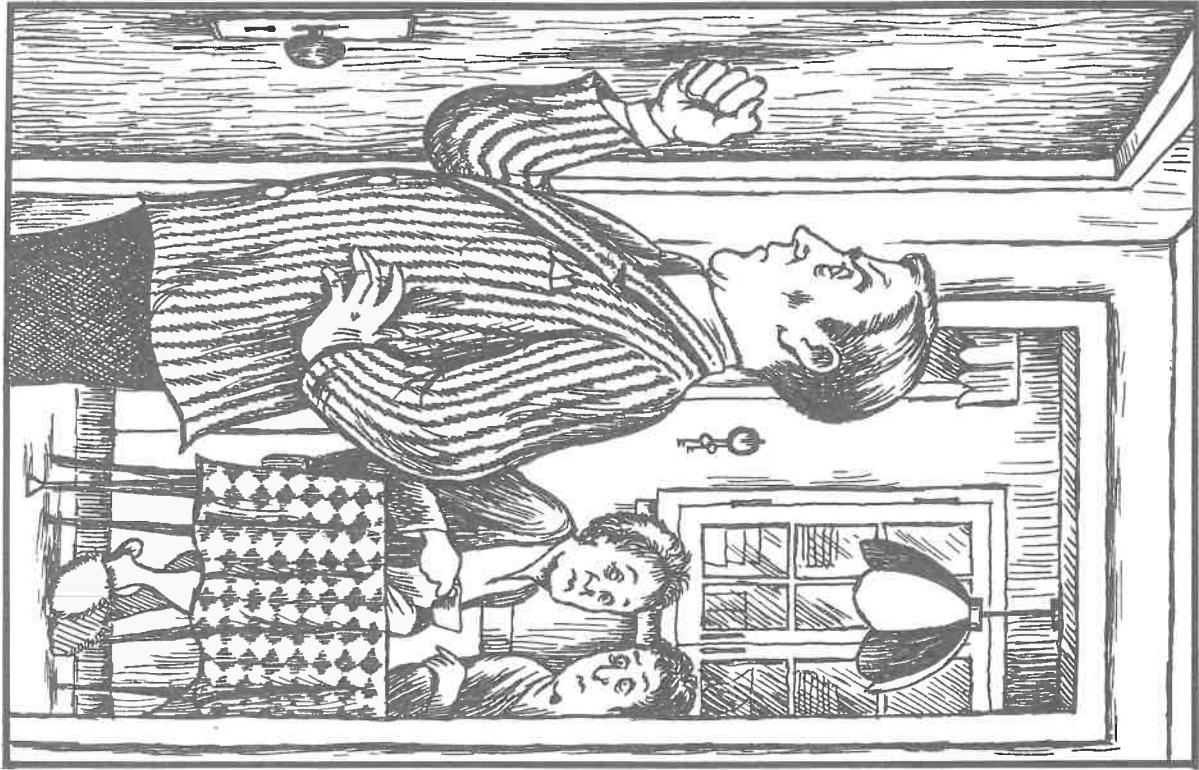


Psychic Suicide



"See you next week, Swami. Take care." Pauline Egremont gently closed the door to the shabby room and made her way into the boarding-house kitchen. "I'm a little worried about Swami Fred. He's very depressed today."

The swami's landlady was sitting at the table with Elsie, another one of her boarders. "I bet you'd be depressed, too, Mrs. Egremont," Elsie quipped. "Living in that dumpy room."

The landlady objected. "It's a charming room with direct southern light. Granted, the poor man's a cripple and has his problems, but don't blame it on the room." By problems, the landlady meant the swami's compulsive gambling, a habit that kept him impoverished, despite his affluent clientele.

Mrs. Egremont sniffed a haughty good-bye, leaving the two women to their coffee and chat. About 45 minutes later, according to their testimony, they heard the television go on in the swami's room. Five minutes after that, the psychic's next client showed up.

Noah Turner, a stylishly dressed businessman, muttered hello, marched through the kitchen, and knocked on the swami's door. He tried the knob. It was locked. "He changes my appointment at the last minute and then he's not even here."

"Oh, he must be in," Elsie volunteered. "There's no other door. We would have seen him go out. Hello? Swami Fred? Are you all right?"

The landlady took a set of keys from a peg on the wall. Within seconds she had opened the door, and all three were staring down at the body of Fred Baxter, psychic to society. As always, the tiny man was in his wheelchair. The television droned on as sunlight from the window illuminated a cup of steaming tea on the table by his right hand. A new, freshly lit incense candle tossed its scented smoke into the air. A teakettle simmered on the hot plate, its whistle flipped up and silent.

The landlady gazed at the half-empty cup of tea. "Poison, I'll bet. Must have just done it, too. He'd been depressed lately. That's a fact."

The police confirmed potassium cyanide in the tea. A plastic envelope full of the deadly powder was on the table by the

window and bore the deceased's fingerprints.

"What's this?" A rookie cop pointed to an open file cabinet on the far side of the room. The top drawer stood open and totally empty. "I wonder what he was doing?"

A sergeant examining the bathroom came up with the answer. "He was destroying something here in the sink. Muratic acid," he sniffed. "That's why he used the incense, to get rid of the smell." The sergeant put on plastic gloves and gingerly reached into a large wheelchair-accessible sink. "The contents of that drawer were slipped into this sink and doused with acid." The few remaining fragments, half-eaten edges of paper, were enough to give the sergeant an idea of what had been in the drawer. "Blackmail! Let's talk to the landlady."

The landlady was reluctant to pass along the idle gossip of a boarding house, but Elsie wasn't. "We figured he had another income source. I mean, he lost so much. His bookie actually brags about it, and it stands to reason a psychic would blackmail people. Even if he's a phony, clients wind up telling him all sorts of things about themselves."

The rookie glanced over his notes and announced his theory. "A clear case of suicide. Even with blackmail, he's a handicapped guy in debt and depressed. So, he locks the door, clears out his files—his one decent act—puts on incense to get rid of the smell, and drinks a cupful of cyanide. It all fits."

"Not quite." The sergeant tapped his finger on the just completed inventory list. "There's something missing. I mean, an actual, physical thing missing from this room. And that tells me it's murder we're dealing with, not suicide."

Whodunit? (1) Who killed Swami Fred Baxter? (2) How was it done?

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

Autopsy Report
Behind House (Miscellaneous Searches)
Noah Turner's Statement (Affidavit File)
Crime Scene Report
Landlady's Statement (Affidavit File)