Ten Detective Aces, November 1948

Man About to Die

By Norman A. Daniels

Detective Steve Murdoch started his strangest assignment on his back—for he had to track down a killer from a hospital bed!

STEVE MURDOCH never felt better physically than when he lay on a stretcher, late that afternoon, and two orderlies manipulated him into the ambulance while a nurse fussed over him.

"Don't worry," one orderly said in a comforting voice. "We'll have you in the hospital in jig time. Nothing at all to worry about."

Steve mustered what he hoped was a weak grin though he could have laughed out loud. This was no joke, however. Murder never is. The ambulance door slammed shut, the siren howled and the trip began. At the hospital they transferred him to a wheel table, whisked him down a corridor and into an elevator. On the fourth floor, he was wheeled into a semi-private, two-bed room.

This time they stripped the covers off him and Steve had considerable difficulty keeping them from seeing the gun. During the trip he'd held it loosely in one hand. Now he had to work fast. As they removed the blanket, his free hand darted out and swept a water carafe off the table between the two beds. He murmured a weak apology as the nurse and

orderly started to pick up the pieces and while they were busy, he managed to slide the gun beneath the mattress of what was going to be his bed.

It was over, finally. He was encased in the rough, uncomfortably short hospital nightgown. The covers were tucked up. His pulse and temperature had been taken and duly noted by a nurse who gave him a quizzical glance—because there was nothing Steve could do about the pulse and temperature. They were quite normal.

Half an hour later Dr. Loring appeared and worked over him. Not once did the doctor smile. He held whispered conversations with an intern and with a head nurse. Then he told Steve not to worry, closed the door and Steve was alone. The other bed wasn't occupied yet. But it was going to be.

Steve slipped the gun from beneath the mattress. It was a .38 automatic, selected because of its flatness. He pumped a slug into the firing chamber, made certain the safety was on and tucked the weapon beneath his pillow. Then he lay back, highly pleased that so far things had gone so well.

A PRIM nurse gave him dinner on a tray. The food was fair and he ate it with considerable gusto. When the tray was removed, he lay back and found himself dozing. He was scarcely aware of her until a thermometer was gently slipped between his lips and cool fingers felt his pulse.

He opened his eyes. They met grey eyes. Very grey eyes, set in a face that even the starchiness of a nurse's uniform could do nothing against. He guessed she was about twenty-four or -five.

"Oh," she said, "so you're awake, are you? How do you feel?"

"Fine," he grinned. "Just fine. Who are you?"

"Miss Ramsey, floor nurse. You're my case. I warn you, behave yourself or I'll become very strict. You have no pain? None at all?"

"If I did have, it would be gone now." Steve sighed and liked his job all over again. "What's supposed to be the matter with me?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she told him. "The chart merely says you are here for observation. I'll try to make you more comfortable."

She suddenly lifted him into a sitting position and started to fluff his pillow. She let go of him almost at once.

"Mr. Murdoch," she said, "I'm afraid of guns. I want you to take that ugly gun from beneath your pillow and place it on the tray. I'll keep it for you, but you cannot have a gun in here. What in the world is on your mind? Yes, you're a sick man, but using a gun is no way out. Give your doctor a chance."

Steve sighed deeply, pushed himself erect and reached for a cigarette. "All right, Ramsey," he said. "Now you know and now you'll have to keep that lovely mouth of yours shut tight. The gun stays because I may need it—and not, as you suspect, for use on myself. The fact is, I'm not sick at all. I'm a detective—a cop. I'm here to see that nobody kills a certain man."

She started to back away. He seized her hand.

"You think I'm nuts, don't you?

"Listen, Ramsey, it's all a plant. I checked into a hotel, howled about stomach pains and called in a doctor who is part of the scheme. He sent me here, arranged for me to be in this particular room because pretty soon another patient is coming in. Do you begin to understand now?"

"I—think so . . ." She faltered, undecided.

"This patient," Steve went on, "was stabbed early this afternoon. His name is James Bradford and he has a lot of money. He's going to die, Ramsey."

"But I don't see why you must protect him if he isn't going to live," she said doubtfully.

"Primarily my mission is to be here when someone tries to finish him off. This is incomplete murder, Ramsey. There are three or four people who could have knifed him. But we don't know which one did it. And they think he isn't going to die."

She nodded slowly. "I'm—beginning to understand."

"I knew you would. So they'll put Bradford in that next bed. Bradford will be allowed visitors. One of them is going to try to finish him off because the murderer believes that Bradford will wake up and make an identification. The murderer has to strike again and that's the only way we can nab him."

"But—but won't that be dangerous, officer?"

"Lieutenant. But call me Steve. Dangerous? Kitten, that's part of my job."

She gave him a smile, unprofessional this time, and he liked it better. "I'll be back," she said. "I'll be worried about you too."

"That's good. I'll ring if I think of anything you can do."

THERE were two long hours after that. Then they brought Bradford in and Steve promptly snuggled down under the covers, closed his eyes and looked as sick as possible. Nobody paid much attention to him. Through slitted eyelids, he watched them transfer James Bradford from stretcher to bed.

Bradford was about forty but looked much older. That guy, Steve Murdock thought, had really lived and now he was going to die the same way—sensationally. There never had been anything wrong with Bradford that losing six or seven million dollars wouldn't have cured.

The grim greyness of oncoming death was already in his face. He breathed stertorously, as if every breath hurt even though he was unconscious. When he was settled, Dr. Atherton entered.

Atherton was in on the deal. He had to be, since he was the first physician to reach Bradford after the stabbing. Atherton gave Steve a quick glance and then went to work on his patient.

Things quieted down after a while, though Bradford's labored breathing gave Steve goose pimples. Miss Ramsey came in occasionally the only ray of sunshine during the long night. In the morning, Steve still pretended to be extremely ill. The first visitor arrived at ten o'clock. Steve already knew who would come and had full descriptions of each suspect. So he easily picked out the first visitor as Floyd Grant, Bradford's uncle.

Grant was in the neighborhood of fifty-five, a man of medium height, inclined to be pompous and stuffy. He had a fat face and a lean body. His eyes were expressionless as they roved about the room. Steve wondered whether or not Grant was thinking of the money he'd get when Bradford died. Or if he died.

Grant sat down beside the bed, leaned back and closed his eyes. His lips moved in silent prayer for a few moments. Then he arose and went over to stare at Steve. Finally he hurried to the clothes closet. Bradford had been transferred to this room from another floor, and all his clothes except a coat which must have been cut off him were brought here. Grant began searching the clothes. He did a very thorough job of it, but shook his head in disappointment when he was finished.

Footsteps sounded down the corridor and Grant immediately went back and sat down beside the bed. Two people entered this time. Steve had no trouble identifying them. One was Hugh Phelan, half-brother of the dying man. Phelan, in no way connected with Bradford, worked in an office, lived in a rooming house and had always envied his half-brother.

Phelan was not bad looking. He was about thirty-three, neat and well dressed. With him was Nan Jordan, whose brunette loveliness often appeared in the society columns. Nan

and James Bradford had been tentatively betrothed for a long time.

She was misty-eyed from weeping. She bent over Bradford, kissed his forehead and had no idea there was a .38 automatic trained on her every moment.

"Who could have done this awful thing?" she asked of no one in particular.

Floyd Grant cleared his throat. "I'm as mystified as you, Nan, but I know what people are saying. About you and Jim. You must have guessed. They say you never wanted to marry him and kept stalling. Not that I blame you. Jim isn't exactly—well—the steady type. But he did will you two million dollars. If he dies you'll get it, married to him or not. I saw the will. I know."

Hugh Phelan walked swiftly up to the older man, his fist clenched. "Of all the rotten statements to make . . ." he said in a low voice.

Grant smiled. "Tut-tut, Hugh. I'm merely telling the truth. I also know that Nan's in love with you, not Jim. But her folks won't let her marry a pauper. But if Jim died and Nan came into all that money—she wouldn't have to care what anyone thought."

Phelan said, "Some day, Uncle Floyd, I'm going to increase the distance between your ears by adding a lump on your head. Come on, Nan. Let's return when the atmosphere of this room becomes cleaner."

Nan didn't look up. "No, Hugh. I'm staying here. Nothing Floyd says bothers me. It's all true anyway—except that he thinks one of us stabbed Jim and we know that is not true."

Hugh Phelan flushed, turned and walked out. Floyd Grant rose too, and left the room. Nan took his chair, held Bradford's hand and wept silently. Steve, stiff and uncomfortable in his rigid position, wished to heaven she'd either do something or leave. She made her departure, at long last.

STEVE stretched, sighed and then grew rigid again. Once more Hugh Phelan came into the room and he must have heard the bed springs move because he gave Steve a quick glance. Then Phelan went over to Bradford's side, bent very low and looked intently at the impassive face. Steve's grip on the gun tightened and his finger moved the safety to the off position.

Phelan whispered, "Jim! Jim, wake up. Damn you! Wake up!"

Bradford never moved a muscle. Phelan cursed, his two hands hovered above the dying man's throat and on his face was a look of intense hatred. Then his shoulders sagged, his hands went limp and he shuffled out of the room.

Steve promptly wiped a layer of sweat from his forehead, bounced out of bed and went over to the side of the dying man. He felt for the pulse, found it and then crawled back into bed. The trouble with watching a man like Bradford, it was difficult to know when he'd pass over from life into death. His breathing had become fainter lately.

Late that evening Dr. Atherton appeared and closed and locked the door. Steve swung legs off the bed and nodded to the doctor.

Atherton worked over his patient. "You're doing a good job," he told Steve. "However, I still believe this whole business borders on the silly side."

"Do you now?" Steve asked complacently.

"In my opinion," Atherton said, "a murderer wouldn't dare try again. Even if he thinks—as I've impressed on them all—that Bradford has a good chance of surviving."

"He'll try it if he sees the opportunity," Steve argued. "What are you shooting into him, doc?"

Atherton deftly withdrew the hypo. "A stimulant to keep him going. Pretty soon I'll start giving him morphine. It's just a matter of time."

"Who do you think buried that shiv in him, doc? You know the family well. The facts I

have, state you've been the family doctor for some time."

Atherton drew the covers over the dying man. "Yes, that's true. So you people have been checking up on me too, have you?"

"We check everybody," Steve grinned. "Even doctors. Any idea who did it?"

"I don't know. They're a funny bunch, lieutenant. Bradford wanted to marry Nan Jordan and she wouldn't have him because she's in love with Hugh Phelan who has plenty of cause to hate Jim Bradford. Jim never did anything for Hugh except tolerate him."

Steve said, "Hugh seems like a nice guy. So does the girl. Grant, the uncle, I don't like."

Atherton sat down. They talked as if there were no one else in the room. Atherton said, "Grant, the uncle, will get half the money. Phelan is slated to get the rest except for a sum that goes to Nan. Nan's people have tried to wheedle her into marrying Jim. For that, Hugh Phelan hated Jim even more. Now this is just an angle. Hugh may have stabbed Jim. Or may have told Nan there was no other way out but to kill him. Nan may have thought he meant it and got to Jim first."

"You're talking sense," Steve said. "Keep at it."

Atherton shrugged. "I'm only offering theories. But all three of those people have a motive. For some reason your Inspector Grady suspects Peter Herrick. Why, I don't know, because Herrick wouldn't profit a dime. In fact, Jim has been supporting him for years and upon his death that charity ceases."

"He hasn't been here yet," Steve said. "Herrick—I mean. What's he like?"

"An old man. He and Jim Bradford's father used to be in business together. Herrick's health failed and Bradford bought him out for a song. Herrick has no claim, even though the business eventually brought in millions. But the Bradfords—Jim and his father—always took care of Herrick. He's a typical family friend. Always hanging around and you get so used to him you hardly know he's there."

Steve pulled his legs back into the bed. "Herrick might pop in. I'd better get sick again!"

Atherton closed his bag. "What are you going to do, lieutenant—in case one of them tries to kill Jim?"

"Try talking him—or her—into not going through with it. I'll say— 'Hold it!'—and then I'll wave my little gun to scare them. But I'll have to be ready for any emergency."

"I'll be back in a little while," Atherton said. "I've other patients."

PETER HERRICK appeared right after lunch. He was a small man with a wild shock of white hair. He showed no sign of sorrow or other emotion. He simply sat beside Jim Bradford's bed for twenty minutes, cleared his throat and then departed as unobtrusively as he'd appeared.

Steve wished the time would go faster. Ramsey wasn't due until four o'clock and that seemed many hours away. She was the only relief from this monotony.

Beginning at two o'clock they all came back, but stayed only a little while. Hugh Phelan again exhibited some of the hatred within him for the comatose Jim Bradford. Uncle Floyd Grant was next and Uncle Floyd must have visited a couple of bars for liquid sustenance. His breath made the room reek.

Peter Herrick contented himself with merely looking down at the patient. Then Nan came. This time she placed her purse on the bed, lightly stroked Bradford's forehead a couple of times and then lit a cigarette. She turned her back on the room, looked out of the window and puffed nervously. Crushing out the cigarette, she turned quickly and walked over beside the bed.

"Jim," she whispered. "Jim, you've got to wake up. You've got to tell them the truth. They think Hugh did it. They'll arrest him, I

know they will. Jim, wake up."

She suddenly thought of the other patient and lifted her eyes toward the second bed. Steve lay motionless. She tiptoed over and studied him at closer range. Then she turned to Bradford again, made a gesture of hopelessness with her shoulders and broke into soft sobs. After a while she walked slowly and dispiritedly from the room.

Steve went over to Bradford's side and lifted off the covers. One thing about Bradford, you couldn't harm him. He was doomed anyway.

Steve searched the bed carefully. He found a hypodermic nestling between the two light blankets. It was loaded with a colorless solution. He pressed the plunger, ejected a drop on his fingertip and tasted of it gingerly. He guessed it was morphine. Ramsey would find out when she was on duty.

Steve emptied the contents of the hypo into a clean glass, then refilled the barrel with plain water and put it back between the blankets. Things were evidently going to happen before very long. That was a setup for murder.

Dr. Atherton arrived soon after and gave Bradford another injection. He handed Steve a cigarette.

"It will be over by morning," Atherton said. "Unless the killer takes action soon, the whole scheme will be ruined. We can't keep a dead man here as a lure for his murderer."

Steve said, "Maybe it won't be necessary. Looks to me, doc, as if Inspector Grady's hunch was hitting pay dirt. Don't ask me any questions, but I'm pretty certain I know who did it."

"Phelan?" Atherton raised his eyebrows. "As I suspected, eh?"

"You'll find out later. Beat it now, doc. In case one of them comes back. You never can tell."

Ramsey came on duty and hurried to the room. She breathed a sigh of t relief when Steve grinned at her. "I didn't sleep all night worrying about you," she said. "How is Mr. Bradford?"

"Dying, they tell me. All he does is lie there and breathe slower and slower. Sometimes I go over to make certain he's still with us. Ramsey—in that glass on my table is a small quantity of liquid. Can you take it to the lab and have them analyze it? A quick analysis. I think they'll find it's morphine."

She picked up the glass. "Why, of course, Steve. This—this wasn't meant for you?"

"Him." Steve jerked his head in the direction of the other bed. "Hypo hidden under the covers. It's still there but loaded with water now. It's a good scheme, Ramsey. An extra shot of dope which, in addition to what he's being given right along, would probably form a lethal quantity."

"Who?" Ramsey asked softly.

Steve shrugged. "Nan Jordan stood at the bed this afternoon."

Ramsey shuddered. "I saw her once or twice. Steve, I can't think it's possible. Does she have a motive?"

"Yes. A good one. Trouble is, they all have motives. One as good as another. And they were all here. Anyone of them could have hidden the hypo."

"Steve, I've got to tell you this. Mr. Grant—I think he is Bradford's uncle—asked a lot of questions about you today. One of the nurses told me. He wanted to know if you were really dying and in a coma."

"Grant pulled a funny stunt," Steve mused. "He searched what clothing came in with Bradford. Maybe he thought I might have seen him."

Ramsey hesitated. "Steve, there's one more thing. I thought of it early this morning: Is the whole hospital staff in on the plan?"

"Nobody is—except Doc Atherton and Doc Loring who sent me here."

"For this scheme to work, all the suspected people must be convinced that Bradford will live," Ramsey said earnestly. "But, Steve, Bradford's true condition must be listed. The

office will have it. I—I thought of that and phoned the office. I asked about his condition and they said he was critical. They'd know the truth from the surgery records."

Steve whistled. "Then if any of them telephone, just to see how he was getting along, they'd be practically told he was a goner. I never gave it a thought. Listen—find out about the stuff in the glass. Then come back and stay here with Bradford. Don't leave him for a moment. I'm going to slip out and pay Bradford's house a visit."

"But, Steve, if the murderer knows Bradford's condition is so bad, why will he risk killing him?"

"Maybe he'll think Bradford will come to long enough to make a deathbed statement. I don't know. Just hurry things along, please."

HALF an hour later Steve was at the rear of James Bradford's outlying estate. Gaining entrance proved simple—one of the back windows was unlocked. Steve made his way to the study where Bradford had been found stabbed. He knew exactly where it was from descriptions provided by Inspector Grady.

It was Steve's first encounter with the scene where the crime took place. He'd been kept out of the case entirely so he'd not be recognized. The room was just as the police identification squad had left it. Disarranged and everything covered with a film of fingerprint powder.

Steve began checking the contents of the desk drawers. Grant, on his first visit to the hospital, had searched Bradford's clothes for something of vital importance. He hadn't found it. Steve guessed that whatever it was, Bradford had either secreted it somewhere in the house or his assailant had obtained possession of it. Steve was playing a hunch and didn't expect too much.

He forgot himself for a moment and closed one drawer with a slight slamming sound and almost at once he heard someone coming toward the room. Steve quickly turned off the desk light and sat there in the darkness waiting, one hand on his automatic.

The door opened. In the hallway was only a weak light. It served to reveal a shadowy form behind the desk, without any details of identity. Steve knew he couldn't be recognized. But the man who entered was illuminated well enough and it proved to be Grant.

Grant had a gun in his fist. He said, "Herrick—keep your hands on that desk. I've been praying you'd come. So you didn't get Bradford's statement after all, did you? What happened? Did you slip somehow or were you frightened away?"

Steve's right hand dropped from his gun butt. He seized a heavy cigarette box from the desk and hurled it before Grant realized what was happening. It wasn't a very good throw but Grant ducked fast and Steve was following close in the wake of the thrown box.

Before Grant could regain his balance, Steve had the man's gun hand pinned down. He twisted Grant around, encircled his neck with one arm and slowly choked him until Grant began to gurgle and let go of the gun. Steve pushed him hard, bent to pick up the gun and had it trained on Grant by the time the man recovered his wits. Steve snapped on the lights.

Grant, white-faced, made as if to hurl himself at Steve, then halted suddenly. He stared at Steve, blinked and stared again.

Steve said, "Yes, it's me. The sick man who shares the hospital room with Bradford. Only I'm not a sick man. I'm a detective. Look this over."

He extended his badge. Grant walked to a chair with effort and sat down. His face had turned crimson now and there were fine beads of sweat across his forehead.

Steve said, "You thought I was Herrick. The old family friend. Suppose you tell me why you made such a mistake in identity."

"I—don't know. You looked like him,

that's all. It was rather dark. . ."

"But you expected Herrick to be here," Steve went on grimly. "You knew he'd come to get the same object you searched Bradford's clothing for. What was it, Grant? Tell me or I'm taking you in. Don't forget, Bradford is going to die and it will be murder. You know far more than you've told."

GRANT moistened his lips. "I—I'll talk. There's nothing left for me. I should have come out with it in the beginning only—well, I'd be blaming Herrick and he simply couldn't have killed Bradford."

"Go on," Steve urged.

"Herrick and Bradford's father started the business which created the Bradford fortune. Herrick got sick, sold out and Bradford built it up. Herrick always said half of this fortune should have been his."

"And he was willing to kill to get his hands on it?" Steve asked.

"Herrick had been named as the beneficiary of half the estate. Bradford made a new will about a week or so ago, naming Herrick. Bradford told me about it. He was always changing his will and laughing at our discomfiture. I figured Herrick had knifed him before he could change the will again, cutting him out. But Herrick couldn't find the new will and had to have it if he wanted to collect. Herrick searched the whole house and I saw him do it. I thought Bradford had the papers hidden in his clothing and that's why I searched them."

"There's only one thing wrong with your statement," Steve said. "When Bradford was knifed, Herrick happened to be a couple of hundred miles away. He can prove it. I've read the inspector's report on the case."

Grant sighed, and shook his head in bafflement.

"Did you know that Bradford has no chance of pulling through?" Steve asked.

Grant nodded. "I guess we all do. I called the hospital and asked about him. They said he was dying."

"Hugh Phelan and you would profit considerably if Herrick didn't inherit," Steve mused. "Gives you both an excellent motive. Nan Jordan too, because what was Phelan's gain was also hers."

"Bradford wanted to marry Nan," Grant explained. "She wouldn't have him. She said Bradford was too easily swayed, too impressionable and weak. Besides, she met Phelan and fell in love with him."

Steve said, "I'm going to trust you, Grant. You're not to breathe a word of this visit. Is that clear?"

"Of course," Grant replied. "But—do you know who knifed Bradford? And if you do, why don't you get him before he runs for it?"

Steve put his gun away. "I know the killer but I don't have to go after him. He'll come to me."

Steve returned to the hospital and managed to slip into the room without being observed. Ramsey was there and she had a report that the contents of the hypo consisted of a lethally strong solution of morphine.

"I thought so," Steve said. "Now beat it, Ramsey. All we have to do is wait for the killer."

When visiting hours began, Nan and Phelan arrived, stood in apparent sorrow beside the bed for a moment or two and then departed. Grant came too, acting his part rather well, without a glance at the bed where the supposedly very ill detective lay. Herrick paid his usual silent visit though he seemed to cut it a bit short this time.

STEVE'S hand was loosely holding the gun. Just before nine Dr. Atherton arrived. Steve's fingers tightened around his weapon. Atherton closed the door, grinned at Steve and went over beside Bradford. He took a hypo out of his bag, bared the man's arm and poised the needle.

Steve asked, very blandly, "What are you pumping into him, doc?"

Atherton looked up nervously. “The usual shot to keep him going.”

“Then why doesn’t he wake up from all those stimulants you claim to have given him? Fact is, doc, all along you’ve been giving him morphine in increasing doses so it was impossible for him to wake up.”

Atherton curled his underlip. “I—don’t exactly know what you mean, lieutenant.”

“Stop the act, doc. On your next visit you intended to reach under the blankets, get the hypo that’s filled with a deadly concentration of dope and kill him. Then you’d leave the empty hypo there to be found later and you’d laugh at us while we tried to find out who gave it to Bradford.”

“Are you accusing me?”

“I’m telling you,” Steve replied. “Herrick is the only man who stands to profit most by Bradford’s death. But Herrick was conveniently away and has a perfect alibi for the time the knifing happened. Nan and Grant stand to lose money at Bradford’s death now—with his still missing will which gave half his estate to Herrick. A will I think you had something to do with. Bradford was impressionable, easily swayed. So much so that Nan refused to marry him.

“He made that will under pressure from you, whom he trusted. How you did it, I don’t know yet. Maybe you made him feel guilty over the fortune his father made—without giving Herrick any. You have the will. You knifed Bradford when he realized it was a mistake and intended to change the will back. After this is over with, you probably plan to sell that will to Herrick for a million or so. I even imagine he has consented to pay.”

Dr. Atherton shrugged. “Now look here, lieutenant, that’s silly and preposterous. Meanwhile my patient is dying and I intend to give him the care he needs. . . .”

Atherton dipped a hand into his bag. Steve threw back the covers, exposing his gun. Steve said softly, “Go ahead and take the gun out, doc. I hate shooting a man down in cold blood. Go ahead, take out the gun.”

Atherton slowly removed his hand and stood rigid. Steve smiled slightly. “You shouldn’t have permitted Herrick to perfect such a good alibi because when he was out of it you were the only one left. When I realized that, 1 knew why all those stimulants hadn’t brought Bradford around to talk. The drugs you gave him were the exact opposite of stimulants.”

Atherton said nothing though the blood was slowly draining out of his face. Steve went on, “You’ve one hope left, doc. One slim hope. If Bradford lives, you won’t go to the chair. You’d better start being the best doctor in the business and start fast.”

Atherton gasped. “Yes. Yes, of course. He’ll need stimulants quickly. Ring for the nurse. I want help. I’ll save him. I’ve got to save him. . . .”

Bradford died soon after midnight. Steve told Ramsey about it all. “Atherton was fairly safe. I didn’t have much on him. But once I was convinced of his guilt, I thought I might try forcing a confession out of him. I’d break him down first, until he was sure I could convict him. Then I’d give him hope. Hope of escaping the chair by saving Bradford’s life. The way he set out to do that was his confession.”

“Bradford could never have been saved,” Ramsey said slowly.

“I might have guessed it, but I’m no physician,” Steve smiled.

“And now it’s over with and you’ll be going,” Ramsey said. “Couldn’t you develop an acute appendix or something? I’ll miss you, Steve.”

He put his arms around her. “No, you won’t. Not during your spare time anyway.”