Weed ’em and Weep!
Murder in Bloom

by Peter Byrne
Special to Bepuzzled Times

The small town of Bloom, Wisconsin, was stunned today by the death of local retiree, Edmund Wallflower, a respected botanist. Wallflower was found in his private greenhouse, his body lying on the floor, a apparent heart attack. The shock of his loss has doubled with the startling revelation made by the Sheriff’s department: prior to press-time: Edmund Wallflower was murdered.

Authorities responded this morning to a phone call from Iris Kelley, Wallflower’s researcher, and the first to find his body. Deputies quickly arrived at the greenhouse that Wallflower used for both recreation and research. The elder-ly botanist had grown exclusive since his forced retirement from the E-Z-Gro corporation, a job he held for over twenty years. Known primarily for the new breed of plant foods and hybrids he had developed for E-Z-Gro’s nationwide chain of nurseries, he had produced no new work for several years, a fact which sources claim had much to do with his departure from the company.

But in recent weeks, Wallflower had hinted to locals that he was about to emerge as a prominent figure in the world of gardening. He referred some-what mysteriously to a “secret project” he was working on in his greenhouse that would restore his reputation. However, no traces were found of this project at the time of his death, save for a few scattered pages of unclear notes and statistics which have not been moved from the scene.

This secretive behavior was appar-tly typical of Wallflower, according to locals, who described him — affectionately — as a sweet old knight who kept one eye on his plants and the other looking over his shoulder. “He’d pass the day with you, talk up the weather, chat about anything, anything you liked,” recalled one local. “But the minute you brought up what he was up to in that greenhouse of his, he was shaking your hand and was halfway out the door.”

Iris Kelley confirmed this, saying that she herself was unaware of the nature of Wallflower’s project, despite her role as his research assistant for over ten years. “He spent all that time working in the cutthroat world of big business,” she said. “He learned the hard way that ideas get stolen, and whoever claims them first gets the credit.” Kelley, a former gradu-ate student who had dropped out of school ten years ago to assist Wallflower full-time, described in detail the elabo-rate security measures he took to protect his work. “He’d make notes in a secret code; he’d memorize data rather than write it down. He’d sleep on a little cot in the greenhouse most nights because he didn’t trust the alarm system. And that’s if he slept at all. Lately I’d been having to make his coffee triple-strength just to keep him going almost twenty-four hours a day. He said this project was his last chance to make his name as big as it used to be, and he wasn’t going to let crying eyes rob him of it.”

But it now appears that this myste-rious project may have died with its cre-ator. After their arrival this morning, police instantly saw through the glass wall of the greenhouse, the sight that had sent Iris Kelley running for the nearest phone. The body of Edmund Wallflower was stretched out on the floor inside, motionless. Forcing their way through the locked door of the greenhouse, they quickly pronounced Wallflower dead at the scene, and removed his body for an autopsy.

NEW LINE, NEW HOPES FOR E-Z-GRO!

Bepuzzled Times staff writer

Ending speculation that his compa-ny was on the verge of bankruptcy, E-Z- Gro Corp’s owner and CEO Bud Rose announced at a press conference today that his company’s new line of Vita-Color Plant Products would be released earlier than expected. The product, a line of plant foods, pesticides, and other gardening aids, are color-coded for easy use by the amateur gardener.

“NothingGuest, no more complicated concoctions or messy plant-food recipes,” Rose said, presenting his product line to reporters in a — suitably enough — rainbow-colored display case. “Just a simple color for your every gar-dening need. With the new Vita-Color line, the first-time gardener can get world-class results. We’ve made it just that easy.”

He then went on to present a series of impressive floral arrangements, each purportedly grown with the Vita-Color line.

The presentation drew strong applause from the audience, made up largely of E-Z-Gro staff members and stockholders. Many were heard to wonder “whether they were clapping out of excitement or just plain relief.”

Certainly, the early release of the VitaColor line comes at a rather fortuitous time for the corporation, which has faced financial difficulties of late, due to innovations by its competitors, as well as a general decline in interest by consumers. The price of the compa-ny’s stock had dipped dangerously low, and more than twenty percent of their nursery franchises were in receivership. Indeed, more than one corporate insider has referred to this product line as “E-Z-Gro’s last last chance to avoid bankrupt- cy.”

But with today’s announcement, it would appear that Bud Rose’s company has turned the comer on its troubles.

Beware

The puzzle image is different than the box cover! Also, there are hidden clues throughout the newspaper and puzzle.

Read

The plot thickens as you assemble the 300-piece jig-saw puzzle. Let nothing go unordered.

Assemble

Examine all the clues from the newspaper and the puzzle. Then check your detective skills by comparing them to the printed solution.

Solve

The puzzle image is different than the box cover! Also, there are hidden clues throughout the newspaper and puzzle.

Beware

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"Her knowledge of... corporate espionage..."


detailed her knowledge of the prior thefts of Wallflour's research. "Her knowledge of the ins and outs of corpo-
rate espionage may just be something she picked up listening to Mr. Wallflour," said Sheriff Hank Dew. "Then again, it may be something she picked up while planning Wallflour. Perhaps too rigid, as project Wallflour's last chance, but maybe it was hers as well. I'd say stealing a million-dollar-discovery — whatever it might be — bears water in the years in

unnatural and uncomfortable stance that Wallflour usually assumes when he speaks. His voice was deep and

just before the moment. She had always been one of those people who could simply say what needed to be said,

"I just can't believe this has happened," said one deputy after the announcement was made. "I can't believe anyone would do something like this, and especially not to

The reaction is typical for the community as a whole. The town of Bloom is small enough so that the cliче,

shaky, if not downright distant terms with Wallflour in the past, and has been

unsuccessfully sought by authorities since the discovery of the body. However, sources say this type of dis- pearsance is not unusual for Bernie Doolittle, who is known in this town both for his addiction to sports gambling and for his frequent periods of unem- ployment. "He's probably in hot water with somebody who loaned him money," explained one local, who asked not to be identified. According to the authorities, Doolittle has a history of running up astounding gambling debts, and then skipping town when payment is due. Wallflour is reported to have repeatedly bailed his cousin out of his financial predicaments, only to have the cycle repeat itself a few months later. As Wallflour's heir apparent, Doolittle was initially being sought in order to simply serve in a legal capacity, for funeral arrangements and other sundry responsibilities.

However, authorities have now issued an All Points Bulletin for Doolittle, in the wake of the revelation that came from the coroner's office late this afternoon: "Tests performed on the deceased have revealed high levels of ammonia in both the digestive system and the bloodstream. Similar tests performed on the coffee the deceased was drinking at the time of death have confirmed it as the cause of death." Those words, read aloud to reporters by Chief Coroner Derek Applegate, have sent a shockwave through the town of Bloom, and changed the sorrow of Wallflour's passing to horror. Edmund Wallflour was poisoned, by person or persons unknown.

"Everybody here knows everybody else," is not far from the truth. In a place

where doors are left uncocked at night, the idea that someone among them is a

murderer is like something out of a bad dream for these people. And given that

there seems to be no apparent motive for the killing, the idea that it could be almost anything is depicted. Aware of this and the panic that could ensue if suspicion is allowed to spread unchecked, the police have agreed, as a public service, to release the following conclusions they have made in their investigations so far.

First, they stress that it is almost certain that Edmund Wallflour knew and trusted his murderer. They point out, since Wallflour's keys were found on his body, and since there was no sign of forced entry into the greenhouse, that the murderer must have owned a set of keys him/herself. This narrows the list of suspects considerably, since, given Wallflour's secretive nature, there are few people whom he would allow access to his greenhouse. The fact that there was no struggle also supports the theory that Wallflour knew his killer. Further, the murderer could not have been a suicide or by acci- dent, since none of the various methods of suicide was found inside the greenhouse during a search conducted after the initial findings. It is believed that the high acidi- ty of the coffee — triple strength, as Iris Kelley claimed — has masked the taste of the poison. Whoever poisoned Wallflour appears to have removed all traces of the crime when he or she left the scene.

When pressed for further details, police have dropped the next bombshell of this evening — announcing that at this time, their primary suspect is none other than Iris Kelley. This revelation comes as a surprise to those who knew both her and Wallflour. The two had the reputa-

tion of being extremely affectionate coworkers; indeed, strangers meeting them for the first time assumed the 35-year-old woman to be his daughter. Kelley reportedly had ini-


tially left her graduate studies with the

following appears to have removed all

traces of the crime when he or she left

the scene.

As yet, police have not announced whether or not Kelley has offered an alibi for her whereabouts last night, nor have they released any of the results of their interrogation of her this afternoon. They remind the public that their inves-

tigation is still in the very early stages, and any suspicions they might have about her guilt or innocence can only be con-

sidered speculative at this time. Or, as Sheriff Dew put it to this reporter.
"Garden Snake"

**WALLEY FLOUR COUTIN NABBED NAPPING!**

Beguized Times staff writer

Acting on a tip from an alert model night manager, authorities this afternoon detained Bernard "Bernie" Doolittle for questioning in the death of his cousin, Edmund Wallblour.

After a physical description of Doolittle was read on the morning's radio news report, Pine Tree Motor Lodge manager Gus Jenkins recognized Doolittle as the man who checked into his establishment last night under another name. "I remembered him especially because of the look on his face," Jenkins told reporters. He looked like he'd seen somethin' he'd regret for a long, long time," Doolittle checked himself in for an indefinite stay, then retreated to his room, and did not leave it until deputies arrived.

Describing the scene they found in Doolittle's room, Sheriff Dew said, "At first, we didn't know whether we needed a squad car or an ambulance. The man was out cold. We were afraid he might need medical attention. Then we saw the empty bottle." Doolittle had apparently drunk himself into a stupor, and remained senseless during the entire time he was being sought by authorities.

"It was pretty pathetic," Sheriff Dew went on. "We searched the guy for something, and all we found was a bottle of wine. It was a huge stack of betting slips from the Chattachoochee Race Track over in Lake County. Not a single winner, either." But the race track employee positively identified the name of the one horse Doolittle has ever won while betting on. As a result, he has never missed betting on her in any race. "She won for him that one time, so he thinks he's lucky for him," he went on.

"Never mind that she's never won anything for him since." When Doolittle does come to his senses, he will undoubtedly find himself in jail with some very unpleasant questions. Despite having Iris Kelley in custody, it is clear that the Sheriff's department is considering Doolittle as a possible suspect in his cousin's murder. It has been confirmed that he has served jail time for a series of misdemeanors, including fraud, petty theft, and, unsurprisingly, non-payment of debts. And, as Edmund Wallblour's only living relative, he stands to inherit his entire estate.

As to the size of the estate in question, authorities have announced that their inquiries into Edmund Wallblour's finances have revealed him to have been a very wealthy man. Despite his retirement from E/Z-Gro, he had continued to find employment on a consulting basis, from government agencies as well as private, and had frequently toured the college lecture circuits. A search of his safe deposit box at the local bank revealed as-yet uncashed checks from several universities, as well as from the EPA, and the Department of Agriculture. Estimates have placed his net worth at the time of his death at well over three million dollars.

These facts, combined with the notorious gambling debts which Doolittle has amassed, is considered a more than adequate motive for him to commit murder. The amount of his debts have not been confirmed, but sources have reported that the money was borrowed from loan sharks. "Doolittle owes money to people you don't say 'no' to," said Sheriff Dew. "Word is, the last guy who owed them this much and didn't pay, was found at the bottom of his swimming pool tied to an anchor." He declined to elaborate further, except to say that since the list of suspects contains only those whom Edmund Wallblour knew and might have trusted with a set of keys, that Bernie Doolittle must be included on that list. "Bernie was on the run quite a bit. Edmund knew it. According to Iris Kelley's testimony, Wallblour had given Bernie the keys to the greenhouse so he'd have some place to hide. Whether or not Bernie ever used them, we don't as yet know."

On a related topic, the court-appointed attorney for Iris Kelley, Harry Lipton, has announced that Ms. Kelley will plead not guilty to any charges that may be brought against her in relation to the murder. "My client loved Edmund Wallblour like a brother," he states after conferring with Kelley in jail. When asked about her possible alibi for the night of the murder, Lipton admitted that his client was alone that night but claimed that she could not have had access to the greenhouse, since her own set of keys had been missing since last week. Asked how he intended to prove this in court, Lipton replied, "No comment."

**Congratulations**

St. Bartholomew's Church for their Charity Bazaar last week! Reverend Shawcross reports that the event raised over two thousand dollars for the city's Clean-Up Crusade Against Litter. Special Thanks to Ms. Grimes for her refreshments, and for Volunteers Mr. Taylor, Mr. Young, and Ms. Kelley.

**Toys Needed**

Toy donations are being sought for the Children's Hospital Annual Drive. Please leave a new, unwrapped toy at the donation box at the front desk, or see Nurse Hyatt for information on how to help.

**Auditions**

Auditions for the Bloom High School's production of "Annie Get Your Gun" are being held in the Grove Auditorium this Thursday from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Please see Mr. Jacobs for music and sides.

**Race Results**

At Fairmont Park, the winner of last night's final race was Four Leaf Clover, followed by Lurello in Place and Drowny Sue to Show. At Chattachoochee's Midnight Running, Thunderbird ran first, followed by Siegfried to Place, and Lady-Of-War to Show. Bluebell running last, stumbled towards the finish line and had to be destroyed.

**Bowling**

The winning streak of the Bloom Amateur Bowlers League came to an unfortunate end last Friday when their bus broke down. The Boomers missed the match, and lost by default. But the local team has requested a rematch, and the State Board is considering the matter.
Edmund Walllour was killed because of his secret project, not by someone who wanted to steal it, but by someone who wanted to keep it a secret forever. Consider the suspects, one by one, as well as their motives and means to commit the murder.

Iris Kelley may very well have planned to steal Walllour's project, and her knowledge of Walllour's coffee-drinking habits does implicate her. But a glance at both the Local News column and the Classifieds confirms that she volunteered at the St. Bartholomew's Charity Bazaar last week, where she lost her keys, which were found by Reverend Sharrow. Thus, her alibi holds up; she couldn’t have opened or locked the greenhouse door.

Bernie Doolittle has a powerful motive for committing the murder: saving his own skin from the law sharks. And as the betting slip and the whiskey bottle seen at the crime scene suggest, he has been using the greenhouse as a hideout recently. But don’t be fooled by appearances; as the Sports Column in the newspaper reveals, Bluebell was running at the midnight race over at Chattahoochee Racetrack last night, at the same time the murder was committed. Since Bernie’s gambling addiction compelled him to be at every race he ran in, he had to have been at the Racetrack, and couldn’t have made it back in time to do away with his cousin. Bernie’s horror, as recounted by the motel manager, came from the death of his only witness, not the murder of Walllour.

So who killed Walllour, and why? A closer examination of the crime scene should provide the answers. Notice the red stains on the marked flower pots, the yellow powder on the measuring spoon, and the blue smear on the coffee cup. Red, yellow, and blue colors on or around plants...it is clear that Edmund Walllour had been working with the new Vita-Color line. If you read the caution copy in the Vita-Color ad, you will see that the weed killer, colored blue, is made largely out of ammonia. Identifying it as the poison that killed Walllour. Since he had access to the products before their release to the public, he must therefore have been working for E-Z-Gro — or the people investigating E-Z-Gro. The paper reveals that the E.P.A. has been conducting such an investigation, and that paychecks from them were found among Walllour’s effects.

Edmund Walllour’s secret project was an expose of the Vita-Color line. A closer look at the potted plants in the greenhouse reveals the results of his experiments. The plants marked V-1, the ones with the red stains, have been fed with the Vita-Color line and they are clearly dying. Those marked yellow — the control group — are flourishing. The Vita-Color line is a failure.

Who, then, as head of the Vita-Color project, would know of the E.P.A.’s hiring of Walllour? Who, as Walllour’s long-time employer, would be known and trusted by him? Who, as the real owner of the greenhouse, would have his own set of keys? And who, as the CEO of a company whose future depends on the success of the Vita-Color line, would have a vital interest in seeing Edmund Walllour permanently silenced?

Bud Rose poisoned Walllour with the Vita-Color weed killer, then stole all traces of the project to cover his tracks. And the proof that Bud Rose was in the greenhouse that night? Look closely at the shelf of plants. Notice the empty spot, and the yellow water stain. Notice the yellow stain on the pot in the photo of Bud in the paper. Bud, a true gardening aficionado, couldn’t resist stealing a perfect specimen for his press conference the next day.

WordPuzz answers: fertilizer, botanist, weed, garden, perennial, greenhouse insects. Key Word: Bowerpot