

Tribute (cont'd from pg 5) Agnes as the lady who always gave the children cookies from the batch she brought to church bazaars and bake sales, specially for that purpose. How the children would miss her.

Pearl Grayson, from the security of her well ordered life, felt that Agnes had been foolish to stick by Charlie Turley all these years. Why she had let that man turn her from one of the nicest girls with a quick mind and ready laugh, to a humourless drudge, was beyond her, and now it was too late.

With his usual somewhat distracted air, Peter Grayson rose from his chair and went to look out the window. He too remembered Agnes, the girl who, had she said yes, would have been here tonight instead of Pearl. He wondered if Pearl knew that Agnes and he --- but no --- Pearl thought she had been first with him always. How many knew that Pearl was a romantic under that brusque exterior, he wondered to himself. She had her dreams and he wouldn't shatter them.

Whether it was his training -- Edward Grayson was a Social Anthropologist -- or whether he was just by nature, an observer, the younger Grayson was keenly watching the reactions of the group to Hilda's story. He too remembered Agnes, and for a moment his eyes wandered to his father who stood back to him gazing out the window. He remembered a packet of letters he had found one day while going through his father's cabinet looking for an old family diary. Letters from a much younger Agnes to a student Peter Grayson. What was his father feeling now? Also he thought of the man, who had as a boy been his friend, Frank Turley. Many the after school snack he had eaten with Frank, while Agnes heaped more cookies onto the plate. She had been like a second mother to him then.

So deep were they in thought, that it was several seconds after Hilda had finished her account of the afternoon before anyone spoke. They all realized at the same time that she had stopped talking, and rushed to fill the void.

"What did she die of?" and "What did the police say?" --- "Were they long in coming?" --- "It was Jeremy Fegan who came as Coroner -- I thought he was retired?"

It was at that juncture that Gwen Portney appeared in the door way. "Would you like me to serve dinner now, Mrs. Hamstead?"

The gathering restored to propriety at this banal inquiry. The guests looked around at each other, yet never actually meeting each other's eyes. Hilda set her glass on the little tray by the decanter, and the guests followed suit. Then offering her arm to William, she led the way to the dining-room. "We are

all such old friends that I have left the seating to you -- with the exception of William -- I hope," she looked up at her escort with a smile, "I hope you won't mind acting as host?"

He responded with gracious enthusiasm, "Of course my dear. I should be delighted."

In spite of the events of the day, those gathered at table, could not but enjoy the food set before them. The pre-dinner sherry had helped to hone their appetites, and because there had been time to sip two glasses, had mellowed their unease at Agnes's demise. Over the soup; which was a clear beef bouillon with just a hint of Port wine; they quizzed Hilda about Agnes's appearance, and wondered at how Hilda could have missed the fact that the woman was dead.

Gwen appeared as the last spoon was set down, and removed the soup dishes. Conversation became desultory as the young woman brought in and served the next course. Hilda explained that the white fish fillets that now reposed, poached to perfection, on beds of rice and chopped parsley, had been delivered fresh to her door that morning. She went on, that she suspected it was caught over quota, but with the local fishery under such pressure from the sport fisherman, she felt quite blameless about buying it. After all these people had to make a living.

On young Miss Portney's departure, the conversation turned again to Agnes's death. Pearl reminded everyone of the work Agnes had done in the community, from fund raising for the Boy Scouts to her years on the Altar Guild. They mused over who would replace her -- if anyone could. Edward and Amy supposed that the children would miss her the most, giving Pearl pause to think of how she had been less than tolerant of Agnes over the years and had been somewhat instrumental in the Turleys being dropped from their social activities. Hilda too felt that she had done little to at least include Agnes in those undertakings that were attended by women alone.

William observed that with Agnes gone, what little restraint there had been on Charlie's drinking was gone with her. Charlie had of late years become something of a public nuisance when in his cups. Remembering how his father's drinking had upset Frank, Edward wondered aloud if Frank would maintain much of an attachment to Charlie, adding, that if ever a father and son were unlike, those two were. The image of Charlie and Frank and their total lack of similarities so held his thoughts that he completely missed the sudden ashen pallor that robbed his father's face of colour, or how quickly

his mother moved the conversation on to a different aspect of the tragedy.

Through the main course of minted roast leg of lamb, beautifully browned new potatoes and broccoli sprinkled with lemon-butter, what could have caused Agnes's death held their attention. The effects of the wines that were served with each course manifesting in several flashes of macabre wit. William's contribution to the conversation was that there was certainly a fitting connection now, between Agnes' nickname from grade school, 'Agnus Dei', and her place of death, for was she not now truly a 'lamb of God'? This pun, however poorly chosen, did lighten the mood around the table. For the rest of the main course the older members of the group reminisced about their youth together.

From this conversation emerged a picture of Agnes Hill, as she had been then. An image of a girl who had been full of life, loved to go to parties and dances with the set they all belonged to, and who had planned to work for a year to earn enough money to attend university and prepare for a career as a school teacher. Why she had suddenly married Charlie Turley, who she had gone out with only a few times in their senior year of High School, was a mystery. It couldn't have been because of Frank, for everyone could tell by the size of him when he was born, that he had been premature. Funny, he was the only child that she and Charlie had had.

For her to go that suddenly, it must have been her heart.

The phone rang just as Gwen came in to remove their plates. She hurried to the kitchen to answer it. On returning she spoke quietly to Hilda. "That was Dr. Fegan. I told him you had guest and asked if I could take a message --- he said he was coming over to speak to you --- that you wouldn't mind, being as you had company and all." The young maid-of-all-work ended her speech on an apologetically questioning note.

"That's all right, dear. When you bring in the desert, we'll set a place for him," she looked around the table, "Perhaps there between the rector and Mr. Grayson." The two men moved their chairs far enough apart to allow the placement of a third chair between them.

The desert was duly served, a place set for the good doctor, and the conversation resumed. This time between spoonfuls of lime sherbet garnished with pink ladyfingers, and sips of a dry sauterne. The discussion now winding down, or perhaps inhibited by, the imminent arrival of Jeremy Fegan, who, although older than the men of the group, was **Tribute** (cont'd pg. 7)