

THE *DAILY COURIER* was hoping to call it "The A B C D Murder" in honor of Ace, Beatrice, Cecil, and Divine. The four alphabetical suspects were all nieces and nephews of the victim, Lord Alexander Purdy. But by the time a clever writer thought this up, one of the group had already been arrested and the headline had to be scratched. Luckily, the British tabloid was able to come up with something just as good: "DID TYCOON DIE FROM BEA'S STING?"

The details turned out to be as sensational as the headline. It all began on a sunny afternoon when the aging industrialist gathered his four relations together for an alfresco lunch at his Sussex estate. The four cousins spent the morning roaming the grounds and communing with nature. At noon, the housekeeper dished up an extravagant picnic in the gazebo and afterwards, Uncle Alexander partook of his ritual nap in the hammock beside the garden shed.

From the columned porch, Ace, Cecil, and Divine gazed out over the lawn. "What is Beatrice trying to do?" Ace wondered.

The others could see it, too. Cousin Beatrice was standing by the hammock, waving her hands skittishly, running a few feet away from her sleeping uncle, then running back. "She'd better not disturb the old man."

Suddenly Lord Purdy sat up, grabbing his elbow. A light breeze carried his cries of help to the porch and within seconds, the cousins were racing across the lawn. "Bee sting," the millionaire gasped and nearly fell out of the hammock. Uncle, as they all knew, was severely allergic to bees and had been hospitalized on two previous occasions.

"I tried to shoo them away," Beatrice moaned. "But they just got more excited."

Ace, Beatrice, and Cecil bundled their uncle into the Range Rover and rushed off for the hospital, leaving Divine to telephone the family doctor. Divine was still at the estate two hours later when Cecil telephoned. "Looks like the old man survived this one. Ace, Bea, and I have been taking turns sitting by his bedside and . . . Hold on a minute." The phone

went dead for not one minute but several. Then Cecil's shaky voice came back on. "Uncle Purdy's dead. Blasted bees. He should've had them fumigated like we've been telling him."

Lord Purdy's physician was suspicious from the outset, and before the cousins even left the hospital, he expressed his concern. "Bee stings usually kill within an hour, not two. I'm going to order an autopsy."

Beatrice and Cecil took taxis to their own homes that afternoon, leaving Ace to drive the Range Rover back to the estate. Over a dinner of picnic leftovers, he repeated the doctor's words to Divine. "He suspects murder," Ace concluded with a quiver in his voice.

Divine nodded. "It has to be Beatrice," she said coolly. "I read about this. You fill a syringe with poison. If the person's asleep at the time, he might not even feel the injection. Then you just pinch his arm and blame it on a bee."

Before Ace could reason with her, Divine had left the house and was striding out to the hammock. Ace joined her and within five minutes they found it, a little wad of cloth stuffed up into the faucet by the garden shed. They knew better than to open it. Together they carried the wadded cloth into the house and called the local constabulary.

Divine's off-the-cuff theory seemed surprisingly accurate. The medical examiner came back with a verdict of death by poison. As for the wadded cloth, it contained a disposable syringe. Traces of formic acid were found in its cylinder.

The prosecutor presents all these facts in his opening argument. It looks like a clear-cut case against cousin Beatrice. Or is it?

Whodunit? (1) Who killed Lord Purdy? (2) How was the murder committed? (3) When was it committed?