join us in really keeping Christmas this year.

But don't forget to keep Christ in your Christmas this year as never before! We who know Him should realize how much the world needs Him. We should see in the months just ahead our greatest opportunity to make Him known.

Our lesson topic is "The Message of Christmas to the World." What is that message? Here it is:

I. Make Room for Jesus! (vv. 1-7).

"It came to pass"—yes, it always does when God has given His promise. For seven centuries God had said, "He is coming," and then He came. God rules the affairs of this world even though thoughtless and unbelieving men not only grieve Him, but often defy Him.

Jesus came—but He came to a manger, "because there was no room for him in the inn." Is it not the same today? There is no room for Him now in the hearts of most men. He wanted in our places of business, in our governmental offices, in our social gatherings?

Remember, it was not because they hated Him that there was no room. It was just that they were "preoccupied." That is the trouble in men's hearts today. They should have made room in the inn for Jesus even though everyone and everything else must be turned out, and we should make room for Him no matter what else or who else must go. They would have made room for Jesus had they known who He was. We do know, and yet we do not make room. Why not? (Jer. 17:9; John 15:24; Rom. 8:7.)

(John W. Bradbury.)

That is the message of Christmas! Make room in your heart, in your life and in your home for Jesus! Then go quickly and

II. Tell Others About Jesus! (vv. 8-12).

The religious leaders slept soundly the night Jesus was born. They knew the prophecies of His coming, but they were not looking for Him. Perchance some of them slept in the very inn where He could not be received.

But the shepherds were awake. They knew that something unbelievably great had happened, for the heavens were ablaze with celestial glory.

At first they were afraid, but they were soon comforted by the words "Fear not." How characteristic that message is of the whole gospel testimony. Fear not, there is salvation; Jesus has come to seek and to save the lost.

But be sure to note that such a message is not just for one's personal joy and encouragement; it is for "all people" (v. 10). The shepherds realized that and the verses following our lesson tell us that "they made known" what they had seen (vv. 17-20).

How great that need is today! After all these centuries since Jesus came there are still multitudes of people on this earth who have never heard about our Saviour. There are children who would ordinarily have been in church and Sunday school who, because of the war, have grown up in heathen darkness.

Others there are who have heard but have not responded, and we must go to them once more this Christmas and tell them that "a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" was born in Bethlehem.

Make room for Jesus, and then make Him known to others. That will lead you to

III. Praise God for Jesus (vv. 13-14).

The angels could hardly wait with their praise. "Suddenly" a multitude of the heavenly host appeared, praising God for the blessed message of peace and good will.

The Christian life is quite incomplete and unbalanced if it does not include much praise. The Lord is worthy of all the praise of every believing heart this Christmas Day!

The writer of these notes extends to you the heartiest of good wishes at this glad Christmas season. He pleads with you if you are not a Christian, make room for the Saviour in your heart! Then, let us all make Him known everywhere, to the praise and glory of His name.

It would please the one who prepares these notes to have a word from his friends everywhere, assuring him of their interest and prayers. Just a postcard will do. The address is at the head of the column. Don't expect a reply, but be assured that he will pray for you.



By Walter Shead  
WNU Correspondent

### Co-Ops Battle to Keep Tax-Exempt Status

THE National Council of Farmer Co-operatives, representing approximately 2,300,000 members of local farm co-operatives, is clearing decks for action. A bitter fight in congress is anticipated over the move to tax farm co-operatives on income, along with other so-called tax-exempt organizations.

These would include such tax-exempt financial institutions as mutual savings banks and building and loan associations. According to a recent report of the internal revenue division, total assets reported by tax-exempt groups for 1944 aggregated \$13,438,908,000. Organizations engaged in business such as the mutual banks, and co-operatives, accounted for the bulk of these assets with \$12,034,959,000. The report further showed that the gross income of the tax-free groups exceeds \$5,000,000,000 annually. Of this total income the farm co-operatives are the largest tax-free group with gross income in 1943 of \$2,233,804,000.

### Co-Ops Pay Many Taxes.

Members of the farm co-operatives received \$117,646,000 in refunds or patronage dividends and other direct disbursements, according to the report. To combat the impression that the farm co-operatives are, in fact, tax-free, the National Council of Farmer Co-operatives, however, has just issued a statement showing that for the year 1943, the 5,233 co-operatives included in the treasury statement paid a total of \$14,822,000 in various kinds of taxes including property tax, social security tax, use taxes and all other taxes paid by other business groups.

"Farmer Co-operatives which are exempt under section 101 (12) operate as non-profit organizations and they pay no federal income tax because they have no income to tax," said John H. Davis, executive secretary of the national council.

Davis further pointed out that there are approximately 10,300 co-operative organizations reporting to the Farm Credit administration, whereas the treasury report only included 5,223 of the farm marketing and purchasing associations or only slightly over 50 per cent of the total.

The treasury report, Mr. Davis says, "completely refutes the claims of those who say that farmer co-operatives are avoiding the payment of their fair share of taxes."

### Tax League Is Spearhead.

The National Tax Equality league, supported by large industries in the grain, meat and other industrial fields, is carrying the ball for those seeking to bring the farmer co-operatives into the income tax fold. They are being supported in some instances by organizations of small independent merchants, who are said to feel the greatest burden of competition from the co-operatives. And at this time the smaller business committee of the house is working on a report which is expected to make recommendations on the tax question. Hearings held by the committee occupied several days and representatives of all the major farm organizations testified against the proposed move.

The small business men up and down Main street in the smaller home towns of the nation, the independent grain dealers, hardware and implement dealers and others, are loudest in their demands that the co-operatives pay the federal tax. The treasury department itself, however, could not say what proportion of the dividends or refunds could be classed as taxable income and it is likely that if there is any action either way, it is more likely to be proposed to equalize competition with this private business rather than for the revenue involved.

### Too Many Votes Involved.

Then too, there is always the political angle. This writer is convinced that this congress, which is so sensitive to the political winds, will not take action, since the farm membership so far outnumbers the membership of the small business groups. The political potency of some two million farm members, all allied with one or the other of the three large farm organizations, is something this reactionary congress will not overlook.

And so the prospects are that any attempt to extend the federal government's taxing power to include these farm co-operatives will reach an impasse. At least it will be a steep uphill fight, which the co-operatives are most likely to win.

At any rate, they are prepared here to go to bat on the question, and they will be aided by other powerful forces included in the tax-free groups, such as the unions, the tax-free financial and lending institutions, and mutual insurance companies. Tied in with this group also are the non-business organizations which also are tax free, such as chambers of commerce, hospitals and social welfare organizations, educational organizations and scientific foundations . . . all of which feel that an inroad into one tax-free group may endanger the others.

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