

PHOENIX 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!)

“The notion of the phoenix rising again from its ashes...”

Herodotus, II.73.

Don't Fence Me In...

“Charles, I am so happy we took the train to Flagstaff rather than driving the whole way,” Judy Earl said to her mathematician, bridge-playing husband. “Let’s go pick up the rental car so we can spend the day tomorrow at the Grand Canyon before we go to Phoenix,” Charles said in an encouraging tone to his wife, “after all, think how exciting it will be; neither one of us has ever been there!” The couple had planned carefully to make time for this important visit prior to driving through the desert, down thousands of feet of elevation, from Flagstaff to Phoenix, for their two week stay at the American Bridge Congress (ABC) tournament housed in two hotels in downtown Phoenix.



Grand Canyon

The next morning, Charles and Judy set off on their adventure to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. In under an hour, they were parking the car near the small railway that would take them to the canyon.



Grand Canyon Railway

Once aboard the vintage train, the couple saw a number of other bridge players who must have had a similar idea; all had taken trains from either

the west coast or Chicago to Flagstaff and had arrived yesterday. Now, this parlor car served as a rendezvous for a subset of bridge players who would ultimately arrive in Phoenix. The Earls sat in their assigned seats and watched as other passengers did the same. "Get out of that seat!!" a large, truculent woman shouted. "I want it...it's got the best view and it's facing forward...I won't ride backwards!" "Charles," Judy asked in a hushed tone, "who IS that woman?" "Oh, her name is Lila," Charles said, "just wait and see what she does. She is well known for being self-centered and domineering and for other things too, but we shall see what aspects of her character come out on the train. Don't be surprised by her behavior, though."

Soon, a set of guys masquerading as Wild West bandits came running through the train as it chugged along the rails through the desert, north to the canyon rim. Then, a mock Sheriff's posse came through and questioned passengers. Kids loved the scene...interactive games in person! "Charles, this is so much fun," said Judy. Charles thought that it was no surprise that Judy would be thrilled with the antics of the actors on the train; she was still a kid at heart and had been the entire 50 years he had known her. He got up and went and got soft drinks to enjoy on the train ride.

Next, Rex, a singing cowboy, came through the parlor. The crowd sang along with him to familiar tunes. Judy stood up and began conducting the group as she sang along. Rex came over and congratulated her on her skill and asked her to choose a song. But, before Judy could do so (she had thought about "By the Time I Get to Phoenix"), Lila brought her wine over. "Hey there cowboy, if you want to see some real dancing, watch my girls dance..." and with that Lila raised both her wine glass and her blouse and started bouncing around while singing raucous, off-key music. "Lila," Charles commanded, "sit down and behave yourself." He escorted her to her seat and plopped her in the chair as he pointed a menacing finger in her face and instructed her not to leave her seat again. "Oh, Charlie, you are so cute..." Lila cooed. "That's enough!" Charles stated emphatically.



Don't Fence Me In

By the Time I Get to
Phoenix

Another hour passed and the group arrived at the railway station at the Grand Canyon. They left the train and headed to a bus that was to take them on a tour of vantage points along the road bordering part of the South Rim. “I must have the seat in the front,” Lila demanded, “give me land, lots of land...ha!” The driver clearly enjoyed his job and had numerous geological and historical facts at his fingertips; he also seemed to be able to handle Lila. He issued a warning that it was illegal to pick up anything from the grounds and remove it from the National Park. He showed examples of rocks, animal feces, samples of wood, and assorted artifacts one might find on the grounds. Further, he instructed the group to stay at least one body-length back from the edge when looking at the awe-inspiring Colorado River spectacle.

Nonetheless, when the group stopped at the first vantage point, someone climbed out over the fence to get a better picture; the driver successfully retrieved the woman and told her that she was engaging in a dangerous practice. As he lectured her on the importance of her survival to her children and grandchildren, others took advantage of the distraction, out of sight of the driver, to collect items of interest from the grounds and put them in their pockets. Rocks, pine cones, and other natural trinkets were generally those most collected. One person, apparently a geologist, even had a vial and took a soil sample.

After the first stop, the challenge of flaunting the local rules seemed to subside, and the group spent time more constructively: photographing the sites, reading the signs, talking to each other and to the driver, and

generally having a fine time seeing one of the greatest Natural Wonders of the World. Later, they returned to Flagstaff, enjoyed a pleasant dinner in a restaurant near their motel, and went to get a good night of sleep in preparation for their trip to Phoenix the following morning.

By the Time We Get to Phoenix...

“Did you see that very pregnant woman on the train yesterday?” Judy asked her husband as they began their car trip from Flagstaff to Phoenix. “Yes, I did,” said Charles, “she and her husband are both fine bridge players: Dolores and Jack...nice people, too. Maybe we’ll see more of them in Phoenix.”

“Charles, it should be remarkable to see the drop in elevation as we head from high in the mountains to the valley containing Phoenix,” Judy noted. Yes, Charles thought as he remarked on the imaginative working of his wife’s mind...we move from “very pregnant” to “mountain”...makes sense in a certain way I suppose, but I think now we are going to see Judy the Geographer on this trip.

“In fact,” Judy continued, “it should be a fine opportunity to observe directly the effects of altitudinal zonation on desert vegetative patterns. Naturally, I have my topographic map with me; I almost feel as if I can see the contours out there in the landscape—that’s what I sometimes tell rookie students in the field—don’t trip on the contours—ha, ha.” Yes, Charles thought, definitely we have Judy the Geographer in the car now. “There’s a rest area up ahead, Charles—please pull over—look at the fabulous road cut on one side and the view down a small canyon exposing the different vegetation patterns going up the steep slope...truly remarkable,” lectured Judy. Charles obliged his enthusiastic wife. “Those are really nice picnic tables out there on that ledge—I could get wonderful photos from there—I wonder why no one is sitting at them; it’s wonderful sunny weather,” Judy continued. “Charles, just stop here; I can get out and go over to the tables and get wonderful photos.” At that, Judy hopped out of the car and started over to the tables. She stopped suddenly, took a few photos, and then ran back to the car and shut the windows. “What on Earth?” asked Charles of

his wife, who was clearly shaken. “Here, look at this photo,” said Judy, “let’s go.” The couple left the rest area and Judy was silent for much of the rest of the trip. In the afternoon, Phoenix came into view, and the couple proceeded to their hotel.



The Presidential Suite, Phoenix

“Well, Judy, it looks as if we have a wonderful room, once again,” Charles noted to his wife. “I love the view,” Judy said, “mountains rimming the valley floor with the sun-drenched buildings...more gorgeous sunsets coming up!” After the Earls unpacked and got settled in their room, they headed on up to the Presidential Suite in the hotel where Ryan, the ABC President, was hosting the higher-ups in the ABC administrative hierarchy for a late supper in advance of the beginning of the tournament.

Folks in the Presidential Suite were full of useful local information. A number noted the need to drink plenty of water in the desert climate; both skin and air passageways dry out more quickly than one might imagine. For the most part, all seemed to be looking forward to a fine, hopefully uneventful, tournament. Judy also hoped for that but had to wonder if perhaps the group was being a bit overly optimistic. She and Charles left and went back to the room where they went to bed in preparation for a busy next day and next week.

Around the Hotel...At the HerBARium

“Charles,” Judy said the next morning, “do we have another ‘Alma Mater’ branch here in this hotel? I seem to recall that you mentioned we might have opened one recently.” “Yes, Judy, it’s on the Fourth Floor; let’s go look.” As a sideline to their academic careers, the Earls had created a chain of fine food facilities, named in honor of Judy’s mother, Alma, and also in honor of the Earl’s lifelong interest in academics. That sort of double entendre greatly pleased them both. Judy served as CEO of the chain and Charles oversaw the implementation of the plans in his role as President. The couple owned the chain jointly. Judy was particularly interested in seeing this most recent acquisition but was sorry that her mother, who had died (at age 100 years) shortly before its opening, was not there for the grand opening. Alma had loved hearing about the success of the headquarters in St. Louis and of the branches in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, and in Bay City, Michigan.

“Well, Judy, here we are,” announced Charles, “ ‘Alma’s HerBARium’! All the herbs used in making interesting bar drinks and bar food are grown right here in our rooftop herb garden near the pool area. There are little signs identifying the herbs by name so that the staff does not get confused, although of course we do expect that after a while waitstaff will learn to identify the herbs by leaf shape, color, taste, and smell. In addition, we make luncheon salads and cater small special evening events around the fire pits surrounded by sofas. During the evening events, we feature Alma’s Curly Dogs ™ when we host sports parties in front of the large screen TV mounted on the wall over there. It’s all been a big hit in the first month!”





Phoenix Bridge Murder

“Charles,” Judy said, “let’s stay here for lunch. It looks so inviting!” “OK, Judy. Do you remember the waiter named David? He’s here somewhere training waitstaff. I’ll go get him,” Charles told his wife. While Charles disappeared into the back area, Judy occupied a round table near the outdoor lap pool. Water fountains spurted clean water from a wall into the pool through gargoyle-like heads mounted about 15 feet up the wall. The sequence of water arcs was stunning—almost reminiscent of an alley of pleached chestnut trees lining the promenades in a Parisian park. Judy studied the detail of her surroundings and of the menu. Her enjoyment, however, was abruptly interrupted when Lila once again appeared on the scene.

“Waiter, get me a bottle of your finest white wine and your menu,” the bossy woman commanded. At this point, David appeared with a bottle of nicely chilled fine white wine “would Madame care to taste this bottle, perhaps?” “Garbage...smells like pig urine...take it away...bring me a magnum of Dom Perignon, instead,” Lila announced to the group that had been happily assembling around the pool and along the side the herb garden. “Yes, Madame,” David said in the even tone of an obsequious waiter. Lila continued, “and I will have the house asparagus salad, onion marmalade on the side, but I want extra pine nuts—beaucoup de extra if you know what that means—and I want it all stuffed into three halves of avocado of course all freshly peeled with no evidence of oxidation anywhere—serve it within 90 seconds of cutting it, otherwise it goes back to the kitchen.” “As Madame wishes; your wish is our command,” David noted wryly. Charles thought that perhaps David was laying it on a bit too thick, but Lila seemed to enjoy it. Lila’s salad appeared and she ate it and drank the magnum without further ado; then she got up and staggered out of the bar, over to the elevator, for elsewhere. David continued to wait tables and served Charles and Judy each a spectacular curly dog stuffed with homemade chili and small house salads. The couple left the poolside bar and herb garden shortly after they finished and headed toward the bridge game.

In the Hotel Ballroom—Afternoon Session

Charles bought an entry for the pair game for the day. The couple sat down, north/south, at a table in the center of the large room which soon filled up with other pairs waiting to begin the first board of the tournament. The boards proceeded in an orderly fashion; Charles and Judy's game seemed a bit above average by the middle of the afternoon. In the distance, Judy spotted Lila, still drunk, making an obnoxious pest of herself at some other table. It appeared that Lila was part of an East/West partnership; Judy hoped that Lila would not come to their table, although Charles had often said that he loved to play against people in that sort of condition and really take them to the cleaners. Judy reflected that perhaps that was at least one reason that Charles was so much better at bridge than she was; Judy preferred most other aspects of the game. Each, however, enjoyed coming to the national tournaments in his/her own special way.

As Judy's mind was drifting across various topics, and not focused sufficiently on bridge, she was jolted out of her somewhat dreamy state by an altercation in the sandwich area just outside the playing area.

"Owww.....Eeeekkk.....Yuckkk!!!" screamed a hotel staff member; a male bridge player had ordered a pre-made sandwich, paid his 8 dollars, opened up the sandwich, looked at it, threw up in it, and then took the sandwich and said to the kind female staff person, "you couldn't serve this swill on a hog farm and expect to get any takers...here, take that!!!" as he smeared the altered, smelly sandwich in the face of the hotel worker. Directors came running from all around. Some helped to clean up the staff member and console her while others looked in vain for the man who had engaged in this vulgar action. But, he was nowhere to be found...apparently he had vanished into thin air. Judy was visibly shaken by the entire event, but managed to finish the rest of the boards for that afternoon. The Earls retired to their room between sessions, where Charles ate some take-out food and worked to calm Judy in advance of the forthcoming evening session.

In the Hotel Ballroom—Evening Session

“Judy, I think I’ll head on down to the game area now; maybe I’ll be able to figure out who we might play against tonight,” Charles volunteered to his wife. “Good idea, you know how much I appreciate that sort of thing; I’ll be down soon. Just give me a few minutes,” said Judy. Charles left their room. He always liked to beat the crush in the elevators around game time. This particular hotel had only one tower, served by eight elevators. That meant that in the half hour before and after game time, the elevators would be overloaded. Right now they were fine; Charles hoped that Judy would also avoid the madhouse scene.

Judy followed in another 15 minutes or so. When she arrived at the game site, she quickly found Charles, sat down at their table, and started panting for air and gagging. She also looked extraordinarily pale. “Judy, what on Earth happened to you?” Charles asked excitedly. “Well, I got into the far elevator on the right side and you know there were a bunch of others in the elevator. At first, I thought that someone might have had a bean salad and simply passed some gas. But, that wasn’t it. The stench in the elevator was just dreadful. It smelled like urine does when one eats asparagus; I can’t imagine the whole thing. One woman started to faint. Probably I should have hopped out; we stopped often but it would have been hard because I was penned in. In any event, maybe someone had an accident of some sort in that elevator. A couple of the men on board went to find hotel staff to get to the source of the problem. I assume it will be cleared up shortly. Right now, I just need to catch my breath and try to clear my head so I’m ready to be a good bridge partner tonight!” said Judy.

Charles waited patiently. He did not have the heart to tell Judy that in the second round they were going to be playing against Lila. Instead, he started with the ‘good news.’ “Judy, remember the pregnant woman and her husband from the Grand Canyon trip—Dolores and Jack? I think they will be our opponents toward the end of this session. They are very nice people and I think you will enjoy having them at the table,” Charles told his wife. “Hmmm,” said a recovering Judy, “and why is it that I am waiting for the other shoe to drop?” “Well, yes, then again it appears that we will be

playing against Lila and her partner in round 2 tonight; and I think that Lila has had even more at dinner—perhaps she was drinking her dinner,” Charles said, “but Judy, look at it as an advantage—if she is drunk she won’t play well—never mind any of her antics—that’s how you get top scores against people like that. Don’t let them get to you.”

The first round of the evening session was uneventful. Charles estimated their scores to be about average. “Now, Judy, don’t react emotionally to anything Lila says or does—just focus on getting top scores from her. Remember, her partner is under far more stress than anyone else at the table,” Charles pointed out to his apprehensive wife.

“Well, if it isn’t Chucky-Ducky, how are you sweetheart!” drawled Lila in a drunken voice. “Pick up your hand, Lila,” her partner said. Charles opened the bidding, using the bidding box on his corner of the table, with one diamond. “I bid one spheart” announced Lila in a loud voice. “Lila, which do you mean—spades or hearts? Please use the bidding box; we no longer speak our bids,” Charles directed. “Oh, all right Charlie Boy, make it two sphearts,” Lila, stated. Then, she laughed uproariously “Charlie is so cute...if you don’t want him, dearie, just let me know and I’ll come right over and take him—I’m shure I can do better than you,” Judy reflected on Charles’s admonition before the round, but let slip “well, you can just get in line with the 47 other sluts who want to come after him, too.” “Director!!!” shouted Lila, “this bitch (pointing at Judy) called me a shlut.” The Director pulled Charles, and Lila’s partner, aside and they discussed the behavior at the table that round. They all agreed that Lila should be removed from the playing area and that the Director should find a kibitzer to fill in for her. They returned to the table and informed Lila of the decision at which point she jumped from her chair and landed in Charles’s lap “ooooh, Charlie, you used to tell me how pretty I was...(only in your wildest dreams, Charles thought); don’t let them take me away from you,” Lila shrieked. Soon security arrived and escorted her out of the playing site.

Charles was the dummy on the next hand and he asked permission from Lila’s partner and the kibitzer to excuse himself so that he could check his clothing for rips or tears. It was not easy to have a 300 pound woman plo

in one's lap. Naturally, they were sympathetic and Charles headed toward the men's room, thinking as he passed security cameras in the main playing area that these cameras clearly had a place in the playing area but that he really didn't care for them in the men's restrooms. Judy quickly played the hand, made her contract and an overtrick, and excused herself from the table and headed off to the elevator area where she noted a hotel cleaning crew scrubbing the carpet with a dry shampoo in the offensive elevator.

The next few rounds moved along well. Charles had estimated a clear top against Lila and perhaps another on the second board. In the rounds that followed, Charles suspected that they had done quite well. Judy had said that when Charles got upset, she could just feel the adrenaline flowing from him and that the unwary opponent was likely to be dealt several blows by Charles. Such was the case in the rounds following the encounter with Lila.

"Well Judy, two more rounds to go," Charles said, "here come Dolores and Jack. Hi, Folks-Dolores, you look beautiful as usual! When is the big day for baby arrival?" "We think it's in a couple of weeks, but of course it's hard to be sure," the pregnant woman noted. Bidding on the first hand took place and Dolores wound up playing 3NT. After the opening lead, she studied her hand and the dummy. All of a sudden, she began shrieking and writhing in pain. "Oh, Jack...I can't stand the pain...oooooh, moan, groan, aaaarrgggh," and the pregnant Dolores collapsed on the floor under the table. Charles took charge and told Judy and Jack to monitor her and try to keep calm; in the meantime he went off to find his helpful medical bridge playing friend, Dr. Bob, and to contact the local emergency paramedics. Soon Charles returned with Dr. Bob, and a few minutes later the paramedics arrived. "Perhaps premature labor?" one of the young paramedics noted. "I don't think so," Dr. Bob stated firmly. "Look at her skin color and feel the skin...more likely an allergic reaction of some sort, even food poisoning. The pregnancy is a distraction to correct diagnosis." Charles thought how fortunate Dolores was to have Dr. Bob, and his many years of experience as head of one of the most highly regarded emergency rooms in the U.S., offer an opinion.

Soon, the paramedics had Dolores loaded and ready to go. Dr. Bob went with them and said he would stay with Dolores and Jack just to see that things went smoothly. The paramedics rang for an elevator. The one that had been recently cleaned arrived, Judy noted. When the door opened this time, a body rolled out of the elevator. It was Lila—"oh, is she drunk?" asked Judy. Dr. Bob leaned over and felt her. "No, she is dead" he said in a matter of fact tone. "Charles," Bob continued, "phone the police—I can't do anything for her, so I'll go with Dolores where I might be some help." The group got another elevator and rushed Dolores to the ambulance; Charles did as he had been directed. Then, he and Judy went to the room for a good night's sleep.





Calling all Assistants!

Charles awakened ahead of Judy. He leaned over to awaken her--"Judy," Charles commanded, "get a grip on yourself. We need to see if we can construct a logical context in which to fit all the puzzle pieces, and you are our expert on that. Fortunately we have all of our assistants here with us in Phoenix, as they came to pay tribute to your mother with the opening of the new Alma Mater subsidiary, 'Alma's HerBARium'. Here, look at a couple of photos; they may help you to regain your focus. One is of the group sitting around at the event and the other is a photo of Alma's favorite frog platter of fancy tea sandwiches; it was the last one she enjoyed.





“Yes, Charles, you are right,” Judy sighed, “I do feel as if I am getting back on track now; it was quite a sequence of events downstairs, though! I think the assistants that we should press into service, at a minimum, are the basic team, the Earl Family Brain Trust, of Theodore, Binker, and Tine, as well as Special Agents Guillaume, for his expertise with plants and small spaces, Ookpik for his skill with water, and Oscar, who can get a vantage point from a high perch without being noticed. We are fortunate that the whole group is here; that way we can easily pull them into action immediately!”

<i>Earl Family Brain Trust</i>		
		<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. He is also a part-time mystery story writer.</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>
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Special Agents Assigned to Phoenix

	<p>Guillaume R. Squirrel: A linguist who is the Master Teacher of all languages to all teddy-type creatures in the Earl world. Guillaume is highly articulate and will chatter endlessly on a vast array of topics—some of greater interest than others. He claims to possess a copyright and trademark on his unique pronunciation of the word “hmmmmph!!” which he uses to express a variety of feelings. Guillaume’s gray coloration, along with his natural athletic talent and structural engineering background, make him an ideal undercover agent in a variety of environments. Guillaume, a world traveler like some of the others, emigrated from Toronto, Ontario, but was born in North Korea.</p>
	<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>



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.”

“Speaking of being able to pull them into action,” said Charles, “where are they? I don’t see any of them!” “Oh,” Judy replied, “I forgot to tell you that Theodore mentioned late last night that he was going to take the entire group out to the HerBARium for drinks and food—as a brunch.”

At the HerBARium with Theodore and Colleagues

“Charles, oh Charles, over here near the pool,” Theodore motioned with the wave of a hefty paw, as Charles entered the bar area. Hmmm, Charles thought to himself, I hope that bear hasn’t been drinking too much mead. Charles joined the group and noticed a few others as well. “Eeyore also joined us and I think there are others from home who came for the bar/restaurant dedication.



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.

But beyond that, Charles,” the gregarious bear noted, “you must meet our new friends who are here at another convention in the hotel, that of the Montgolfier Society. Please welcome Gordon the Dragonfly, François Poodle, Froggie, Honey, and L.C. Cow. In honor of Honey, I have taken the liberty of ordering a round of Mead Cocktails (which David makes and serves beautifully) for the entire group...I figured it would go on the corporate account. I added in asparagus salads and eggs benedict with a side of caviar for those wishing them.”

Friends Attending the [Montgolfier](#) Society Meetings



Gordon Dragonfly and François Poodle



Froggie



L.C. Cow



Honey

At that point, L.C. broke into tears...she had been flirting with Eeyore (who might have been a bit flattered); subsequently, Guillaume told her ‘to stick to her own species’. Theodore worked to console her and told her that Guillaume was a linguist and just liked to turn a clever phrase, sometimes without regard to the feelings of others. Froggie in the meantime had expressed his personal concern to the rest of the group that he might wind up in the center of a platter of tea sandwiches and that such a position might be life-threatening to him. Again, others worked to reassure him of his safety and that this gathering was one big, happy, and supportive, group.

“Never mind the accounting now,” Charles muttered as he decided not to burden the group with corporate ethics (which he would straighten out later with Theodore), “it is true that you seem to be having a delightful time and I’m happy to see you enjoying yourselves and that you are pleased with the restaurant. Nonetheless, things have happened that will require pressing your greater talents into service. Theodore, think about it—see if we might constructively add to the team with any of the others who are here. Let me know...now I have things I need to do...please get back to me quickly. I’ll be in the room.” On his way out, Charles instructed David to put the bill for the group on the Earls’ personal hotel bill.

Deploying Special Agents

Shortly before noon, Theodore returned to the room with the entire group from around the poolside table at the HerBARium. Charles briefed them on the unusual set of events to which Judy had referred and then sought advice from Theodore as to how he thought the agents might be deployed. “Well,” said the introspective, and now sober, bear, “here are my thoughts. But please let me know if you think I’m off base; after all, I do not yet have any direct knowledge and, as you know, primary sources are always best. I will enumerate the set of events and suggest which teams of agent(s) to assign to which location. I have also designated team captains.

Theodore’s Team: We have the sandwich-throwing incident. I will take that one and will sit near the concession stand to see if I can

figure out if that were an isolated, random event or whether it might somehow be linked to these other events as part of a broader pattern. I'll take Eeyore with me (and L.C. wants to come along). I think that looking for broad context fits well with my skill sets and that discovering how transportation and circulation patterns might fit within that context fits well with Eeyore's skill sets. We will soon go there.

Oscar's Team: We have incidents of various sorts in one elevator: smelly urine and then later a dead body. Oscar could perch up high in the elevator to observe any further conversations or activities there. Also, Honey and Gordon could observe unobtrusively and at differing height levels; they would also learn and benefit from Oscar's previous detective work experiences. They would be extra eyes. François said he would be willing to be used as the scapegoat for where the urine came from should that become an issue; so he is willing to ride in that elevator on occasion. I believe that the police have now released that elevator and that it is once again functional (or soon will be). I am guessing that the elevator may be critical so I would like to have multiple eyes involved.

Guillaume's Team: We have Lila's various activities and patterns of incredibly obnoxious behavior. With regard to those at Alma's HerBARium, I would assign Guillaume because I believe that he can scamper around unobtrusively on the patio. He is also an expert on trees and plants and can look in the herb garden as part of natural squirrel behavior. Also, I would assign Ookpik to the same general location, having him focus on the pool area; he has swimming experience, and I might add, that when we were just at the HerBARium, he enjoyed a brief swim in the pool along with Froggie, who has asked to join this team.

Binker's Team: In the bridge room, we have unusual incidents associated with both Dolores and Lila. There I think it best to introduce a pair of players into the next game, beginning shortly. Binker and Tine have an established partnership, so they should be

able to penetrate that arena effectively without attracting too much attention.

So, what do you think, folks?” queried the thoughtful bear.

“It sounds like a fine plan to me,” said Judy, “and I would add that I will serve as command central; you all need to check that your smartphones are charged and that the coordinated network is working effectively. Test the phones from various parts of the hotel as you move around; the speed or quality of transmission may vary with respect to how much insulation the signal needs to travel through. Be prepared to use the cameras and share both text and graphic information with the group. Try to get the information coming in as soon as possible—a report format is also useful.” “And,” Charles added, “I will consult with Dr. Bob, hotel staff, and others as the need arises.” With that the group disbanded and headed off to various parts of the hotel to begin an afternoon and evening of work on this second day of the tournament.

Reports of the Investigative Teams

For the next four days, these four teams went around the hotel, played bridge, studied patterns of human behavior at the HerBARium, in the elevators, at the concession stand and wherever else they happened to be. The reports they returned to Judy and Charles are reprinted below.



Report of Theodore’s Team (Theodore, Eeyore, and L.C.), presented by Theodore

Eeyore and L.C. and I sat near the sandwich concession stand. It’s really quite elaborate. The hotel does a fine job; and the sandwiches, cookies,

and drinks are nice. I had honey baked ham with Muenster cheese with lettuce, tomato, onion and pickle. The ham was baked on site—none of this pre-sliced deli stuff. Then I had house-baked honey-nut cookies for dessert, and a glass of juice. It cost me ten dollars and was well worth the price; no one should have any complaints. The service was also great: friendly and efficient.

Anyway, it all seemed to be going well. It was hard to imagine how that disgusting incident happened earlier. So, I decided to shake the system up a bit and see what would happen. I asked Eeyore and L.C., both large and slow-moving but deliberate, to stand in line and kind of tie up traffic to see if we would get any response that was out of the ordinary.

Sure enough, there were bridge players who were pushing and shoving trying to get in. Some tried to push Eeyore...a BIG mistake...nothing more stubborn than a relative of a donkey! They pushed and shoved, jockeying for position. A few grabbed cans of soda and left without paying. None of that was too surprising. After a while, a tall man of wiry build, wearing white sneakers and socks, blue jeans with roll cuffs, red polo shirt, and red baseball cap and sunglasses sauntered to the front of the line, grabbed the mustard bottle and squirted it in the face of one of the women selling sandwiches. Then, he grabbed another sandwich, spat in it, and smeared it on the face of one of the astonished on-looking hotel staff members. The man vanished into the crowd.

Now, it's easy to understand why the hotel is losing even some of its most established staff members. I might quit too in the face of this disgusting nonsense. But, what they don't seem to get at is the importance of catching the guy. When this happens, the emotional response gets in the way of the logic. So, once again, he disappeared into the crowded situation that Eeyore and L.C. had managed to create. The system works well, but it is apparently easy to disrupt. Thus, it may be a source for distraction.



Report of Oscar's Team (Oscar, Honey, Gordon, and François), presented by Oscar

We spent way too much time in that elevator for my tastes! Phew! We have all bathed carefully but still I have disgusting odors in my recent memory. I hope we do not offend anyone. We have seen quite a bit, looking down from above the tops of heads. But, there are no cameras in the elevator so in essence we were fulfilling that function. I'm glad that Judy noted that this elevator seemed to smell of asparagus-urine odor. In fact, I think that her analysis was entirely correct.

We also saw the wiry man that Theodore described. On a number of occasions he entered the elevator on the fourth floor or below, urinated in a corner and then left. Later, he would enter again and do something with his smartphone...read something, type a quick message and then leave.

I know from the tests of our phones that Judy had us do, and from sending her photos of what was happening in the elevator, that the phones worked differently in the elevator from elsewhere, presumably because there is less insulation in the elevator shafts than in other parts of the hotel. We thought that in warm climates they probably saw no need to spend extra dollars on the shaft and so in essence treated it as if it were outside and simply covered it. In fact, within other parts of the hotel, the smartphones were using the hotel wifi to connect; within the elevator, however, they were using the same general network as we would use if we were outside. Apparently the elevator shaft functions as a hole in the hotel...it's just a

covered hole, but nonetheless a hole in terms of what's insulated and what is not.

Judy rode in this elevator early in the tournament. By the time we got there, almost no one other than this guy rode in that elevator...I guess word of mouth comment about the odor had travelled quickly, much as rumor and gossip seem to in this world. One exception to that was Lila. I gather, from talking to David, the waiter at the HerBARium, that she made frequent trips to the bar (yes, even though she was here only one day of the tournament) and she seemed to like to take this elevator. Perhaps it was a way for her to hide her activity—I gather she ran to the bar between rounds. After a few rounds, she was probably oblivious to the odor that had sent Judy and others away.

Somewhat later, the elevator opened at the fourth floor; the wiry guy got on the elevator with another wiry guy. We were amazed...they were clearly not twins when viewed side by side, but if we had seen them separately we might not have known they were two different people. They were about the same height, weight, and wearing the same type of outfit. They both urinated in the elevator; clearly they had been eating the asparagus salad in the HerBARium. Honey and Gordon had the opportunity to sit on the visors of their baseball caps. I think that Judy has photos of them.

Another time, when just one of them was in the elevator, we used François as a source of distraction so that Honey and Gordon could fly around and get good photographs of the situation. Honey had the opportunity to fly down and buzz around the guy's smartphone as he was using it. She photographed what he had typed onto it: 16, S, 6C. Then it was sent somewhere.

When François left the elevator on the second floor, the cleaning crew was there. As he strode past the men, he apologized profusely, in his best French accent, for his accident in the elevator. They seemed amazed that such a small dog could cause such a large stench. Then, François mingled in the crowd for several hours where he made numerous friends (he is very cute). He overheard a group in the corner speaking French, but not with a

Parisian accent—seemed like folks from all over using French as some common form of communication. So, he wandered over to the group and made some small talk with them in French. Naturally, they loved it; bent over to pet him; and gave him some of their food. All that sounded quite normal.

However, his description of the group is far from normal. There were six guys, all tall and all wiry. Each one was wearing white sneakers and socks, roll-cuff blue jeans, red polo shirt, red baseball cap and sunglasses. He could distinguish one from the other, but it was not all that easy. As he sniffed around at their feet and ankles, he noticed that each of them had a numeral embroidered on the cuff of the blue jeans, ranging in value from 1 to 6. How odd, he thought, but said nothing and instead wandered off as a friendly dog might do in quest of yet another set of people.



Report of Guillaume’s Team (Guillaume, Ookpik, and Froggie), presented by Guillaume

Well, these are certainly unusual activities that Theodore and Oscar note; we have a few to report, too. Yes, we saw the group of guys at the HerBARium, too; usually two of them during the time when bridge was being played and often all of them between sessions. They usually drank seltzer water and ate asparagus salads. Sometimes a couple of them drank beer. They seemed to drink large quantities of fluid; then again, they were quite tall and would surely drink far more than we would.

One time during a bridge session, I overheard two of them (a non-playing pair during that event) speaking in Ancient Hittite (I studied it when I was a student in theoretical linguistics)—it belongs to the Anatolian Branch of the

Indo-European Languages. Anyway, I went over to them and sat up and acted cute. In Hittite, they said they were impressed with their outfits; that people had trouble telling them apart and that in particular the outfits served to disguise which one of them was the client. They noted that every detail that could give them even the slightest edge was important. I guess I seemed quite interested because one of them pointed at me and said that I looked as if I were listening. They laughed and said no, that couldn't be true because after all I was just a dumb animal...hmmpphh!!! I swatted one of them with my tail and left their table. Of course, I could never get close enough, as François did, to study the cuffs of their pants; most humans think dogs are 'cute' and 'safe'; they won't let an adorable, smart squirrel very near them though...

After that, Ookpik and Froggie continued the surveillance from their vantage points in the swimming pool. Apparently those two just continued talking, and eventually began comparing convention cards before they got up and went to the smelly elevator.

Meanwhile, I went over to talk to David. He told me that he had observed the same sort of behavior pattern from this group of six men as I had. He added that they had been, on occasion, quite friendly to some of the other patrons, as well. In particular, they had spent time with Lila. One of them had offered her extra pine nuts for her asparagus salad; another had offered her extra herbs for the onion marmalade that comes with the salad. Subsequent to that, she complained that the asparagus had not been properly cleaned—that it was still gritty. Apparently another one of that group is a medical doctor; apparently he talked to her about the various prescription drugs that she took and, who knows, may have offered her more.

I gather that sometimes the hotel guests take a great interest in the herb garden. This time, though, David told me that one of the hotel guests, or someone else, had apparently switched around the little signs identifying different herbs and plants. He commented that the most disturbing switch might cause folks to think that a bucket of daffodil bulbs, ready for planting, were in fact onions (as he noted that the daffodil bulb is poisonous and

really should not be eaten lest it make one sick). David said that he had not discovered who had made the switches but noted that it would be fairly easy to do, particularly at night when there were guests around the fire pits near the herb garden.



**Report of Binker's Team (Binker and Tine),
presented by Binker**

Tine and I had an interesting time at the bridge table; we picked up a pair and played in a team game. We did play one set of boards against a pair of guys wearing the outfits others noted. Of course, we saw all four guys on that team and they all looked very much alike. Apparently, they had just arrived and were playing in our event as a kind of a warm up session for their system.

They were very friendly; said they were a professional team from all over the world and wore similar outfits as a way to suggest world unity and global peace. One fellow noted that to him it seemed particularly appropriate to be playing in the United States of America—that the unifying approach of their team seemed to fit with the 'melting pot' and 'unification' ideals underlying the foundations of this country. After I listened for a while, I was beginning to wonder if I had come to a beauty pageant where every contestant stands up with a flag-waving routine and world peace as her platform to winning the event. Of course, I know that's a bit silly, but seriously it did make me wonder if they were trying to distract us. Nonetheless, we were of course very friendly and told them that we hoped that they and their team would have a wonderful time at the tournament.

It was intriguing to play against guys who apparently are world-class players. One hand I thought Tine played flawlessly, toward the end of the first half of the boards. The bidding seemed straightforward and led to a 6S contract. I didn't see any way to play it other than how Tine did. But, he went down one trick. At the other table they were in 6C, making—I couldn't figure out how they got to 6C. Charles, care to take a look at the hand and see if you can figure out either where Tine went wrong or how one might get to 6C?

	♠ K Q 7 6	
	♥ Q	
	♦ K 5	
	♣ Q T 9 5 4 3	
♠		♠ J T 9 8
♥ A 8 6 4 3		♥ J T 9 7
♦ T 9 7 6 3 2		♦ Q J 8
♣ J 6		♣ 7 2
	♠ A 5 4 3 2	
	♥ K 5 2	
	♦ A 4	
	♣ A K 8	

<u>North</u> Binker	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u> Tine	<u>West</u>
		1S	P
4H (splinter)	P	5C (cue)	P
5D (cue)	P	6S	P
P	P		

“Well,” said Charles, “in 6S certainly you must have lost the heart ace and a spade. So, Tine played it just right. The bidding looks normal to me. Now the 6C idea is a very strange one, indeed. Here is a sequence that could lead to that contract, but even if you had gotten to that contract, it makes only sense with South as declarer because if North is declarer a spade lead gets ruffed and the heart ace is also a winner, down one again. Anyway, here it is.

<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>
		1S	P
4H (splinter)	P	5C (cue)	P
6C	P	P	P

If someone bid that against me I might well make a report of some sort—but I might not—makes it a ‘good’ bid (or cheat?). It would appear to me that in this latter auction, Tine would have bid 6C (rather than bidding the 5D cue bid) only if he knew in advance what was going to happen.”

Binker continued: Certainly our opponents talked, at the time, about how unlikely it would have been to be in 6C and that it made only sense from the South seat—but, I wasn’t sure—I needed to hear it from you, Charles. Independent voices are good. We played the next set of boards after they came from our teammates. When we compared scores at the end of the match, we were of course shocked to find that South at the other table had bid and made 6C. The rest of the match was pretty flat so we lost handily based on the result of that one board.

Charles’s Analysis

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. Let me go through this as I think it unfolded in my mind.

To some extent, the reports seem a bit confusing. If, however, one considers that there are two issues here, then it all seems to mesh quite well. First, there is a premeditated plan, involving bridge, and then there is a spontaneous plan, involving murder, when it appeared that the bridge plan might be uncovered.

The people involved are the team of six players all of whom dress alike. I believe that they came with a, ah shall we call it, 'business plan' (I'd call it cheating) scheme that would virtually guarantee their client a win any time the plan was implemented, either in a team game or in a pair game. For this, they were paid handsomely. They were all involved in implementing this plan, but only four at any single time. Their plan was masterful. Lila, however, had the misfortune to get caught up, or appear to get caught up, in it.

I believe that Lila stumbled (perhaps literally) into the heart of their scheme and threatened, by doing so, to interfere with the functioning of their communications hub. I don't think she knew that she had done so, but they could not take a chance and thus needed to get rid of her. Evidence from Binker and Tine also corroborates this idea, as does evidence from the rest of you.

The Premeditated Bridge Business Plan

After I heard back from Binker and Tine, it became apparent that there was a lot of money at stake here for these professionals from all over the world. I asked around a bit among my friends who play pro bridge and they said yes, that members of this team were being paid over a million USD each, per year, to play with the man known as 'number 6' (whose favorite phrase was 'I am not a number'). Their mission was to deliver wins, not points, to number 6. Using the numbering system that I've heard made reference to, and that François uncovered, here is how I think they did it. For the sake of discussion, I will say that numbers 1 to 5 are all professional bridge players from various parts of the world and that number 6 is the client. In using this numbering, I am assuming that the numbers 1 through 5 describe various roles. Number 6 is the 'client' role.

The business plan involves the use of orchestrated distractions and creative smartphone usage. It might have been implemented as follows.

Number 1 is in charge of causing distractions in the hotel; throwing sandwiches and so forth. His mission is to keep the hotel staff off guard so they don't notice anything peculiar in association with bridge. It's better yet for the 'business plan' if established hotel staff leave; new staff might not recognize what is 'peculiar' and what is not 'peculiar' behavior. Thus, Theodore, Eeyore, and L.C. observed Number 1 in action (and we had all heard about some of his earlier actions).

Number 2 is a transmitter of information. He carries, as do all the team members, a smartphone in the breast pocket of his polo shirt. Naturally, he is supposed to turn it off in the tournament. Instead, he turns off the ringer. At a key moment, he bends over and flips on the record feature along with auto-forward so that the recording is sent to a pre-set number. He keeps that running during the auction when the players are using bidding boxes. Then, after the bidding cards are returned to the boxes, he asks for a review of the auction. That review is automatically recorded and sent to someone. But, where is it sent? It cannot be sent to another player in the tournament or to anyone else within the hotel network; to do so, and violate written ABC policy, could cause the team to forfeit and to be banned for a period of time from other tournaments, costing each player as much as a million dollars.

Number 3 is the receiver of information from Number 2. He is in the elevator, outside of range of the hotel camera network (recall that even the men's rooms had cameras). The danger of being observed in the elevators comes from other bridge players riding in them. That's where the importance of the urine comes in. It's a simple way to keep people out and make one elevator their own center of communications. But, now they need to get the information from the elevator back into the bridge room, to the other table. Here the regulations of the ABC were exploited. The ABC does not permit the

reception of any messages, except by licensed medical personnel, and then only from a phone outside the hotel, as evidenced by coming in over a network different from the hotel's internal wifi network. Number 4, a medical doctor, was therefore critical. It was easy for Number 3, in the elevator shaft and consequently outside the hotel network, to relay the information to Number 4 using the LTE—Long Term Evolution—network, outside the hotel's wifi network. As licensed medical personnel, he was free to receive the transmission, read it, and act on it. Clearly this couldn't happen on every hand, but once in a session would have been more than enough to give fine players a nearly guaranteed win. Binker and Eeyore saw this in action when they went down in 6S, and their opponents made 6C! "Yes," noted Tine, "the one man did bend over to pick up a pencil he dropped under the table and the other man did ask for a review of the auction. After the hand we discussed it, including saying out loud what didn't make and what did and how difficult it would be to bid 6C and the fact that it made only when South played it. And yes, Honey, it was Board 16—so probably what you photographed in the elevator was our hand being sent to our opponent, the doctor, sitting in Binker's seat! It all seemed so normal we didn't even include most of it as part of our report...but yes, you are right! Outstanding analysis! What a 'business plan'—I guess when they said they were testing their system that we didn't get what it was they were testing—it worked all right—gave us a bottom board."

The Spontaneous Murder Plan

As I said, I do not think that they came here with the idea in mind of murdering Lila; she must have gotten in their way somehow and so they killed her out of necessity to protect their business deal. To do so, they needed an on-the-fly, spontaneous plan. I think they did it as a group, each contributing a piece, so that no individual was solely responsible for the murder. Because they looked alike, if someone placed one of them at any single location it would have been easy for him to prove that in fact he had been observed somewhere else at the stated time.

The group had noted that Lila rode all too frequently in what they had pre-determined as their private elevator and communications hub. She had adopted it as her own, and this was an adoption they could not afford. She had to be removed, whether or not she knew anything. Using a group effort of individual tactics, no one of which was sufficient to kill her by itself, was the strategy they came up with. No single person would have cast the deciding stone, as *the* murderer.

Depending on who was playing bridge at any given time, various of them filled each role of the business plan. But now, to achieve this new end and secure their business plan, they created ad hoc roles for players Number 5 and Number 6 and added to the role of the doctor, Number 4. Yes, they even had to bring the client in on it more directly.

Number 5 was to be a 'charmer' and sit in the bar with Lila; offer her all she wanted (and more) to drink. Find out what she knew or didn't know.

Number 4, the doctor, added to his role: he was to find out her list of medications and offer her any added things she thought she might enjoy or to suggest creative increases to existing dosages with promises for refills. He also got to study interaction possibilities of her medication list with food and drink.

Number 6, the client, handled food for Lila. He was the geologist with us on the Grand Canyon trip and had innocently collected not only a soil sample at the Grand Canyon but also some deer turd (which the tour guide had noted were poisonous). Now, I do say 'innocently' only in reference to murder; clearly he was willing to bend the rules when such bending served him in either the cause of science or in the cause of bridge. He offered the greedy Lila extra pine nuts (deer turd look like pine nuts) knowing they were poison; when he did so, some of the soil must have fallen on her salad causing her to think the asparagus had not been properly cleaned. He was probably also the one who switched signs on herbs (a red herring) and on the bucket of narcissus bulbs, again with full knowledge that eating narcissus bulbs would make anyone who ate them quite ill.

I gather that David was of course not at the bar the whole time; he had some new help who no doubt innocently made some onion marmalade from the narcissus bulbs and served it to both Dolores and to Lila. Dolores got sick from it, and only from it. Lila on the other hand had been hit with deer turd poison, alcohol poison, and medicinal overdose—with a final blow from narcissus poison. Did one of them also introduce either rattlesnake or scorpion venom? Certainly from what Judy saw, that might have been possible.

By the way, I did check back with Dr. Bob about Dolores, the pregnant woman. Both she and the baby (in utero) are in the hospital under observation; they appear to be fine, but the medical staff is being careful. They believe that she suffered some form of allergic reaction or low-dose poisoning from food. They are running tests and we may know more later.

Dolores was an important piece to this puzzle--she was not the target of poison. You see, if Lila had been the target, and the person doing the poisoning had only a physical description, one might mistake the very pregnant Dolores for the morbidly obese Lila. Notice, please, that Dolores only received enough poison to make her sick—not to kill her. It was the latter point that got me to thinking along these shocking lines of group murder and created a cascade of thoughts that caused the wonderful information you all brought back to fall into place.

Well, there you have it: A logical chain of events accounting for all that we have seen and leading to the appropriate result along with a plausible rationale for that result. What do you think? “I think,” said Theodore, “you should head right over to the Phoenix Police Department and explain it all to them and turn over all the evidence we have from our smartphones in support of it—brilliant work, Charles!” “Bravo,” the group cried! “Ah, yes,” said Judy, “instead of a bird rising from the ashes, we have bridge hands rising with the elevator—a new twist on the classical image of ‘Phoenix’!”

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