



OVERNIGHT GUEST

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I: Adam Bruce, department justice operator vacationing in the eastern hills, ran into his former inspector Tope and Mrs. Tope. He recommended that the Tope's spend the night at Dewain's Mill. Later that night he phoned Bruce to come out to the place and get Ned Quill, a state trooper, located nearby.

CHAPTER II: Bee had rented a cottage called Faraway to the Tope's, telling them it had not been occupied since the war. When they entered the cottage Tope saw burnt matches, which he related to him that someone had been sleeping around. He sent his wife out to investigate. Later he asked the Tope's to transfer to another cottage.

CHAPTER III: Tope explained to Mrs. Tope and Quill what made him think something was wrong. He then took up the mattress and showed them a man, dressed in greasy clothes, hands and feet bound and covered with a blanket. Quill went after the district attorney and the medical officer. There was no question but what it was a murderer.

CHAPTER IV: When Mat Cumberland and Dr. Medford arrived, they held a conference and it was decided to leave Tope in charge of the investigation and to move the body to Amasa Dewain's house for further investigation. As they were leaving Mrs. Tope told her husband that she recognized the body as that of Mr. Ledforge, head of New England utilities.

CHAPTER V: Bruce went out to some lime quarries to see if he could locate a stolen car that might have been used by the murderers. He later reported the car had been stolen, although the police did. Mrs. Kell, housekeeper of the owner of the stolen car, had seen driving the car away. She was acquainted with Ledforge.

CHAPTER VI: Tope found out that Mrs. Kell was likely in the bottom of the lime quarries in the stolen car. Mr. Holdom had disappeared, and his employer had been found in a Connecticut hospital unconscious from head wounds. Check on the tracks leading away from the quarries indicated that they belonged to Kell—who had been with Holdom and Ledforge.

CHAPTER VII

Tope exclaimed in a mild exasperation: "Didn't the doctor know who he was? Holdom must have had letters, labels in his clothes, something. A doctor that will keep an unconscious man for three days without trying to find out who he is and let his people know, needs looking into, Mat!"

"Holdom told his office he'd had a smash-up," Cumberland volunteered. "Smash-up! Smash-up!" Tope repeated exasperatedly. "That's a lie, Mat! He and Ledforge started up here together, with Kell driving. Ledforge came back to his office Monday morning with no word of a smash-up! Kell came home with a word of a smash-up! The car showed no signs of a smash-up! It doesn't make sense, Mat."

"Holdom told his office he'd be here tomorrow," said Cumberland. Tope looked up at him. "If he was conscious in this doctor's hospital, didn't telephone from New York Saturday?" he said.

"Telephone?" Cumberland echoed. "Some one telephoned!" Tope reminded him irritably. "Telephoned the police at Ridgecomb, and said he was Holdom and that his coupe had been stolen!"

"Holdom must know something!" Cumberland said. "I'll send for him, get him up here, as soon as he is able."

Tope nodded. "Of course. I guess he'd better send Dane," he decided. "Dane, as soon as Holdom can get up, bring him up here. He's a material witness, anyway. Make him come."

Dane protested: "No need of my going. Any policeman—" But Tope urged: "Needs a responsible man with a head on his shoulders, son." He hesitated. "Mat," he apologized, "I'm speaking out of turn. After all, this is your show."

"That's all right," Cumberland interjected. "Joe, you do what Tope says."

Dane insisted stubbornly: "I ought to be here. Keep in touch with me."

Tope touched his arm. "We want to know more about this doctor down here, son," he declared. "Maybe he's one of the gang. You look him over, ask him a few questions, size him up, see what you think of him."

So Dane was flattered into consenting. "Well, that's so," he agreed. "I'd better do that. I'll check up on him, and bring Holdom up. I'll see what I can get out of him on the way."

But Tope objected to this, and in some violence. "Don't you dare!" he commanded. "Don't you holdom anything. Just tell him we've got orders to bring him up here. Let him stew in his own juice till we're ready to talk to him. He's been unconscious since Saturday, there's a lot he doesn't know. The time you get him back here, maybe we'll know more than we do now. Be able to ask him some questions he can't answer."

And he added, remembering: "By the way, Joe, I want you to find out the things for me. Ask Medford what gas from the exhaust, and whether it could get into the rumble seat, and whether this dead man had breathed any of it and whether he was drugged. And see if you

can find out where Mrs. Kell and Ledforge went last week-end."

Joe and Cumberland turned toward the door; but there they met Bee Dewain. The girl's face was white and strained, she would have spoken. Tope, with a sudden violence of words, urged Dane and Cumberland toward the car; and only when they were gone did he turn to Bee.

"Now, Miss Dewain," he said gravely, "I judge you've got bad news?"

She nodded. "I telephoned Ed Priest's camp," she said unhappily. "Mr. Eberly's not there. They don't expect him. They haven't heard from him."

Tope whistled softly. "That's where he planned to go?"

"Yes, that's where he always goes. That's where he said he was going."

Tope wagged his head. "Child," he said gently, "I hadn't ought to have asked you to telephone up there. It's just a bad habit of mine, working on a business like this, whenever anyone tells me anything, to check up and see if it's so. I've no notion that Mr. Eberly has anything to do with this. As far as wondering where he is—" He chuckled, touched her arm. "Don't ever wonder about a fisherman," he urged. "You can't rely on them any more than you can on trout in the brook. . . . Did you think to fetch that letter?"

It was in her hand. "Here it is," she said.

Tope unfolded the single sheet, he looked at the letterhead, then read the scrawled words.

Dear Carl—
How about some fishing this week? Trout ought to take hold. Shall we try the pond? I'll be home sometime Wednesday afternoon. Come about half-past four. That will let us catch the evening rise. You'd better plan to stay the night in case we keep at it till dark. No need of answering this, because if you're not there by four-thirty, I'll go ahead alone.

Here's luck!
Leddly

The old man asked: "Carl is Mr. Eberly's name?"

"Yes."

"Ledforge wrote this, eh? That the way he signs himself?"

"Yes." She watched him almost fearfully.

And he returned the letter to her, touched her hand. "Now, don't you worry," he urged again. "Mr. Eberly's all right." And he asked: "Earl Priddy has disappeared, has he?"

Bee answered him in some surprise: "Why, yes. How did you know? Mrs. Priddy wanted him to come and peel potatoes for supper, but he's gone! Just simply vanished into thin air!"

Tope nodded, chuckling: "Earl's out spreading the news," he assured her. "I guess the excitement is due to start," he predicted. "Country folks have tongues like a lot of dominoes. You set one of them wagging and you wag them all."

"I'll go after him," Bee promised. "Find him, make him be still." She hurried away.

Tope sat down on the edge of the bed. "I'm getting old," he confessed. "Going to catch a nap before supper-time."

He lay down, and Mrs. Tope covered him over and made him comfortable.

As Tope had guessed, Earl Priddy was busy. When Joe had asked for Inspector Tope, Earl was startled into a curiosity that would no longer be denied. An hour later, after various investigations which included a secret survey of Amasa's farmhouse, he came almost at a run to the store in Madderson village. He went directly to the telephone and called the District Attorney's office in North Madderson and

"Sh-h-h!" he whispered. "Sh-h-h!"

asked for Joe Dane. Of Cumberland himself, Earl stood in some awe; but not of Joe Dane.

Joe was not there!

"Well, you tell him Earl Priddy's got some news for him," Earl said vehemently. "Something mighty important about this case out here. He'll know what I mean. You tell him to see me, quick's he can!"

And only then did he turn to recite his tale to the audience that while he phoned had been quick to gather close behind him.

While Earl thus brought the news to Madderson village that there was a dead man in the small back room at Amasa Dewain's, Inspector Tope was still asleep, Mrs. Tope on guard beside him. He did not stir till the supper-bell roused him; and a little later he and Mrs. Tope came down to the Mill. Bee met them apologetically.

"I don't know whether we'll get much supper, or whether it will be fit to eat," she explained. "Earl didn't get back till a little while ago, and Mrs. Priddy had to peel her own potatoes. She may take it out on us!"

Tope guessed: "Priddy probably went to spread the news."



And when the others appeared, it was immediately apparent that if they did not know the truth, they at least suspected many things. Vade stalked in and maintained a stony silence; Mrs. Murrell and her husband ate without a word, their heads bent low over their plates. And then they heard some small uproar from the kitchen, heard Mrs. Priddy's irate tones.

"You get out of here and stay out! If you can't be here when you're needed, you needn't show up at mealtimes!"

They heard Earl protest, heard him overborne, and heard then the slam of the outer door. Bee rose uneasily. "Well, I think we're all finished," she decided. "Shall we go into the other room?"

She herself went to the kitchen, presumably to mollify Mrs. Priddy. The others moved into the living room; but Mrs. Murrell without a word, in a silence that was significant, led Isaac and the twins away. Vade followed. Adam and the Inspector and Mrs. Tope were left alone.

When Bee returned from the kitchen, her eyes were troubled.

"Mrs. Priddy says Earl knows all about it," she confessed. "He saw the dead man up at Uncle Amasa's—peeped in the window." And she said with a rueful gesture: "I don't know how he knows, but he told Mrs. Priddy the dead man was found in Faraway!"

She added, looking at Adam, her eyes twinkling faintly: "Earl claims he has some important information that he's going to give Joe Dane!"

So if you and Inspector Tope don't hurry, Joe will be the one to read the riddle, after all!"

Adam grinned. "Joe couldn't read the alphabet in large type," he told her confidently. "And Earl wouldn't know information if he saw it."

"I'm afraid you've always underrated Joe," she retorted. "But then you don't know much about real criminals. You've spent your time annoying innocent men!"

Mrs. Tope watched them, amused; and Adam protested: "Bee, I never claimed Eberly had committed any crime, done anything wrong. But the bank had to be closed to protect all the depositors. Those Utilities bonds—" He checked himself, looked at Tope in a startled way. "Inspector, I forgot about that. It was Ledforge stuff that ruined Eberly's bank. Do you suppose Eberly—"

Bee uttered an indignant exclamation: "Adam Bruce, if you try to pretend that Mr. Eberly—"

Adam shook his head; he grinned at her. "No, Bee," he said. "You're a stubborn young hussy, and no one can beat any sense into you; but Eberly's all right, Tope. He threw all his own money into the bank, made every sacrifice possible to help save the depositors." He looked at the girl in sudden concern.

"Bee," he asked, "you don't think it possible that he would—" "No, no," she whispered. "He's too—"

She was interrupted. The door burst open, violently. Here was Earl Priddy, his eyes wide and goggling with excitement, his hands shaking. He leaped into the room, and banged the door behind him, and set his shoulders against it, his hands outspread to press hard against the panels.

"Sh-h-h!" he whispered. "Sh-h-h!" Bee said reproachfully: "Earl, you're drunk! Don't be a nuisance! Go out of doors!"

"Not me," said Earl Priddy hotly. "I don't go out there again tonight! No sir, not me."

Some one pushed at the door from without, and he fought to hold it shut. The door bulged, and Adam

leaped that way. There was suddenly a weapon in the young man's hand. He thrust Priddy aside, and Earl stumbled and fell, and Adam jerked wide the door, his gun ready, expecting anything.

But he saw only Vade, and Isaac Murrell, and Mrs. Murrell and the twins clustering curiously there, pale and alarmed. They recoiled before Adam's weapon; and Earl, scrambling to his feet, cried: "Come in! Come in, quick, everybody! Shut the door! Lock it! There's a man in Faraway!"

Half a dozen people had heard Earl's announcement. Tope regretted this; but regret did not impose on him inaction. He said briefly: "Adam!" And with young Bruce beside him, he started up the drive toward Faraway.

There was never in Tope any particular capacity for fear; if he knew danger lay ahead, he was not above taking precautions, for there was no arrogance of folly in this man. But tonight he had—or seemed to have—no feeling that it would be dangerous to surprise the intruder in Faraway. He made haste to come to the cabin; and before Adam could intervene, he had thrown the door open and stepped firmly in.

Night had by this time almost fully fallen, and the interior of the cabin was dark. Yet there was light enough for them to see the bed—that bed under which a body once had been bestowed—all in disorder, with blankets and coverlet and mattress in a heap upon the floor; and a man, with a lighted match in his hand, staring down through the springs at the empty space below.

The man, at their entrance, whirled, and the match went out; but Adam snapped on the lights. Then Balsar Vade came up on the porch behind them, and Tope turned and saw him, said curtly:

"Vade, go tell Miss Dewain to call Mat Cumberland. Tell him to come here." He added: "And Vade, don't you come back!"

The violinist moved reluctantly away along the path; and Tope closed the door. Adam Bruce, with a business-like promptness, had held this intruder here at gun's point while he made a brief search of the other's garments. He turned as the door closed to say:

"No gun on him, Inspector!"

The man standing here before them without speech was tall and bulky, with heavy black mustache, and a box-like head set on massive shoulders. His clothes were plain. His hands, the Inspector noted, were blunt-fingered and heavy, with a fine network of dark lines about the finger-tips, like grease on ingrained. Tope's attention fixed on those hands; he nodded as though satisfied.

"Hello, Kell," he said.

The big man twitched as though some secret agony tormented him, but he made no move nor sound.

"What are you doing here?" Tope asked.

The answer came stammeringly. "I—wanted a place to sleep. I'm hunting work, walking—"

Tope looked at the other's shoes, now wet with dew, though they had been faintly dusty. Then Adam touched the Inspector's arm, whispered in his ear. Tope nodded.

"Of course," he assented impatiently. "This is Kell, all right." He faced the mustached man again.

"Go on," he said then. "You're out of work, tramping the country, looking for a job; you thought you might steal a night's sleep here. You have no money. Is that your story?"

And when the other did not answer, Tope said: "Adam, turn out his pockets!"

(Continued next week)

Key City Wins Two From Swannanoa

Black Mountain high school won a double-header from Swannanoa high school Friday night. The boys' score was 25 to 22 and the girls' 19 to 9.

Girls' lineup:
Swannanoa (9) Black Mtn. (19)
F—Gibbs (1) Simmons (4)
F—Webb (2) Swayngim (10)
F—Edwards Rondthaler (3)
G—LeMasters McDougle
G—Lytle Fortune
G—Nanney A. Burnett

Subs: Swannanoa, Whitaker 1, Owenbey, Wilkerson 1, Ingle 4, Ammons, Ramsey, Jones, Hensley, Black Mountain—Anders, M. Burnett 1, Goodman 1.

Boys' lineup:
Swannanoa (22) Black Mtn. (25)
F—Burgess Willis (8)
F—Strahia (8) Edwards (4)
C—Sides (8) Britain (8)
G—Mills (2) Turner (2)
G—Rainwater (4) Pence (3)
Subs: Swannanoa—McClure. Black Mountain—Gragg.

Beer Taxes Increased

Beer taxes yielded the State of North Carolina \$3,287,793.50 in taxes for the calendar year 1945, according to the North Carolina Committee-United States Brewers Foundation.

This is an increase of \$352,000 over the amount collected in 1944 and is the first time that the \$3,000,000 mark has been topped since beer was re-legalized in 1933.

Cattle Industry Tends Toward Grassy Areas

The cattle industry tends to follow closely those areas where grass grows naturally and where its production is encouraged. Nutritious grazing is the foundation on which successful cattle production can be developed. The cattle industry comprises a number of distinct enterprises, meeting therefore, a wide variety of conditions. Such enterprises include the production of milk-fat or feeder calves, feeder steer production, baby beef production, the finishing of calves as ultrababy beefs; the finishing of steers on pasture and in feed-lot, and the production of registered stock for the improvement of commercial herds.

All beef cattle enterprises provide an excellent method for marketing forage such as grass, hay, silage and stover. The type of beef cattle enterprise will be determined largely by the farming area, crops produced, markets and experience, financial position and preference of farmer.

The availability of land and size of farm are factors which mostly determine the adaptation of a beef cattle enterprise. The production of cattle also enables farmers to make use of otherwise idle lands which often can be made to return an income in grass. Cattle production by diverting lands from clean cultivated crops provides an effective method of controlling erosion. The abundance of grazing varies widely by type-of-farming areas and soil types.

Indian Camps Believed Cause of Mountain Balds

Altitude (timber line) is not the answer why Appalachian mountain tops from 2,000 to 6,000 feet high will not support trees for both Mt. Mitchell and Clingman's Dome, both nearly 7,000 feet high, are timbered to the top. In 1933, W. A. Gates of Louisiana State university, discovered twig gall wasps laying their eggs in oak trees on mountain tops, which eventually killed the timber, and so concluded that the wasps are the real barbers of the balds.

But Dr. B. W. Wells, botanist at North Carolina State college, sticks to his theory that certain mountain tops were favored camping spots of Indians, and that they continually burned off the tops, to furnish space for their villages, and also to provide themselves with unobstructed lookout points. He points out that the balds are always gently sloping tops, none of them rugged or precipitous, and that usually, too, they are on the southern (protected) side of slopes, and that often strong flowing springs are nearby. In other words, they were ideal tenting grounds for the aborigines.

Dr. Wells continues that after a natural fire in the mountains, the arboreal succession is of "fire cherry," which under repeated fire succeeds itself in basal shoot regeneration. Thus, he concludes, natural fire itself cannot explain the balds, and hence the grass sub-climax must result from human (Indian) interference.

Repainting Metal

When repainting metal which still retains all or part of an old finish coating, it is highly important that all bare or worn spots be cleaned down to the metal by wirebrushing, sandpapering, or sand blasting, and that all loose or scaling paint be similarly removed. The bare spots, after cleaning, should be treated like new metal with a priming coat and any remaining glossy surfaces of old paint should be rubbed dull with sandpaper to promote adhesion of the new paint, which should be applied only when the surface to be coated is perfectly dry and when the temperature is between 50 and 70 degrees. Care in avoiding the application of paint to surfaces which are too cold is especially important in the case of metal, to insure permanent adhesion and freedom from peeling, scaling, or cracking of the new coating.

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