YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED
TO ATTEND
AN INTIMATE WEEKEND PARTY
IN HONOR OF
DR. DAVID BLACK'S
MOST CHERISHED AND MOST LOYAL FRIENDS
TO BE HELD AT TUDOR CLOSE
APRIL 8 - 10
A WELCOMING DINNER WILL BE SERVED
PROMPTLY AT EIGHT O'CLOCK
R.S.V.P.

SIX CASES OF MURDER
By Henry Slesar

Six hearts pounded in anticipation when their owners saw the embossed envelope postmarked Darkham. Who could refuse an invitation to Tudor Close, the most magnificent mansion in England? Who could resist an "intimate weekend" with its master? He was a genial, generous and warmhearted man, a charming host, an amusing raconteur, a considerate friend. Indeed, there was only one thing wrong with Dr. David Black. He was alive.

It was a tribute to the doctor's charitable nature that he never suspected the devious motives of his closest friends. Having no relations of his own, they were like his family. It never occurred to him that it wasn't his company they coveted—it was his home. He would have been shocked to learn that the document uppermost in their minds was his Last Will and Testament. Especially the words:

"And I leave Tudor Close, its house and grounds and all its contents, to my dearest and most loyal friend...."

Without exception, every one of those invited guests believed that his or her name completed that fateful sentence.

Professor Peter Plum, an American who lived in England for many years, had been jogging when he encountered the postman cycling towards his cottage, the large white envelope in his hand. He had ripped it open without breaking his stride, and almost somersaulted with joy when he read the invitation to David Black's estate.

Plum had met Dr. Black at a seminar at Harvard University, the Professor's alma mater. Black had been impressed by his title (Plum never bothered to tell him it was "honorary") but he was even more impressed by the Professor's ideas about Healthy Living.
The doctor was a frail man with a wistful yearning for a muscular build, and Plum convinced him that his goal was only a few simple calisthenics away. Alas, the muscles never arrived—but Professor Plum arrived often and early at Tudor Close.

Professor Plum looked forward to his next visit with even greater enthusiasm. He was so confident of his inheritance that Plum had already sketched his visions of the mansion's redesign into the Tudor Close Health Club. He almost packed the sketch into his suitcase, along with several other curious items, but he thought better of it. In the past he had known Dr. Black's butler to unpack his luggage, and it would hardly be discreet to disclose his plans for the future. His wonderfully healthy future....

**Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock** had her own designs on Tudor Close. Twice married to wealthy men, and twice widowed, she wasn't interested in riches—only in rich living. Not only was Tudor Close the kind of home she had always coveted, it would make the ideal setting for the gourmet restaurant she had dreamed about for years.

Even though Mrs. Peacock never entered the kitchen (Mrs. White did all the cooking), she loved food. Fortunately, so did Mr. Black. It was a bond between them from the day they first met at a Gourmet Food shop in London. Hardly a day passed when they didn't converse by phone, exchanging recipes, comparing ingredients, judging cookery books. Their only conflict came the day Mrs. Peacock offered to buy Tudor Close to fulfill her dream, and Dr. Black shocked her by his curt refusal. The mansion was his ancestral home! He would never, never allow it to become that lowest of things, a "commercial establishment."

But Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock was not a woman who could take "no" for an answer. That was why she answered "yes" to Dr. David Black's invitation to the weekend party, and why there was a determined look on her face as her valet loaded her suitcase into her blue Rolls Royce—a suitcase filled with some unusual items....

**Mrs. Blanche White**'s suitcase was also in the trunk of that Rolls Royce. Even though Mrs. White was Elizabeth Peacock's maid, she had her very own invitation to Tudor Close.

But Mrs. Peacock wasn't surprised by that fact. She knew that Dr. Black was very fond of her cook, and had allowed her to work for him on certain, special occasions. Perhaps he saw a maternal image in her white hair, her matronly figure, her rosy cheeks. And perhaps he didn't realize that the "rose" in those cheeks was often the result of a few daily tipples.

What Dr. Black definitely didn't know was that Mrs. White had her own secret plan to renovate his ancestral home. Oh, she would keep the handsome wood paneling, the gleaming chandeliers that graced every room, but the deep-pile carpeting would have to go. Carpets would be inappropriate in a pub, and Mrs. White imagined the Tudor Close Tavern (she would definitely spell it with an "e") as a drinking establishment whose fame would spread through the country. It would be filled with jovial patrons, the clink of glasses, the thud of darts, the ringing of the till. It would be a happy reminder of her childhood (her father had owned a pub). Of course, she knew Dr. Black would never approve of her idea. But then, he wouldn't be around to object—would he?

As she packed her suitcase, carefully including some very special items, she drank one last toast to the future....

**The Reverend Jonathan Green** murmured a small prayer of gratitude when he opened his invitation to Dr. Black's weekend party. It was definitely a sign from Heaven, considering that only the evening before he had let the Bishop in on his dream of building a religious retreat for wayward men of the cloth. The Bishop had been less than sympathetic, knowing only too well that Reverend Green was the most prominent backslider in the parish—perhaps in all of England....

Reverend Green hadn't told him that he had already chosen the site, that he planned to turn Tudor Close into a secluded
retreat where sanctity might be combined with just a dollop of sin. The Bishop wouldn't have understood.

Dr. David Black understood him very well. They had met at a church service, and Black had confided in him about his own father, a minister whose virtuous example was lost on his irresolute son. The doctor had been relieved by Reverend Green's assurance that a few lapses now and then wouldn't necessarily block Dr. Black's entry into Heaven. From that moment on, Reverend Green became a rather lenient spiritual advisor, and a friend—Black's closest friend, the Reverend believed. He felt guaranteed to inherit, if not the world, then at least Tudor Close.

With a beatific smile on his face, Reverend Green packed his suitcase, making sure to include several meaningful items....

Miss Vivienne Scarlett had been in her customary place on the morning Dr. David Black's envelope arrived. She was in front of her vanity mirror, forcing a brush through the tangle of her brown hair, and wondering when the phone would ring. Miss Scarlett expected at least one invitation from an admirer every day, but she was thrilled when she saw the one on her mat. She adored mansions, weekends, parties, and wealthy bachelors. Most of all, she adored men who were madly in love with her, and she was sure that this was the case with Dr. David Black. He was just too shy to say so.

Miss Scarlett hadn't been shy about talking to David about her brilliant notion, that Tudor Close would be an ideal location for a Beauty Spa, a place where the finest beautician would keep her (and her paying customers) beautiful for the rest of their lives. She would manage it, of course. Her favorite picture (one she had had taken fifteen years ago) would grace every brochure and every advertisement; she would even appear in her own television commercials. Wasn't it a perfectly marvelous idea?

She was dismayed when Dr. Black had laughed at the suggestion. But as she packed her bag for the weekend party, making sure to include some indispensable items, she didn't share his amusement. Vivienne Scarlett was in the habit of getting what she wanted, and now she wanted Tudor Close. She was determined to be his heiress if not his bride, just as soon as Dr. Black had the courtesy to die....

Colonel Mike Mustard's stoic face expressed no elation at the invitation from Darkham, since he knew it was coming. Only the week before, Dr. Black had called upon his services to repair a bathroom leak that was threatening to inundate the dining room, and the grateful doctor had told him about the "intimate weekend" he had planned.

Dr. Black was hardly the Colonel's idea of good company, but he took sadistic pleasure in it. He enjoyed the fact that Black was putty in his hands.

In fact, it was putty that brought them together. The Colonel had been in a shooting party near Tudor Close, and a stray bullet had shattered one of the mansion's windows. Mustard hadn't fired the shot (he was too good a marksman) but he offered to make the repairs. Dr. Black had been surprised at such an offer from the military man (the Colonel, although retired, still wore his uniform) but Mustard assured him that he was expert in all matters pertaining to home maintenance and repair. He had proved it time and again.

A solid friendship—even dependency—had been formed, and so had a yearning on the part of Colonel Mustard. From his first day at Tudor Close, he saw the mansion as the seat of a Gentlemen's Club—a place where retired officers and other like-minded men could keep alive their masculine images. Colonel Mustard hadn't the slightest doubt that he was Black's heir and that the mansion would one day be his.

As he packed his suitcase, making sure he packed the correct items, the Colonel thought about his Battle Plan....
"Welcome, my friend, welcome!"

Professor Plum was the first to arrive, having cycled some eleven miles to reach Tudor Close. He brought a smile to his host's face by an immediate appraisal of his physical well-being.

"You look splendid, David, tip-top!" he said in his booming voice, slapping the doctor on the thin edge of his shoulder blade. The doctor coughed to conceal his pain, and smiled with some embarrassment.

"Well, the truth is I've been neglecting my calisthenics a bit," he confessed. "Every morning I put on the exercise video you recorded for me, but as I stay in bed whilst it's running, I don't think it's what you had in mind."

Professor Plum roared with forgiving laughter.

"That's what I like about you," the doctor said. "You never reproach me, Peter. You let me exercise my right not to exercise."

Mrs. Peacock's entrance was a noisy one. She floated past Hobart the butler as if on a cloud of euphoria. "Darling!" she cried, gathering Dr. Black in her arms, enveloping him in silk and fur and the smell of perfume and powder. "How wonderful to be here! How wonderful to see you! And I have the most wonderful new recipe for coq au vin!

"Practically every dish tonight is from one of your recipes," Dr. Black said gallantly. "If this dinner is a success, Mrs. Peacock, you can take all the credit!"

He was just as effusive as he greeted Mrs. Peacock's cook.

"How lovely to see you again, Mrs. White!" he said. "We must have a good long chat this weekend, just the two of us."

Mrs. White murmured her approval and wondered when drinks would be served.

Miss Scarlett appeared almost an hour later in a hired car, a glamorous white limousine more appropriate to a wedding. She had planned to be the last to arrive, to make a grand entrance, and was disappointed to learn that she had been beaten at the lateness game. But she made the best of it. She fluttered her heavily made up eyelashes at Dr. Black, and David responded with the usual blush that Miss Scarlett habitually brought to his cheeks.

"My dear, you look lovely," he said, with a slight stammer. "I'm absolutely stunned."

Reverend Green drove to Tudor Close in his vintage car, the sound of its clattering engine announcing his arrival ten minutes before he reached the driveway. He apologized for the lateness, citing two breakdowns on the way, and hoped he hadn't delayed the festivities.

"Not at all," Dr. Black said. "In fact, you've already made this weekend a success!" He looked at the others and explained with a smile, "I asked the Reverend to pray for good weather. I've just heard the forecast and it's spot on—sunny, warm and fine! It certainly pays to know someone with influence!"

They all joined in the laughter that followed, but a vigorous knock on the front door soon cut it short. Colonel Mike Mustard was there, his Land Rover parked on the drive. He was in full uniform of course, and there seemed to be more braid and ribbons than ever.

"All right," the Colonel snapped, with a twinkle in his eye. "What needs fixing this time, Doctor?"

David Black chuckled. "Nothing, my friend, nothing. You've already earned a medal for what you did last week!" But before he could say more, Vivienne Scarlett made a pouting plea for a cocktail. Mrs. White mumbled something about it being a very good idea.

The dinner was an outstanding success. Dr. Black's compliments to his guests flowed as lavishly as the wine, and very special wine it was too.

"A gift from Mrs. Peacock," Dr. Black announced. "Five different wines, one for each course of the meal. Elizabeth, your good taste has made my life so much more pleasurable."
He raised his glass to Mrs. Peacock, who managed to blush becomingly.

In the seat beside him, Vivienne Scarlett shifted about in a body language that spoke of annoyance. Aware of it, the doctor's arm moved to encircle her slim waist. Apparently, his fourth glass of wine had emboldened the shy Dr. Black.

"And only a blind man could miss the happiness Miss Scarlett has brought into my world," he said. "My dear, you are the most beautiful woman I've ever known, and if only I had the courage...."

Now it was Vivienne's turn to blush.

"And speaking of courage, all one has to do is look at Colonel Mustard and his splendid medals, and we see courage personified!"

The Colonel modestly bowed his head.

"But not all courage has to do with War!" the doctor said, beaming. He gave them an account of the Colonel's heroic repairs of the upstairs leak, the way he maneuvered through the narrow space between ceiling and bath, as if he had been on a combat mission.

"And there is yet another kind of courage," the doctor said, looking at Reverend Green. "Moral courage! And who better exemplifies it than my dear friend, the Reverend. If you knew how many times I needed his counsel, how often his wise words brought me peace...."

"And body?" Professor Plum said, feeling left out.

Dr. Black laughed, and summoned Hobart to pour some wine into the Professor's empty glass. Plum waved him away; he abstained from all alcohol.

"No, my friend," Dr. Black said, looking at the Professor with affectionately if slightly swimming eyes. "My body I have entrusted to you, to your splendid program for healthy living."

It wasn't until they were halfway through dinner that Dr. Black toasted Blanche White, the woman who had assisted his own cook in preparing the elaborate meal.

"To Mrs. White," he said. "The lady who is almost a member of my own family." Mrs. White bowed her head modestly, and indicated for Hobart to refill her glass.

There was only one thing that Dr. Black missed at his dinner party. Awash in good feelings, he failed to notice an undercurrent of hostility among his guests, an air of malice thick enough to cut with the knife that carved the roast beef.

When the party broke up after midnight, he bid them all good night as they headed upstairs to unpack and to dream their dreams of ownership....

If Dr. Black had heard their conversation in the hall, he might have been shocked.

"Better get to bed right away, darling," Mrs. Peacock said to Vivienne Scarlett. "You'll need three hours to put on your makeup tomorrow morning."

"Of course, we can't all afford to have face lifts every six months," Miss Scarlett said sweetly.

"I think I'll have a nightcap before bedtime," Mrs. White said.
"All I need is a bath," Colonel Mustard said.
"I certainly agree with that," Professor Plum said.
"I'd take a shower if I were you, Professor," Reverend Green said cheerily. "You ate so much tonight, you might get stuck in the bath."
"Especially since the food was as heavy as lead," Colonel Mustard grumbled.

"You ought to know about lead," Mrs. Peacock said sharply.
"That's what you made your medals out of, isn't it?"

Finally, they were all behind the closed doors of their rooms. There was no sound but that of water splashing into a bath.

It was less than five minutes later that the noise downstairs startled them.

It was a sound that none of them could fully describe. A sound like "THUMP!" one said. A sound like "BUMP!" another said.
A sound like "Whump!" another said. But only the below stairs servants, all of whom had retired for the night, heard the second sound that followed it—the sound of a tumbling body.

One by one, the doors of the upstairs bedrooms opened, and curious faces peered out. One by one, the six guests at Tudor Close made their way down the carpeted staircase, to join the curious, frightened Hobart and the two maids, commonly known as Dilly and Dally. The servants were in nightdresses, but the guests were partly dressed in the clothes they had worn at dinner, having had little time to unpack.

Dr. David Black, however, was still in his full dinner dress, and "still" was the operative word.

He was lying face down on the dining room floor, and there was a spreading red stain on the carpet beneath his head.

On the dining room table a breakfast service had been laid out for a morning that Dr. Black would never see. And lined up in a neat row on the side board were six small packages, special gifts that Dr. Black had planned to present to his six most beloved, most faithful friends.

One of whom, it appeared, had just bludgeoned him to death. After the initial shock, the denials and accusations began.

"This is horrible!" Mrs. Peacock said. "Who could have done such a terrible thing?" She looked at Vivienne Scarlett, who reacted angrily.

"Don't look at me, Madam!" she said. "I was getting ready for bed when this happened!"

"I was reading," Reverend Green said, "The Book of Matthew."

"And I'll bet you'll swear to that on the Bible," Professor Plum grumbled.

Colonel Mustard said: "And what about you, Professor? Were you doing your evening exercises?"

"Please," Mrs. White said, in a quavering voice. "We have to do something! A man has been murdered!"

"How do you know that?" Professor Plum said. "He might have had some kind of freak accident!"

"And crushed his head like a melon?" Mrs. White said, in a voice that threatened hysteria. "He was obviously struck with something—something terribly heavy!"

"One of your biscuits, perhaps," Colonel Mustard said.

"And where were you when it happened?" Mrs. Peacock said.

"The brave military hero! With all those medals!"

"He even takes a bath in uniform," Professor Plum said dryly.

"I was upstairs with my door closed," the Colonel said stiffly.

"Ask the servants. They saw me coming down only moments after we heard that terrible sound."

"And me!" Mrs. White said.

"And me!" Vivienne Scarlett said. "I was right behind you!"

"It had to be someone down here," Reverend Green said, glancing uneasily at the servants. "Who else could it have been?!"

The two maids whimpered, and Hobart drew himself up haughtily.

"I respectfully suggest that we let the police ask the questions," the butler said. "It's their responsibility to find the answer."

"I'd like to know the answer to one thing," Mrs. Peacock said, slowly approaching the body. "If David was killed with a blunt instrument—then where in Heaven's name is it?"

It was the first question that Constable Durwood asked when he walked into the dining room. He was still asking it after a thorough search had been made of the dining room and all the adjacent areas of the house. And Constable Durwood, being a practical sort of man, voiced a simple conclusion.

"Why, the murderer took the blasted thing with him, that's all. He took it and hid it, that's what. Now we've got to find it again, and that's that."

He looked at the surrounding faces uncertainly, not knowing precisely what to do next. Luckily, their attention was once again
drawn by Hobart, the butler, who cleared his throat and said:
"If I might make a suggestion, Constable...."
"Fire away!"
"I suggest we look at our guests' luggage as they have had little
opportunity to unpack since retiring to their rooms and...."
A chorus of six angry voices drowned out the rest of his words.
"Wait a minute, now," the Constable said. "The man's talking
dense here. Let's get those suitcases downstairs and have a look
for ourselves. Who knows what we'll find?"
What Constable Durwood found were the clues that led to the
solution of the mysterious murder at Tudor Close.
You can see those clues by assembling the jigsaw puzzle.
Do it now!