

"A GUNSHOT," REGGIE LONG yelled into the receiver. "And a split-second after that I heard a shout, a man's shout." He was still gazing out his living room window at the front of the house next door. "No one's come or gone. It's 412 Maple Street. Hurry."

The police dispatcher said a patrol car would be there within minutes, warning him not to leave his house. But Reggie's curiosity would not be denied. He slipped on his coat, grabbed a set of keys from a peg, and trudged out into a foot-deep carpet of newly fallen snow. Arthur, the neighbor from the other side of 412 Maple, was already standing at Gus's front door. "Arthur? Is anyone answering? I have a house key Gus gave me."

Arthur Ames pounded a fist on the door. "Gus?" he yelled, then tried the knob. "It's locked. Gus?" He waited several seconds, coatless and shivering. "OK. Give me the key."

The entry hall was dark as the neighbors stepped into the elegant house that separated their own residences. They didn't have to wander far to find the body. Gus Goode was lying in the doorway to his downstairs study, a pool of blood surrounding his head. Five feet away lay a .38 revolver. "Is anyone there?" a voice wailed from the second floor. "Something woke me. It sounded like . . . Is Gus all right? Gus?"

The neighbors knew the voice—Lydia, Gus's ailing, bedridden wife. Before either could answer her or approach the corpse, the blare of a siren became audible, growing louder with each passing second.

Right off, the police noticed footprints. The snow had stopped a half-hour earlier and the white lawn of 412 was dotted with two clearly marked trails, one set leading from Reggie's house, the other from Arthur's, both trails converging on 412's doorstep. As expected, they found their suspect still inside. Joey Goode was Gus and Lydia's nephew, a deaf-mute who had been living with the elderly couple for the past year. When the police searched the third floor, they found Joey in



his room watching the last of his morning shows on a soundless TV, seemingly unaware of the murder that had taken place just two floors below.

The alleged motive was found clenched in the victim's fist. Arthur, the family lawyer as well as neighbor, recognized the scrap of torn paper. "It's a corner of Gus's new will. He signed it last night. See here? The date. And part of the signatures of the witnesses, Reggie and me. I know it's not usual for a lawyer to witness a client's will. But Gus was insistent on getting it done right away. Lydia couldn't sign because she inherits."

Naturally, the police wanted to see a copy of the will. Arthur led the way to his own house. And that's where they encountered the day's second crime. "It's gone," Arthur said as he fumbled through his papers. "The only other copy of Gus's new will is gone. I put it in this file just last night."

No trace of either copy was ever found—not a shred, ash, or any other remnant—which made Gus's old will once again valid. The district attorney begins his opening argument.

PROSECUTION: Joey Goode had motive. He inherited under the old will, but not under the new. He was the only one with opportunity. No footprints other than the witnesses' were found in the snow. Also, the front door. It's not equipped with an automatic lock, which means that someone leaving the house could not simply pull the door locked behind him. He would have had to use a key. And yet the witnesses tell us the door was locked, another indication of an inside job.

It seems pretty conclusive. Joey had been the only physically capable person in a house cut off by a blanket of untrampled snow. But, as you view the evidence, something doesn't seem quite right.