



OVERNIGHT GUEST

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

CHAPTER VI

He looked at Joe Dane in mild triumph. "So that was pretty good for a stab in the dark, Mr. Dane!"

"What's that about heel-plates?" young Dane demanded.

"Well," said Tope, "somebody with heel-plates has walked through the woods near Faraway; and a man with heel-plates left some tracks up at the quarry; and Kell, Holdom's chauffeur, had a pair of shoes with heel-plates on them. They're in his closet down at Holdom's right now."

"Then we want Kell!" Dane exclaimed. "And—Mrs. Kell? Was she running around with Ledforge? We've got to find her too!"

Tope nodded. "It would help a lot," he assented, "if we could talk to her." He took Mrs. Tope's arm. "Let me know when you're ready to salvage the car, Mat. I want to be there. I'll be at the Mill if New York calls."

And despite Dane's efforts to detain them, he and Mrs. Tope went down the stairs, and got into the little roadster at the curb. When they were under way, she said thoughtfully:

"I don't like that young man, but he's right about one thing: You've got to find Mrs. Kell, make her tell you—"

"I guess we'll find her," he replied grimly. "But I don't expect her to tell us anything!"

She looked at him. "You know where she is?"

"Well," he confessed, "there were two or three little things I didn't tell them! That gray suit in Kell's closet, I looked at the name on the tailor's label. The name was Ledforge."

She uttered a low ejaculation. "But Mr. Ledforge might have given it to Kell—when Kell worked for him."

"It wouldn't fit Kell," Tope told her. "Kell's a big man. His uniforms were big. This suit was small."

She frowned in bewilderment. "But even so," she insisted, "what has that to do with Mrs. Kell? Where do you think she is?"

He said heavily: "I think she's in the coupe in the quarry."

"Why?" she whispered, in a still terror. "Why?"

"Adam and Bee found a man's tracks leaving there," said Tope. "Shoes with heel-plates. But there were no woman's tracks! And that gray suit in Kell's closet, there was blood on the sleeve of it, and the dead man hadn't any cut or wound that would have bled at all!"

When Mrs. Tope and the Inspector reached Dewain's Mill, Tope himself went indoors, but she stayed outside. The camp seemed deserted, till Adam Bruce and Bee Dewain, hearing the car arrive, came together from the direction of Faraway.

Tope heard their voices and came to the door. He still wore his heavy rubber boots. He called: "Hello, Adam! Come in here and play boot-jack for me, will you? My feet are just about parboiled."

Inside the cabin, the Inspector, a little flushed, more than a little hot, extended his foot; and Adam dragged the boots off, and found slippers. Tope said:

"Well, you located the car. That's good."

Adam said: "Yes. And I don't know when I've ever had to do anything that scared me more than diving down into that gray water; but I felt the axle, and a wheel." He added: "And while I was doing that, Bee found the man's tracks. What do they mean?"

"You're as bad as Joe Dane, always asking questions. Son," he countered, "how long are you going to hold out on me?"

Adam protested: "Hold out?" But his face was red.

"Why, yes—just that. Why, for instance, does Balsar Vade dislike you?"

"He's just a harmless crank," Adam insisted.

The Inspector relaxed in his chair. "All right, son," he said. "You do as you like about telling me."

Adam hesitated in some distress. "Any idea yet who the dead man may be?" he asked at last.

Tope answered mildly: "Yes, in a way. Mrs. Tope thinks he's Ledforge, the Utilities—Why, what's the matter, Adam?"

For at that name, young Adam Bruce had come to his feet in quick astonishment, stood now leaning over Tope, and cried out:

"Ledforge?"

"Mrs. Tope says so," the old man insisted. "She saw Ledforge once at a stockholders' meeting."

Adam relaxed; he chuckled. "You startled me for a minute," he confessed.

"Yes, I noticed that!" said Tope dryly. "Matter of fact, I meant to!"

"But Mrs. Tope is wrong, Inspector," Adam declared. He hesitated. "I telephoned our people in New York this morning, from Ridgcomb, to ask about Ledforge. He's in New York! I checked—"

"Yes, so did we," Tope assented. "Ledforge is in New York, all right."

But Adam, how did you happen to think it might be Ledforge?" He looked at the young man shrewdly. "I'm wondering," he said, "if Balsar Vade—you said he was a letter-writing kind of a man—ever wrote a letter to Ledforge."

Adam surrendered. "All right," he yielded; and he grinned. "I give in. Here it is. But I think Vade's harmless, Tope. Only, Ledforge ruined him, ten years ago, in a water-power project. Since then Vade has been a little cracked on the subject of brooks and streams. I told you about that. He blames Ledforge for spoiling the rivers. Ledforge's office sent over to our people half a dozen letters, pretty wild and extravagant, from this society for the protection of rivers, signed by Vade as secretary, and threatening Ledforge with—fire and brimstone! One of them said something about snatching him up in a fiery chariot, like Elijah or whoever it was; and that suggested kidnapping, so I came up here to see Vade."

He added: "Vade admitted writing the letters, and he dared me to arrest him. He seemed to want to be persecuted, seemed to want publicity, and a chance to tell the world what sort of man Ledforge is. I think he'd like to play the martyr, but Ledforge didn't want to prosecute." He added: "I suppose Ledforge was as anxious to avoid publicity as Vade was to get it."

Tope nodded understandingly. "But after that, naturally you thought of Ledforge—"

"And I checked up," Adam agreed. "And Ledforge is in New York."

Tope beamed. "So this can't be he," he assented. "And Mrs. Tope's mistaken." And he went on to recite to Adam the discoveries of the day. He told the tale of the stolen car, and of Whitlock's inquiries, and of the visit to the Holdom place, and of Miss Nettie Pineyard.

"And Mrs. Kell and Kell have disappeared," he explained. "Holdom was expected home Friday, but he didn't come. Kell came, in the limousine, and drove away in it afterward; and Mrs. Kell drove the coupe away."

Adam ran to quick conjecture. "And Kell joined her later, came with her here? Then they dumped the coupe in the quarry and headed for Canada?"

"Well, maybe," Tope admitted. "What was it? Jealousy? Is Mrs. Kell—the flighty kind?"

The Inspector said reluctantly: "Well, it looks as if she spent last week-end—ten days ago—with Ledforge somewhere. And if she'd go away with him, maybe she'd go with others. Maybe this dead man—long as he's not Ledforge—was one of them." He slapped his knee in sudden recollection. "We ought to have sent a tracer out after the limousine that Kell drove away in. Adam, do that, will you?"

Adam nodded. "Yes. What else?"

"Why, it just might be that Ledforge is really missing, and they're covering it up in New York."

"I'll find out," Adam promised.

"And one other thing, Adam: May not have any connection, but I'd like to know. Holdom had a plane—pilot named Bob Flint—and it crashed in Long Island Sound on Saturday morning. Flint, he was killed. I'd like to know what made that plane crash. Maybe you can find out through the Department of Commerce."

Adam said: "Sure."

Then they heard voices outside; and Mrs. Tope and Bee Dewain appeared in the open doorway. Bee had sandwiches wrapped in a napkin, and a glass of milk.

Tope chuckled, and looked at Mrs. Tope. "I declare," he exclaimed, "I forgot all about food!" He took the sandwiches and began to eat them comfortably.

Adam said: "Bee, I've got to do some telephoning; don't want the neighbors listening in. Want to run me to town?"

"Take our car," Tope suggested. "No need to bother Miss Dewain. I want to tell her what's been happening." He added with a chuckle: "You'll get back quicker if I keep her here!"

So Adam drove away alone; and Tope told Bee what there was to tell. The girl listened silently till he finished. Then she said:

"No, the dead man isn't Mr. Ledforge. I had a letter from him this morning. Or rather Mr. Eberly did!" And she explained: "You see, Mr. Eberly and Mr. Ledforge are old friends. The bank had some Utilities bonds, and that was one reason it had to close; but Mr. Eberly never blamed Mr. Ledforge. Mr. Eberly left Saturday morning to go fishing in New Brunswick, and—I used to be his secretary—he arranged to have his mail delivered to me so I could take care of it. He's not married, so he often does that when he goes away."

Tope listened without questions, and she went on:

"This letter came this morning from Mr. Ledforge. He wants Mr. Eberly to come over and fish with him in the trout-pond above his summer place, tomorrow afternoon. Mr. Ledforge wrote the letter himself."

"You sure?"

"Yes, of course. I've never seen him, but I know his handwriting. I'll show you the letter."

Tope said mildly: "Why, I'd like to see it." And he asked: "Any way you can get in touch with Mr. Eberly, Miss Dewain?"

"Telephone," she said. "Or telegraph."

"I wish you'd call him up, tell him about this invitation." And he added disarmingly: "If he doesn't want to come back to fish with Mr. Ledforge, ask him to fix it so I can go in his place. I like to fish."

"All right," she assented, amused; and Tope asked:

"Mr. Eberly seen Ledforge lately, has he?"

She shook her head. "No. Mr. Ledforge called him up about ten days ago—Saturday, I think it was. Wanted to see him; but Mr. Eberly was in Boston over that week-end. The operator knows I handle some things for Mr. Eberly so she shifted the call to me."

"Where did Ledforge call from?" Tope wondered.

"Up here, I think," Bee replied. "He said something about 'dropping in.' Something casual. Not as if he were in New York."

Tope nodded, and then they heard a car turn in and stop by the Mill, and Bee looked out and said: "It's Mr. Cumberland, and Joe Dane."

"Call them up here," Tope directed sharply. "Before the whole world knows they're here!"

He came to the door as Bee made haste down the drive; but she was too late to avert the danger Tope foresaw. Joe Dane was inflated by the prospect of handling what promised to become a celebrated case. So when they turned in off the road and stopped beside the Mill, where Earl Priddy was working, Joe called in important tones:

"Hi, Earl! Where's Inspector Tope?"

Priddy straightened up and scratched his head and stared. "Inspector?" he echoed, his eyes wide. "Inspector of what? What's the Inspector of, Joe?"

Bee, arriving just then on the spot, hushed him sharply. "Never mind, Earl! It's none of your business. Go on with your work." She summoned Joe away; the car moved on to Cascade, where Tope waited, and the two men alighted there.

Tope looked at Dane in mild disapproval. "Young man," he said, "you advertise too much!"

"It's all right," Bee said reassuringly. "I told Earl it was none of his business!"

Tope chuckled. "Why, that's fine, miss," he assented. "After that, Earl Priddy won't give it another thought, I know! You certainly fixed that." And he added gently: "You go along now and telephone Mr. Eberly. And let me see that letter."

And as the girl turned away, he said: "Come in, Mat. Come in, Dane. I guess Earl doesn't matter. We couldn't keep this thing dark much longer."

So they came in, Dane defensively defiant. "I don't believe in secret procedures, anyway," he protested. "The way to solve a puzzle like this is to cut right through it, get at the heart of it."

"That been your experience?" Tope asked in a dry tone; and Dane's cheek flamed. Tope looked at Cumberland. "I judge you heard from New York, Mat?" he remarked.

Cumberland nodded. "Why, yes, Tope," he said. "We did!"

And he added slowly: "They've located Holdom. He's in a private hospital down near Hartford with a broken head, a concussion, maybe

a fractured skull."

Tope took care to betray no excitement or surprise. "That so, Mat?" he asked calmly. "Well, start at the beginning. Let's have the whole thing!"

Cumberland nodded, and he explained:

"New York says Ledforge and Holdom started up here last Friday, in Holdom's limousine, with Kell driving. They left New York early, about nine o'clock. Holdom went around to pick Ledforge up at his apartment; and the officer on the beat saw Ledforge come out and get in."

"They don't know when Ledforge came back, but he was in his office Monday morning, and he was at the bank and in his office this morning."

Tope nodded, and Cumberland went on:

"Well, today, when they had made sure about Ledforge, they sent a man to Holdom's office, and the staff there was all excited, because they had just had a telephone message from Holdom. He's in this private hospital in a little town just this side of the Connecticut line."

"He's been there since Saturday morning. He was picked up beside the road unconscious, with a lump on his head, and his scalp was cut and had bled some. There was rain down there just before daylight, but his clothes were dry. He was laid out on a grassy bank where the driver of the first car that came along after daylight was bound to see him. This doctor had been out on a confinement case, and found him."

"Holdom was unconscious until today. He had conscious intervals yesterday, but not enough to know who he was; but today he told the doctor to call his office."

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Courtesy Rev. R. E. McClure, Asheville, N. C.

Theme for Quarter: "A NATION IN THE MAKING"

Lesson for January 13, 1945

"A People Delivered"

Basic Scripture—Exodus, Chapters 6-18.

Devotional Reading—Isaiah 41:8-13.

Comments to guide further study by Rev. R. E. McClure, Executive Secretary of Asheville Presbytery, Presbyterian Church, U. S., based on the Uniform Series of International Lessons, Cycle of 1945-1950.

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Last week the lesson studied was "A People Oppressed." Today, the basic Scripture, Exodus 6-18, tells the story of events from which Jews count time as a nation and race. Here is manifested the power of God for deliverance. Here is also a lesson for any man, reliance upon God as the first step to service and success.

This week Primaries will want to travel "On A Long Journey" with these people. Juniors are a little older and can better understand "God's Help At All Times," even hard times, as He provides all things needful. Intermediates and Seniors would be "Seeing God's Hand in History," for certainly God's hand is here, in a fundamental experience. Young People and Adults will need to follow more closely the great fact of "God's Deliverance of the Oppressed."

Any other method of salvation from the slavery of Egypt might have caused the people to feel that they had gotten themselves the victory.

It was essential that they know of a certainty that the victory belonged to God. Every individual needs to be taught this lesson, that he may say truly, "I will trust, and not be afraid; for the Lord, even the Lord, is my strength." (Isaiah 12:2). Those words comprise the memory verse for the older departments.

Contrast the waning power of the Egyptians and the ascending power of the God of the Israelites. The plagues, in the main, were directed at the so-called gods of the Egyptians. The Israelites' God was supreme. This power found its highest manifestation in a power over life and death. The death of the first born of Egypt and the salvation of the first born of Israel in turn became a type of the salvation from sin through the Christ of the New Testament.

God ruled the sea, and the Israelites went over on dry ground. God provided manna in the wilderness and water from the rock. And these again transcended their immediate usefulness by symbolizing what Christ was to do for those who learn to see God in Him. And their immediate purpose was great, namely, to give confidence and assurance to those people that "the Lord, even the Lord, is my strength."

Moses was led to effect a temporary organization with the elders of the camp. The people needed to be more closely related as a nation of people. They were free in the wilderness from slavery of Egypt, but slaves of a different sort. They needed law and order and government. In obedience to law they could learn true freedom.

When they were conscious of God's providence, then God was ready to reveal more fully His laws. These constitute the lesson for next week, as we are to study "The Laws of a People."

Ridgecrest defeated Cecil's in the Y. M. C. A. City Basketball League at the "Y" by the score of 75 to 28.

The lineup: Ridgecrest Willis (4) Edwards (13) Britton (20) Pence (8) Turner (1)

Cecil's Styles (12) Dale (4) McPeters (6) Bly (4) Owensby (2)

Substitutes: Ridgecrest, Gragg (17), Swangyn (6), Hamby (6), and Brown; for Cecil's, Pierce.

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Moore General Has Been Designated to Provide 400 TB Beds and Patients Have Already Began to Arrive

First Lt. Alfred C. Rice of Chandler, Arizona, in civilian life a lung specialist, has arrived at Moore General Hospital and has been assigned to the new tuberculosis section, Colonel Frank W. Wilson, post commander, announced Saturday.

Colonel Wilson revealed on New Year's Day that Moore General had been designated to provide 400 TB beds and patients have already begun to arrive.

Lt. Rice is no stranger to Moore General, having served in detached service here for six months. Since entering on active extended duty he has served at Starke General, Moore, Oliver General, and at Fort McClellan, Ala.

He took both his bachelor of science and doctor of medicine in the University of Illinois and interned in St. Louis City Hospital from 1930 to 1932. He then engaged in general practice in Tip-ton, Ia., until 1937 when he went to Detroit, Mich. for a 14-month course in chest work in Maybury Sanatorium, Northville, Mich.

From 1938 to 1941, Lt. Rice was with the Alabama State Health Department and specialized in tuberculosis. From there he went to Chandler where he was in general practice until being called to duty.

Moore General's new tuberculosis section will render treatment to servicemen who will be sent here from all sections of the country and from overseas. The section will be a component of the hospital's medical service under Lt. Colonel James M. Kinsman. More than 80 per cent of the hospital's more than 2,000 beds will continue to be devoted to patients suffering with tropical diseases and ailments other than tuberculosis, it was emphasized.

The Saxons were mentioned for the first time by Ptolemy about the middle of the second century.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, while attending Bowdoin, was fined 50 cents for playing cards for money.

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