

OVERNIGHT GUEST

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

CHAPTER V

"Mrs. Priddy was busy Saturday, so I made the beds, changed the linen. I smelled this same musky smell on one of the pillowslips in Little Bear. Oh, I'm sure of it." "Who were they?" Cumberland asked.

"I don't know," Bee confessed. "Earl Priddy took them to the cabin. They came late Friday night and left very early. I didn't see them at all. But I'm positive about the smell." "There seemed no more to say. They moved out of doors again, and Cumberland asked heavily: "What did they do to him, Doc? How'd they kill him?"

Doctor Medford said unsteadily: "I can stand most things all right; but this gets me." "And he continued, without prompting: "It was more or less luck that I hit it so soon. I didn't find any wounds, knife, bullet, nothing like that; so I went into the abdomen, thinking of poison. I found the answer there."

He hesitated and Cumberland urged: "Go ahead, Doc." "The Doctor said grimly: "All right. It's hard to believe; but this man died of peritonitis, from a ruptured appendix. Rupture resulted from a gangrenous condition produced by a crease in the omentum that bent a fold in an artery, the way you do a hose, and shut off the blood supply. That's how he died!"

For a moment no one spoke, till Cumberland muttered: "Then it's not murder, Tope!" "The Inspector said impatiently: "They tied him up, gagged him, left him half-smothered with a blanket around his head when he was running a temperature and pretty sick and needing a doctor quick. If that wasn't murder, it was the next thing to it!"

"Manslaughter, maybe," Cumberland admitted. "Bee shivered. Even Adam's lips were white. Tope stood silent, his head wagging to and fro as it was apt to do when he was deep in thought.

"There are two or three things to do, to start," he decided at last. "But Mat, let me do them. Nobody knows me around here. I can poke around, and ask questions, and no one will think anything about it." He added: "Adam here can help me, and Quill."

"What do you figure on doing?" Cumberland asked. "Well," Tope suggested, "suppose it was you that had fetched this man to Faraway and left him there to die. Wouldn't you be worried for fear some one had spotted you?"

"It was dark," Cumberland reflected. "I'd have kept my hat pulled down, my collar turned up." "How about the car? Wouldn't you be afraid Priddy might remember the car?" Then, putting himself in the other man's place, Tope went on: "Of course, maybe I'd steal a car to do the job. Mat, have you had any reports of a car being stolen around here?"

"I wouldn't know about that," Cumberland confessed. "Ned Quill would, though. The State police get all those bulletins." "Where is he?" "Asleep inside. He was up all night."

"Well, send him out," Tope directed. The District Attorney went into the house, and after a moment Ned Quill appeared, elaborately rubbing his eyes. Tope spoke to him. "Get any rest, did you?"

"Sure!" the trooper told him cheerfully. "A good three hours!" Tope nodded. "Quill, have the State police had any reports of a car being stolen around here, the last few days?"

"Sure, cars are stolen all the time." "You go find out whether any cars have been reported stolen within fifty miles of here since Friday," Tope directed. "Or since Thursday, for that matter."

"The trick?" "Nary a one that I know of." Tope nodded. "All right," he agreed. "Now you go find out whether there's been a car stolen, and let me know."

When Quill was gone, Tope turned to Adam. "Son, you know where these quarries are?" "I can find them."

"Get Miss Dewain to drive you up there," Tope directed. "That way, you can enjoy yourself and help me too. Take a fishingline and a sinker and make some soundings—see if you can locate anything in the quarries that might be a car."

Look for tire tracks on the road." Adam nodded, and Tope said: "Another thing, Adam. Look for car tracks, but look for a man's tracks too. And a woman's. Any soft ground or sand around there, look it over careful and let me know what you find."

"Where are you going?" "Mrs. Tope's going to drive me down to Ridgcomb first. Then we'll come back to the Mill. Miss Dewain will drive you home."

"I came up to get some fresh vegetables for dinner," Bee remembered. "Adam, come help me. Then we can go."

So she and Adam departed toward the garden, and the Inspector and Mrs. Tope got under way; at once he proposed: "Now ma'am, we'll drive down to Ledforge's summer place and see what they say there!"

She assented; but first he bade her stop at the Mill; and he went to talk with Priddy for a while. When he returned to the car, there was a deep excitement in his eyes; but he only said: "All right, let's go along." Not till they were on the road did he explain. Then he told her: "Some one else is on this trail we're running."

"Who?" "Those two men last night. Whitlock and Beal! Whitlock told Priddy he was an insurance agent, said he was trying to trace a stolen car—a Chevalier coupe, pale gray with blue trim. Earl told him a car like that was here Friday night."

"Is that the one with the Englishman?" "Yes!" "Did Earl get the number of the car?"

"No, but he says it was a coupe, light gray. He didn't see the man's face, or the woman's. They drove in late, and Priddy had to get out of bed. He took them to Little Bear. The man gave him the money for the cabin without getting out of the car, and Priddy went back to bed; but he says the man was small, and that he talked like an Englishman—whatever that means! And Priddy says the car had blown out an exhaust gasket. He heard it puffing."

He added: "I had to go at Priddy easy, so he wouldn't realize I was asking questions. That's what took me so long." For a while, then, he said no more.

For several hours the Tope were busy. . . . The District Attorney's office was in North Madderson, a dozen miles from Ridgcomb. Quill had preceded the Tope to announce their coming. Mat Cumberland and another man were here to greet them—a brisk young man, sure beyond his years.

"This is Joe Dane, Inspector," Cumberland said. "Heard Mat speak of you," Tope said courteously, his hand extended. "Says he couldn't get along without you."

"Well, Tope admitted, "I've been fairly busy." He hesitated. "I've found out some things, and guessed at others. I know about what happened." "And he went on: "Late last Friday night, a little man who talked like an Englishman, and who had a woman with him, drove up to Dewain's Mill in a gray Chevalier coupe with blue trim. They had this man that's dead now under the rumble seat. Priddy put them in the cottage called Little Bear. During the night they carried this man down to Faraway and put him under the bed there."

"How can you know that?" Dane demanded. "Well, I'm guaranteeing it," Tope assured him mildly; and he went on: "They put him under the bed in Faraway, and sometime before daylight they pulled out. I figure that they'd want to get rid of the car. I've a notion it's in an old quarry Ned Quill here told me about. Adam Bruce has gone to see."

The District Attorney looked at Joe Dane. "You and me wouldn't have thought of that, Joe," he said. But Dane retorted: "We don't know the car's there! That's just a stab in the dark."

"Why, that's right," Tope agreed readily enough. "But I tried another stab," he continued. "Quill helped me on this too. I asked him to find out whether any car had been stolen around here. Well, there was one, belonged to a man named Holdom, has a summer place down near Ridgcomb. It was taken Friday night, out of the garage. Nettie Pineyard—she's Holdom's housekeeper—says Mrs. Kell, the chauffeur's wife, drove it away."

He hesitated; but no one spoke, and he went on: "Saturday morning, Holdom telephoned from New York to the police in Ridgcomb that the car had been stolen." He turned to Quill. "Ned you go call up your friend, the insurance man—see if he had insurance on that car and whether Holdom reported the theft to him too."

Quill disappeared and Tope spoke more softly: "Didn't want Quill to hear what I'm telling you now," he said. "But Mrs. Tope here saw Ledforge, the Utilities man that lives down below Ridgcomb, at a meeting once, and she saw the dead man this morning. She thought he was Ledforge!"

Cumberland leaned forward, and Dane leaped to his feet. "Ledforge!" he whispered hoarsely. "By Godfrey! Say, if that's so—!" His eyes shone.

But Tope said mildly: "Wait a minute, Mr. Dane. I only said that Mrs. Tope thought the dead man was Ledforge. But Ledforge is in New York. He was at a bank directors' meeting there this morning."

Dane made an exasperated gesture. "Well, for heaven's sake, if it's not him, why set off a skyrocket here?"

But then Quill returned. "Charley Fay had the insurance on the coupe," he said. "But he hasn't any report about its being stolen."

Tope nodded, and gently he dismissed the trooper. "You've been a lot of help, Ned," he said. "I wish you'd drop in at Dewain's Mill and see if Adam's there. Tell him I'll be there soon."

So Quill departed; and Tope looked at Cumberland. "Now, I want to do a little telephoning, Mat," he said. "Mind if I use your name?" Cumberland assented silently; and Tope put in a call for Police Headquarters in New York.

While they waited, "There are two or three things we ought to know," Tope explained. "Kell was at Holdom's Friday night; but he left, and Mrs. Kell hasn't been back since she drove the car away. I'd like to know where they are. And there's another thing: There was a man named Whitlock at Dewain's Mill last night, said he represented the insurance people, trying to trace a stolen car. The way he described it, it was this car. But if Holdom hasn't reported it to the insurance people—"

"Where is Whitlock?" Dane demanded. "He sounds fishy!" "He got away before I found out what he was up to," Tope confessed; and Dane made a disgusted gesture. Then the phone rang, and Tope took the instrument. "Hello, Pat?" he said in friendly tones. "Tope speaking. Tope! Tope, you young whelp! How are you, Pat? Haven't seen you in five years . . . Sure, you heard right! I was married a year ago. Still on my honeymoon!"

He became serious. "But Pat, list-

ten. I'm speaking from Mat Cumberland's office. He's the D.A. up here in Highland County, Massachusetts, yes. North Madderson is the town. He wants some information. O.K.? All right, take this down."

And he gave careful instructions: To find out whether Ledforge was in New York; to check his recent movements. What kind of hair-oil did he use? Was he in New York over the week-end? Check up on Holdom, where he had been, where he was now.

"And Holdom's plane crashed Saturday morning," Tope explained. "Pilot, named Bob Flint, was killed. Down on the Sound somewhere. Find out what made the plane fall."

He finished, hung up the receiver; Joe Dane started to speak, and Tope looked at the young man, a certain sympathy in his eyes. "Son," he said, "I know just about how you feel—you're itching to get action. I'm too old to run around in circles; but if you want a job, here's something you can do: A week ago, Mrs. Kell drove down to Middleford and met Ledforge at the train there. Where did they go? See if you can find out, Joe."

And he added: "We'll know a lot more when we hear from New York. You know pretty near as much as I do, right now."

Then the phone rang, and Joe Dane took the call. "It's for you, Tope," he said, surrendering the instrument. And they heard Tope say: "Hello . . . Oh, Adam . . . Good, glad you did . . . It's there, is it? Fine . . . Fine . . . Adam, did you notice whether there were heel-plates on his shoes? . . . Good."

He returned the receiver to the hook. "The car's in the quarry," he said. "Adam located it. You'll want to get it out, Mat."

(To be continued)

38 VARIETIES BIRDS FOUND IN COUNT

English Sparrow Leads in Number; Reports Are Yet Incomplete.

Members of the Asheville Bird club and others who volunteered their services, covered an area in Buncombe County 15 miles in diameter Saturday to count birds of the various species as a part of a long established program of the National Audubon society, which sponsors Christmas week bird hunts in localities all over the United States.

Unofficial and very incomplete reports from only seven of the 15 zones show that 38 different varieties of birds were seen by the counters Saturday. This, of course is the season when the minimum of varieties could be expected to be here. In the peak of the bird season here in the summer perhaps as many as 300 different varieties can be seen.

A number of the varieties identified by the bird counters could be considered very rare for the Asheville section at this time of year. The birds on this rare, or unusual, list would include: Red-breasted nuthatch, blue-grey gnatcatcher, flicker, hermit thrush, yellow warbler and the golden crowned kinglet.

In the first scattered returns of the bird census, the English sparrow led the list in number seen with 415. Next in order came the Junco with 219, chickadee with 151 and the song sparrow with 116.

At the other end of the list (varieties seen the least) were the yellow-bellied sapsucker 2, screech owl 2, tree sparrow 2, yellow warbler 1, red-breasted nuthatch 1, Savannah sparrow 1, blue-grey gnatcatcher 1, and hermit thrush 1.

When reports from each of the 15 sectors come in, the executive committee of the Bird club will tabulate the figures and send them to the National Audubon society headquarters in New York for inclusion in its permanent records.

The weather was ideal Saturday for the bird counters and the 12 or 13 groups participating were busy from dawn until dusk searching for and counting the various species.

Each of the groups walked from six to ten miles in their search for birds.

It is the hope of the club that the annual count will become a community affair.

VETERAN, BRIDE LIVE IN TRAILER

"Living in a trailer? We think it's the most satisfactory way for a married couple going to college," say Betty and Bill Brinkley. They are students at the University of North Carolina.

Their home is a trailer jacked up on the Eureka Farm owned by J. B. Fearrington) about eight miles from Chapel Hill.

It is their solution to the housing problem at Caroling. Bill said: "The set-up is ideal both for housekeeping and finances. Average monthly rent for apartments in Chapel Hill is \$60. A trailer runs from \$1,000 to \$1,800 second-hand, and from \$1,800 up if new. We figure it will almost pay for itself in the two years we'll be here since we won't be paying rent."

"It isn't easy to live on \$75 a month." "You can put that in capital letters. But we aren't complaining. Veterans should realize the Government is only helping us with living expenses.

"Of course I guess it wouldn't be so much fun," his wife put in, "if we weren't in the country and didn't have a radio and Zombie. Zombie is our puppy dog."

The green and gray trailer is set down the hill from the Fearrington's house. The trees around them are brown with autumn, and the smell of fermenting hay drafts down from the barn.

Housekeeping in the trailer is on the co-operative system. "I really don't think a husband should have to do housework," Betty said as she scrambled some eggs.

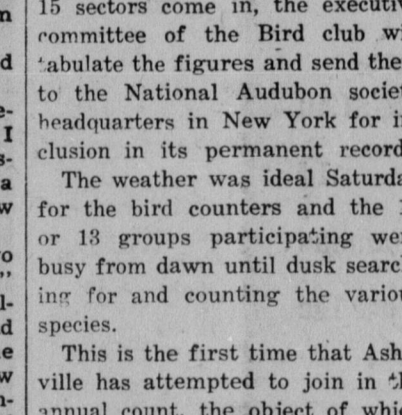
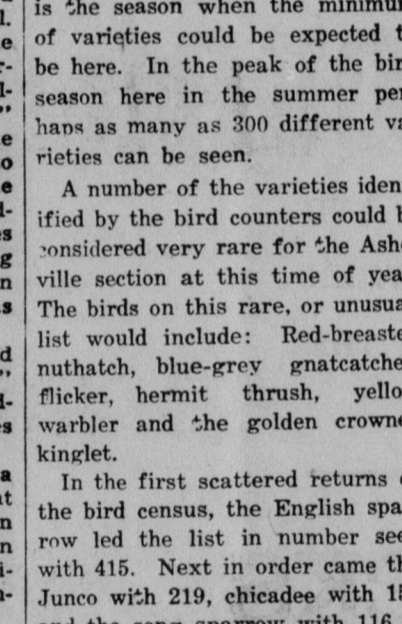
"When Bill was stationed in Florida last summer he didn't do anything except feed the kittens and the rabbits. But here whichever one has the most homework studies and the other cooks."

In the morning they get up at 7 to get to 9 o'clock classes. Bill makes the bed and straightens the room while Betty gets breakfast. "Of course Bill grumbles a lot, but he's wonderful about helping," Betty chattered on. "Except he positively won't wash dishes."

Betty explained one of the basic principles of trailer living: "You don't save magazines and newspapers and letters. And you buy the smallest size everything—toothpaste, hand lotion, soap flakes."

Bill, who is from Charlotte met Betty Welles of Fayetteville in 1941 at the university. During the war he was a pilot in the Army Air Corps, and they were married one and one half years ago between his Africa and China services.

Betty is tall and loose-jointed, blonde. Bill is one of those men who is handsome with a mustache. The third and most prominent member of the family is Zombie, a wire-haired terrier. Every few minutes it is "Zombie, go to Bill," or "Zombie, get down off the bed," or "Isn't Zombie a sweet puppy-dog?"



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