

Tribute cont'd from pg. 6

"What if it wasn't Agnes the killer wanted to kill?" He watched a fly buzz around the room, alighting here and there at random until it came to rest on the toe of his booted foot. "What if Mrs. Hamstead was the killer? She's certainly able to plan such a crime."

Jeremy's eyes gleamed with a sudden interest. "And do you have a motive? She's the least likely candidate for murderer. No, you'll have to do better than that."

Fairchild nodded.

"Well, I guess we aren't getting any place just sitting here. When you hear from the lab, let me know." Jeremy rose from his chair. "Take care."

"You too!" Fairchild's feet hit the floor with a thump as he sat up. "Why do I get the feeling that you have a theory of your own?"

"I'll let you know if anything develops," Jeremy said, then closed the door quietly behind himself.

The hospital was abustle with morning rounds, clinics in the out-patient wing, the emergency waiting room awash with the sufferers of the usual summer complaints, from colds to broken limbs, to children with rashes that could be poison ivy or could be measles. Jeremy spoke to those he knew as he made his way to the Medical Records office. He had known from the full parking lots, that the hospital would be busy, and had given thanks that he was no longer actively involved in the process of curing the ills of the world.

Medical Records was, by comparison, an oasis of calm. The three typists were busy with their head sets on, transcribing the doctors case notes and didn't even notice his entry into their domain. He walked on through to the office of the head of the records department and tapped gently on the door frame.

Joyce Bradford looked up from her desk. "Oh good, Dr. Fegan, I was just going to have you paged." she said, putting down her pen and closing the file she had been working on.

"Something come in that's of interest?"

She picked up a computer printout from the desk. "You know we have all our records on the computer... well last summer we had a research team from Queens come in and set up a hospital records programme they had been developing. This hospital, because of its small size was used to assess the programme.... you don't want to know all this," she laughed self-consciously, "but it really is a very exciting programme, with many applications. Well I had the computer search our records for the symptoms that you gave me and pull out the names for those cases." She handed him the list. "This is the list it came up with."

He looked at the dates, "Good heavens, this goes back nearly twenty years."

"But that's not all." She picked up a file and handed it to him. "These were faxed through from Leamington. They have a good set of records there because of a study on pesticide use that has been on-going for several years."

"Thanks Joyce," Jeremy said, his voice full of gratitude. "I could kiss you, you've done such a good job."

The woman blushed, but laughed at his comment. "Go on with you. I like playing detective now and then too."

Back in his own office a few minutes later, Jeremy began to go through the list from Weavers' Mills hospital. Some of the cases he remembered, for there had been an obvious connection between the illness and the pesticide cause. But some of the cases were linked only by the similarity of several of the symptoms. As he went through the list, he put a line through the ones that he knew to have no bearing on the present case.

"Thorn"... the name fairly leaped from the list.... Beth Thorn. Four of the five symptoms that he had requested be matched, were the same. For a moment his dislike of William almost over-came his sense of fairness. Then he returned to the list and circled the cases where three or more of the symptoms matched, and wrote down those names.

He picked up the phone and dialed the number for Medical Records. "Mrs. Bradford, please.... Joyce, would you bring me a copy of the records for the following cases...." He read off the case numbers and the names. "Thanks."

As he waited, he tapped his pen on the desk, his mind on the peculiar coincidence of the names. He picked up the phone again and dialed an outside number. Again he waited for the phone to be answered.

"Hello.. Hilda?" relief tinged his voice. "Good, you're home."

"Well of course I am. I do stay home occasionally," Hilda retorted.

"Now don't get on your high horse old girl. Just stay there until I can get over to see you. I have some things to do here, but I should be over shortly after lunch," he explained.

"William is coming over after lunch and we're going to meet with the rest of the garden club executive to discuss the awarding of the Gardener of the Year Awards. I can't put it off," Hilda protested. "I have to take the proofs for the local history to the publisher today too. William was going to drive me to Kingston after the meeting."

"What time is your meeting?"

Hilda could be heard leafing through the day planner that always sat by the phone. "Here it is. I knew it was an early one, because the publishers close at 5."

"Come on Hilda! What time is the meeting?" there was a hint of exasperation in Jeremy's voice.

"It's at 1:30."

"Never mind the meeting. Phone Willy and tell him that something has come up with the publishing of that book and you have to get to Kingston earlier to discuss it. Tell him I have to go down anyway to pick up a report that I sent to the lab there. One that I want to pick up personally...." he paused, "and don't phone him until 1 o'clock. I'll be there by 1:15 at the latest." Before she could counter with an argument, he broke the connection.

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