



LOUISVILLE BRIDGE MURDER*

By B. K. Barry

A Charles Earl Short Mystery, Featuring the Earl Family Brain Trust

(For an interactive reading experience, please read with a smartphone equipped with a QR code reader in hand—you might even read it with a child or grandchild and have a fine interactive, intergenerational, reading experience together!)

**“Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres,
quarum unam incolunt Belgae,
aliam Aquitani,
tertiam qui ipsorum lingua Celtae, nostra Galli appellantur.”**

Caesar, Gallic Wars

Arrival in Louisville

“Charles, this will make the third time we’ve been to Louisville for a conference of some sort,” commented Judy Earl to her mathematician, bridge-playing husband. “But, the first two times were for math meetings, remember?” noted Charles “I hope this will be more fun! American Bridge Congress (ABC) tournaments are usually carefully orchestrated events!”

With that thought in mind, Charles Earl deftly pulled the car into the valet parking area of their hotel, The Gallia, with its towers overlooking the Ohio River on the north and the rest of the historic city of Louisville on the other compass points.



“Judy,” Charles explained to his wife, “the hotel (as was Gaul) is divided into three parts. Two guest towers, the Belgian and the Celtic, and residential apartments in the House of Aquitaine. I think you will enjoy the feature they have linking the two guest towers!” But, first, let’s go to the lobby and check in; if our room isn’t quite ready, it should soon be set to go.”

In the Lobby of The Gallia

“They said it would be ready in a few minutes, so let’s wait and see—have a seat, Judy ”the handsome mathematician motioned to his wife. As the couple sat on the lobby sofa, other bridge players began to enter the scene and queued up at the hotel registration desk. “Charles, do you know that diminutive woman over there?” queried Judy, “she seems to be making quite a ruckus—I think I’ll walk over and see what’s happening.” Charles laughed to himself; his wife’s insatiable natural curiosity had gotten them into interesting adventures in many different venues. He hoped that perhaps life would simply be a calm adventure of bridge hands at this tournament. “Actually, Judy, I do know who they are; they are not particularly friends of mine, but she is ‘Eleanor’ (an extremely wealthy and powerful woman) and he is ‘Cass’ (her husband whom she maligns and ridicules on a regular basis)—they are ‘characters’ as I recall,” Charles noted in an understated fashion.

“Listen to me you idiotic pipsqueak, I always have the Royal Suite. I don’t care if the King of Prussia did show up unexpectedly....and I don’t believe you...that’s a town in Pennsylvania...don’t give me that hogwash....I WANT the Royal Suite. I deserve it; you have no right to give it to anyone else!” Eleanor sniped at an overworked young man wearing a hotel uniform. “Ma’am” offered the registration desk worker, “we are prepared instead to let you have a lush apartment in the House of Aquitaine—the view of the River is better from there than it is even from the Royal Suite; the apartment also has more square footage than that Suite and has a better kitchen with a full-sized refrigerator/freezer. You could make elegant delicacies for your guests...it is truly a gorgeous place. Furthermore, it is close to our magnificent gym atop one of the guest towers. You would be

able to look down not only on the Ohio River as you do your daily workout, but also on the apartment building. This deluxe apartment's cost is about double that of the Royal Suite, but because you have been inconvenienced, we would let you have the apartment for the same cost as the Suite." "Eleanor, honey bunch," Cass purred, "that sounds wonderful; let's accept that offer." "I don't know what you know about much of anything, you worm," retorted Eleanor, "a hole in the ground is where you belong. Independent of what you say, I am willing to accept this feeble offer but under the following condition. It must be the case that no smoker has stayed in that apartment. I will not immerse myself in someone else's smoky stench; naturally, though, I plan to smoke." "Madam, this is a smoke-free hotel; we do not allow guests to smoke in guest rooms, apartments, or public areas. If they do so, and we find out, they are charged a substantial fine," the clerk told Eleanor. "So, what's the cost of the smoking penalty, per day?" demanded Eleanor. "It's 1000 dollars per day," the young man said. "Cass," ordered Eleanor, "pay him upfront in cash for our 10 day stay...you easily have that in the allowance I gave you this morning. Young man, I'll need a receipt." Cass dutifully peeled off 10,000 dollars from his roll of bills and handed them to the shocked clerk, who looked as if he wanted to rescind his kind offer on the discounted apartment price. Eleanor stormed out of the lobby with Cass following an acceptable number of paces behind her.

"Charles, did you hear all that?" asked Judy. "How could I miss it; indeed, characters," said Charles. "While you were watching them," he continued, "I checked on the status of our room. You can imagine that all this commotion has left the hotel staff a bit unsettled. Anyway, it will be an hour or so before we can check in to our room. I gave the clerk your smartphone number. They will phone us when the room is ready," Charles told Judy—"now, let's go have some fun while we wait." He loved to show Judy new and exciting places; she pounced all over them.

In the Conservatory

"Charles," gasped Judy, "this is fabulous! Look at the giant plants, with huge broad leaves, that shield the greenhouse-like effect that could come

from having this glass three-story connector of the two guest towers. I just love it—I could stay here all day!” Charles knew that his wife would like the elevated, multi-story conservatory that linked the two guest towers of the hotel on the second floor; he noted that so far she had only noticed the plants. “Judy,” he said nonchalantly, “did you see the bar? It’s part of the Alma Mater Bar and Grill franchise system. I set it up a few months ago; it runs in conjunction with the Casino over there on the side where you enter the other tower.” Charles knew that Judy would love to see that the Alma Mater chain had an outlet in The Gallia. Charles and Judy owned the chain that was named to honor Judy’s mother, Alma, a great French chef. In addition, it honored the long-standing academic traditions of both of their families. Charles was heavily involved in the business end of things and often traveled to investigate new sites and hire local staff to help get them started.

“Ooooh,” shouted Judy, “and look at the fish in the bar...not just a few goldfish like in a doctor’s office, but it looks like a 100 foot aquarium with some fish as long as a foot, plump and well-fed; other shiny multi-colored tropical fish; look, there’s a catfish. Can we sit at the bar right now....please, please?!! I’ll have a glass of house red and watch the fish swimming underneath my glass. Wow, I’ve never seen anything like this!” “Judy, you have not yet asked me why the bar has a connection with the casino,” Charles noted. “Oh, OK, Charles, why does the bar have a connection with the casino,” Judy obliged in a perfunctory manner.

“David,” Charles called out to the handsome young man behind the bar, “I’m sure you remember us from other times we have been at Alma Mater pubs elsewhere? Please explain to my wife what your job is here and why you were brought, just recently, to this particular franchise.” “Oh, yes, Dr. Earl, of course I remember both of you,” David replied. “Naturally,” he continued, “I can help with tending bar when there is a crowd, but the main reason I am here is to run and supervise the ‘fish races’ that we hold every day. You see, we are capitalizing on the general reputation of Louisville as a racing town. Notice that the bar is shaped like a racetrack; it is a loop. The fish swim around the whole circuit. The casino over there is called

Pisces Pieces; they will sell you markers to put down on the bar as a way to place bets on particular fish when the race is on. Do you see that every three feet there is a clear curtain that can roll down into the water, inside the tank? We hold the racing group within one of these pods. Then, we throw food into the next pod, open the curtain, and the fish race to the food. We do this opening and food placing sequentially around the loop. Naturally, we want to keep the racing fish somewhat hungry. Short races send the fish around once. Longer races go around more times; like horse racing.”

“Amazing,” shrieked Judy, “simply amazing...what a brilliant idea! When is the next fish race? I want to be here for it. In fact, I’d like to come every day!” “Our next race is at 7:30pm today,” David noted in a professional tone. “Now, while you enjoy your wine, might I offer you some of our homemade bean dip with soy rice crackers or homemade bread? It is a fine treat, excellent flavor, and a healthy food.” David went over to the dumb waiter and sent an order for the bean dip to come up to the bar from the kitchen on the first floor. Soon he brought the dip and excused himself saying that he now needed to put on latex gloves and clean the inside of the fish tank in preparation for the evening’s event.

“You know, Charles, this bean dip is really good—would you like some?” asked Judy, “otherwise, I’ll probably eat it all myself...oops, there goes my smartphone. It’s the front desk, our room is ready.” “Good,” said Charles, “let’s go and get unpacked; we’ll come back here later. There are other interesting things here in the Conservatory, too—you will see them later!”

Off to the Hotel Room in The Gallia


“Judy, I found an elevator for you that is not intimidating,” Charles said to his wife. “We need to go into the House of Aquitaine, to the far end, and then up to our floor and then out into the guest tower. In theory, that elevator is only for long-term apartment guests, but they let folks such as us, where someone is hypersensitive, also use them...certainly makes good business sense—who wants a guest who loses control of bodily

functions riding in an elevator that causes such a reaction!” “Thanks,” she noted, “let’s go. I’ll get familiar with the routine very quickly...I’m highly motivated...I want to get back to the Conservatory as soon as possible!” The couple wound around hotel floors, in and out of the different hotel ‘kingdoms’, and eventually settled in their handsomely-appointed room with a gorgeous view of the Ohio River.

Judy unpacked the electronic equipment and set it up, while Charles put away their clothes and toiletries. After about an hour, they were done, and the room was all set for the 10 days of their visit. “Charles,” Judy commented, “you know that sometimes I worry about things and about what the future might bring....in any event, I think I’d like to activate our Earl Family Brain Trust right now, just in case we need them later...if not, no harm. They are fun, too, after all. I hope that there will not be anything funny going on here, but the way things look, I’m worried that we might need them.” “Whatever you want,” Charles told Judy. This man of logic held his wife’s sensory capabilities in the highest regard; he apparently thought that while logic could handle many situations, it could not handle all of them—that there were events that came about for which there appeared to be no logical explanation—perhaps they were based on faith, on premonition, or whatever. But, he never pooh-poohed such insights from Judy; she had been right on the money all too often in the past. No doubt it was all related to her hypersensitivity and high creativity.

“So, now that we are all set up in the room, permit me, my dear, to introduce the Earl Family Brain Trust: Theodore E. Bear, Binker Bear (also a part-time mystery writer himself), and Tine E. Bear. They have submitted their credentials for all to peruse,” Charles said in a good-humored manner. “Wonderful, Charles,” said Judy, “and now can we leave them here and go back down to the Conservatory—I want to learn everything there is to know about it!”

Earl Family Brain Trust


		<p>Theodore E. Bear: A sedentary philosophically-inclined bear. Kind and thoughtful. A clear-thinker interested in the balance between pragmatics and abstraction. He worries about personal issues, such as being made into the bed, as well as broad-ranging issues involving world peace and global politics among all creatures, real and imaginary. He views himself as a dignified and proper teddy bear wearing a tuxedo—NOT as a panda. He is a native of Detroit, MI.</p>
		<p>Binker Bear: Named after Christopher Robin's [A. A. Milne, <i>When We Were Very Young</i>] "imaginary" friend Binker, as in "you can't see Binker." He lives largely in the realm of the imaginary, in the world of abstraction. In his "bear" persona he is physically quite large; he has a number of other personae he has been known to adopt. He is known to keep his cards close to his chest. Binker is originally from Paris, France, and was born at Galeries Lafayette.</p>
		<p>Tine E. Bear: Named for his diminutive stature. Tine focuses on the pragmatics of life. He feels he has to do so...as a small creature in the world of giants. He enjoys playing duplicate bridge, as an equalizer, and has a fine partnership with Binker who is large enough to use a bidding box. Tine emigrated from Paris with Binker, but is originally from a US Zone in Germany (as his tag says). His genealogy is rooted in the Vintage (mohair) Branch of the prestigious Steiff Family.</p>

Back in the Conservatory

"David," Judy cooed, "tell me all about the various wonderful things that go on here in the Conservatory...if you have time before the evening fish race!" "Sure, I have time," noted David. "One interesting program that

Alma Mater introduced recently is called the 'IcePik'. It's a toothpick-sized icicle loaded with bar fruit, as a skewer for a fancy drink. Some of them are colored and flavored; others are just made from clear water. On the drink menu, drinks that come with them are marked with a small dagger.

OokPik, one of Dr. Charles Earl's associates, is here to help me introduce the new item. He has a background based in arctic climates."

	<p>OokPik: From his strong Inuit family background, he has a keen sense of survival in difficult climates. He is an adept swimmer; his seal skin and albino northern wolf fur exteriors, while not currently politically correct, have made him impervious to icy arctic waters. OokPik, himself, is an urban creature; he emigrated from Toronto, Ontario, from a gift shop in the Royal York hotel. Thus, most of his experience with swimming has come from an occasional venture in the ubiquitous in-home urban swimming pool known as the toilet bowl. For a brief period of time, long ago, he took frequent dips in the Earl family bowl in order to delight their three-year old son, Ed. Lessons in survival that OokPik learned as a young owl have stuck with him throughout his adult life.</p>
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"Patrons suck on the icicle," David continued, "eat the bar fruit, and allow the icicle to disappear, one way or another, on its own. It's a fine bar addition; unlike a toothpick, there is no extra clean-up for this way of delivering bar fruit in a drink. You may have seen me use the dumb waiter to bring stuff up from the kitchen—no need to truck stuff back and forth with the IcePik...it disappears on its own...very clever." Judy agreed.

“Probably, Dr. Earl,” David went on, you have noticed that the Conservatory is filled with beautiful plants, some of which have large leaves and strong stalks and serve to shade out the late afternoon sun so that patrons might enjoy the glassed-in space in comfort. There are a variety of seasonal environmental items to notice, as well. For example, when I arrived here a few weeks ago, the Ohio River had flooded and was out of its banks. We had water lapping up against the side of the hotel, and water came up the ramp that you can now see cars coming up on from the river road, under the Conservatory, and into downtown. That was all flooded and there was no access—up here, it was almost like being on a river boat, especially as I reflected on gambling on races!” “Marvelous,” said Judy, “I love it; you are clearly a very thoughtful and sensitive young man; I am sure your family must be pleased with you in many ways.” “Well, thank you” David said as he blushed, “I’m glad you find it all interesting—I know I do. Now it’s time for me to set up for the race tonight—how about more drinks and bean dip, perhaps a burger, first?” “Sure,” Charles said, “bring us a meal—whatever looks good!”

David brought the food and drinks, and the couple enjoyed a pleasant meal in a delightful setting. After a while, people began to come in for the fish race. Judy bought some markers from Pisces Pieces and bet them on the catfish she had noticed earlier, whom she affectionately named “Kitty.” This evening, however, Kitty was not the liveliest fish in the track; a smaller tropical fish won the prize this time. Kitty came in third. Judy noted that she would soon return and the pair went off to their room to get ready for events the next day.

At the Bridge Table

“Today, Judy,” stated Charles, “I will be playing bridge with my friend and humanitarian, Dr. Bob. We saw him recently when we were in Bay City. We are playing in an open pair event today. Let’s meet in the Conservatory after the afternoon session. I know you are going on a tour of the baseball bat factory with our friend, Roger. So, I’ll see you after the game, but right now I’d better get downstairs to talk about conventions with Dr. Bob.”

“Oh, yes, and have a good time at the batting cages!” Charles chuckled as he thought of his highly competitive, and athletic, little wife sticking it to some of the macho guys at the batting cages.

The first few rounds of the afternoon session were uneventful. Charles and Dr. Bob had a few fine scores and a number of average scores. The next table they were to go to was that of Cass and Eleanor. The second board at that table contained the following hand:

	♠ A T 6 3		
	♥ T 8 5		
	♦ 4		
	♣ A 9 8 4 2		
♠ Q 7 2		♠ 4	
♥ A J 3		♥ Q 9 4	
♦ A Q T 9 2		♦ K J 7 6 3	
♣ J 6		♣ Q 7 5 3	
	♠ K J 9 8 5		
	♥ K 7 6 2		
	♦ 8 5		
	♣ K T		
<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>
<u>Eleanor</u>	<u>Charles</u>	<u>Cass</u>	<u>Dr. Bob</u>
		1S	2D
4S	P	P	P

Cass’s play of the hand was less than perfect, and he failed to make the contract. Eleanor’s behavior, however, was far less than perfect. She commented that his one spade opener was a bit on the light side. That was the last reasonable comment she made. She ridiculed Cass for his lack of planning in the play of the cards and noted in a variety of vulgar ways that any fool could have done better. As Charles and Dr. Bob left that

table, they noted that the tirade from Eleanor continued to escalate. No doubt Cass would be making many more bad plays, a natural and spontaneous response to verbal abuse from partner, throughout the afternoon. Charles also was left with some sort of vague and uneasy sense of déjà vu in regard to the whole board.

Yon Cassius Has a Lean and Hungry Look

Following the afternoon session of the Open Pairs, a number of bridge players rushed to the bar. Not surprisingly, Cass was one of the first ones there. He ordered a drink with a IcePik in it and some of the bar's signature pinto bean dip and bread. Soon, Charles and Judy arrived separately as did a variety of others. Roger came over and complimented Judy for hitting eight of the ten balls in the batting cage, especially after the attendant had patronized her and asked if she wanted extra slow pitches and a lighter bat...Judy wasn't having any of that. She and Roger talked about that for a bit as the bar began to fill up.

Charles, meanwhile, greeted friends Kent and Joe, his early morning walking pals (and fine bridge players) and sat down with them at a table in the bar area. He also encouraged his friend from the Great Lakes area, Whitey, wearing his orange velour University of Tennessee slippers (in Kentucky!) to come over and sit down. The group chatted for a while about bridge hands. Whitey left and went to look at a game on TV—much to his dismay right in the middle of a group of University of Kentucky fans who spent more time ridiculing the orange slippers than they did watching the game. “Hey, Whitey,” shouted Jules, a bridge-playing psychiatrist, “you gotta hear about this hand this afternoon—you hold K J 9 8 5; K 7 6 2; 8 5; K T—you are the dealer—what’s your opening bid?” “I think I’ll pass, although one spade is tempting, but I think I’m a bit light for that; I’ll wait and see what happens,” Whitey noted. He reflected that he was so happy to get away from the rude sports fans that he didn’t have the heart to tell Jules that he had just heard all about this controversial hand from Charles. “Ah, yes, the conservative approach. Well, I’ll tell you,” Jules said thoughtfully, “I just finished hearing about this hand from Cass, the guy

sitting over there, and while the hand itself is somewhat interesting, I found far more interesting the human behavior pattern associated with it—I gather Cass's wife didn't approve either of his bidding or play of the hand and let everyone in the ballroom know about it. The human mind is an amazing thing! "Yeah, sure Doc," Whitey replied, as he made some excuse to leave the Conservatory. He'd known Jules long enough to know that there would soon be an obscure lecture to follow on some of the famous psychiatrist's published works.

After his conversation with Jules, Cass settled in to enjoy a solitary drink and food as he admired the many fine plant specimens. His garden at home was his pride and joy—he had spent many an hour getting it just right. Naturally, he remained highly appreciative of fine horticultural work from others. The bar was a lively and convivial place full of relatively happy people.

All of that was about to change, however, as Eleanor entered the happy picture. Cass sauntered over to her, and in a friendly gesture said, "here, Sweetheart, have a drink and some pinto bean dip. The drink has their special new IcePik holder in it and the dip is homemade—excellent—only the best for my dear wife!" Eleanor looked at the slender IcePik and commented in a loud voice "well, it is harder than you ever get and bigger, as well...no wonder you want small boys instead of a real woman." Cass recoiled, stunned by her lying vulgarity. He grabbed her IcePik and rammed it into the meaty flesh of her upper arm. "You incompetent fool," she screamed, "here you want to hear about baseball like these two (motioning to Judy and Roger), take that!" she yelled as she scooped up some of the bean dip in her hand and threw it at Cass. Cass ducked and the dip flew down the bar to where David had the fish tank open. The dip plopped into the fish tank. "What are you people doing?" David said in a restrained voice. "We cannot have that sort of behavior in here. I must insist that you leave the bar immediately, and, if you choose to come back another time, we will demand civil behavior." Eleanor licked her fingers and then stomped off shouting to Cass as she left that she would lock him out of the apartment, and he could sleep in the Conservatory with his plants...with something as sessile as he was.

David continued with his preparation for the evening fish race. Judy eagerly purchased a number of Pisces Pieces and put all of them on the head of 'Kitty', her pet catfish. Last night, Judy and Kitty had not won the prize; tonight was different. Kitty was the victor. Charles and Judy stayed for quite a while at Alma Mater to celebrate the victory.

At the Fish Races...for the Third Time

"So, David," noted Judy, "I see you that mess cleaned up last night just in time for the race!" "Actually, it's harder than it might look," he said, "you see it's not simply a matter of cleaning up some dip. The fish love the bean dip. They are trained that when food goes in the water they need to race to get it. Now, I had my gloves on when that happened because I was working in the tank so I could respond quickly. I tried to get as much dip out as I could. We don't want the fish to eat anything that is not on their rigid racing diet...an overfed fish is a sluggish fish and not a good racer. So, I have cleaned the tank multiple times. I hope none of the fish ate extra dip; I must monitor their behavior in terms of racing pattern to see to it that they are still in top form. Fish races are big bucks for the bar and the casino. Please let me know if you observe anything out of the ordinary in their behavior." "Wow, David, I didn't realize the complexity that Eleanor introduced last night!" said Judy. "Of course I will try to be helpful to you."

"Beyond all that," David continued, "my co-worker OokPik has swum the entire route of the tank, several times, to see if he can find any stray particles of bean dip. He takes a small special microfiber cloth that we cut from one of those large mops, like the ones they use to keep basketball floors shiny. I think he's done a great job, but even just a few particles of extra food can interfere with fish diets, especially with the diets of the smaller fish. Running fish races is not hard as long as the tank is kept pristine; as soon as it gets any contamination, we have problems. This episode is the worst yet; I hope we never have another customer who throws pinto bean dip around...I know, I know, it sounds kind of humorous, but obviously, as you note, it has complex implications as well. I just hope there are no unintended consequences that turn up."

Judy decided that she would not bother David any more tonight. It had obviously caused him difficult times. Instead, she ordered some food and sat back to get ready to bet on “Kitty” in tonight’s fish race. She edged over to the line at the casino and bought some Pisces Pieces to place on the bar, on “Kitty.” When she returned with the markers, she walked around the bar to look for “Kitty.” “Do you see my pet fish, ‘Kitty’,” she yelled to David. He shook his head, no—he was busy getting set up. As Judy neared the far end of the aquarium loop, she saw a mass floating on the surface. As she approached, she saw it was her pet ‘Kitty’—belly-up and dead in the water. “David” she shrieked, “Kitty is dead...over here! I can’t imagine what happened. I had become quite attached to her”; and at that, Judy fell to the floor. Soon, David and others revived Judy and assured her that they would work to figure out what had happened and that they would refund the money she had wished to bet on her ‘Kitty’ that evening.

At Derby Downs

Charles was happy for Judy’s sake that the following evening there would be no fish races for her, and that instead the two of them would go to another event at the world-renowned Louisville venue, Derby Downs. Charles and Judy and various other bridge administrators, and those who could otherwise wangle an invitation, had been invited to a special event in the inner sanctum of this home of horse racing. Charles was happy to keep Judy away from the Conservatory, at least for an evening, until she had recuperated from the loss of a ‘pet.’ He was also happy that they had no pets at home—just stuffed animals who were no trouble at all, made no demands, gave unconditional love through warm hugs, and didn’t wind up belly-up somewhere.

“Charles, look!” cried Judy, “we get to walk through starting gates to enter the party. Now I feel like I’m in a horse race...wonderful and amazing...’and we’re off’ – come on, let’s go see what else they have in here.” Charles and Judy entered the circular track interior of the clubhouse at Derby Downs. Clearly it was a marvelous site for venue catering: weddings, birthday parties, and even large groups of bridge players! There was a surprise food station around every turn. Judy expressed the delight

of a small child as she rode the interactive race horse display and chatted with the food bearers as they passed tidbits of fancy food around the group. Charles talked about bridge politics with a group of people Judy did not know.

“Judy,” Charles announced, “see that crowd of people over there at the bar? They are waiting to get mint juleps. I’ll go over and get one...we should try one. OK? Back soon.” “I’ll have one drink,” Charles told the server. “Right you are, buddy” the man said “one is all you get. We have a limit of one mint julep per person; they are deceptively powerful. Personally, I never touch the stuff...but, the tourists seem to love to come to the track and have one. Anyway, here you go...y’all enjoy it!” Charles took a sip, and then another sip. Then he returned to Judy. “Tell me what you think of it,” Charles said to his wife. “Well,” Judy said after she had sloshed the fluid around in her mouth, “it has good flavor and I like the mint leaves that have picked up the Bourbon flavor, but it is way too strong. I cannot drink this, even though I am used to occasionally drinking wine and beer; you are not even used to drinking those drinks. So, I urge you to put it down somewhere and walk away. Let the servers take care of it.” Charles did as Judy suggested.

As they moved away from the abandoned drink, they spotted Eleanor and Cass arriving through the starting gates. “Well, well, well,” Judy whispered to Charles, “look at what is just now arriving...I suppose she must be one of the guests who wangled an invitation through creative means, perhaps by buying her way in, as with smoking in the room?” “HmMMM, we shall see...,” mused Charles. “Cass, my dear, please get us two mint juleps,” Eleanor stated in a saccharine tone, “that is what one does here, in ‘this neck of the woods’ I am told.” Soon, the browbeaten man returned with two mint juleps, one for himself and one for Eleanor, commenting “I practically had to sign my life away to get the server to let me bring you yours. But, I convinced the young woman that I would simply be doing the job of one of the circulating servers, and they were all busy...that I would be helping her.” “Cass, you are so kind, thoughtful, and introspective,” his phony wife noted as she gulped down her mint julep. “Well, that’s it for that one. Now, give me yours,” she demanded in a tone that was reflective of

her earlier behavior. “I really think, dear, that you should be careful with these; they pack quite a wallop,” Cass said. Charles and Judy moved away from the couple, leaving them to their own devices, and headed on over to talk to their friend, Dr. Bob.

Soon, the first call for dinner (a formal, seated affair in a private room in the center of the clubhouse) was announced. As some of the crowd moved to the dining area, still others lagged behind while they finished their conversations and their mint juleps. All of a sudden, Charles, Judy, and Dr. Bob heard a cry of panic from near Judy’s abandoned drink. “Help, help, please someone help me...” yelled Cass, “is there a doctor in the house?!!” “Oops, gotta run,” commanded Dr. Bob... “come with me, pronto.” “What happened here,” Dr. Bob demanded of Cass as the small group gazed down at the now unconscious Eleanor. “Well, we were having our drinks and a not too unpleasant conversation,” Cass blurted out, “when all of a sudden her color changed dramatically and she passed out...nothing like this has ever happened before.” “Oh, she gulped down that abandoned mint julep over there,” noted one bystander. “Yeah, I heard it was her third one...imagine that!” commented another. “Right, she slugged them down and passed out—give her a few shots of coffee and she’ll be fine,” stated a third. “Enough,” Dr. Bob said firmly, “Judy, call 911 right now and inform them that we have a severe medical emergency here at Derby Downs; I will continue to examine her and then be in phone contact with the paramedics. Cass, I will ride in the ambulance with her to the hospital. You follow us in a car that Charles will drive. Now, everyone else, go in to dinner, we will take care of this situation. I am an emergency room physician.” While they waited for the paramedics, Dr. Bob told Charles that there was far more going on here than mere over-indulgence. “I’ve seen a case like this once before,” the kind physician noted, “the key is her skin color and temperature; I don’t like it. We need to get her in and taken care of immediately; she is still breathing. I’ll talk to the doctors once we get there.” Soon, they could hear the sirens as the emergency response team quickly made their way to the scene. “Oh, dear,” commented Judy, “those sirens will upset the high-strung race horses in the barns, I’m glad we

already activated our Brain Trust...Theodore, please handle the horse situation so we don't have extra problems tonight from that source."

Comments of Theodore E. Bear

Well, Judy, as you know we were already on the scene, thanks to your fine intuition and sense of premonition. So, I had already taken action in the Conservatory, where I assigned Oscar Owl to help supervise his cousin, OokPik, who is also an owl. I thought that since we already had one owl working at Alma Mater, that another sitting in the trees would not be very noticeable. Besides, Oscar has good experience with investigative procedures, having served us well in Lake Geneva and Bay City. He has been sitting in the Conservatory trees, watching and listening to the activity for several days now; in fact, he's been there from shortly before the bean dip incident, when I first requested his service when you were on the way back to the Conservatory just after you got the hotel room set up.

In response to your frantic request tonight, in regard to temperamental race horses, I dispatched Eeyore, Baudet de Poitou. You know, donkeys are sometimes used as pets to calm race horses. Now Eeyore doesn't have the built up rapport of the sort of arrangement where a small donkey shares the stall of the horse in a planned long-range calming strategy, but he is quite creative and surely knows more about managing these beautiful creatures than do any of the rest of us. I have great confidence in Eeyore. Please consider the situation under control.

I expect to have reports in hand from a number of sources, including Eeyore, fairly soon. I will keep you posted. In the meantime, let's hope that Eleanor will recover quickly from the problem...whatever the cause might have been.



Special Agents Assigned to Louisville



Eeyore, Baudet de Poitou: Like Binker, Eeyore is also named after a character from A. A. Milne's classic children's work and like Binker is originally from Paris' Galeries Lafayette. Eeyore worries about his tail, of course, but in recent years has learned to enjoy greatly the fact that real-world versions of himself, an endangered species, are once again rising in number. He is a kind and thoughtful, though stubborn, creature. His plodding ways and stubborn persistence, along with his gray coat, make him an ideal undercover agent in complex, but physically bounded, situations that appear drab in color. He has a background in problems associated with the hauling of materials. Eeyore persists until he gets to the bottom of things.



Oscar Owl: A native of Detroit, Michigan. Oscar is an expert at observation from high platforms, especially at night. He has been known to frequent wooded areas, as well as other outdoor locales, and to report back on nocturnal activities in these areas. Some of his friends refer to him, in jest, as a "hooter."

Dr. Bob's Report

Ricin, Charles, it was ricin. You remember, I said I thought I had seen something like this before? It all came together for me in the ambulance. I recalled a pattern of similar symptoms involving clammy skin and an off-color skin hue. It happened to a teenage girl (who had clearly not been drinking mint juleps) who had been absent-mindedly chewing on a Jamaican necklace. She suffered from ingesting a small amount of low-grade ricin. We treated her and she recovered. Similarly, Eleanor is being treated along those lines; she appears to be responding to treatment and we expect that she, too, will recover shortly; she is in fine hands.

What we don't know is what caused this. What quality was the ricin? How was it inserted into her body? When was she exposed to it? Answers to these questions will indicate the delay, or lack thereof, in response time to the ricin. The mint juleps caused an immediate reaction, of course...imagine three of them in a petite woman. But the real problem was poisoning from ricin, an extremely deadly substance. "We were very fortunate that you were there" noted Charles, "AND that you were willing to come forward when the call went out for a doctor...The entire bridge community owes you a great debt for your service."

Investigative Reports of the Special Agents



Report of Special Agent Eeyore

Well, I was glad to be able to help with the Derby horses. By the time I trudged on out to the barn area, they were all in a state of panic. Naturally,

I hadn't known any of them before, but I did figure that a strategy of distracting them from the flashing lights and sirens might work well. So, I drew on experience from a hobby of mine that I don't think I've ever mentioned to you. At times when you don't need me to help you or otherwise be with you, I like to go out to the dance hall. Here, let me show you some photos I have in my smartphone from one of my favorites: the Pioneer Farms Dance Hall. It's part of a chain, you know. The facility is mostly outdoors and it's a place where animals of all backgrounds and persuasions can get together for fun times and perhaps even meet a life-long partner.

At the one I go to on a regular basis, there are often Watusi cattle as well as other guests from various parts of the world. These cows have huge horns and they are really nice guys and gals, but it's a little hard to get close to them...that is, to dance physically close to them...the horns get in the way. Anyway, a number of years ago, they developed a dance they could do without hugging a partner, and called it the "Watusi." It even caught on with humans! We still do it out at Pioneer Farms, often to an older song called "Wah-Watusi." It's fun, but many of the rest of us don't require the separation aspect that these cattle require.



So, I talked to some of the other Baudets de Poitou who frequent the place and we decided to write our own dance, the “PoiTusi”. It seems to take two forms: the athletic version, and the line dance version. Here, look at this beautiful ladyPoitou...see the come-hither look in her eye—gorgeous long coat...she sees me coming to visit! Well, never mind all that.

Anyway, often when I’m there, I do the athletic version of the dance if I think she is watching (I like to impress her with my prowess, you know). In the next photo, you will see a young male Poitou; he is waiting at the gate to get into the Dance Hall; he would very much like to dance with my friend with the beautiful long silky coat. When we have a group, we do a line dance version; it’s illustrated here, through the QR code, with a single Poitou doing it (feel free to skip any extraneous materials that come up in the link). But, it’s not hard to imagine a group of Poitous doing it, holding onto each other in a manner that the Watusi cattle could not. We call the music the “Pwa-PoiTusi.” Everyone loves it—who knows, maybe some day it will also catch on with humans.

Well, of course all this led me to think, if Poitous can line dance the PoiTusi, why can’t race horses. They are fine athletes and sensitive. They should be able to coordinate body movements with music. So, I went out to the barn, played the Pwa-PoiTusi music I have in my smartphone, taught them the steps to the line dance, and led them in the dance. Before we knew it, they were all having a wonderful time and had forgotten about the events in and around the clubhouse. I hope it was a positive contribution and also hope that it is a tradition they will adopt for their own comfort in the future.

After I got the group settled down, I also thought it might be prudent to ask them if they had seen anything out of the ordinary that evening prior to the medical emergency. They said that often there are groups of individuals who come to the clubhouse for special events and that, as far as they could tell, this group had been no different from a typical group. So, I left, and they went back to dancing.



Athletic Version



Line-dance Version



Report of Special Agent Oscar

I've been hanging around the Conservatory almost from the beginning of your trip when Judy first called on Theodore. Theodore asked me to go down there and stake the place out...keep my eyes and ears open; advise OokPik as needed. Now, I don't have any sort of wild night life activities on which to draw as Eeyore apparently does, but I did accumulate some facts that I hope will be useful to you.

- The first afternoon I was there, I spent time getting my bearings and talking to OokPik. I observed that you and Judy did not notice me when you came back to the Conservatory from upstairs (Theodore had not informed you of my dispatch, at my request, as a way to test my cover).
- The second day was the day of action, following the afternoon session at the bridge tournament; it was the first day of the tournament. It was also the last time that Eleanor was in the bar—when she flung bean dip at Cass.
- Cass had arrived in the bar in advance of anyone else that day. He came in muttering to himself, clearly quite upset at the way that Eleanor had treated him at the bridge table.
- He spent time admiring the various plants. When he thought no one was looking he took samples from various of them. He took a flower from one of them and put it in his lapel. He took some seeds from another and put them in a handkerchief in his pocket. He wore clothes that were much more traditional, indeed classical, than did

most bridge players...always well-dressed in a suit, so the flower did not look out of place on him.

- After he got done looking at the plants, he sat down at the fish bar and ordered a fancy drink with an IcePik in it (OokPik assisted on that) and a bowl of their pinto bean dip. He ate some of the dip and tasted the drink. After a while, a man came over and sat down and showed Cass a bridge hand. They discussed it a bit, and then the man went off and talked to other bridge players.
- When Eleanor came in, Cass pulled the handkerchief from his pocket and wiped off the glass and the edge of the bowl so that the presentation would be proper. He then took the dip and drink to her, and you know what happened from there.
- Today, Cass came to the Conservatory and spent time admiring the plants. Again, he had one drink with bean dip.
- Probably Judy knows as much as I do about the other folks in the Conservatory. She really enjoyed it! I am sorry her 'pet' fish died. Apparently a number of other fish died, as well. Anyway, because OokPik is impervious to water, he was a big help in swimming around inside the water-track to clean it out and assist in guiding the remaining fish to safe areas while all the water was replaced in successive pods.
- The only other person who came as regularly as Cass and Judy was a psychiatrist who seemed interested in people-watching; I think he may have been the man who sat down briefly with Cass the first night. I did fly down and sit close enough to him to listen in—that's how I know his profession. He seemed interested in evaluating how tournament duplicate bridge players might react to a wide range of topics, including, but not limited to, bridge hands of various sorts. I think he tried to talk to Judy, but she was engrossed with the fish and showed no interest. Also, he talked to a variety of other bridge players whose names I do not know.

Charles's Report

These reports all offer great information. Here is a logic I see that would plausibly fit all the pieces together. When I tried to check up on it, as more than simply a plausible chain of reasoning, it appeared to make sense.

When Judy and I entered the Conservatory for the first time, she immediately noticed the large plants. In fact, she noticed them even before she noticed the fish—that surprised me. Oddity in the ordering of events often yields insight. Cass, who also knows his plants, was also taken by these huge plants that were growing successfully indoors. I looked them up and found that they are a plant called a castor bean plant. They grow commonly on tropical islands and elsewhere in the tropics, but with care can be cultivated in other climates, including indoors. At some times of the year, their pods contain castor bean seeds. These seeds look a lot like pinto beans. The oil from the seeds is extracted and used to make commercial castor oil. The residue from the extraction process is highly toxic and contains ricin.



All very interesting. So, we can imagine that the teenaged girl that Dr. Bob mentioned, must have been wearing a necklace with at least some of the seeds on it being castor bean seeds from a tropical island. She chewed on them and extracted a tiny amount of ricin, which made her quite ill. That was a case of accidental poison. So, what was the case here? We now

have a source for the ricin. But, how and why did it get from the plants in the Conservatory into Eleanor's body?

It's very unlikely that the hotel-made bean dip was made with any of the castor beans. It might be tempting to think so because the castor beans look quite a bit like pinto beans. And, it might also be tempting to imagine a scenario in which the insertion of beans somehow involves the use of the dumb waiter from the Conservatory to the kitchen downstairs. But, it takes work to systematically extract ricin from the beans. So, no, that's not an option in my mind. Here Oscar's report is helpful. He observed Cass picking some beans from the plants. I gather that the mere act of picking the beans would be insufficient to release the ricin. Remember, though, that Cass put the beans inside a handkerchief in his pocket. The action of keys rubbing against the beans, either accidentally or deliberately, might have been sufficient to release a small amount onto the cloth. Later, when Cass wiped off the glass and the dip bowl, some of the ricin might have been transferred to those surfaces—presumably a very low quality toxin in a miniscule amount. Eleanor threw the dip, and then licked her fingers. That must be how she ingested the low-grade poison that would subsequently affect her on the following evening.

The residue in the fish tank must be what killed the fish that ate it. OokPik cleaned all the surfaces, but perhaps too late for some of the poor fish. Naturally, he was not affected because he is impervious, as a consequence of his birth structure...he's waterproof and more. It was a good call on the part of the team to encourage OokPik in that direction; we probably saved a bunch of fish.

Eeyore's report, after we get through the fascinating detail of his personal nocturnal activities at the Dance Hall, seems to validate the idea that nothing of any particular importance to this case went on at the Derby Downs—that freed my mind to focus on the events in the Conservatory. As Dr. Bob noted, there was more going on there than met the eye of the casual observer (many of whom would have walked away from Eleanor, assuming she was merely drunk).

Now, we can account for a source of the ricin, its quality, the manner in which it might have been introduced into Eleanor's body, and the slowness or timing of her reaction to the poison.

So, let's think about this a bit more. Cass certainly could have recognized the castor bean plants when he saw them. The knowledge he gained from gardening might well have equipped him to do so. Also, he might have known about the connection of this plant to ricin; that is information I found in 30 seconds. He might well have known it; apparently it is common knowledge of a sort.

Did he decide to attempt to use his keys (or some other hard object in his pants pocket) to deliberately damage the castor bean hulls sufficiently to extract a tiny amount of ricin? He certainly could have done so, and done so in a manner which would never have been detected. But, even if he deliberately tried to release ricin and cause his wife to ingest it, why did he want to make her sick or kill her? Sure, she is one of the more obnoxious people I've encountered, but he stayed married to her...for her money or power? Hard to say; but why murder her? Why not just get her help for her behavior problems?

The answer may lie in the bridge hand Dr. Bob and I played against them. You will recall that I had a vague sense of déjà vu with that hand. I looked it up. It's a famous hand, card-for-card, that was played almost a century ago. Apparently the play of the hand and the bidding went the way they went at our table. At the end of the hand, one player murdered the other over the bidding and play of the hand. Sydney Lenz and Eli Culbertson have given an account of what might have happened in terms of the bridge detail in this case, the so-called "Bennett Case" in which John Bennett (holding Cass's cards) was murdered, using a gun, by his wife (holding Eleanor's cards).



Now, what are the odds that a given duplicate board will hold the famous Bennett deal? Those odds are, of course, the same as those they will hold any other particular deal. Here, I'll calculate that. Let's see, there are 52 cards and we want 13 in each of four hands, so that the number of possible different deals is:

$$(52!) / (13!)^4$$

From using my calculator app, on my smartphone, that value works out to be, 53,644,737,765,488,792,839,237,440,000, or 5.36×10^{28} . So, the odds of any one particular deal are one in 5.36×10^{28} . It's possible, but extremely unlikely, that the deal would appear (anyone betting on horse races or fish races would likely agree, I should think). I think it's far more likely that someone would find a way to introduce it into a duplicate board, deliberately, at the beginning of the session, just for his own amusement or for some other reason.

Here, Oscar's observations come into play again. I think it's not far-fetched to consider that the psychiatrist, Jules, might have introduced this deal, as some sort of research-style experiment involving bridge and human nature. It would not be too hard to execute, especially if the hands were pre-dealt—then they could easily be inserted at the beginning of a session in which the players were instructed to “shuffle and play” the first two boards. He could

have arrived early at the table and told arriving opponents that he had already made the first board.

Jules's motivation might have been to test people to see if they would remember the hand; most top-flight bridge players know of this story. Or he might have wanted to see what reaction, if any, it caused. So, when Jules talked to Cass about this hand right after the session in which it was played and given the state that Cass was in following an afternoon of bullying by Eleanor, a plot may have clicked in Cass's mind to solve his problem using ricin, made on the spot from the castor beans. That is, Cass was programmed by the bridge hand and its history to guide his actions the way that they went.

So, to try to find out some facts, I went to talk to Jules. And, yes, he did introduce the hand from the Bennett case. He was, in fact, overjoyed to hear that once again it had caused a serious fight between husband and wife—in terms of studying patterns of human behavior. But, he told me he certainly never thought that any physical harm could come of it because now the hand was being played in a wide-open area filled with many people instead of in the privacy of a four-person game in an apartment. He said he was quite concerned about the outcome and in fact offered to help in any way he could.

I explained my theory about the ricin in the bean dip; he found that idea fascinating. Also, I asked if the stress Cass was under might have, in some bizarre manner, 'programmed' him to take nasty action. Jules is a nice guy; but, get him started on the subject of the human mind, and he never shuts up—really dedicated to his profession. I guess that's a fine professional trait, but it can be annoying. After I listened to his lecture on the human mind might go in any direction, I told him that I had decided to take him up on his kind offer and asked him to come with me to talk to Cass, to see what Cass had to say about the bean dip.

So, Jules and I set up an appointment to meet with Cass in the Conservatory. When I explained my full theory to Cass, he began sobbing. He said that yes, he had in fact put his hand in his pocket to scratch the

surface of the beans so that a bit of low-grade ricin would fall into his handkerchief. He said he just wanted to make Eleanor a bit sick. He wanted to show her that she should be a good girl; that good things happen to good girls, and bad things happen to bad girls—and that he had the power to make bad things happen when she was bad. I gather that he had planned to tell her all that after he rescued her, as her ‘hero’. It was bizarre logic, and an over-the-top approach: but, plausible in a certain way.

So, a bunch of fish were murdered by Cass (with an assist from Eleanor), and a woman was deliberately made ill. I understand that The Gallia has instituted a review board to examine the plants in the Conservatory and remove any that might have parts that are possibly toxic to humans. Further, because ricin entered the picture and because there might be a question of attempted murder, Jules and I turned the material over to the police, and they, along with attorneys, will determine a correct course to be taken against Cass in terms of possible punitive action.

“Oh Charles,” Judy giggled, “so, I accuse--Cass did it, in the Conservatory, with the bean dip.” The group laughed as they reflected on the fun they had all had in the past playing a classic children’s murder game.

* All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. The author acknowledges the fine animals kept at Domino Farms in Ann Arbor, Michigan, some of whose photographs appear here.