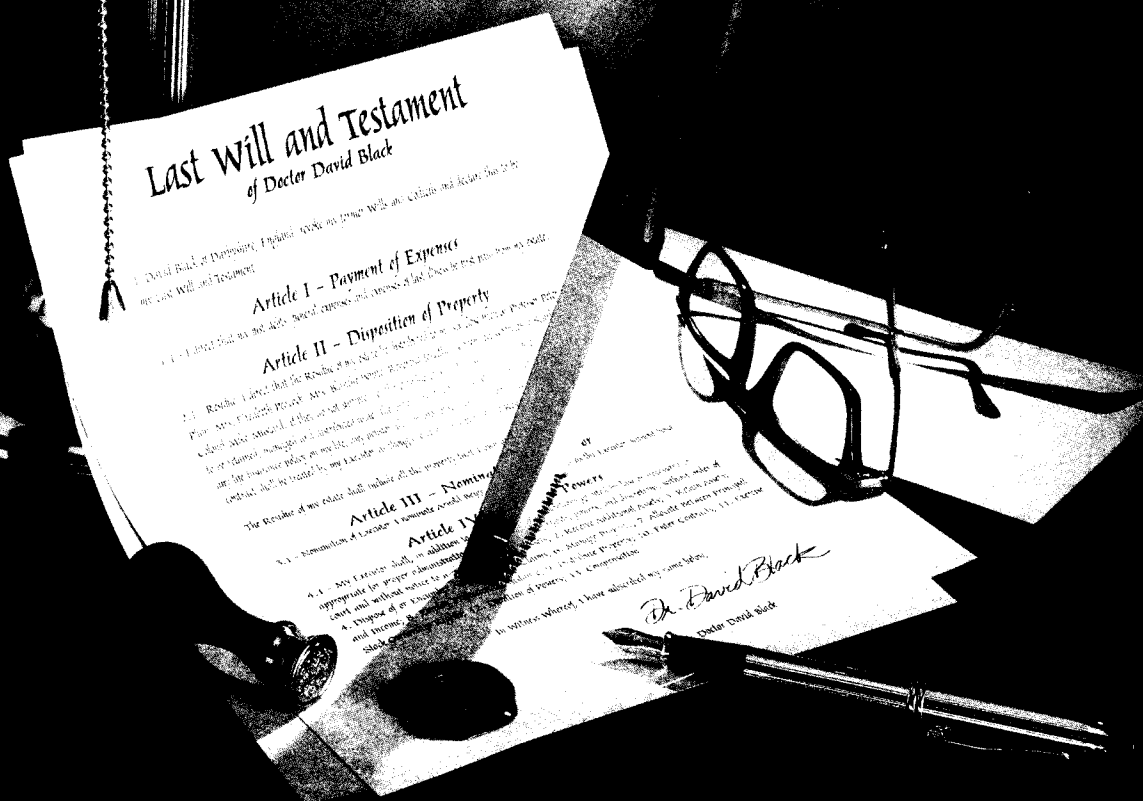


MYSTERY PUZZLE

by Parker Brothers



To Kill A Dying Man™

A JIGSAW PUZZLE MYSTERY

To Kill A Dying Man™

"He has only a few hours to live," Hogarth whispered as he led the guests into the ornately furnished room. Quietly the six friends gathered round the bed, staring down at a weakened man. He appeared to be in great pain and the sound of his labored breathing filled the gloomy shadows.

Dr. David Black opened his eyes and his haggard face lit up. "Are they all here, Hogarth? All six?" The butler assured him they were. "It was so very kind of you to come. If I'd known I was going to die, I would have given you more notice."

"You're not going to die," Colonel Mustard huffed with gentle authority.

Black chuckled. "Good old Mustard." He reached out a thin arm. "I've nominated you to the board of Consolidated Mining, old friend. To take my place. With all the stock I'm leaving you..."

"Good Lord. Don't talk that way. You'll inherit my stock before I inherit yours. I mean, I won't inherit yours. You'll..." Mustard was getting flustered. "Peacock, tell this stubborn old thing we won't permit him to die."

Mrs. Peacock took the colonel's place at the bedside. "Of course we won't. Tudor Close wouldn't be the same without David Black."

"Yes, it will." The frail man squeezed her hand. "In fact, that's your job, Elizabeth. I'm leaving you the house and grounds in my will. I want you to keep the estate just the way it is — for my friends."

The matronly widow was about to protest when he cut her off. "Not much time left. Is that Scarlett I hear?" The young, well-manicured Miss Scarlett was weeping openly. "I just wanted to remind you about the jewels," the dying man said, trying to make himself heard above the sobs. "I know you wanted to borrow them for a party next week. But Hogarth is sending them to London for cleaning. I do it once every five years. Hope you don't mind."

"Who cares about a bunch of silly jewels," Scarlett bawled, careful not to streak her makeup.

"Always thinking of others," another voice blubbered. "The man's a saint."

Black leaned his head forward. "Who's that? Mrs. White?"

A dowdy, white-haired woman in a maid's uniform made her way to the front of the pack. "Yes, it's me. You can't die, Dr. Black. Why you're my oldest friend in the world. Ever since me dear old Mum worked here as your nanny."

"Dear Blanche. Like the sister I never had. You remember those lovely books Nanny used to read to us over and over?"

"I know," she said, using the feathers of her duster to dry her wet cheeks. "I know. You're leaving them to me as a memento. Well, I don't want any little toddler books. I want my old mate to get better."

"Ah, if that were only possible. What? Who's that?" Dr. Black seemed suddenly disoriented. "Peter? Did you say something?"

Professor Peter Plum pushed the maid aside. "Right here, Cousin. If you need any sort of transplant or transfusion, you just have to ask. Being a blood relative, I'm sure I'd make a good donor."

"So selfless of you," Black groaned. "Imagine, the two of us being friends for so long and not realizing we were actually related."

"It was by pure fluke that I discovered my connection to the American branch of the Blacks."

The doctor smiled. "You're my family now, Peter. I only wish I could live long enough to pore over those records the lawyers are sending me from Boston. The stories they must hold."

"You'll outlive us all," Plum said, brushing back a tear.

The Reverend Green tiptoed over to the butler and whispered in his ear. "Have you managed to make him give up drink?"

"I heard that," Dr. Black said, a twinkle lighting up his dim eyes.

"No, my dear Cleric, I have not given up drink. I like it and it's good for me."

"It is not. I've talked myself blue trying to get you to moderate your habits."

The doctor seemed amused. "My goal, you know, was to drink the family cellar dry. But I'm afraid this death of mine is going to leave several hundred of my best bottles undrunk. Well, don't worry, Padre. I'll keep my promise. I'm leaving the rest to the church. You can dole out a brandy worth five hundred pounds as sacramental wine. That should make your parishioners happy."

"We don't want the wine, you old reprobate," Green chided, not without affection.

Hogarth saw that his employer was growing weaker and gently ushered the six mourners from the room.

"I never thought our David would get sick," Mrs. Peacock sniffled as she walked out. "He's always been so healthy."

Colonel Mustard agreed. "I always thought, if he went, it would be from some sort of accident. Poor man's been so accident-prone these past few months."

"This disease of his came on so suddenly," Miss Scarlett whispered as the bedroom door closed behind her. "Hardly seems fair."

The friends retired to the mansion's library to reinforce themselves with a marvelous port and to await the inevitable.

They were still savoring their first glass when the doorbell rang. A minute later, Hogarth entered from the hall. "Mr. Gray," he announced and stepped aside to reveal a man in a herringbone suit and thick spectacles.

"Afternoon," Gray said in a soft but raspy voice. He shook out his checkered umbrella and handed it to the butler. "Nasty weather out there. Ah, Mrs. Peacock. I took the liberty of parking behind you. I hope that won't be a problem."

Mrs. Peacock examined the thin stranger, taking in his full head of salt-and-pepper hair and the Vandyke beard that came to a point

just an inch below his chin. "I'm afraid I haven't had the pleasure," she said coolly.

"Sorry. I feel as if I already know you. My client has told me so much. I'm Gerald Gray, Dr. Black's solicitor."

"His lawyer?" Professor Plum scratched his head. "What happened to old Arnold Beige? He's been with Black for eons."

"Mr. Beige is off on holiday and asked me to take over. Considering the emergency nature of our business today..." Gray wiped the rain from his spectacles. "You see, Dr. Black has only just recently changed his will."

Hogarth pricked up his ears, hearing a bell that no one else could. "Excuse me. The doctor's ringing."

The lawyer turned to the departing butler. "If his condition is any worse, please let us know."

The guests exchanged meaningful glances and more than one mouth curled up at the edges. Colonel Mustard, however, maintained his serious demeanor. "Changed his will? How exactly did he change it?"

"Oh, the bequests stay the same. No need to worry there." Gray smiled and his features grew slightly familiar. "Perhaps I should start from the beginning. Before the good doctor grew sick, he came into our office with an extraordinary claim. He had never mentioned this to anyone and was embarrassed to admit it. But he was convinced that one of his best friends was trying to kill him."

"One of his best..." Scarlett wrinkled her otherwise flawless brow. "You mean one of us?"

"That's what he claimed. He's in the habit of entertaining the six of you at regular intervals. Well, during each of your five most recent visits it seems the doctor was the victim of a freak accident. Is this true?"

"True," the Reverend Green admitted. "But they were most definitely accidents. You know how it is — a gargoyle breaks off the tower and almost crushes his skull; a stray bullet is fired while we're out shooting grouse; a bowling ball bounces down the stairs just as he's going up with an armful of books. All perfectly ordinary accidents."

Gray stroked his beard. "Perhaps. But the doctor got it in his head that one of you is out to kill him. His problem, of course, is that he doesn't know which one it is."

Mrs. Peacock raised a hand. "How exactly does this affect his will?" she asked hesitantly.

"Well, you see, he added a clause." The solicitor reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out the newly-written codicil. He adjusted his spectacles and starting reading. "Whereas the testator of this document firmly believes that one of his heirs is actively attempting to murder him, and whereas the testator believes such behavior should not be encouraged..."

The paragraph boiled down to a simple objective. Dr. Black wished to disinherit the accident-maker. If the guilty party was not revealed before the doctor's death, then all six heirs would be cut off without a penny and their inheritances would go to charity.

"No. He would never do that," protested Mrs. White. "Hurt five innocent friends in order to catch one scoundrel? That's not like him at all. Let me see that paper."

The lawyer quickly slipped it back in his pocket. "I'm sorry, but that's what it says."

"But he's dying now," Plum said, grasping the obvious. "What's he got? An hour? How in blazes are we supposed to find out who's behind the attacks? If they were attacks. And if he dies before we find out, then..."

A thoughtful hush fell over the library as the six suspects mulled over their predicament.

"It's Peacock!" Mrs. White blurted out, pointing an accusing finger at her employer. "It has to be. She inherits all of Tudor Close."

"Oh, poppycock," Peacock retorted. "True, my finances may be a bit ragged right at the moment, but to murder my best friend? Besides, I would never sell Tudor Close. I promised David."

Mrs. White was smirking. "I'm your maid, don't forget. I see who comes and goes. If you would never sell, then what was Donald Ecru doing at your house last week?"

"Ecru?" Plum sputtered. "Why, that's the scoundrel developer who wanted to tear down Tudor Close and build a shopping mall. Cousin David kicked him out the front door."

Colonel Mustard frowned. "Didn't Ecru finally give up on trying to buy the estate? That's what I heard. He's looking elsewhere."

"And maybe he will look elsewhere if he can't make a deal," Mrs. White suggested. "Maybe that gives Peacock a reason to give Dr. Black a quick and fatal accident. So she can sell Tudor Close to Ecru before it's too late."

"What nonsense. I had Mr. Ecru over to my house because... because..." Mrs. Peacock threw up her hands. "Really, this is too much. I don't know when I've been so insulted." And without another word, she stormed out of the room.

"Interesting." The lawyer made a notation. "But Mrs. Peacock is not the only one to inherit a hefty sum. Let's take you, Colonel Mustard. Fifty thousand shares of Consolidated Mining. If I'm not mistaken, Colonel, last year you sold your own block of stock in that company."

"How did you..." Mustard seemed taken aback. "It's none of your business, but yes. The price was high and my accountant advised that I liquidate."

"I'm sure he did," agreed the Reverend Green. "I happened to overhear you chatting with your accountant last week at the call-

box by the rectory. I believe the fellow is more properly known as a turf accountant."

Everyone but Professor Plum seemed shocked. The clergyman explained. "For the sake of our American friend, turf accountant is our term for a racetrack bookie. From the conversation I overheard, the colonel here has a wad of gambling debts that are well past due."

"Well, so what?" the colonel harrumphed. "I always have a few debts and I always pay them off."

Green continued. "If I were a betting man, I'd wager that you cashed in your stock last year to pay off those debts. I'd also wager you're broke again and ready to cash in more stock, the shares you plan to inherit as soon as possible from dear Dr. Black. Am I right, Colonel?"

"Blast your wagers. Just because I need some quick cash doesn't mean I'd lift a hand against my friend. You're disgusting." Colonel Mustard made a point of slamming the library door behind him.

The four remaining guests fidgeted. "Well, it must be either Mustard or Peacock," the reverend said, breaking the awkward silence. "Can't be me. I personally don't inherit a thing."

"Personally, maybe not," interjected the American professor. "But your parish does inherit an impressive wine cellar. And the longer my cousin lives and drinks, the less of that expensive wine will be left. That could give you a pressing motive to arrange a little mayhem, don't you think?"

"What are you talking about? I'm doing my best to make him give up his excessive drinking. I despise excess."

"I know." Plum nodded. "So it must be particularly galling to see all that money being poured down David's throat, money that could be much better used by the church."

"What? How can you think such horrid thoughts. I'm a clergyman."

"Sorry, Padre. I wouldn't have mentioned it except that one of my friends is the local wine merchant. It seems that you've been in

his shop several times lately asking about the prices of certain rare vintages."

"Oh." Green winced. "Well! I don't have to stand here and listen to this scandalous tripe." A moment later and there were only three suspects standing in the library.

The lawyer adjusted his spectacles. "This is more than I was counting on. Is there anyone else with a motive? Professor Plum?"

"What?" Plum replied in dismay. "You can't be serious. I admit the doctor was kind enough to leave me a sizable sum. But I don't have any real need for money. I make a very nice living, thank you. Someday, God forbid, I may inherit from my dear cousin, but..."

Scarlett raised a delicate finger as she cleared her throat. "About this cousin thing. Has it occurred to anyone but me that it's all a rather extraordinary coincidence? I mean, Professor Plum arrives all the way from America, becomes friends with Dr. Black and then suddenly discovers they're related. Well, I was thinking... What if they're not related after all? What if it's all a fraud?"

"Hmm." Gerald Gray thought for a moment. "Well, there's one way of finding out. Dr. Black asked our office to get in touch with the family lawyers in Boston. They're unearthing the records right now and sending them over. That should settle the question one way or the other."

"And if he *is* a phony?" Scarlett regarded Plum out of the corner of her eye. "I suppose it would be important for Dr. Black to die soon, before this fact can be discovered and while the professor's still in the will."

"Miss Scarlett! Not only are you accusing me of fraud, but attempted murder. Why, I never..."

A minute later, after Professor Plum lost his temper and stomped off, only two guests remained. The solicitor stood between the women, the beauty and the maid, wondering which one would break first.

"Well, don't look at me." Scarlett's blush could be seen through her rouge. "I know I inherit the Black jewels. But since the doctor lets me wear them whenever I want, I hardly think that gives me a reason to use his staircase as a bowling alley."

"He does let you wear them a great deal," Mrs. White concurred. "I especially admire that diamond necklace you borrowed for Mrs. Peacock's garden party — even if it does look a tad bit duller than it used to."

Scarlett's blush grew and a drop of sweat broke through her makeup. "Duller? What do you mean?"

"Duller. Not as bright. You know, like those paste diamonds you see middle-class ladies wearing."

"Paste? Are you insinuating that Dr. Black owns fake diamonds?"

"No," the maid assured her. "He would never do that. But an unscrupulous woman who had access to those diamonds... Well, the temptation would be there, wouldn't it? To secretly sell the real ones and have fake replicas made. After all, one day you're going to inherit them. Why not get a head start? Not that you would ever do such a thing."

"Of course not."

"My stars." The lawyer's face had turned a shade that matched his name. "I just remembered. Next week the jewels are going to London to be cleaned. If they are forgeries, they're sure to be found out then."

Mrs. White chuckled. "Well, it looks like our Scarlett might have a motive after all. Kill off Dr. Black before the forgeries are discovered and he has her arrested."

"This is pure slander." Miss Scarlett nearly collided with the butler as she raced out of the room.

"I'm afraid the doctor's fading fast," Hogarth reported from the doorway. "Have you had any luck in exposing the accident-maker?"

"Too much luck," said Gray, obviously shaken by the revelations. "Hogarth." Mrs. White regarded the butler suspiciously. "How did you know about Dr. Black's suspicions?"

Hogarth didn't bat an eye. "He told me, Madam. When the accidents first started happening."

"Hmm. Interesting. How much longer will this take?" Mrs. White pulled at the lawyer's sleeve, checking his wrist for a watch.

Gray jerked his wrist away. "I'm afraid I don't wear a timepiece. If we can have a minute more of your time, Mrs. White." He straightened his cuffs, then referred to his copy of the will. "You inherit a collection of children's books, is that right?"

"Just a few books. I am in need of money, I admit. My son had a brush with the law. He needs to return some funds to his employer or else he'll go to jail. But I don't see how a handful of old books..."

"Old books?" Hogarth asked, an idea suddenly coming into his head. "Exactly how old are these books, Mrs. White?"

"What? How should I know! They were old and faded when we read them as children."

"Perhaps that's the reason you want them, because they're so old."

"All right, all right. You guessed it." The silver-haired maid sighed. "If I don't tell you, you'll find out. They're first editions of the Alice books and Winnie the Pooh and they're worth a bloody fortune. Are you happy now? Like everyone else, I have a motive, and the sooner the old fool dies, the better."

Mrs. White exited with a flourish, leaving the lawyer and the butler to themselves. "Not quite according to plan," Gray hissed conspiratorially. "I think I should be going. I'll contact you as soon as I can."

As the solicitor walked out the front door, six heads popped out from six neighboring doorways and watched him leave.



Despite their embarrassment that afternoon, none of the suspects had driven off, preferring to remain at the mansion and await Dr. Black's demise. About ten minutes after the lawyer's departure, Mrs. Peacock was wandering the upstairs hall. As she approached the doctor's bedroom, she saw Colonel Mustard standing in front of the closed door.

"He's not answering." The colonel bit his lip. "If he's dead, we're all disinherited. David? Are you all right? David?"

The two of them knocked and called for another full minute, then gently pushed open the door. "He's not here," Mrs. Peacock said as she glanced around the room. "Look." She was pointing to Dr. Black's nightshirt, now folded neatly on a chair. "Where could he possibly be?"

The alarm was quickly raised. Hogarth and the houseguests fanned out and started to make a search of the premises.

It was Professor Plum who found him. Dr. Black was lying on the floor of the kitchen, dressed in nothing but his underwear and a sharp kitchen knife. Around the knife handle, an oval of blood stained his white undershirt.

Hogarth and the friends stared down at the lifeless body.

"Horrible," Mrs. White gasped. "Why would anyone want to kill Dr. Black? I mean, besides the fact that he was a saint, the poor fellow was already dying."

"And what was he doing down here in his undergarments?" added the Reverend Green. "Very strange."

"The kitchen door is kept unlocked," ventured Miss Scarlett.

"Anyone could have come in. But who? Who would do such a thing?" She paused in thought. "Is that lawyer still here? I didn't hear him drive off."

"Neither did I," said Colonel Mustard and promptly marched off through the mansion and out the front door. A light rain continued to soak the oval drive. "Well, his car's not here," he reported to the others back in the kitchen. "You know, there was something definitely odd about that Gray."

"I felt the same way," piped in Mrs. Peacock. "A bit dodgy if you ask me. Hogarth, what are you doing?"

Hogarth had lifted the receiver and was in the process of dialing. "I'm telephoning the police, Madam. From what I see here, Dr. Black's killer is still in the mansion. I would like the local constable to arrive before the perpetrator has a chance to escape."

"His killer's still here?" Miss Scarlett said, glancing around with an alarmed expression. "And you know who it is? Hogarth, how can you possibly..."

"Quite simple, Miss. The evidence is right in front of you. Hello? Constable Mauve?"

Before the constable arrives and Hogarth explains the details of the crime, it's your turn. Just assemble the jigsaw puzzle and you'll have all the clues needed to solve this most puzzling of murders.

THE SOLUTION

