OVERNIGHT GUEST

By BRENAMES WILLIAMS

THE STORY THUS FAR: Adam Brent, 32% operator, inspector from out West. Tops met in the Globe tavern. Tops found a man murdered, who was at first identified as Ledbrge, head of first National airlines. When a car believed to have been used in the murder was traced from the quarry it was found to contain the body of a murdered woman, Mrs. Kell, the landlord, connected with the two lines, murdered G.A., arriving Tops at Bradley the next, and complete change. Finally but Ledbrge to go on a hiking trip. When they get to the cabin, Ledbrge have the same. He have met the Kells and Holdens. Now he find out the Kells are not trying to conceal secret but are engaged to Tops.

CHAPTER XIV

Kirsty said steadily: "He overturned the canoe, swam away. Then he invited Ruth, expecting to see me drowning. He knew I couldn't swim. But when he saw me still afloat—Mr. Tops had made me wear a life-preserver—he started back to finish me!"

Ledbrge, a bitter hurt in his tone, cried: "Nonsense! I came to help you, Carl!"

"There was murder in his eyes," Kirsty insisted, not speaking directly to the other man at all.

Ledbrge whirled toward Tops, furiously. "You put this idea into his head! Of course he's shocked, doesn't know what he's saying!"

"He had a blackjack on a thong on his wrist," said Kirsty.

Ledbrge wore a circus watch on his left wrist. He held it up. "Carl must have seen this," he laughed; and he said sympathetically: "Gentlemen, Mr. Kirsty is hysterical. He has always been afraid of the water."

Tops, after a moment, spoke. "Well, you see, Mr. Ledbrge," he explained, almost apologetically, "there's more to it than just this. The whole thing started with a man that left New York last Friday morning with Mr. Holden. He drove Holden's car, and with Holden's chauffeur driving. And the next time anybody saw that man, he was dead under a bed in one of the cabins at a roadside camp up here."

The others—save young Adam Brent—were watching Tops. Adam watched Ledbrge. He saw the man's pasty faintly dilate, saw his eyes become fixed in a concentrated attention. Tops paused, and in the instant of silence, Adam heard Mr. Kirsty's teeth clattering together. He had had an impression of racing thoughts behind Ledbrge's motionless calm. Then he was asked surely:

"What of it? What has that to do with me?"

"Why, Miss Ledbrge hasn't seen him yet," Tops explained. "But—the dead man looked mightily like you."

Ledbrge cried, in quick horror: "Looked like me? Dead? Decomposed, do you mean Christopher?"

"Why, yes, Brad," Tops assented quickly. "I didn't know his name was Christopher; but he looked enough like you to be your twin."

Ledbrge nodded gravely. "Gentlemen," he said firmly, "I can't stand here. Civil is freezing, and I'm cold myself. Suppose we go down to the house. I could keep the whole story."

Tops asked: "You know who the dead man was, then?"

"Certainly," Ledbrge insisted. His eyes clouded with grief. "You said he looked like my twin brother. Well, gentlemen, he was."

At the house, Whitlock and Reid by Tops's direction stayed outside. Kirsty disappeared with a serving man, to drink hot grog and find dry clothes. Ledbrge asked for Miss Ledbrge; and the servant reported.

"She had a turn, sir, and is lying down. Two fellas are with her."

"Dead," said Ledbrge. "Don't disturb her."

Tops suggested: "You'll want to get dry, yourself!"

But Ledbrge negatived this. "There's a good fire on the hearth," he pointed out. "I'll be all right. Come in!"

So they gathered in the big living-room, oddly paneled like a hunting hall; and Ledbrge said: "Now then. My brother dead, and some one else too, you said?"

"Mrs. Kell," Tops told him.

But Joe Dane could no longer endure that Tops should dominate the scene.

"And Kell too, Tops!" he cried. "Dead as a herring! And Holden gone, so we'll never get a word out of him."

Tops saw Ledbrge's eyes quicken in a sort of triumph, and the old man turned to Joe almost roughly. "Joe," he said, "you're a real gift for talking out of turn. Mr. Ledbrge, here, can tie all he wants to now, knowing Kell and Holden can't contradict him."

Cumberland and Adam were grim, silently listening; even Joe did not for a while interrupt again. And Ledbrge spoke, a little coldly.

"It's hard to speak openly about it," he confessed. "We've kept it an absolute secret for so long that silence is a habit now."

And he said earnestly: "But you know, every important case needs a double. Did you ever occur to you? Imagine how much easier it would be for the President, for instance, if he were twins. With one twin to attend to the business of the office, the other to handle the social and official banquets, make speeches, display himself."

He continued: "But it was more than a double anything else that led us into it. Some years ago the luxury demands upon our time and our energy began to worry us. I had something like a nervous collapse, and I well went quietly to my boyhood home—a remote little town in Manitoba—for a vacation.

"Christopher lived there. He was a doctor—surgeon and doctor, too, as well. I had always been fond of him; and he took me in hand, cured me. But he approached me for overwork-ing; and he suggested that a man so busy as I ought to have a personal physician to watch over his health. I persuaded him to come back with me in that capacity. He suggested also that I ought to have a social secretary or an assistant, to whom I might delegate some less important activities; and the fact, which we discovered before we left town, that (of even our intimate friends would distinguish one of us from the other, led naturally to the arrangement which has continued till now."

He looked from one to another. "It was very simple," he said, "once

"But you know, every important man needs a double."

we began. A little attention to such details as clothes, haircuts, and so on . . . Christopher, even more than I, hates taking care of my health, has lived the social side of my life, leaving me free to attend to business without distraction."

Tops wagged his head. "I declare, that's a queer one," he admitted. "I don't suppose many people knew about his thing?"

"Not a living soul," Ledbrge declared confidently. "Except my sister Alice—and even she can't tell us apart to this day."

"How about servants and all that?"

"It was usually a matter of never appearing anywhere together," Ledbrge answered them. "One of us always stayed out of sight when the other was to be—visible. Of course, we used some simple disguises at times, to give the one who let the moment did not exist a little freedom of movement." And he said suddenly:

"But now it's my turn to ask questions. Who told you the dead man, Christopher, looked like me?"

"Mrs. Tops had seen you—or your brother—at a stockholders' meeting once."

"Probably she saw Christopher," Ledbrge suggested. "But tell me what happened? Where is Christopher? How was he killed?"

Tops said gravely: "Why—all right, Mr. Ledbrge. I'll tell you. I found your brother under a bed in a cabin called Faraway, at a roadside camp called Dennie's Mill, up above here. He was dead when I found him.

"He had on an old sweater and a pair of overalls. His hands and feet were tied with rope. He was gagged and blindfolded with tape. His hands and feet and head were sacrificed in pieces of blanket.

"He'd been alive when he was put there. He died of a ruptured appendix.

"He'd been brought there in a coupe belonging to Holden, by a man and a woman. I found their tracks. Afterward the man killed the woman—it was Mrs. Kell—and left her in the car and ran the car into an old quarry up in the hills. We found the man's tracks there."

Ledbrge made an existence gesture. "Unbelievable!" he cried. "Sheer fiction!"

"Pretty bad," Tops assented; he added implacably: "And my notion is that you did it, Ledbrge."

Ledbrge stood his head abstractedly. He seemed not to resent the accusation. "Wait a minute, please," he said. "Of course, I know nothing of what happened up here; but I can make a guess. Let me think a minute."

Tops nodded, and waited, and calmly filled and lighted his straight black pipe; at last Ledbrge lifted his head. "It's part guess and part certainty," he confessed. "But I think I see the answer."

The fire had burned low. "I'll take off this wet coat," he remarked, and stood before them in flannel shirt, vest, khaki trousers and light suede shoes with rubber soles; a spare, gray, sturdy old man.

"It was Holden," he began then. "I can see what was in his mind, what he tried to do."

And he explained: "A week ago, I would have been as mystified as you, because I had always trusted Holden. But I know now that he was a thief and a rascal. I learned last Monday that he had been using my authority to traffic in air permits under my name, to sell my own stocks short. I have already approached the register to the Exchange authorities."

He paused, but no one spoke. So he went on.

"Holden did not know, you understand, that there were two of us, Christopher and I.

"Now gentlemen, Christopher was sick. Being a doctor, he of course knew that he had a bad appendix, but he was devoted to me. For him to go to a New York hospital would have been to risk the discovery of our duality. He was willing to take some risk to avoid that, so he decided to come up to Holden's house here for the operation. Mrs. Kell had been a trained nurse. Dr. Bryson would come from Boston to do the operation, in the remote above Holden's garage.

"Christopher himself, pretending to be me, made all these arrangements with Holden; so Holden would naturally suppose that I was about to be incapacitated for a week or two at most. Perhaps he thought I was likely to die. Perhaps he already intended my death. At any rate, he had been leaving New York, and trading in my name—he sold my stocks short."

He hesitated, then continued: "So they left New York on Friday morning, Christopher and Holden, and Kell driving. I protested, but Christopher overruled me. He preferred to be alone with Holden. He was afraid, so no one saw him; so Kell drove past the house to the garage.

"Holden was completely unsuspicious. He dressed Christopher in that old gray sweater and overalls, gagged him, muffled his head and feet and hand in pieces of the dog blanket so that he could make no noise, and stuffed him into the rumble of the coupe.

"He sent Kell away with orders to meet him later at a certain agreed spot; then Holden put on a pair of Kell's shoes. Their prints would be easily recognized because of the heel-plates. He knew that when Christopher's body was identified as me, Vicky—because of his threatening letters to me, and because he lived there at the Mill—would be at first suspected; but if Vicky were exonerated and Kell's footprints found, then Kell would be the next suspect.

"So then Holden and Mrs. Kell—she was his mistress—drove to Dennie's Mill, in the coupe, with Christopher hidden in the rumble. He looked at them all, challenging-ly. 'Doesn't that fit the facts?' he demanded.

"Well, so far," Tops agreed. "But go on."

"They took a cabin for the night, and Holden hid Christopher where you found him. But Mrs. Kell must have protested at the inhumanity of leaving him there alone, till Holden, in rage or desperation, strangled her."

He hesitated, and the color for an instant left his cheeks as though that word had shocked and frightened him. "It's sickening," he exclaimed then, huskily. "But—after that, Holden would go on to dispose of the car, and of Mrs. Kell's body, and most Kell, and make Kell give him a tap on the head and leave him to be found beside the road. As an alibi!" And he said in a low tone: "It is incredible; and yet something like that must be the truth!"

He finished, and Joe Dane started to speak, but Adam touched his arm and halted him.

Tops rapped his pipe on his heel, chuckled for notice on the hearth. "We showed Kell the dead man," he remarked. "He said it wasn't you."

"Kell would lie, of course. To save himself."

"Yes, I figured that," Tops agreed; but he said that in a sort of accusation: "Stories, Mr. Ledbrge, all that's too complicated for me. Holden was in it, sure; but my idea has been, right along, that whatever Holden did, he did because you told him to."

"Sir!" Ledbrge cried angrily. "Why should I tell Holden—"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

IMPROVED UNIFORM INTERNATIONAL

SUNDAY SCHOOL Lesson

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Lesson for March 3

A PEOPLE FINDING A HOMELAND

LESSON TEXT: Judges 1:34; 21:25.
MEMORY SELECTION: That each man do that which is right in his own eyes.—Judges 21:25.

God is the Lord of nations as well as of homes, and he is concerned that those who honor him in their homes have opportunity to serve him in their national life. This was true in a special way with Israel, but it is also true of us today.

Ready to enter the Promised Land, the people had to part with their great leader, Moses, who was not permitted to enter. The time comes when even the mightiest of men fall, but life must go on and new leadership must be found.

I. The Charged Leader (Josh. 1: 1-9).

1. Workers Die—God's Work Goes On (vs. 1, 2).

God buries his workmen at the end of their day of labor, but God's work goes on. The people had become attached to Moses and had learned to trust his leadership, even though they often murmured. With his death we might have assumed that there would be a letdown, but that was not in God's plan.

The Lord works through men. He gives them abilities and uses them for his glory, often in a way which astonishes them and others. But let them not become proud, for God has someone to take their place when they are gone. They are not indispensable.

2. The Road Is the Same, So Is the Blessing (vs. 3, 5).

The promises given to Moses were still good. God's promises are always good. They are the only really stable thing in a trembling universe. The question is, Are we ready to take him at his word?

They were to step out in faith. The land was promised to them only as the sole of their foot should tread upon it. Israel never took out the full promise of verse 4. They lacked faith.

God honors those who believe him, and who move forward by faith to plant the foot of spiritual conquest in new territory. Some are doing it now. Are you?

The enemies of God's people were many and mighty, but they were not able to stand in the way of God's people when they were moving forward by faith. Even again, Israel failed. They did not drive them out, because they did not take God at his word. The application of that truth to us is obvious.

3. The Unchanging God (Josh. 23: 1-11).

Between our first scripture and this selection will be found the history of the conquest of the land (at least, of the larger part of it), and the division of its territory between the tribes.

Years have passed quickly, and the new leader, Joshua, is now an old man, soon to go to his reward. He gathers the elders who represented the people and gives them good counsel for the days ahead, even as he recalls the blessings of the past.

1. God Did Help (vs. 1,3).

Israel had been in many hard battles. They had gone through the trials of present days in a new and unfamiliar land. Now they were established and at peace. Perhaps they were receiving their reward for their faithfulness to God, and for the sacrifices and their own sacrificial efforts.

Joshua reminds them that it was God who fought for them (v. 3). We need just such a reminder in our busy today.

2. God Will Help (vs. 4, 5). Joshua had a word of encouragement for the days ahead. There was much yet to be done. The land had not been fully taken. He reminded them of God's help in the past, so that they would depend on it in the future.

It is one mark of a great man that he looks beyond the end of his own short existence and plans for the future.

What about the future? Joshua reminds them that every blessing they had received, every victory they had won, everything had come to them by the hand of God. There and there alone was their hope for the future. And it was enough!

3. Help Yourself (vs. 6-11). To keep true in the land where their neighbors engaged in idol worship and all manner of immorality required definite action on the part of Israel.

They were not to deviate in the slightest from God's way, "to the right hand or to the left" (v. 6). For a little beginning in the wrong direction winds up in awful departures from life.

They were not even to swear by the heathen gods, not even in name that them. They were to "cleave" to the Lord, a graphic presentation of the close relation between God and his people.

There are many thoughts here which can be profitably applied to our daily lives. Faith in God calls for obedient action and separated living for him.

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Household Hints

Cut stitch seams on baby's dainty garments and underwear in half them flat. Helps prevent irritation to the sensitive skin.

To dust the hole in your son's sweater sleeve, baste a square of matching cotton over the hole on the under side. This makes a firm base on which to do your mending.

Clean the underside of rugs frequently, for dirt works through, and insects are likely to hide underneath.

A little salt in the bottom of the skillet will keep the fat from popping.

Screw a hook into the end of your broom handle. You'll find it handy for reaching objects on high shelves, also the window shade pull that springs to the top. And naturally you hang the broom up by its hook in order to preserve the bristles.

For cleaning tiles in the bathroom and kitchen, use a soft cloth moistened with kerosene.

If salt fish are soaked and cooked in milk they become much sweeter than when soaked in water.

Paint wooden knitting needles and crochet hooks with a coat of colorless nail polish the minute they begin to get rough or scratchy. Smooths them off. Make sure polish is thoroughly dry and hard before putting needles in use again.

Shoes that are stiff after being worn in the rain will become quite pliable if vaseline is well rubbed in with a soft rag.

Should the head fishing of a chick in the sick room bother the patient, place a glass bowl over the aperture.

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