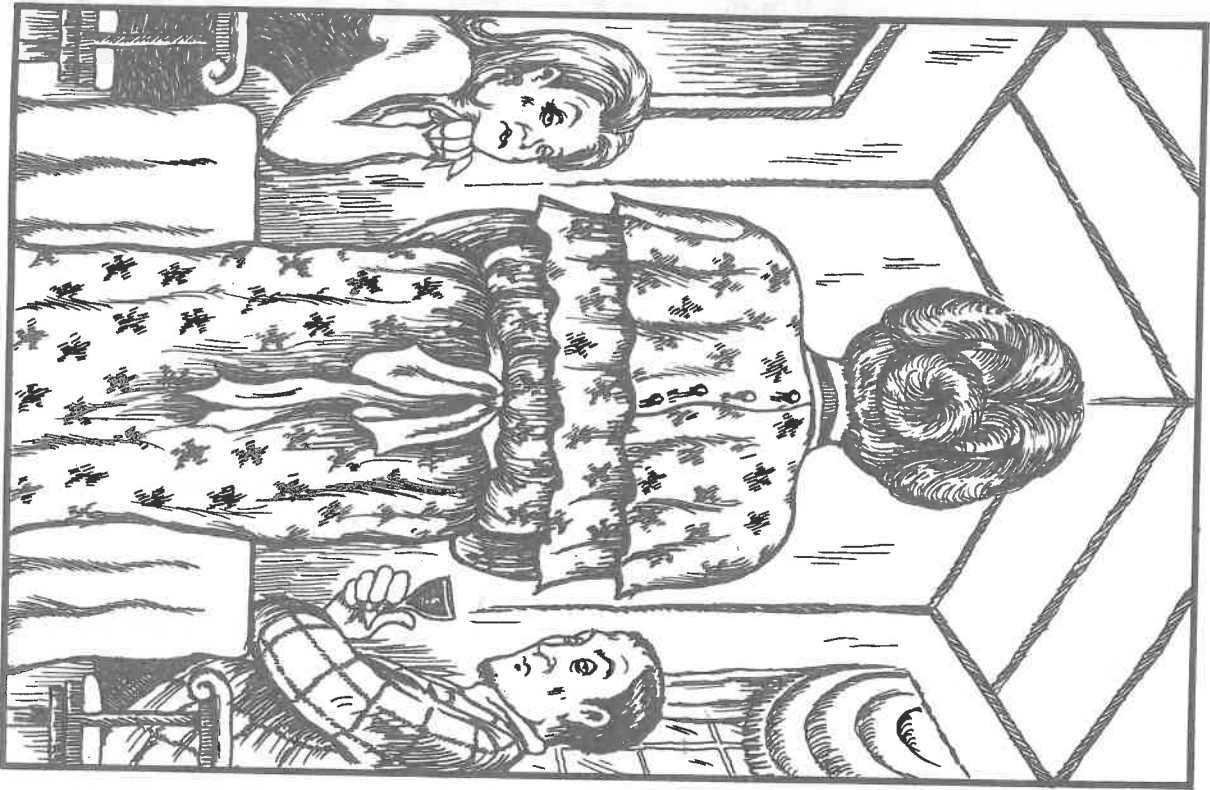


# The Bearded Lady



For years Ben and Vicky Livery forced themselves to be nice to Uncle Joshua, always assuming that he would die and leave them his fortune. When that happy day arrived and the old millionaire keeled over from a stroke, the Livery siblings were faced with a rude surprise.

"Your uncle changed his will," Joshua's lawyer informed them. "It seems that forty years ago, when Mr. Livery was a youth, he fell in love with a girl named Amelia Perdue. They were engaged to be married. But Amelia had a twin brother, Alex. Alex Perdue talked his sister out of the marriage. Soon afterwards, the Perdues moved to Australia."

"Don't tell me he put this woman in his will!" Ben pulled nervously on his goatee. "How much does she inherit?"

George Trent cleared his throat. "Toward the end of his life, it seems the old bachelor began to fondly recall his one great romance. Amelia gets everything, I'm afraid. If she's still alive, that is, and if I can find her."

For months brother and sister lived in hope. The first rumors to surface were that Amelia had become a nun and died in a Melbourne convent. This, of course, was too good to be true. Eventually the lawyer located the old heiress, flying her back to Boston to claim her windfall.

On the second evening of her American visit, Amelia was seated in the place of honor in the Livery dining room. She was a big-boned woman in her late sixties, dressed in a prudish concoction of satin. She tried smiling at Joshua's niece and nephew but was rewarded with only stony glares.

"You've checked her out?" Vicky asked the lawyer. "This is the real Amelia Perdue and not some impostor?"

Trent nodded. "Birth certificate. Bank cards. Her passport is ancient, but the photo leaves no doubt. Plus, she knows all the details of Joshua's life forty years ago. It's her."

"I know how hard it must be. A stranger from the past popping up like this." The elderly woman rose to her feet. "I won't be staying any longer than necessary." She gulped several times, her cameo choker bobbing up and down. Then she doubled over in pain and fainted dead away.

Dr. David Denton lived alone next door. He was called in to examine the unconscious woman in her bedroom. Before leaving, he spoke to George Trent. "Food poisoning," Denton whispered gravely. "She'll be all right, but . . . I would keep a very careful eye on her if I were you."

Amelia spent much of the next day recovering, while Trent kept a nervous watch on the Liverys, personally monitoring all the food going into the old woman's room. Around 10 that night, just as the cook was preparing to leave, a gunshot rang out. More surprising than the shot itself was the fact that the sound had come from next door.

When the sheriff's department broke into the Denton house, they found Dr. Denton slumped over the desk in his study, a bullet hole centered in his chest. The weapon, a World War II pistol from Joshua's gun collection, had been taken from a display cabinet in the Livery entry hall.






"He must've been sitting here working on his stamp collection when someone walked in" deduced the sheriff. "Maybe they had a conversation, maybe not. Anyway, that somebody pulled out a gun and shot him. Simple as pie."

"Maybe not." A deputy was gaping down at a row of stamps scattered across the desktop. "Look. The victim's got a pen in his hand. I was checking to see what he might have been writing and . . ." The deputy pointed to a century-old postage stamp featuring the likeness of Queen Victoria. "You see? He drew a beard on her. A tiny beard and a mustache."

The sheriff frowned. "Why on earth would he do that?"

**Whodunit?** (1) Who killed Dr. Denton? (2) Why? (3) What was the meaning of the bearded Victoria stamp?

**Evidence** *This crime can be solved in 2 clues.*

-  Crime Scene Report
-  Desktop (Miscellaneous Examinations)
-  Poison Analysis (Lab & Hospital Reports)
-  Joshua Livery's Will (Wills & Insurance)
-  Livery Mansion (Miscellaneous Searches)