

*Tribut cont'd from pg. 9*

killed Agnes who was bigger than me."

"That's the one fly in my ointment, or should I say insecticide. It would take a high concentration to kill an adult, but a combination of two or more compounds might be sufficient cause a fatality." He shook his head, "I just don't know, but that's my best theory."

Hilda thought for a moment. "You should speak to Peter Grayson. He's been studying the toxicology of insecticides. Several of the insect pests we've been encountering of late are resistant to the sprays available, so he has been experimenting with new and more insect specific sprays."

Jeremy's eyes met hers gravely, "I wish you wouldn't have told me that."

Hilda looked at him in bewilderment, then what he was hinting at struck her, "Good heavens Jeremy! Peter is the very last person who would do a thing like that."

"Perhaps, but what of Pearl?" Jeremy suggested. "For all she is a good woman, she would do anything to protect her family's good name. The thought of Frank being Agnes and Peter's child must have preyed on her mind for years. Consider how she managed to cut Agnes off from all of you who went to school with her. You were the only one who maintained a regular contact with her and that was through the Altar Guild."

"But Pearl knows next to nothing about chemical insecticides or herbicides. She is devoutly organic in her gardening practices. She insisted that Peter use only chemicals with an extremely short life, and only as a last resort," Hilda protested. "Why we tease her that some of her old recipes for insecticides are more lethal to the environment than any of the new ones. You know...things with copper sulphate and such in it. Even steeped rhubarb or tobacco leaves make a deadly poison, and they are some of the ingredients for her sprays and dips."

"You gardeners use the damnedest concoctions," Jeremy mused.

Just then the waitress stopped at their table. "Would you and Mrs. Hamstead like to order now, Dr. Fegan?"

Jeremy looked at Hilda with his eye-brows raised questioningly.

"Oh, yes. I noticed the specials on the menu board as I came in. Is the soup du jour Priscilla's cream of carrot and cauliflower?" The waitress nodded in the affirmative. "Good I'd like a bowl of that and a Caesar salad. ... Oh yes, and a pot of tea." Hilda ordered.

"Sounds good to me," Jeremy agreed, "and I'll share Hilda's pot of tea."

"It won't be a minute," the girl promised hurrying off with their order.

A ripple of chair scuffing and a murmur of voices passed through the tea room as a woman made her way to Hilda and Jeremy's table in the corner.

"There you are. I just realized I was hungry and knew you two wouldn't mind my coming to join you. I come in here quite often," Dorothea Salter gushed as she took an empty chair at their table. "You know how lonely it is, always eating alone." she added with a sigh. For a moment Hilda almost believed her and felt some sympathy for the woman. "Oh but Hilda wouldn't understand, she's never alone...if it's not Will Thorn, its the girls from the bridge club."

"Well its good that you found someone you knew well enough to be sure of a welcome then, isn't it," Hilda observed rather testily. "We've ordered."

Dorothea raised her hand to summon the waitress. Catching the girls eye, she trilled, "I'll have whatever they are having."

"Was that a Greek salad, with feta cheese and added olives we ordered, Jeremy?" Hilda asked innocently. At Dorothea's gasp of horror, she relented, "No I guess it was the Caesar with plenty of garlic."

The good doctor looked away briefly as he schooled his face into more serious lines at this bit of goading done by Hilda. "Well garlic is good for us. Keeps us young," he offered reassuringly.

"And I suppose you two were discussing dear Agnes?" Dorothea recovered her natural inquisitiveness. "As I said to Hilda. A terrible thing. Makes you wonder who will be next."

Hilda would have liked to suggest a likely candidate, but instead, "You knew Agnes well did you?" she asked.

"She was behind me in school, but we've kept in touch just as you have, with each other," Dorothea said with sweet agreeability.

Jeremy took a sip from his glass of water, and choked, continuing to cough as he intercepted Hilda's angry glare. "She didn't go out much socially except to help raise funds for various causes. You'd have thought that Charlie was cause enough to keep her home."

"Perhaps that's why she went out occasionally," Jeremy commented quietly.

"You always were a kind man." Dorothea laid a hand on his arm in gratitude.

"Hi there Mrs. Salter. Hardly see you any more," the waitress said cheerily, putting the tray of food down at the empty place and setting their dishes around. Hilda and Jeremy exchanged knowing looks.

"You must be mistaken, dear. I was in here twice last week," Dorothea maintained, not willing to leave well enough alone.

"That's odd," the waitress said looking truly puzzled, "I'm sure I'd have remembered your being in."

"I'm sure she would have too," Hilda muttered.

"What was that Hilda?" Dorothea quizzed.

"You should try this soup. It's delicious. But you must have had it before, so you know that already." So saying, Hilda put a spoonful to her lips and sipped delicately.

Conversation generally centred on the quality of the lunch. Dorothea questioned the freshness of the Romaine lettuce that went into the salad. She also wondered how fresh the salad actually was, for the croutons were a bit soggy. Hilda

*Tribute cont'd pg. 11*