

Nothing is Impossible

by Hoch, Edward D.

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by Edward D. Hoch

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A Dr. Sam Hawthorne Checklist

INTRODUCTION

Over the seventeen years I worked with Edward D. Hoch at *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, I had the pleasure of editing twelve of his long-running series. And that was less than half of his output for *EQMM*, where he had a thirty-four-year unbroken streak of publication in every monthly issue of the magazine.

My favorite of all of his excellent series was that starring Dr. Sam Hawthorne. Many fans of this series, which began in 1974, cite its locked-room and impossible-crime puzzles as what chiefly attracts them to the stories. In the Hawthorne tales one finds some of the best Hoch plots, perhaps because he liked to save the most difficult kind of puzzle, that of the locked-room, for his country doctor.

As brilliant as the plots of the Hawthorne stories are, however, they are only a part of the magic the series has for me. Ed Hoch had many exceptional talents beyond plotting. One of them was the ability to create a milieu that readers could look forward to returning to again and again. Set in the New England town of Northmont in the 1920s through '40s, the Hawthorne stories have a certain parallel to the Miss Marple stories and novels of Agatha Christie, whose early cases were set in roughly the same period of time, in the English village of St. Mary Mead. The settings of both series are relatively self-contained; both create ambiances in which the occurrence of crime should be an anomaly; and both include some returning supporting characters. But Northmont has always felt to me a more real and vital place than St. Mary Mead, and I think that may be partly because, unlike Miss Marple, Dr. Sam Hawthorne is not primarily an observer of his town—he's an active participant in all that goes on.

As a young, single doctor, Dr. Sam is involved in all sorts of relationships—personal, professional, and civic—with characters who turn out to be suspects, victims, and witnesses. He has a stake in what happens that goes beyond achieving justice, and his supporting characters become more important, as the series progresses, than they ever could be were his primary role that of observer. The supporting characters of Northmont are part of Dr. Sam's *personal* story—a story that, spun out over some seventy

adventures, provides as compelling a reason to continue reading the stories, for many readers (myself included), as are the astonishingly clever puzzles each story contains.

You have in your hand a volume from the second of more than three decades of the Hawthorne series. If you've read collections of the earlier stories, you won't find the good doctor the same in this one, because this is one fictional series that progresses in something like real time. Hawthorne moves on, and so do the times. With each case told as a reminiscence, we're guided by an elderly Dr. Sam through the decades of his youth, with all of the attendant changes to Northmont, the country, and the world. Part of the pleasant expectation with which I used to open the manuscript of a new Hawthorne story was that of seeing how the milieu, and the characters, had changed. And Ed Hoch always delivered. One of the things being his editor for so many years proved to me is that he was a scrupulous researcher. Using primarily his own extensive personal library, he brought to bear the kind of detail that made his settings places I felt I could walk right into. And I can honestly say that I never detected a historical error in any of his stories.

If you are newly making Hawthorne's acquaintance, there's a respect in which I envy you: You don't know yet how Sam's life turned out. Although his creator died suddenly and unexpectedly in 2008, he had revealed, only a short time earlier, answers to two of the key questions that had kept readers going over the decades: Did Northmont's most eligible bachelor ever marry? And how old is the retired Dr. Sam who narrates the tales? I won't chance spoiling your reading of future collections by answering those questions for you. I think the author himself had some reservations about resolving all of that. Although he believed that Nick Velvet—an eccentric and endearing thief who became the subject of a French television series—was his most popular sleuth, he too seems to have believed that Hawthorne was one of his most important creations.

I'd like to add one final, more personal, note about this remarkable series: Into Sam Hawthorne Ed Hoch infused the qualities of character for which he himself was best known: kindness, decency, and compassion. He, like Hawthorne, always had a ready smile and a willingness to forgive. He is an author whose work should not be forgotten, and a person who never will be forgotten by those, like me, who counted him a good friend.

Janet Hutchings

Editor

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine

THE PROBLEM OF THE SNOWBOUND CABIN

Dr. Sam Hawthorne settled down in his favorite chair, took a sip of brandy, and said, “I wanted to tell you about my vacation in Maine back in January of ’thirty-five and I suppose you wonder why any sane person would drive up to Maine in the middle of winter, especially in the days before turnpikes and expressways. Well, I suppose it was because of the car . . .”

My major weakness (Dr. Sam continued) has always been sports-cars. When I completed my internship, my father and mother presented me with a yellow 1921 Pierce-Arrow Runabout and it was the pride of my life until it was destroyed in an explosion. The cars I owned after that, in the early 1930s, were unsatisfactory shadows of that great vehicle. Then, in early ’35, I finally found the car of my dreams—a Mercedes-Benz 500K Special Roadster in glorious red. It was expensive, of course, but by that time I’d been a practicing physician for over twelve years and in my single state I’d managed to save a fair amount of money from my country practice.

I purchased the car in Boston, and when I drove up to the office wing at Pilgrim Memorial Hospital with it, my nurse April couldn’t believe her eyes.

“You *bought* it, Sam? It’s *yours*?”

“That’s right. Hawthorne’s folly.”

She ran her hands over the red lacquer, admiring the long sleek lines of the engine housing. We tried out the rumble seat together and examined the twin spare tires mounted behind it. Then I let her take the car for a drive around the hospital parking lot. “It’s a dream, Sam!” she said. “I never saw anything like it!”

April had been with me since I came to Northmont, and a decade earlier we’d had a brief vacation on Cape Cod together, but our relationship had remained platonic. I liked April as a friend and found her perfect as a nurse, but no spark of romance had ever developed between us. She was a few years older than I, in her late thirties, but still an attractive woman for the

right man. Though we never discussed her private life, I had the feeling the right man hadn't yet appeared within the confines of Northmont.

It was against this background that I impulsively said, as she climbed out of the Mercedes, "Let's drive it up to Maine."

"Maine? In January?"

"Why not? It's been a fairly open winter and the roads are clear. We might even try some skiing."

"No, thanks, I don't want a leg in a cast." But I could see the idea of a vacation intrigued her. "What would we do about your patients?"

"Doc Handleman's offered to take care of them if I want to get away for a week. I'm filling in for him in March when he goes to Florida."

"Let's do it," April decided with an impish grin. "But remember, no skiing . . .!"

We set off at the beginning of the following week, driving north through Massachusetts and into New Hampshire. The car handled like a dream, and though it was far too cold to drive with the convertible top down, the right-hand steering wheel and the long hood gave the feeling of driving something foreign and fast. I'd telephoned ahead and made reservations at a vacation lodge north of Bangor, so even after we crossed the state line into Maine we had a long drive ahead of us.

"It's starting to snow," April pointed out as the first fine flakes hit the windshield.

"I guess we were lucky to get this far without it."

The snow was light but steady for the remainder of our journey, and when we reached the Greenbush Inn a few inches had accumulated on the road. I parked in the shelter of a large pine tree and took our bags out of the rumble seat where they'd been stored. The lodge was a large structure built entirely of logs, reminding me of the number one resource of the Maine woods. Inside a cheery lobby with the fireside atmosphere of a cozy living room, we were greeted by a tall dark man in his forties whose speech held just a hint of an accent.

"Good afternoon and welcome to Greenbush. I am your host, Andre Mulhoney."

"Dr. Sam Hawthorne," I said, extending my hand. "And this is—"

"Ah, Mrs. Hawthorne!"

"No—," I continued my introduction, "—I've booked separate rooms."

Andre Mulhone smiled. "Separate but connecting. If you'll sign the register, I'll show them to you."

"We'll be here for six nights."

"Very good."

Our rooms were pleasant and when we went down for dinner an hour later, Mulhone motioned us to join him at his table. "I despise dining alone," he said. "Please dine with me."

It was an enjoyable meal, and I could see April warming to Andre. He told us about his French-Irish background and about his wife who had been killed the previous winter when her car skidded off the road. "What was her name?" April asked sympathetically.

"Lois. I have a picture of her in my wallet. When she went out of my life, I had very little to keep me going. We had no children and the inn was all I had to occupy myself."

He showed us a snapshot of a pleasant-looking woman about his age. "What a nice smile," April commented.

Mulhone's conversation at dinner reflected cosmopolitan interests I found surprising in the Maine woods. At one moment he'd be speaking of Thoreau's visit there a century earlier and the next he was discussing Adolf Hitler, who was threatening all of Europe. It wasn't the sort of discussion I ever had back in Northmont.

"What's there to do around here?" I asked, adding, "Neither of us ski."

Andre Mulhone shrugged. "Skiing is an Alpine sport. I often wonder if it will be as popular in America as it is in Switzerland and Norway. I understand, though, that it is gaining popularity in Minnesota among the Scandinavians. And who knows? There is a new invention called the ski lift, which could revolutionize the pastime. One can ski downhill and ride back up."

"But you have no skiing at Greenbush?" April asked.

"No. But we have snowshoeing and hiking. Let me fit you both out with snowshoes in the morning and I'll show you a bit of the countryside."

I was sure Mulhone's special interest in us had more to do with April than with me, but I had no cause for complaint. He was a charming man and an excellent conversationalist. I went to bed looking forward to the morning.

It was bright and brisk, with a north wind that made us turn up our collars as we waited for Andre to join us in front of the lodge. April had her eyes on the door and I let mine wander to the pine tree where I'd parked my Mercedes. I was startled to see a young man in a plaid jacket hovering by it. In one hand he carried a shotgun.

I strolled over. "Admiring the car?" I said.

"It's a beauty. Is it yours?"

"That's right."

"You staying at the lodge?"

I nodded. "My name is Sam Hawthorne."

"I'm Gus Laxault. I do some odd jobs around here."

"With a shotgun?"

"Been out shootin' varmints. When there's a snow cover and they can't get food easily, they come in to our rubbish dump. Got me a bobcat this morning."

"I didn't realize we were that close to nature."

Laxault was more interested in the Mercedes. "First one of these I've seen," he said, running his hand over the fender. "I'll bet it set you back a good piece of money."

"It wasn't cheap." I didn't want to pursue the conversation any longer. When I moved away from the car, I was relieved that he followed along.

Mulhoney had arrived by this time, carrying three pairs of snowshoes. He frowned at Laxault and seemed about to say something, then to think better of it. The varmint-hunter veered off and disappeared around the back of the lodge.

"Oh, it's a perfect morning!" April was radiant.

"We had snow last night back in the hills," Andre said. "You'll find it quite deep in spots." He knelt to fit April's snowshoes while I struggled with the pair he gave me.

"How many people do you employ here?" I asked.

"It depends on how busy we are. If we have many reservations for a particular weekend, I call on some temporary help from town."

"Is Laxault one of your temporaries?"

"He does odd jobs, but he's a bit unreliable."

"He told me he shot a bobcat this morning."

"He probably did. During the winter they come looking for food."

We started out, heading north across a frozen lake and up the side of a gentle hill. April and I were unaccustomed to snowshoes and walking with them wasn't as easy as it looked. My leg muscles were aching before we'd covered the first mile.

"We can rest at Ted Shorter's cabin on the other side of this hill," Mulhoney suggested. "It's hard walking in this cold wind if you're not used to it."

"Who's Ted Shorter?"

"A retired stockbroker who moved up here a few years ago. He lives by himself, but he's friendly enough if you come to visit."

Once we reached the crest of the hill, the cabin came into view. A Ford sedan was parked nearby, but the road was completely buried by the snow that had drifted across the cabin's front door. There was smoke coming from the chimney.

"He must be home," Mulhoney observed. "The fireplace is going and there are no tracks out of the house."

Following his lead, we made our way down the hill. April pointed off to the left. "Are those bobcat tracks?"

Mulhoney went closer to them and said, "I think so. They're about nine inches apart. It might be the one Gus Laxault shot." The tracks wandered toward the corner of the cabin and then went off in the other direction. The drifted snow grew deeper near the cabin and I doubted we could have made it without snowshoes. When we reached the door, Mulhoney pounded on it with a gloved fist.

When no one came, he tried the knob. "It's unlocked," he said and carefully pushed it open, letting the drifted snow fall in on the floor. He turned a switch and a single overhead light came on. Over his shoulder, I saw a pleasant room with a large easy chair drawn up to the fire. Sunshine from a skylight in the roof flooded the room. I could make out a sleeping loft with an unmade bed and some dirty breakfast dishes on a dining table.

We could see the top of someone's head in the easy chair and Mulhoney hurried forward while April and I waited in the doorway. "Ted, it's Andre. I was out snowshoeing and stopped to—" He bent over the chair, shaking the man slightly. Then I saw his face change.

"What is it?" I asked, starting forward.

"My God—he's been stabbed."

I took one look and saw it was true. And that the man in the chair was dead.

Mulhoney used the crank phone on the wall to call the authorities.

When he arrived a half hour later, Sheriff Petty proved to be quite different from Sheriff Lens, my best friend back home in Northmont. He seemed out of place in the backwoods—a tall, slim, frowning man who wore an expensive leather coat over his tailored uniform. He wanted to know what had brought us to the cabin that morning. Though he'd ignored me during the initial questioning, he perked up when he learned I was a doctor.

"We don't have a full-time coroner right now," he said. "Is there any chance you could estimate the time of death for us, Dr. Hawthorne?"

"I could try," I told him, "but the body was so close to the fireplace it's hard to be accurate. There's no sign of rigor mortis. He could have been dead anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours. Certainly no longer than a few hours. The fact that the fire was still burning when we entered the cabin tells us something. It would have burned itself out over a longer period."

"Then he was killed after sunrise."

"I'd say so, yes. It was around ten o'clock when we found him. There were unwashed breakfast dishes and the lights were out."

"The snow stopped before the sun was up." Sheriff Petty turned to Mulhoney. "There was no one else here when you entered the cabin?"

"Only poor Shorter."

"And no tracks leading in or out?"

Andre shook his head.

"No tracks," I confirmed. "We searched the cabin and looked out in all directions. This is the only door and the snow was drifted against it when we arrived. The windows were all closed and latched against the cold. Nothing came near the place except for a bobcat."

"The killer must have been here all night," the sheriff decided. "But then how did he get away without leaving tracks?"

"Suicide," Mulhoney said. "It's the only answer."

Sheriff Petty's frown deepened. "If it's suicide, what happened to the weapon?"

It was a fair enough question, and for the moment we had no answer.

They took the body away, pulling it on a sled up the snow-covered hill, then down the other side till they reached the road that was clear. We headed back to the lodge.

“Tell me about Shorter,” I said to Andre. “Who do you think would want to kill him?”

The innkeeper shrugged. “Someone from his past, I suppose. I doubt if he saw enough people around here to make enemies. As I said before, he was friendly enough but he kept to himself.”

“Did he ever come over to the lodge?”

“Hardly at all.” Then he snapped his fingers at a sudden thought. “But he did show up just a few days ago. He came to visit a woman who’s staying here. I remember being surprised to see him, but then I thought no more about it.”

“Is she still here?”

“Mrs. Deveroux—yes, I believe she is.”

I left April enjoying Andre’s company and sought out the number of Mrs. Deveroux’s room. The desk clerk pointed across the lobby at a slim woman in her thirties who was glancing through a fashion magazine. I thanked him and walked over to her. “Pardon me. Mrs. Deveroux?”

She turned and smiled. “Yes. Do I know you?”

“I haven’t had the pleasure. My name is Sam Hawthorne.”

“And I’m Faith Deveroux, as you seem to know. What can I do for you?” She put down the magazine.

“It’s about Ted Shorter. I understand you knew him.”

“Knew?”

“I’m sorry. I thought you’d heard by now. Mr. Shorter was found dead in his cabin this morning.”

She swayed and started to fall out of her chair. I caught her just in time.

When she’d regained her composure, Faith Deveroux took a sip of the brandy I’d ordered and said, “You’ll have to excuse me. I haven’t fainted in years.”

“I’m sorry my news was such a shock.”

She leaned back against the sofa in the lobby. There had been no fuss—only the desk clerk had seen her fall and I had quickly revived her. “It

shouldn't have been, really. He was someone I knew a long time ago. What was it—a heart attack?"

"He was stabbed in the chest."

"You mean someone *killed* him?" Her pallid face might have grown a shade paler.

"It might have been suicide, but that's doubtful. Could you tell me something about him, about why he chose to live here away from everyone?"

"That's simple enough. Ted was a stockbroker. He was wiped out in the crash and never recovered from it. He not only lost his own money but that of hundreds of small investors as well. Some of them blamed him for their losses. He finally reached the point where he couldn't face it any more. He moved up here from Boston about three years ago and he's been alone ever since."

"Were you one of his investors?" I asked.

She gave me a sad smile. "No. I was his wife."

It was my turn to be shocked. "You were divorced?"

Faith Deveroux nodded. "It had nothing to do with the crash. I met Glen Deveroux early in 1929 and we fell in love. I told Ted I wanted a divorce a few months later. I was sorry when I heard what happened to him, but it had no connection with me."

"You're up here now without your husband?"

"Yes. He's a construction engineer working on the new Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Sometimes he's out there for months at a time. I got lonesome, so I came up here for a week."

"Did you know your former husband was living here?"

"I knew he was in the general area."

"Did you phone him when you arrived?"

By this time her patience had worn thin. "What are you, Mr. Hawthorne, some sort of detective? What's the meaning of all these questions?"

"I'm a doctor. I've had some experience with crimes of this type and I thought I might help the local police."

"What do you mean, crimes of this type?"

"The circumstances seem somewhat bizarre, even impossible. Mr. Shorter was stabbed while he was alone in a cabin surrounded by unmarked snow.

The killer couldn't have entered or left once the snow stopped before dawn. Yet there is no weapon pointing to suicide."

"Do the police suspect *me* of killing him?" she asked.

"I don't think at this point they're even aware of your existence."

"I'd appreciate it if that continued to be the case, Dr. Hawthorne. I assure you I know nothing of my ex-husband's death. We dined together the other night and that was all."

There was nothing more to be learned just then. I thanked her for her time and went to my room, where I sat by the window and tried to recall the details of the dead man's cabin. It was one large room with a sleeping loft and a small kitchen area. An outhouse was located at the rear. There had been some books, mainly about business and the stock market, and the remains of breakfast, confirming that Shorter had probably died after dawn. I wondered if a man would make breakfast if he intended to kill himself—and decided that stranger things had happened.

I didn't see April until after dinner. Then she seemed happier than I'd ever seen her.

"Have you been with Andre all day?" I asked, thinking I was making a joke.

To my surprise, she nodded. "I really like him, Sam. We had dinner in his office, just the two of us."

"This is getting serious," I said.

She changed the subject. "Do you have any leads on the killing?"

"Nothing much. I met a woman here at the lodge who turns out to be Shorter's former wife. It's interesting that she should be on the scene at the time he died, but she swears she knows nothing about it."

"Why would anyone kill a man who lived by himself in the woods?"

"I don't know. He lost a great deal of money in the crash and so did a number of people whose investments he handled. Perhaps one of them followed him up here for revenge."

"After more than five years?"

"It's happened before. Sometimes the anger at a supposed wrong will build in a person's mind until it blossoms into a homicidal rage. Shorter may have been here in hiding from just such a person."

We strolled out around the lodge, and the conversation shifted to Northmont and the people there. April spoke of it with something like nostalgia, as if remembering the home she'd left long ago. The conversation bothered me, and later in my room I sat for a long time at the window, staring out at the snow and the few lights that reflected off it.

Once I saw a figure moving, passing beneath one of the lights. It was Gus Laxault, carrying his shotgun, perhaps on the trail of another bobcat.

In the morning, April was gone from her room when I knocked at the door. I went down to breakfast and avoided joining Faith Deveroux, who was seated alone on the other side of the room.

April appeared as I was finishing my coffee. "I'm sorry I'm late," she said a bit sheepishly.

"That's all right. We're both on our own up here. Have you had breakfast?"

"Yes."

"How about a walk, then?"

"Sounds good. Where to?"

"I was thinking of taking another look at Shorter's cabin."

"Won't we need snowshoes?"

"I imagine Sheriff Petty's people have worn a path to the door by now. Let's find out."

We followed our route of the previous day, encountering deep snow at only one point. April sank in up to her waist and I had to pull her out. We were still laughing when we finally reached the top of the hill overlooking Shorter's cabin.

"I think someone's in there," I said. "The door's standing open."

It proved to be a bearded man in a fur parka, sent by the telephone company to remove the phone from the wall. "Guess he won't have any more need for this," he told us. "We don't like to leave our equipment around in an empty house."

"Did you know Ted Shorter?" I asked him.

"Not really." He kept working as he talked. "Met him once when I came out here to string some new line."

"Was he alone?"

“No—one of the fellas from the lodge was here with him.”

“Andre Mulhone?”

“No, a handyman who works there. Laxault, I think his name is.”

“Gus Laxault.” I thought about that. “Ever see any bobcats around here?”

“Sure, once in a while. Mostly they mind their own business.”

After he’d gone, April and I examined the cabin. It was much as I remembered it from the previous day, except that now there was no warming heat from the fireplace. I stood by the chair in which Shorter had been found dead, looking in every direction for some clue I might have missed. “Any ideas?” I asked April.

She giggled, this lighthearted new April I’d never seen before. “You sound like Sherlock Holmes. All right, how’s this? He stabs himself with a knife tied to a piece of rubber cut from an inner tube or something. When he lets go of the knife, it’s yanked away out of sight by this long rubber band.”

“Where out of sight?”

April looked up and pointed. “Through that skylight to the roof.”

It was just crazy enough to have happened. I moved a sturdy table over, placed a chair on top of it, and was able to reach the skylight. It opened easily, but the snow on the roof appeared unmarked. I felt around the edge of the window but there was no hidden knife.

I climbed back down to the floor. “Nothing up there,” I said.

After replacing the furniture, I looked up the chimney, remembering a story I’d read about a weapon pulled up a chimney after a suicide, but there, too, I found nothing. I tried to reconstruct the events of the previous morning, talking as much to myself as to April. “He got up, probably shortly after dawn, and fixed breakfast. He started a fire, either before or after breakfast.”

“Maybe the killer started the fire,” April suggested, “to keep the body warm and confuse the time of death.”

That was a possibility I’d overlooked. “But that still doesn’t tell us how the killer got in and out,” I said.

“During the night, before the snow stopped.”

I shook my head. “You’re forgetting breakfast.”

“The killer could have faked that.”

“But there’s still the fire. It would have died down if it was unattended for that long.”

“I suppose you’re right,” she admitted. Then her eyes fastened on something on the floor near the door, almost hidden by a scatter rug. “What’s that?”

It was a slim gold lead-pencil with the initials *G.D.* engraved on its side. “Maybe it’s a clue,” I said, though I doubted it. Sheriff Petty’s people wouldn’t be likely to miss it. Perhaps one of the investigators had used it to draw a map of the cabin and dropped it. I put it in my pocket and looked around the room. “I guess we’ve done all the looking that makes sense, April,” I said.

As we walked back to the lodge, April became serious. “Sam, what would you do if I left you someday to take another job?”

“Probably close up my practice and become a monk.”

“No, seriously.”

“You’ve been with me thirteen years, April. As long as I’ve had my practice. Aren’t you happy? Do you want more money?”

“It has nothing to do with money.”

“I thought you were happy. You’ve certainly been happy the last couple of days.”

“Yes.”

“Then, what—”

“Andre’s asked me to stay up here.”

I was dumbfounded. “He offered you a job?”

“He wants to marry me.”

“April! You’d marry a man you met only two days ago?”

“No.”

I sighed with relief. “That’s something, anyway.”

“But maybe I’d like to stay here a while longer, to get to know him better.”

“His wife was killed in an auto accident last year. He’s just lonesome.”

“So am I.”

“What?”

“I’m thirty-nine years old, Sam.”

“I never thought of you as wanting—”

“I know you didn’t.” There was a new note of sharpness in her voice. “Sometimes I’ve wondered if you thought of me as a woman at all.”

I didn’t want to talk about it any more. “We’ve got a few more days here,” I said. “Let’s just see what happens.”

That night after dinner, I joined Faith Deveroux at her table for a little sherry. “I’ll be leaving tomorrow,” she confided, “going back to Boston.”

“You’re not staying for Shorter’s funeral?”

She shook her head. “He hasn’t meant anything to me in years. I was foolish to come up here at all.”

I saw April standing in the doorway, looking around the room. When she saw me, she waved and headed for the table. “What is it?” I asked, standing up to greet her.

“Can you come with me? Andre thinks he’s solved the mystery. I want you to hear it.”

“I’d be happy to.”

Faith Deveroux was on her feet, too. “May I come?”

I introduced her to April and we both followed along to Andre’s office. He was seated behind his desk and seemed surprised to see Mrs. Deveroux, but he quickly offered her a chair. “You must excuse me, Mrs. Deveroux. I wasn’t aware Ted’s former wife was a guest here. I have a theory about his death which seems to fit the facts, and April thought Dr. Hawthorne should hear it.”

“Go right ahead,” she said.

“If you can explain how he was killed in that cabin with no tracks nearby except those of a wandering bobcat,” I told him, “I’ll certainly be interested in hearing it.”

Andre nodded. “It’s so simple I can tell you in one sentence. Ted Shorter stabbed himself with a dagger of ice, which promptly melted in the heat from the fireplace.”

Faith Deveroux and I were silent, but April was quick to praise the theory. “That’s the sort of thing you’d come up with, Sam! I just know it has to be right.”

“April—” I started to say, and then directed my remarks directly to Mulhoney. “Have you ever tried cutting the skin with a sharp piece of ice? It’s not as easy as it sounds, even outdoors. Indoors, next to that fire, it

would be impossible. What happens is that the edge of the ice, no matter how sharp it is, immediately begins to melt and grow dull.” I turned to Faith. “Would your ex-husband have gained anything by concealing the fact of his suicide?”

She shook her head. “Nothing. After the divorce, he turned in his insurance policy for its cash value. He told me after he moved up here that there was no one who needed his insurance money.”

“I still think your theory is possible, Andre,” April insisted.

“No, Dr. Hawthorne is right,” Mulhoney said graciously. “I hadn’t thought it through. I suppose I was trying to dispel the notion of a killer at large in the area.”

Later, as I relaxed over a billiard table in the lodge’s game room, April sought me out. “Sam, I want to talk.”

“All right. In the bar?”

“I’d rather go upstairs.”

I took her to my room and relaxed in a chair while she sat stiffly on the bed. “Now tell me what’s troubling you,” I said, dreading what might be coming.

“You hate Andre, don’t you? Ever since I told you about us.”

“You’re wrong, April.”

“What is it, then?”

I felt drained of energy. What I was about to say was the most difficult thing I’d ever done. “We have to face facts. Shorter’s death wasn’t a suicide, and certainly that wandering bobcat didn’t kill him. No one entered that cabin between the time the snow stopped and we entered to find him. No one could have. The windows were latched and the snow at the door and on the roof was undisturbed.”

“But—”

“Ted Shorter was alive when we entered, perhaps dozing by the fire. Andre, the first one to reach his chair, stabbed him when he bent over to shake him. That’s the only way it could have been. I’m sorry, April. — Perhaps he lost money with Shorter’s firm some years ago.”

“*No!*” She threw herself down on the bed and sobbed, beating at the spread with her fists. There was nothing I could say or do. I’d said too much already.

I slept badly that night, but I finally dozed off near dawn and awakened with a clear head. My brain seemed to have been working even while I slept, and I had a fresh grasp of the situation that hadn't been obvious before. I lay in bed for a time, staring at the ceiling, then finally got up and telephoned Sheriff Petty. I told him what I wanted to do, without explaining why.

"It may be too late, Sheriff, but I'd like you to go with me to Shorter's cabin. This morning."

"What for?"

"I'd rather not say until I'm more certain."

"Don't tell me you believe that old chestnut about the murderer returning to the scene of the crime."

"Something like that," I admitted.

I met him there shortly after eight o'clock, having suggested he leave his car out of sight on the main road. There had been no further snow, so we were able to enter the cabin along the well trodden path without leaving new prints. Once inside, I suggested we take cover in the sleeping loft.

"Who are you expecting to come?" Petty wanted to know.

"I'd like to wait to see if I'm right. There'll be plenty of time for explanations later."

But as the hours dragged on, I could see the sheriff's patience wearing thin. "It's after ten o'clock, Dr. Hawthorne. I have other duties, you know."

"Give me one more hour. If nothing happens by eleven, we'll call it —"

Below us, the cabin door started to open. I touched Petty's arm, warning him to silence. A man I'd never seen before entered and began looking around the floor. "Who—?" Sheriff Petty started to whisper, but I squeezed his arm, tensing myself to leap out of the sleeping loft.

I landed not six feet from the searching man, bringing him up straight with a look of surprise on his face. "Is this what you're looking for?" I asked, holding out the pencil April and I had found the previous day.

He looked at me oddly, then reached out his hand. "Yes, it is."

"Sheriff," I called out, "you'd better join us!"

An expression of panic crossed the man's face and I thought he might try to flee, but he stood his ground. "What's going on here, anyway?"

With Petty at my side, I felt a surge of confidence. “You dropped your pen yesterday morning when you were wearing your false beard and posing as the telephone man. You had to remove the phone wires before we figured out how you got into this cabin without leaving tracks. Sheriff, I want you to arrest this man for murder. He’s the husband of Shorter’s ex-wife. His name is Glen Deveroux.”

I had to explain it all to the sheriff before he took Deveroux away, and then later, back at the Greenbush Inn, I told April and Andre about it. Faith Deveroux, shocked by her husband’s arrest, had gone to the county jail to be with him.

“I’m sorry about last night,” I told April at the beginning. “My mind wasn’t functioning right.”

“We understand,” Andre said. Obviously he’d heard the details from April.

“Glen Deveroux is a construction engineer, supposedly working for long periods on the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Apparently he mistrusted his wife and would sneak back to Boston to check up on her. This time he followed her up here, wearing a beard for disguise, and found her having dinner with her ex-husband. Maybe they did more than have dinner. Posing as a telephone lineman, Deveroux went to Shorter’s cabin and strung a couple of thin steel cables—the sort he uses in bridge construction. From a distance they looked just like ordinary telephone or electric wires. They were so much a part of the scenery that we never noticed them as we approached the cabin, but they had to be there. The cabin had electric lights and a crank telephone. I suppose our attention was diverted by the bobcat tracks.”

“You mean,” Andrew asked, “that this man walked across to the cabin on the telephone wire?”

“On a steel cable,” I corrected, “with another steel cable to hang onto. Not a difficult task for a bridge builder. Once he reached the roof, he lifted the skylight and entered that way, lowering himself with another length of cable. When Shorter encountered him at work, he wasn’t alarmed because Deveroux had visited him before in his guise of a telephone lineman. Deveroux stabbed Shorter and left the way he came. Any tracks he might

have left on the roof would be easily smoothed over and the wind would finish the job of obliterating them.”

April had a question. “If Deveroux met Shorter on a previous visit to the cabin, why didn’t he simply kill the man then? Why go to all this trouble?”

“Because Shorter wasn’t alone the first time. Gus Laxault was with him. Deveroux used this method in the hope the death would be taken for suicide. But he was so anxious to get out of there, he forgot to leave the weapon.”

“How do you know this, Sam?” April asked. “Last night you thought Andre was guilty.”

“I remembered the sunshine coming through the skylight when we entered the cabin to find the body. There wasn’t time for all the snow to have melted from that glass, even with the heat from the cabin. Remember it was a cold morning. There was no snow on the skylight because it slid off when the skylight was opened. It wasn’t latched like the windows. In fact, it opened quite easily. I asked myself, If the killer came through the skylight, how did he reach the roof?

“The wires, those unseen but necessary wires, were the answer. But could telephone and electric wires support the weight of a man across that distance? Not unless they were special wires, especially anchored on either end. When the lineman was there, removing the phone not twenty-four hours after the murder, I had to suspect him.

“Then there was the matter of the pencil. It had the initials *G.D.* on it, which could have stood for Glen Deveroux. It hadn’t been dropped at the time of the murder or the police would have found it. If it didn’t belong to Sheriff Petty or his people, it must have been dropped by that telephone man. If the phone man was Glen Deveroux in disguise, everything fell into place, including the motive. This morning, I took a chance he’d come back to the cabin, looking for his pencil.”

Andre stood up when I’d finished and shook my hand. “We owe you our thanks, April and I.”

She kissed me on the cheek. “Can you ever forgive me for the way I behaved last night?”

“If you can forgive me.” I looked at my watch. “I think I’ll be starting back today. What are your plans?”

“I’ll stay for the rest of the week, Sam. Then I’ll come back to help train my replacement. You deserve a month’s notice after all these years.”

“April and Andre were married in the spring (Dr. Sam Hawthorne concluded). Of course, I hated to see April go, but they were happy together and had a fine marriage. I was the godfather for their child. Things didn’t go as smoothly with April’s replacement, though, as I’ll tell you next time.”

A DR. SAM HAWTHORNE CHECKLIST

Books

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More Things Impossible, The Second Casebook of Dr. Sam Hawthorne. Norfolk: Crippen & Landru Publishers, 2006. Contains Dr. Sam's next 15 cases.

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