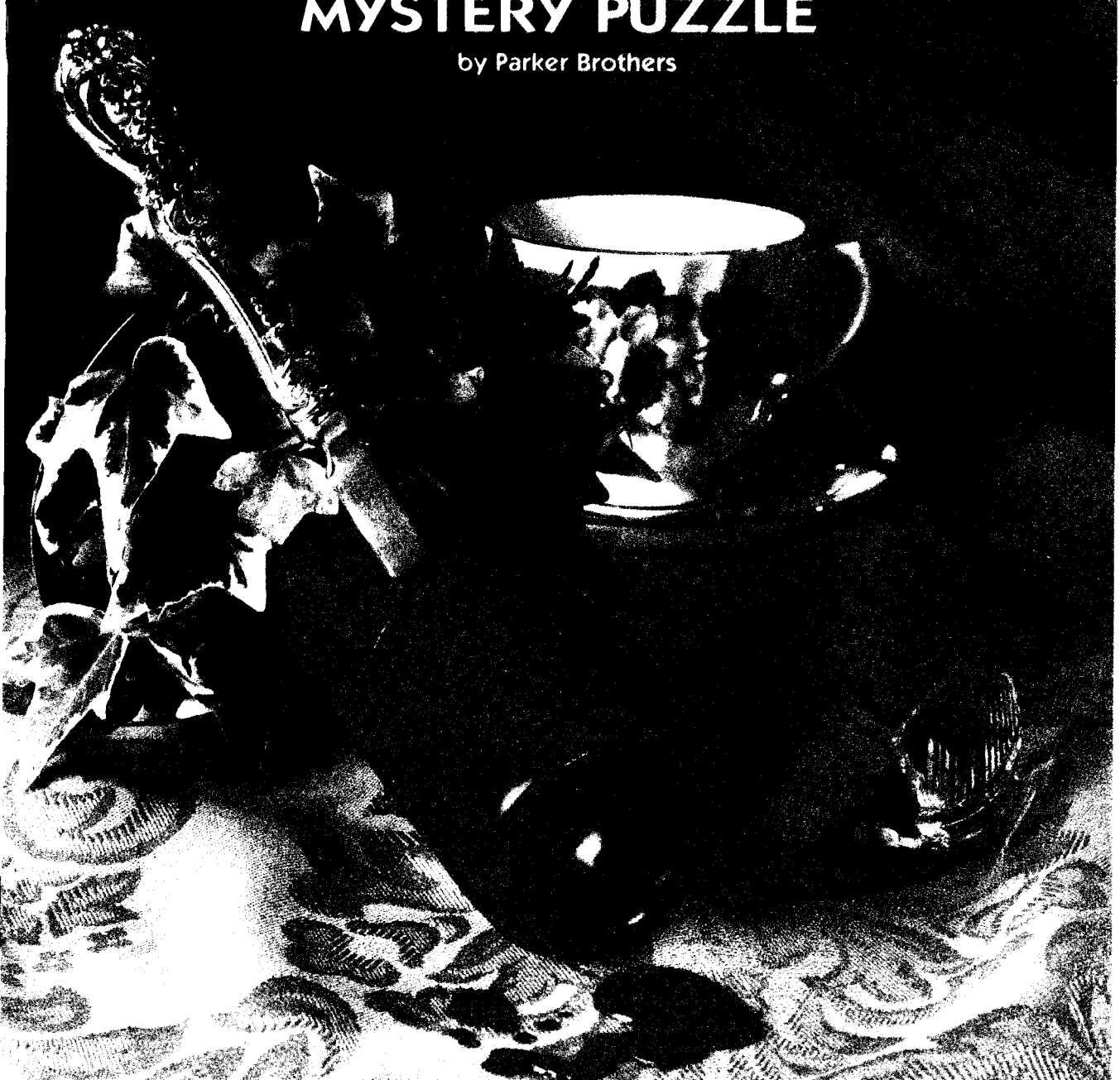




Clue

MYSTERY PUZZLE

by Parker Brothers



A Merry Little Murder™

A JIGSAW PUZZLE MYSTERY

A Merry Little Murder™

It was a crisp autumn day and Hogarth the butler was treating himself to a stroll around the lawns of Tudor Close. As he passed by the bend, where the private drive began to meander through a stand of ancient elms, he paused and sighed. He could never walk by this part of the grounds without thinking of that fateful night.

Perhaps it was his memory of the accident that sharpened his eyesight or perhaps it was just the angle of the sun. But as soon as he approached the first tree, he saw the glint. Instantly he knew what it was, what it had to be. Why had no one seen this before? With care, he knelt and dug the piece of glass out of the battered bark.

It was just a few minutes later when Hogarth tracked down his employer. Dr. Black was brooding in the study off the master bedroom. A pale shadow of his former self, the physician seemed to have aged ten years in ten months.

"I found this embedded in the tree." *The tree.* That was all Hogarth had to say. The tree was never far from David Black's thoughts.

It had happened last year on Christmas Eve. Six friends were spending the evening at Tudor Close with Dr. Black and his lovely bride. He had met Rose only a few months earlier, but it was love at first sight, the absolute love that comes just once in a lifetime. The frail millionaire and his young Rose were married within a fortnight.

The Christmas Eve party was the first time Rose had met his old friends. She did her best to be a good hostess, but Black could sense that she felt bored and left out. Finally unable to stifle her yawns, Rose said her good-nights.

"It was wonderful meeting you all. Sorry I wasn't more talkative, but I'm afraid I have a headache. David, dear, I'm going out for a little walk, then straight up to bed." Those were the last words he would ever hear her say.

Shortly afterwards, the Reverend Green also called it a night. "Have to officiate at the midnight service," he announced as he hopped into his estate wagon. One by one, the others finished their drinks and made their own departures, each guest driving off alone down the twisty gravel drive. It was shortly after 12 when Dr. Black waved farewell to the little red sports coupe that held the last of his visitors.

A half hour later, as he prepared for bed, Black saw that Rose had not yet returned from her walk. Hogarth was the one to eventually discover the crumpled body, hidden from view behind the stand of elms. The police determined that she had been the victim of a hit-and-run. The sequence of events seemed clear. One of their guests had slammed a motor vehicle into the young bride and the force of the impact threw her body behind the tree.

David Black glanced up at the thick piece of glass that the butler now held out. "It's from a headlamp," Hogarth explained. "After hitting Mrs. Black, the vehicle obviously nicked the tree. By the time the authorities investigated, the driver must have replaced the lamp."

"Why didn't the police find this?" the millionaire snarled.

"Person or persons unknown? Incompetent fools." Then, as he

clutched the glass shard, a wicked smile formed on his thin lips. "Thank you, Hogarth. You've given me new reason to live."

For the next month, Dr. Black was a man possessed. He began by sending the piece of glass to a laboratory for analysis. Next, he hired private detectives to wade through the invoices and memories of a dozen garage mechanics and auto supply salespeople.

Hogarth saw all this and it made him worry. His master was a pragmatic man. Not a miserly man, but one who prided himself on not wasting time or money on the unnecessary. If Dr. Black was putting so much effort into discovering the driver's identity, then he definitely intended to do something about it.

A week later, on a stormy night in late November, Black summoned the butler to his study. "I think we should do another Christmas party this year, Hogarth. Make a whole weekend of it."

"Very good, sir. And the guest list?"

"Same as last year," the doctor replied with a thin grin. "My six best friends. Oh, and Hogarth." He caught the butler just as he was leaving. "When you're in the village posting the invitations — could you pick up some .38 caliber cartridges? The smallest box possible. No sense wasting."



It was late afternoon on Christmas Eve when Dr. Black braved the blustery breeze and greeted the first of his guests. Mrs. Peacock had just pulled her sky-blue Bentley into the oval entryway.

"You shouldn't be out in the cold," she scolded her feeble host. With one hand, she grabbed her overnight bag. With her other, she led Black back into the Tudor mansion.

Mrs. Peacock was by nature a strong woman. In the prime of middle age, she had already buried two husbands and looked fit enough to bury two more. Moving to Darbyshire after her second widowhood, she had bought the property just west of Tudor Close. Her relationship with Black had never been a romantic one. They were simply good neighbors with a few hundred acres between them and a shared love of birds.

"I've been thinking it over," Dr. Black told his neighbor. "You were right about the sanctuary idea. When the holidays are over, I'm changing my will. On my death, the grounds of Tudor Close will combine with your property and become the Black-Peacock Bird Sanctuary, the largest refuge of its kind in all England."

Peacock was overjoyed. Her dream was about to become a reality and she thanked him profusely. But her host was too busy coughing into his handkerchief to take notice. I hope he lasts through the holidays, she mused. After I legally have my sanctuary, he can get as sick as he wants.

The backfiring of an engine and the grinding of gears announced the arrival of Colonel Mustard and his ailing roadster. The military man bounded through the double doors, straightening his tie as he entered. "Beastly old car to have in the midst of winter. Nearly froze me to death."

Mustard's financial woes were well-known. He had never been good at investments and his fortune had dwindled steadily over the years. "I'll buy a new car with the first of my profits.

Eh, Black, old friend? You are going to make a profit for me, aren't you?"

Dr. Black looked pleased. "Ah. So you finally bought a few shares of Black Medical Supplies."

"A few? I dropped my last farthing into that company. With your business savvy, there's no reason why the stock can't double in six months. Don't you think? Black, old man. Are you all right?"

Black didn't answer. Another coughing fit was contorting his body. Blast, thought Mustard. All my cash tied up in Black Medical. Just my luck. He'll die now and the stock will plummet.

A mechanical commotion even louder than the Colonel's suddenly tore through the air, shocking the doctor out of his spasm. "What the... Oh, I forgot. Mrs. White and her motorcycle."

It was a disconcerting sight that next strode through the marble columns — a motherly, white-haired woman, outfitted in a helmet and a pair of goggles, and with a cigar clenched firmly in her teeth. And under her leather jacket? What else — a maid's uniform, still neatly starched and pressed!

Mrs. Peacock frowned. "That woman's been in my employ for years," she said to no one in particular. "And yet I don't think I've ever seen her out of that uniform."

"I like being a maid," Mrs. White retorted, then turned to Dr. Black. "Are we still on for next month?"

"Absolutely. A fresh year, a fresh cleaning."

Dr. Black, for all his failings, was not a snob. He was genuinely fond of the eccentric domestic and made an effort to help her out. Although Tudor Close was a well-maintained house, the doctor still insisted that Mrs. White come in once a year, during her two-week holiday, and clean the mansion from top to

bottom. For this, Black paid her a handsome fee, nearly half of her yearly salary at Peacock Manor.

Mrs. White gazed at the millionaire's shaking hands and her heart sank. Poor dear, she thought. I just hope he lasts until the fresh year. Hogarth has never been fond of my annual intrusion. And this year I really need the cash.

The next interruption was a car horn, followed shortly by a bellowing American accent. "Hogarth! Get your tail out here. I've got a yule log to deliver."

Professor Peter Plum was already at the rear of his Land Rover, swinging open the tailgate and staring in at the tree trunk that filled the rear. "I hope your fireplace is large enough," he chortled as the host, butler and guests emerged onto the drive.

"The very thing needed for a proper English Christmas," Dr. Black said, feigning holiday cheer.

"Bought it from the village pub. All properly aged and ready to keep away evil spirits." The professor was uncomfortable with sentiment. He loosened his tie and cleared his throat. "Just a little something to show how much I appreciate... you know." Black knew.

Professor Plum was the newest of the doctor's friends. A trans-Atlantic transplant, he had given up the world of academia for the world of exercise and nutrition. But the Brits were not quite so eager to jump on his fitness bandwagon. Plum's fitness center was on the verge of collapse and his unique line of mineral supplements was the subject of a class-action lawsuit.

"I'm so grateful you're testifying," Plum whispered. "Your professional opinion will clear my name."

"No trouble. Those granite and shale supplements couldn't possibly be harmful. At least that's my opinion." Again the doctor began to cough violently.

Plum said a silent prayer for Dr. Black's health. The sickly physician was the only medical authority to support him. Black had to live, at least through the trial.

Black and the women watched as Hogarth and the others struggled to lift the log out of the Land Rover. They had just succeeded and were rolling it across the gravel when an ancient, wood-paneled estate wagon tore up the drive, scattering the men and running its front tires up and over the log.

"I say, Black." The Reverend Green was peering out of the driver's window. "Since when have you taken to installing speed bumps?"

The nearsighted, bespectacled clergyman clambered out of the wagon. "Hogarth!" he called, squinting mistakenly at Mrs. Peacock. "I hope you recalled I was bringing the Christmas goose."

"Naturally, sir." The butler was at the wagon's rear door. He lifted out the prized specimen, displaying it to the guests. "Magnificent bird."

"Least I could do, you know." The cleric had crossed to his host and was warmly shaking both of Black's hands. "I feel like a schoolboy. I can't tell you how much I look forward to delving into your archives."

The Reverend Green was an amateur historian and had spent years compiling the stories of Darbyshire's notable families. The history would be incomplete without the Blacks and the reverend was ecstatic about getting the rare chance to examine the doctor's family records.

"My relatives object, you know," Black whispered conspiratorially.

The clergyman knew all about the uncooperative Black cousins and hoped that the master of Tudor Close would remain in good health, at least until his research was complete. There was to be one last guest. Vivienne Scarlett was always the last and her little sports coupe could be heard churning up the gravel just as the men were finally stuffing the log into the great hall's yawning fireplace.

"Hello, darlings." The beautiful and vain woman flounced into the marbled hall. "Blackie, dear. You look divine." She kissed the millionaire on the cheek and the force of her kiss nearly knocked him over. "I hope you haven't forgotten our trip. I haven't."

"Not a chance, my dear. Tickets are all bought."

For as long as Miss Scarlett had known the doctor, she had been hinting about a cruise to the Galapagos Islands. For years she talked of little but tortoises and iguanas and the strange birds found only on those South American isles. At long last he had gotten the hint. Their great excursion was less than a month away.

David Black still seemed overwhelmed by the kiss. His coloring was even paler than before and he seemed about to set off on another coughing fit.

"We should get you out of this drafty hall," Colonel Mustard said solicitously and the others concurred. Gathering around him like six pallbearers, they escorted their delicate host into the comfort of the main sitting room.



There was a traditional Christmas Eve. The yule log filled the massive grate and was ignited with kindling left over from last year's log. There was wassail to drink and carols around the piano. The stuffed boar's head was dusted off and paraded around the table in great ceremony before the party sat down to a tamer meal of honey-glazed ham.

After dinner it was time to trim the tree and deck the hall. The revelers hung ivy and boughs of holly on every available surface, with the chandeliers reserved for the sprigs of mistletoe. "I trust you've all been good little children," Dr. Black teased as he took the red knit stockings out of their storage box and began to tack them up on the mantel. There was a stocking for each of the guests and the host, each embroidered with the appropriate name. Seven in all.

No. Eight. Colonel Mustard was the first to note the mistake and it caused him to choke on his cigar. "Hogarth," he hissed and pointed nervously.

The butler followed the Colonel's gaze and saw that his employer was blithely tacking up a stocking that had been mounted for the first time last year but had never been filled. The name "Rose" glowed from the wool surface like neon.

A chill went up Hogarth's spine. He had removed the dead woman's sock from the box this morning, precisely in order to avoid this kind of scene. Dr. Black had obviously replaced it. But why?

A mournful expression crossed the doctor's face as he fingered the name on the stocking, then turned to his guests. "Just a year ago," he mumbled. "A year ago tonight."

Mrs. Peacock sniffed sympathetically. "Such a tragic accident." "Accident?" Black wondered aloud, his features hardening into a scowl. "I suppose so, yes. But to leave her on the lawn like that, to just drive away without even trying to help. That is unforgivable."

The great hall was filled with a chorus of squeaks as everyone shifted uneasily in the leather upholstery.

Hogarth was even more uneasy than the guests. Only he knew about the headlamp, about the doctor's private investigation and about the gun kept loaded in the drawer. To him, it could mean only one thing. David Black was planning a murder.



As the minute hand inched its way toward one o'clock, Hogarth gave up the idea of sleep. A sixth sense told him that the murder was set to happen tonight, on the anniversary of Rose's death. Hogarth could no longer lie in bed and do nothing. Slipping on his robe, he set off on a tour of the house.

The second floor bedrooms were all quiet. Particularly loud snores emanated from the rooms assigned to the smokers, Colonel Mustard and Mrs. White. No sound at all came from the door of the master's suite.

It was downstairs in the library that Hogarth found the first sign of danger. A crumpled note sat alone at the bottom of a dustbin, a dustbin that Hogarth recalled having emptied before heading up to bed. "Meet me in my room at midnight," it said, written out in the doctor's own unmistakable longhand.

Disturbing questions buzzed through the butler's mind.

Which guest was the doctor meeting at midnight? And what

was he planning to do, shoot that person in his own bedroom? Hogarth read the note again. Midnight. It was now one a.m.

And there hadn't been any gunshot, not at midnight or anytime after. Hogarth ran to the main staircase. "Dr. Black!" he shouted, a feeling of dread rising in his throat as he raced toward his master's room. "Dr. Black?"

The millionaire's body lay halfway between his bed and the door. An ornate letter opener was embedded firmly in his back and a pool of blood was already drying, adding a brown pattern to the rug. Resting in his clammy hand was a .38 revolver.

"Don't touch anything," a voice warned.

Hogarth turned to see the six guests behind him in the doorway, all wrapped in their dressing gowns. His frantic shouts must have roused them from their slumbers.

They stood speechless at the door, the horror of the moment only gradually sinking in.

"It must have been an outsider," Professor Plum said as he removed his glasses and wiped away a little tear. "Lord knows we all had our reasons to keep the poor man alive. No one wanted him dead. No one."

Hogarth knew better. Dr. Black had confronted the hit-and-run driver, right here in his bedroom. But something had gone wrong and Black-the-avenger was now Black-the-victim.

The butler carefully took in the scene. Better than anyone, he knew his master's personality and peculiar ways. In less than a minute, he knew the killer's identity.

An hour later, when the sleepy constable arrived on the site, Hogarth showed him into the bedroom and meticulously explained the telltale clue.

By assembling the jigsaw puzzle, you, too, can examine the bedroom and deduce exactly which of the guests turned the tables on the murderous doctor and beat him to the punch. Or, to be more specific, *the stab*.

Good luck!

THE SOLUTION

