



PROVIDENCE BRIDGE MURDER*

By B. K. Barry

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

Dedicated to the memory of Jeff Johnston

(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!)

“They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
Waved over by that flaming brand, the gate
With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms:
Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them
soon;

The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide;
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.”

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Arrival in Providence—Monday morning

“Charles,” Judy Earl said to her bridge-playing, mathematician husband, “that was a tiring trip; how about if I sit over here in the lobby while you check us into the hotel?” “Sure, fine, Judy.” Charles still enjoyed doing small, thoughtful things to please his wife of many years. The Earls had arrived in Providence to play in a national bridge tournament held by the American Bridge Congress (ABC).

Judy walked over to an area with comfortable black leather sofas and arm chairs. Two well-dressed women were sitting there, also waiting for something or someone. One of them had a beautiful cat on her lap. Both women admired the cat, as they stroked its silky long fur in various directions. Soon, the cat looked up at them and began rearranging its messed-up coat, using its tongue, according to its own specifications. Then, it jumped off the lap of the one woman and went behind the registration desk. Judy wondered if it were a hotel cat or if it were the pet of one of the women. If the latter, then she wondered what other pets she might see in the hotel. If the former, she wondered what sorts of pests might cause the hotel to keep a cat.

“Judy Earl...long time no see...you are still a good-looking broad!” shouted a man from across the lobby who was just entering the hotel, apparently for the first time. Judy recognized Mickey, an acquaintance from long ago when Charles, Judy, Mickey, and Mickey’s first wife, were all graduate students. “Hi, Mickey” Judy said in an even tone. “Well, come on, Judy, how about a hug...you are OK...I don’t know about the guy you married, though...let me know when he bores you—I could really thrill you—just say the word.” “Really, Mickey, cut it out...you will never be half the man that Charles is,” Judy jabbed back at their arrogant academic acquaintance, as she continued... “Charles wrote his dissertation and completed his degree...unlike others I can think of!” “Touché, Judy” Mickey commented and winked at her “but unlike you, I did mean what I said...let me know when you are ready for ME.”

Soon the cat wandered out from behind the desk “hmmm,” Judy thought, “guess Mickey is the sort of pest the cat is supposed to get rid of...Ha!” The cat wandered over and looked at Mickey, then crossed the lobby and hopped up into Judy’s lap. Judy was happy to pet the gorgeous animal that had now apparently rearranged its coat to its liking. “That cat had better not barf on me” Mickey shouted across the lobby at Judy, “I have my expensive three-piece suit on and I won’t have it sullied by that lower animal.”

At that, the cat began licking its coat, rearranged it once again, hopped off of Judy’s lap, trotted across the lobby and vaulted into Mickey’s lap. As Mickey began pushing at it, the cat dug its claws into Mickey’s thighs causing Mickey to bounce up and down in anguish. Soon, the cat regurgitated one hair ball after another on Mickey’s suit. Mickey

shrieked, grabbed the cat around the belly and threw the cat across the lobby against a concrete pillar going from the lobby floor to ceiling. As the cat flew through the lobby, the folks checking in turned around in response to cat-shrieks in time to see the cat hit the pillar and hear the agonizing crunch as the cat's neck broke. The crowd gathered around the dead cat, lying on the floor of the lobby. "Ha, that'll teach that cat...Mickey is a man of his word...I warned him that he had better not barf on my suit...once he stiffens up a bit, atrophies as it were, you all can say it was a 'cat-astrophe'—man, am I clever!" The arrogant man strutted off to the hotel elevator bank and stairway where he vanished as the stunned crowd looked on.

In the Hotel Room—Monday noon

"Judy, come on, let's go up to our room" Charles said as he guided his shocked wife to the elevator, "let me help you." Soon the couple entered their room on a high floor. "Look at the view, Judy—it's the Rhode Island State House...beautiful, isn't it...imagine all the links to history that this physically tiny state has." "Charles, do you think Rhode Island is named for the classical island of Rhodes? You know, the Colossus of Rhodes, and all that...colossal Rhode Island!" queried Charles's inquisitive wife. "I don't know Judy, you tell me; here are some links I found while we were on the train—just trying to anticipate some of what I thought you might think about" Charles noted as he saw his wife beginning to relax following the outrage in the lobby:



[Rhode Island, Origin of Name](#) [Rhode Island State House](#)

With this motivation in hand, Judy quickly set up the laptop and other electronic equipment she had brought. Then she settled in to read online about her new surroundings as Charles unpacked the suitcases and made all other arrangements.

"OK, Judy, I'm done," Charles announced, "I think I'll go check out the rest of the hotel and see what it's like while you stay here. OK? Then I'll meet you at the first session of the tournament this afternoon." Judy nodded her head in agreement. Charles always liked to study how the tournament setup was progressing. He enjoyed seeing the diligent ABC workers setting up the rooms with tables, changing light bulbs in the

ceilings and perhaps setting up security systems, and the many other tasks often unappreciated by those who come once all is done.



Soon, Charles headed back to the Lobby. He found that the local police were there. He volunteered to them to help find Mickey—he hoped that his personal knowledge of Mickey might expedite their efforts. Charles related to them that Judy had overheard Mickey’s comments about staying for the entire tournament and shared with them that it was his sense that that would be precisely what Mickey would do. Charles described Mickey’s appearance and described the three-piece suit he was last seen wearing. He also told them that Mickey was now an attorney and that the Mickey he had known many years ago was a master actor, of sorts...not trained as such, just a natural talent. Mickey had been working on some combination of philosophy and theoretical linguistics in his graduate study. He could mimic voices, noises, and speak a variety of languages with a native accent, all the while discussing implications of cross-cultural variation in subtlety of meaning of various words. When combined, his various capabilities could render him difficult to recognize even though he was not wearing a mask or other items of physical disguise—he knew how to select what people would remember when describing him...clothing, accent, oddity, and so forth. In this case, it was the three-piece suit. The police were appreciative of the offer to help. They assured him and the hotel staff that animal abuse of this sort would not be tolerated. Charles agreed, and made yet another offer—that once Mickey was found, Charles would ‘persuade’ him to make an offer of restitution of some sort (in addition to legal punishments that might come his way)—perhaps a gift of \$10,000 to the local shelter for cats or some such. The hotel staff was very supportive of this idea. Then, Charles joined Judy in the convention center for their first session of bridge.

At the Bridge Table—the First Session—Monday afternoon







“Judy, we have a few minutes before the start of the session...enough time to grab some food at the Café on the way to the game...it’s another in the Alma Mater chain,

you know,” Charles said. Charles’s reference was to a chain of restaurants that the Earls had established in various locations nationwide. The name was a double-entendre of sorts. Judy’s mother had been named ‘Alma’ and was a great chef. The ‘alma mater’ reference was linked to the profession of the Earls: Charles was a professor of mathematics and Judy was a professor of geography, both in major universities. In the last few years of Alma’s life, she had much enjoyed knowing about this chain her daughter and son-in-law had named in her honor. And of course the Earls enjoyed the extra hobby of running them: Judy as CEO of the chain who oversaw the business records and Charles as President who implemented site selection, building, acquisition, and all aspects of the actual running of the businesses. “Sounds good to me,” Judy said, “let’s go.”

Alma Mater Café was located in the convention center just beyond the convenient second floor link from the hotel to the convention center. The hotel was linked to a mall in another direction. The covered second floor links were much-appreciated barriers protecting them from the frosty Rhode Island late autumn weather. After a quick bite to eat, they were soon seated north-south at a bridge table; Charles had needed a double north-south because a recent wound, now well on the way to healing, had made it uncomfortable for him to get up and down off chairs frequently. East-west opponents came by and the couple settled in to play. After four rounds, they had a couple of tops and a zero and an average. Two pleasant men came to the table in round 5. Charles, sitting north, opened 1D. East bid 1H. Judy passed. West bid 2H. Charles passed. East bid 1H. Charles asked him if he would care to make his bid sufficient. East noted that he found the comment insulting but said he would prefer to bid 1NT anyway. At that, Charles called for a Director. A Director came over, straightened things out and the pair played a 4H contract down 5. The next hand East opened the bidding with “1 Oyster.” Charles looked at Judy. Again, Charles politely informed the man that the bid was not appropriate and called for a Director. This time, ABC Chief Director Eric, a long-time friend of both of the Earls, came over. “And what seems to be the problem here?” Eric queried. Charles described the situation. “Sir,” Eric said a bit sardonically as he tipped his Director’s hat at him, “we try to leave dinner topics in the restaurant; I am a great admirer of Rhode Island seafood. Did you perhaps enjoy some seafood for dinner along with a few glasses of wine?” “No,” snapped the man. Then, East began shaking uncontrollably and started banging his head against the table. Then he fell off the chair onto the floor and lay there in a pike position. “Let’s call the paramedics...Judy, use your smartphone,” Eric ordered. The thoughtful Director sat down at the Earl table. Soon, the ambulance and paramedics arrived; the man was given an injection, and then taken off on a stretcher. The pair withdrew from the event, as did Charles and Judy. Charles kept the pair count even that way and it also gave him an opportunity to take his shaken wife away from the scene—the dead cat and the sick man were a bit much for his hypersensitive wife.

The Quest for Mickey—later Monday afternoon

“Judy,” Charles suggested, “I think you need a rest. I will activate our team of agents to assist me in finding Mickey--take them all down to the Café for a few drinks while we discuss background, context, and strategy.” Judy nodded agreement as she lay down on the bed and turned on the TV. The ‘agents’ to whom Charles referred were their family ‘Brain Trust’ team who often travelled with the Earls.

<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 even when he is dummy. Binker is originally from Paris, France, and was born at Galeries Lafayette. He is also a part-time mystery story writer and trivia player.</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>

“Ahhh,” said Theodore E. Bear (aka ‘Ted’), “there is David...he’s the head trainer of waiters for the Alma Mater chain...let’s get him over here and get a round of Mead for all...I’m partial to honey in all forms, but particularly to Mead!” David soon brought a round of Mead. Charles passed on it, so Ted had his own drink and Charles’s as well. The other bears enjoyed Mead, too, but Tine could drink only a bit so Theodore wound up drinking close to three glasses of it.

Soon the group was plotting strategy on how to find the elusive Mickey. They synchronized their smartphones. “OK,” Theodore waved with a gesture of a large paw, “we have a plan. I will stay in the hotel room and direct it—making good use of electronic network and smartphone technology. I think we’ll use FaceTime and camera reversal when needed in tracking.” “Then,” the bear continued, “Tine can hang out in small areas where he will not be noticed...elevators, corners, and so forth. And I want Binker to stay here at the Café...they have trivia boxes and I’m guessing that Mickey might enjoy the game...Binker is an expert player...let him look around while playing. He might even play more than one wireless trivia box at a time to try to build a crowd and perhaps attract Mickey.”

“Furthermore,” continued the thoughtful bear, “I think we need some extra agents; the connection of the hotel, kind of sitting in the middle, between a linked mall and a linked convention center, makes it easy for someone to disappear. So, I’d like one agent assigned to the mall, one agent to the hotel, and one agent to the convention center. But, let’s do an initial reconnaissance prior to making such assignment. Leave now, look over the extended hotel site, and then come back together right here for a late dinner. OK? Then we will go from there.” It sounded like a good plan to this small group and they headed out to do a bit of field study in order to understand their new surroundings.

Dinner at Alma Mater: Reports of the Brain Trust Agents—Monday late afternoon/early evening

Report of Theodore E. Bear

Well, I got all the networks set and ready to go. The wireless networks in the hotel work well. If we need any printouts, we just email the file to the front desk and they will print it out. I have the appropriate email address and in fact created a word-processed document containing that information and had it printed—just to test the system. The other testing, of the human networks within the hotel, did not go as well. We need to know how room service works, location of service elevators, electrical boxes, and so forth. Most of it I now know and it too is summarized in the little report I printed out and gave you each a copy of. Where

the test failed, however, was with room service. I called and placed a substantial order—some for this evening, some to be put in our room refrigerator, and some to be stored on a shelf for later.

So, I ordered a number of containers of Greek yogurt with honey (they had my favorite kind with the separated, but attached, little container at the side of the yogurt cup), tea bags and small jars of honey, an empty ceramic teapot, several quarts of mixed berries (raspberries, black berries, and blueberries), a jar of maraschino cherries, and a magnum of Mead. When room service came, they tapped on the door. I was otherwise occupied so could not get to the door to let them in. After about 20 minutes, I was able to get to the door. There were three trays on the floor outside, but to my amazement, almost nothing on them! A couple of stray berries lay on the carpet; a few were smashed. I photographed the scene and then called room service. They came up and checked our room (I presume to establish that I was not fibbing) and then assured me that they would again deliver another order at no extra charge. They did ask, however, that I answer the door and let them in with the food. I gather that they think there may be a thief in the hotel who steals food and drink left on trays by room service. Judy and I both wondered ‘might it be Mickey’? What a world!

So, later I let room service in and it was all very nice. I macerated a bunch of the berries in sugar and honey. Later, after we finish dinner here, we will return to the room and have dessert. I’ll top the berries with a dollop of Greek yogurt and a Mead-soaked maraschino cherry. We will have tea with honey and Mead with the dessert as we contemplate moving forward. If anyone wants a cigar he will have to go outside; however, I think that only Jean-Pierre Bear smokes cigars and I don’t see him here. Nonetheless, forewarned...ah! Here comes Judy...I had hoped she would come down and join us here.

Comment of Judy

Ted, I think that we might have to revise our view that the food thief is Mickey...maybe it is he; however, we now have another possibility to consider. When I was waiting for the elevator just now, Theresa and Ernest Defarge got off the elevator at our floor. I watched them and they are staying in the room next to ours. Remember, Theresa was stealing food from the hotel at the Dallas tournament; in fact, she may be a murderer...but she is slippery and clever—a brilliant coding theorist/mathematician. The Dallas police must not have been able to find sufficient evidence to convict her of the murder there (any more than the New York City police had been able to convict her of the murder of her first husband). So, she is here, and may be back to her old ways of stealing food that

she finds a 'luxury' (what you ordered from room service would qualify as such) and giving it to the poor. In any event, we need to keep our eyes open...who knows what else we might find on our quest for Mickey.

Report of Binker Bear

I played trivia at the Café for a while. David (whose handle at the game is 'Person'—mine is of course 'binker') was able to sit down and play too. After a while, a couple of guys who were scouting out the site for a future meeting of the Montgolfier Society joined in. They were Ossi Dog and Otto Octopus. Ossi is the Chief Scout. Otto is the Scrivener for the Society and so they refer to him as 'Bart' after the classic short story ('Bartelby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street') by Herman Melville (1853). Anyway, Bart is here to evaluate and to sign any formal contracts—he is multi-dextrous—could play more than one trivia machine at a time. They were swell trivia players; smart and alert.



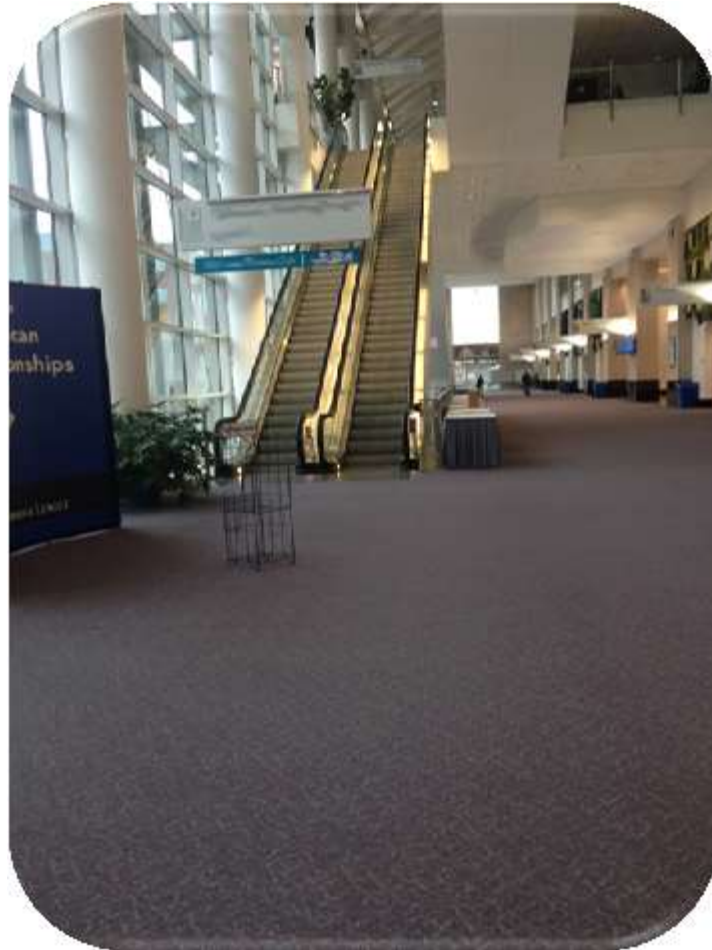
Ossi the dog, Chief Scout for the Montgolfier Society



Otto (aka 'Bart') the octopus, Scrivener for the Montgolfier Society

Together we played a total of eleven machines but were unable to generate much interest in the game. People looked, but they seemed to be rushing around getting their bearings at the tournament. Thus, after a while, I decided perhaps I should do the same. I toured the convention center, taking both the

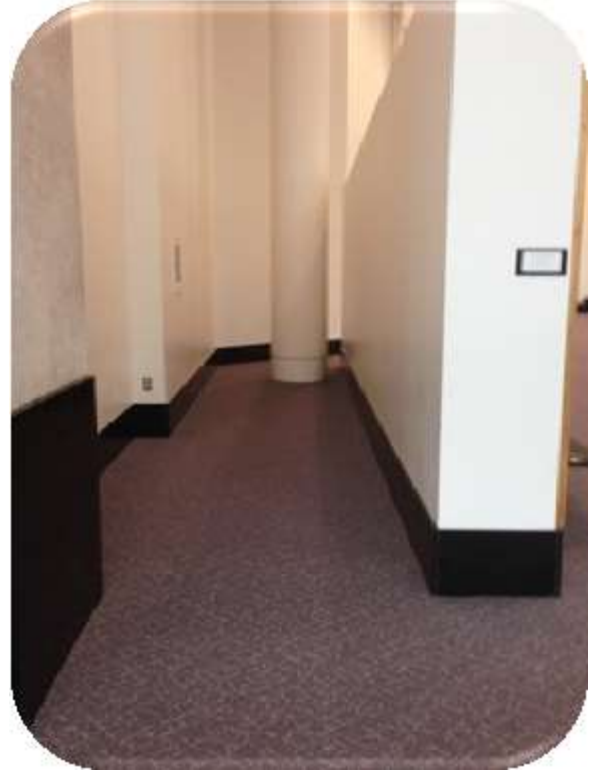
escalators and the elevator. It's actually quite interesting from the standpoint of numbering system.



When we leave the hotel, we are on floor 2 of the hotel. We walk through a set of walkways, without going up or downhill, and arrive in the convention center on the level called 3. That's counterintuitive and I can see why folks need a bit of adjustment time. To further the confusion, if one takes the escalator down, one arrives on level 1. What happened to 2? Also, if one takes the escalator up from 3, one arrives on level 5. What happened to 4? Now there is some access to 4, but 2 remained completely hidden. Then, when I got in the elevator, there were buttons for each of 1 through 5. Naturally, I went to each floor. It appears that the building administrative offices are hidden, tucked away on 2. What a place to hide!

There are other places, right on floor 3 in plain sight that might offer opportunity for hiding. There is a beautiful mural with benches in front of it, right across from

the Café. The mural itself contains intricate other images; notice the turtles, almost as 'tracks' in the lower left-hand corner. Behind the mural is an interesting thin empty area that could certainly hide something.



In fact, someone (probably an ABC staff member) is already using a similar space, behind the sign advertising this ABC tournament, as a place to hide the large cases for transporting that sign. The place is crawling with hiding spaces!



When we first met, someone mentioned that we might need extra agents. Part of our goal in this reconnaissance was to determine positions for extras. So, yes, I certainly think an added agent in the elevator, and elsewhere, in the convention center would be a fine idea—let's see if Mickey has figured out where the hidden floor is or where other hiding places might be!

Report of Tine E. Bear

How about that—I too found a numerical oddity in the mall. As you say, Binker, we leave the hotel from floor 2 of the hotel...no change in elevation on the walkway linking the hotel to the mall. Yet, when I arrived at the mall building, I was on floor B. I got into the glass elevator which went to either 1 or 2 as well as levels A and C. Well, I heard that the food court was on level 3. Turns out, that to get there by elevator, I could take the glass elevator to level 1 (passing floor C on the way up from B to 1), get out on 1, walk to the rear of the mall and take an internal elevator up to 3, 4, or 5. Again, not very intuitive...easy to get lost. But, I did not find any 'hidden' floors. Just an awkward circulation pattern, perhaps designed to walk patrons past a variety of commercial establishments in the hope of encouraging impulse-buying, but also perhaps because there was careful planning in the use of infill development in an older city. I am quite sensitive to how the mindset of 'small' can translate into the environment. It seems to me that our smallest state might be, too. It appears to have high density of development executed by thoughtful planners...I think the mall makes use of floodplain property. You can even see this careful planning philosophy in our hotel room; it's a small room as these things go, but it is one of the best organized I've ever seen. We have more space for our things than we have had

in many larger rooms...every square inch is used constructively and creatively...even to the extent that there is the illusion of some open space in the room. I am a great admirer of such strategy—compactness works.

Anyway, someone like Mickey might be able to take advantage of the unusual layout of the mall to 'hide' in the open. People are thinking more about the logistics of getting around than they are of what other mall patrons might be doing or might look like. Yes, I would agree that having an agent focused on people-watching in the mall might be a good idea.

Assignment of Added Agents

"I think we have a good idea," said Theodore, "of where we would like additional agents. Otto/Bart is an expert at camouflage and is quite intelligent and good at figuring out mazes and complex circulation patterns—traits of his species. I gather that those facts, coupled with the ink supply that he carries in his sack make him uniquely qualified for the role of Scrivener." "Binker," Theodore continued, "would you be willing to see if he would also be interested in helping us? If he could replace his ink supply with helium, then he could float around in the mall and do people-watching not only at ground level but also from above, as he drifted from level to level. That would be great!"

"Oh, yes," Judy contributed excitedly, "it reminds me of my own fascination with helium balloons—the best ever when I lived in Paris, the home of M. Montgolfier. I would be happy to assist Bart in this venture."

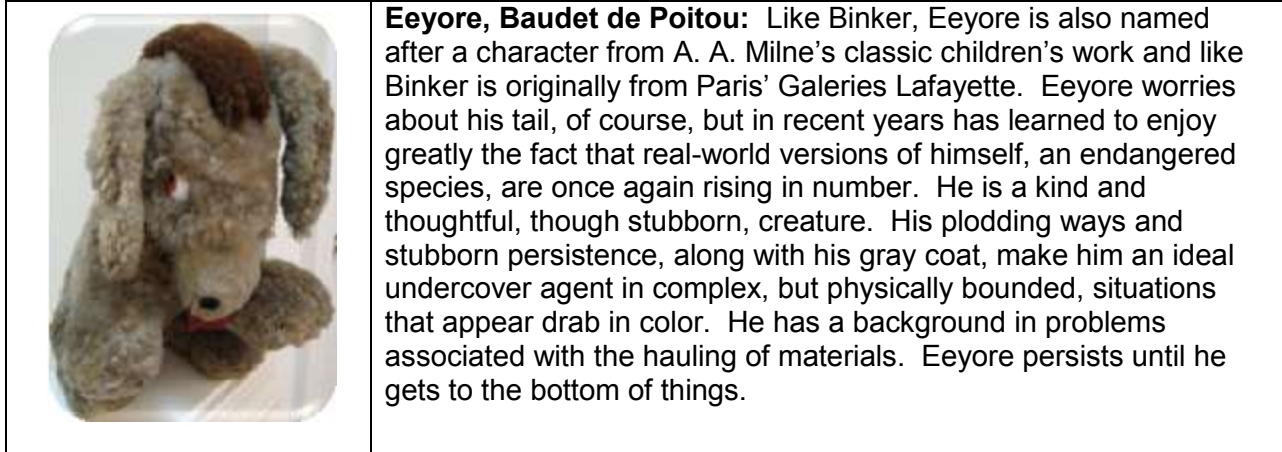


Judy as a child in Paris: Champs Elysses

“Sure,” continued Theodore, “so we have Bart (if he agrees) and Judy covering the mall. Then let’s see if Ossi will help us in the elevator in the convention center. I have seen several small dogs over there; some being carried, some walking on a leash. He would not seem at all out of place in the elevator, escalator, or in the rooms where they are playing bridge. He can always claim to be a service dog...after all, he is in the service of the Montgolfier Society! In addition, we may need an agent with him with a bit more experience, so I would suggest adding Eeyore who is quite strong and has good, if plodding, endurance. Further, I think that Binker could use extra help in the Café so that he can choose to roam if desired...but we do need always to keep that covered. Ludwig von Bearthoven would be perfect; he is already the Entertainment Director for the Alma Mater chain, so his presence there would be natural.”

“Charles,” Theodore stated, “and the Brain Trust will cover the hotel...we will keep an eye on room service trays in the hallways...Mickey will need to eat. I’d like to add Guillaume Squirrel into that group—he has lots of experience in hotel hallways, duct work, and other long thin spaces. And, like Mickey, he too is a linguist.” “That all sounds like a fine plan to me,” Charles said, “Binker, please phone your friends from the Montgolfier Society and see if they will help.” Binker did so and said that they agreed, although at first Bart had said that ‘I would prefer not to...’ But, when Binker mentioned the use of helium, Bart agreed.

	<p>Ludwig von Bearthoven: A native of Troy, Michigan, and a member of the illustrious Gund family. Ludwig is from a musical family and serves as the corporate Director of Entertainment for the Alma Mater chain. He also has considerable “undercover” experience as his soft hugs have lulled many to sleep. This experience translates elsewhere in a natural manner. “Freude !!” is a favorite greeting of his.</p>
	<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>



With their initial reconnaissance of the site complete, and a team in place, the group of assistants settled in for an evening of dessert and Mead, followed by a sound sleep. Charles and Judy went, instead, to the Presidential Suite of the hotel where they enjoyed seeing long-time friends in a convivial setting.

In the Presidential Suite, Monday Evening Late

John and Joanne Harlow, the charming ABC presidential couple, welcomed guests for the evening. Joanne was nearing the end of her year as ABC President. She and John had toured most of North America in the effort to spread goodwill about the game of tournament duplicate bridge. In the Suite, John helped with the bar tending duties, while Joanne ushered in guests and made them feel at home. As always, the food was spectacular and the liquor flowed freely. So too did some of the guests.

Judy sat with some of her friends who were interested in promoting goodwill in the ABC while Charles hung out at the bar and discussed bridge hands from the afternoon with a number of the expert players there. As the couple helping with the food began to bring out more delicacies for the dining room table, the group began moving around to follow the food trail. A bowl of local seafood made an appearance as did any number of dips, chips, brownies, cookies, cheeses, fresh fruit salad, and a gorgeous cheesecake topped with cherries. Charles came over to Judy who was helping herself to a slice of cheesecake. “Oh, Charles, old boy” came a voice from a stocky guy at the bar, “grab me some of that stuff the broad next to you is getting...looks like something with raspberries on top...just scrape off the raspberries and put them all in a bowl for me and bring me the bowl...I just love raspberries!” Judy marched right over to the bar, “you, sir, are a shameful excuse for a ‘guest’—greedy pig is more like it—I am not some ‘broad’; those are not raspberries, they are cherries; and, how dare you grab all of them!” The man went to John, shoved Joanne out of the way, and said “you are the President, throw that broad out, she was rude to me.” “First of all,” John replied—his voice shaking—“I am not the President, the nice woman you pushed out of the way is.

So, let's see what SHE has to say..." "Get out! Now!" Joanne told the man firmly. "What did I do?" he demanded. "Just leave...no one here invited you" Joanne said. "Oh, well, I didn't realize this was some sort of elitist hoity-toity, or should I say toiletty, club...I have money...what's the initiation fee...I can buy and sell this entire group...but then again why would I want to hang with you creeps," the man shouted as John escorted him out the door.

"Charles, who was that man?" Judy Earl asked her husband. "He's Van Silverman" Charles said "...a bit on the obnoxious side and he also can't ever seem to get anything right. He offends people all the time and doesn't seem aware of what he's doing. No one knows if it's an act designed to throw you off your game or if he is just a confused person who needs some professional help. This afternoon we played against him the round before the guy fainted at our table...you might not remember given the upsetting times with the cat and then the fainting...when he sat down he demanded to know how I got a double north-south entry. I told him I was injured and could not move around, up and down, easily. He commented that I should be required to pay extra; his poor partner told him that when someone had a serious physical problem that it would be unkind to require them to pay extra...that in fact the ABC was doing the right thing by taking good care in such situations. Van scoffed at that and told partner he was a fool. I think that's one of the reasons we got two good boards from them." "Oh," commented Judy, "what a swell guy—takes all kinds I suppose—nonetheless folks like that are distressing...let's go down and go to bed and see if we can manage a better day tomorrow."

Tuesday Morning

"Wow, Judy, talk about strange things," Charles said to his wife as they went off for their morning workouts at the gym, "we enter on the eighth floor and exit on the sixth floor...more strangeness...more opportunity for hiding...did you see the guy watching us as we went downstairs? A big burly sort...I wonder...might have been Mickey? I was distracted by the whole arrangement and didn't really pay that much attention...that's Mickey, though, ubiquitous and there when you least expect him. If we go back, he'll be gone..." "But," Judy noted, "once you get there, the machines are nice...good selection and well-maintained. Now, I need to get on with it," and she pulled out her smartphone and headset and listened to Mozart's Exsultate Jubilate as she hopped on the elliptical crosstrainer.

After about an hour, the couple left, returned to their room and laid out plans for the day. Charles was to play bridge all day in the premier ABC Gold Ribbon Pairs event while Judy and the group tried to track Mickey. They assumed that Mickey might not be playing in the Gold Ribbon event, but rather in one of the many team events and that he

might well participate on six person teams so that he could go about his other unusual activities undetected while others were playing bridge.

Charles and Judy headed off toward the convention center; Charles to play bridge and Judy to meet with Theodore and crew at their pre-arranged rendezvous point in front of the mural with turtle tracks on it—across from the Alma Mater Café.

Tuesday Afternoon, Tracking Mickey

“Theodore,” Judy commented, “I must compliment you on your choice of a rendezvous point...turtle ‘tracks’ when we are engaged in a ‘tracking’ venture...very cute, indeed!” “Thank you,” the friendly bear noted, “now let’s get on with it. Judy, I gather that you think you might have seen Mickey this morning near the gym...so, it appears he is still around and up to his old tricks. I hope we will be up to tracking him down and bringing him to justice. Now, let’s go! We will meet back here shortly before dinner.”

Theodore’s report

Well, the first thing I did was place an order with room service. I ordered what got stolen before and added a few goodies to the order: peanut butter and bagels for Guillaume and a magnum of Champagne and some caviar for myself (I hope you don’t mind...all this is hard work). Then, Guillaume went to work in the hallways and elevators in the hotel to see what would happen. Of course, I remained in touch with him over my smartphone. Here is what we found out...shortly after I placed the order, I began to smell burnt toast. Guillaume said it was coming from next door, from Theresa Defarge’s room. Once the food arrived, she came out into the hallway and took some of it—but she left some, as well. I could see that activity through the peep hole in the door (we have a handicap room, so there is a low peep hole). She apparently took the bagels and peanut butter, perhaps as a replacement for her burnt toast. Soon, Guillaume phoned to say that there was a group of young street people on our floor heading for the food—they took it all and left in the elevator. We assume that Theresa must have a network much like ours and she phoned them to come get the food—her approach to altruism.

Now, we did wonder how these folks got upstairs; after all a key is needed to go above 8 in the elevator, even if someone else has pushed a button. However, one way to get in is to first push a lit button (that someone with a key has activated), hold that button in, and then simultaneously push a different ‘locked’ number...I remember when I was just a cub many years ago that reverse Polish notation calculators worked in a similar way...but I digress. Anyway, Guillaume figured out how these non-residents were able to access a locked floor and in

doing so explained also why there would likely be a lag between Theresa's activity and their arrival...they had to wait for a registered guest to press one locked floor button.

So, Guillaume and I concluded, as Judy had previously suggested, that Mickey was probably not involved in stealing food from room service trays. Instead, we decided that we had uncovered some sort of plot of Theresa totally unrelated to our concerns. Thus, I reported what we had discovered to hotel security, including the trick with elevator buttons. Then, I reassigned Guillaume to the convention center while I continued to man the center of operations from the hotel room.

Ossi's report

When I got to the mall, on the top level, there was a man in a fine gray suit hosting a dog show of some sort. Little battery-operated dogs were dancing around on the floor; some did gymnastics. I knew I could join in with this group and not be noticed. It was fun and many children convinced their parents to buy them a toy dog. Naturally, it was the toys, and not the man, that were the center of attention. After a bit, I could see Judy in the distance; she was apparently coming upstairs after she had made her rounds in the mall in search of Mickey. When the man running the toy dogs saw her, he ran away. I decided quickly that perhaps he was Mickey; after all, Judy is the only one of us that would recognize Mickey. I looked up, saw Bart hovering overhead, and motioned to him to follow the man in the gray flannel suit. He did so, and I'll let him pick up from here.

Bart's report

It was very strange; that man ran straight for the women's restroom. When he went in, all the women in there came running out and caused quite a scene outside the door. It would not have been possible for someone to get in there through the throng of screaming women and others who started panicking simply because there was an 'event' of some sort. Fortunately, I was able to drift right in. But, I was confused. I did not see the man I had been chasing. There was one occupied stall. It may sound a bit gross, but I was able to hover over it and observe what was going on. I did not see anything in there that would lead me to think the person was a man. What I did see was an elegant gray suit and carefully manicured hands. Soon, mall security guards came in. They spoke to the person in the stall, who replied in a feminine voice. She came out, walked gracefully, hips swiveling a bit, and talked briefly to the security men and expressed her horror at the idea of a man having been in there while she was

(fortunately) locked in her stall. They left; the woman adjusted her hair, and soon after that left and headed toward the hotel.

Binker's report

Once again, we set up to play trivia with lots of machines. This time we were successful in attracting a group of players. By now, I think folks were familiar with the logistics of the place and were a bit more relaxed. They seemed to enjoy playing trivia while they waited to play on their five or six person bridge teams. You all know how much I enjoy playing trivia; with this many good players in the group we were able to score in the top 20 nationwide, as a bar, in most of the games in the early afternoon. Then again, there were only about 3000 players (nationwide) in most of the games...still a fine performance I think. There was, however, one unhappy camper. I don't really know what his problem was; I think that probably Ludwig can give us greater insight on that. In retrospect, that fellow may well have been Mickey.

Ludwig's report

I signed onto the trivia box with my usual handle of 'Ludwig'. This unhappy guy to whom Binker referred was unusually upset; he claimed that that handle belonged to him and that I had no right to use it. He said he was a descendant of Ludwig Wittgenstein and that he owned the original *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and that such ownership entitled him to use the handle 'Ludwig' as he wished. We debated this for a while, particularly in the context of Wittgenstein's picture theory of language; eventually, he adopted the handle 'Witt' instead. He was a fine player; he had wild and crazy looking hair and seemed to speak with a German accent. He ordered some Cutty Sark and referred to it as Irish whiskey and as appropriate to Rhode Island. I corrected him, showed him some pictures, and turned around to bring him a drink. When I came back he was gone. As Binker commented, we suspect that 'Witt' was, in fact, Mickey.



Photo of Judy's of a relative (clipper ship) of the Cutty Sark on the high Atlantic seas in 1949.



Tine's report

I spent all afternoon on the escalators and in the elevators of the convention center. While there were a number of odd things that happened, I did not see anything that I would attribute to Mickey. But, you decide.

First, there was a man lying on floor in front of elevator. A woman was hurriedly looking in her purse, apparently for medication. She was well-dressed and was carrying a Coach bag. A man was also kneeling over the ill person, apparently taking his pulse. The kneeling man was wearing a beautiful gray flannel suit; he had well-manicured hands...very graceful. I assumed he must be a doctor; he carried himself with great confidence. I never saw his face, although I tried. Small stature is sometimes an advantage; and, sometimes it is not.

Second, I gather that there had already been a van delivering medical goods to the hotel; I heard that someone in the bridge game had fallen on the floor and slithered on his belly, across the ballroom, to the men's room. Apparently he was ok, but needed some supplies. I don't really know because I did not witness it. But, I did verify that a medical supply truck was parked in front of the hotel. Of course, the paramedics also came.



Third, I noted that a man in a paramedic jacket was present in the convention center as if waiting to see what would happen next. He was sitting on a bench near the mural. Given what had been going on, the idea made sense in some ways, although of course I had never seen that behavior before from a paramedic. This man was a bit on the chunky side but of course I don't know if he had extra padding in his jacket.

Eeyore's report

For a while I played trivia with the group in the Café. I do enjoy that but wasn't really sure it was the best use of my talents. So, I decided to help David with some of the heavy bottles, kegs, and barrels in the bar. That's a real workout you know, even for someone with my steady legs and portly build. By about the middle of the afternoon, a man in a paramedic jacket came and asked me to help him. Of course, I was happy to do so. He had a heavy box behind the mural that he wanted me to lift and put behind the screen advertising the tournament. I was happy to do so; he told me the box was quite fragile and to handle it gently. I did as he wished and then went back and helped David some more. That's about it from this Poitou!

Guillaume's report

When I left the hotel, Theodore and I agreed that I should switch on Face Time, use the camera reversal feature, and track my progress with Theodore who had been following the progress of others back in the hotel room 'command central.' That way, Theodore could efficiently direct me to go to places the others had not been and see what was happening there. I gather that the picture he had been getting from phone calls from the others was becoming quite interesting.

So I turned the camera on when I entered the hallway linking the hotel to the convention center. The hallway was lined with an array of planters of various kinds. Naturally, I felt that I could investigate these without being noticed. Squirrels are quite at home in trees!



I noticed that in the base of each of the large planters the attractive stones were arranged not only around the base of the tree but also around a plastic cup of some sort. One of them was open, so I looked in. A nearby hose suggested that these cups were part of some system for watering plants. Another cup had its lid closed. I opened that expecting to find some stagnant water, at worst. Instead I found a used condom! Disgusting!! I made sure that Theodore understood what I had found and then went on my way.



As I neared the doorway to the convention center I saw a group of men, in heated discussion, speaking Bulgarian. They were blocking the doorway, functioning as a dam to cause a buildup of bridge players trying to get through the door. I went and tickled the ankle of one of them who was wearing a particularly attractive gray suit (I am partial to gray). He jumped, moved, and then so did the others. Guillaume does a good deed, I thought. Then I went on past the “bridge” sign, toward a room where playing was going on with screens in use.



Theodore felt that I had an advantage over the others in looking around in the room with screens. I gather that there may have been some fouled boards, but perhaps not of much consequence. My capability to move quickly, and scamper across tables, through the opening in the screen, and around table legs is an advantage. So, I hopped right up on a table and through the door in the screen along with the tray. The woman on the other side was delighted...she thought I was so cute...she reached out to pet me. Of course, I do like that sort of thing so was happy to oblige. While she was petting me, I looked in her purse and saw that she had two duplicate boards in there. I pulled them out and flung them on the table; she picked one up and tried to mash me with it. But, I was too quick for her, mocked her, and ran off. Theodore meanwhile was having a fit, at my behavior, on the other end of the phone. A squirrel has got to have some fun! That is our nature.



But, I obliged the Bear and got back to serious work (some of these bears are so involved in 'deep structure' that they lose sight of fun). I didn't really see anything of particular note, although I did stop and tell Eric of the boards in the purse that I uncovered.

I left that room and ran out, past the rendezvous point and past the Alma Mater Café, into the main area of the convention center with the long escalators. As I passed the Café I noted a peculiar odor. I said something to David and he said that he did not smell anything unusual, but also commented that he had been working with kegs of beer and had spilled a bit on himself so might not. As I

neared the escalator, the smell kept getting worse—it smelled like rotten meat in a supermarket. I hopped up on the stands selling candy; they were fine. It was coming from somewhere else. When I looked behind the big sign announcing the tournament, the box in the sunlight reeked of something awful. I went and got Eric. Together, we opened the box. We had found Mickey—apparently a discontented man in a gray flannel suit. He was dead. His neck had been snapped. How ironic, I thought as I reflected on the fate of the poor cat whose neck Mickey had snapped not long ago.

Tuesday, Dinner: Charles Puts the Pieces Together

I think you have all done outstanding work. You show clearly the power of team work. We can all see things beginning to take shape. Even though you might have thought you were not tracking Mickey, clearly you were! Ossi, you were correct, I am sure. The man running the show of toy dogs was clearly Mickey. He ran into the women's room where Bart tracked him. That gave him an opportunity to alter his appearance a bit and to get out and away from Judy under different cover. When he came to the convention center, he ruffled his hair, played trivia for a while, then left and found the man on the floor near the elevator. Finally, I think that Guillaume saw him speaking Bulgarian. Mickey was the man in the gray flannel suit and the man of many personae; from man, to woman; from wild 'Witt' to native Bulgarian. And then of course we tracked him to his final resting place. Thanks to your good work, those pieces of the puzzle fit together easily and well.

But, there is the remainder. Why did someone kill Mickey? Who killed Mickey? What about the other strange things that some of you observed? I think I know the answers. It all came about through a bridge hand.

Now, as to timing. I looked in the records; of course, Mickey was not playing under his own name. But, there was a player named L. Witt. We know from the trivia game that Mickey did use 'Witt' when pressured. This afternoon, L. Witt was playing on a six person team. He did not play the first half of the afternoon session; he was supposed to play the second half but did not show up. Thus, I think that we can conclude, given your observations of him, that he was killed shortly before the second half of the afternoon session started, during a break perhaps.

My own bridge game this afternoon was largely uneventful. The last round, we played against Van Silverman and his partner. Van came to the table and referred to women as 'broads' (as we have heard him do before) and 'sluts.' His commentary about women was at a new vulgar low, even for him. I said something to him along the lines of how would you like it someone talked about your wife that way...that didn't seem to

disturb him in the slightest...just good ol' Van, I thought. The first hand everyone passed. The second hand was an interesting one. Here it is. Everyone is vulnerable.

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

We (North-South) had a careful auction to get to 6S, vulnerable worth 1430. But, Van (EW pair) sacrificed in 7C virtually without warning. We (NS) defended perfectly, setting it 5 tricks for +1400. Only three other pairs sacrificed and they all sacrificed in 7D doubled, down 4 for -1100 EW. So, we (NS) got only 3 matchpoints. It was very strange. I became quite suspicious of him at the time; figured maybe he had seen the hand before. Then again, with Van, it's hard to know. Now that I hear of all the events of the afternoon, I have to wonder if perhaps Van was distracted because he had murdered Mickey only a short while earlier and so sacrificed in 7C instead of 7D.

But, still, we have to wonder why? Did he know Mickey? What would cause a man with Van's temperament, that lashes out anyway whenever he feels like it, to get upset enough to murder someone? Now, I go back to Guillaume and another of his discoveries of the afternoon---the used condom. Was Mickey having sex while he was out roaming around? If so, where? Recall how aggressive he had been with Judy in the hotel lobby. In the convention center he was seen only on the main level. So, let's suppose that Mickey was having sex in a hidden area near enough to the planter to use it to hide waste---perhaps in the space behind the mural---behind our rendezvous point. Remember that Eeyore was asked to haul a box from that area to behind the screen where Mickey's body was found. The two locations are near each other. In fact, the space behind the mural is about equidistant between the planter in the hallway where a

full condom was found and the hiding space behind the poster where the full box was found.



Don't worry Eeyore, you could not have known (Charles had to reassure the sensitive Poitou). I think that Van Silverman was the unlikely paramedic that Tine saw—that Eeyore helped. But, why? Van just picked up a jacket left behind from all the other activity which had called for real paramedics; he is like that—he'd take candy from a baby. When he saw his own wife behind the mural having oral sex with Mickey, he became enraged—remember his particularly nasty comments about women. Van is not that large, but he is powerful. I am sure an enraged Van could easily have snapped Mickey's neck.

If you all agree, I am going to go talk to the police. I think we have enough observed evidence connected by a plausible chain of reasoning; I will suggest to them that they find Van Silverman's wife and talk to her very carefully about her activities (I would guess that she might not have been a willing participant with Mickey) and about what she saw. Again, just guessing, when Van jumped Mickey, I'd guess she ran off and didn't even see that it was Van who was 'rescuing' her (although 'rescue' was probably not the intent here). In addition, I will turn over the used condom and suggest that their

lab might find interesting extra evidence behind the mural and in the hallway as well as elsewhere in the convention center.

If the police see things as we do, I'd guess that Van may be locked up for quite a while. In addition, since Mickey cannot make good on a contribution to a cat shelter, I will contact his first former wife, Cindy, whom Judy and I both knew long ago, to see if she will do so; we never understood how a nice young woman like Cindy wound up with the likes of Mickey!

* All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.