

Deadline

Preface to the Story

A wealthy industrialist, Mr. Marshall Robner, locked himself in the upstairs library of his New England colonial estate one night and committed suicide by taking a lethal overdose of anti-depressants. Or did he?

You are the Chief of Detectives. You've been asked by Robner's attorney to make a thorough investigation of the case, simply to "quash the suspicions which are inevitable" when a moneyed man dies a sudden and unnatural death. The Medical Examiner found nothing unusual, and interviews with family members and family associates are consistent with the idea that Robner committed suicide. Everything falls nearly -- maybe too neatly. You smell foul play, and you have 12 hours to crack the case. If you arrest someone, you'd better have the three traditional ingredients to an ironclad case for the prosecution: the accused must have had a motive, a method, and ample opportunity to commit the crime. There are many possible endings to this case, and the one you reach is determined by your actions and by the deductions you draw from the evidence you gather. But one ending fits the facts better than any other, and you will know it when you reach it.

About the Author

Marc Blank. A graduate of MIT and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Marc has been involved in writing interactive fiction since its formative period in the late 1970s. Co-author of the original mainframe version of ZORK in 1977, he was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the appearance of interactive fiction on personal computers in the early 1980s. He is co-author of ZORK I, ZORK II, ZORK III, and ENCHANTER, and is sole author of DEADLINE, the first interactive mystery. His continuing work in interactive technologies in large part made Infocom's name synonymous with interactive fiction. His mother still wishes he would practice medicine.

Home of the Underdogs
<http://www.the-underdogs.org/>

Deadline Special Commands

*ACCUSE (someone) OF (something) - This makes an accusation against someone.

*ANALYZE (something) - Duffy, your assistant, will take "something" to the police lab for routine analysis, including fingerprints

*ANALYZE (something) FOR (something specific) - If you're looking for a specific substance on or in "something," the lab will run a special analysis.

*ARREST (someone) - If you've found enough evidence, this sentence will end the case and describe the outcome of the prosecution.

*ASK (someone) ABOUT (someone or something) - This is an impersonal form of the sentence CHARACTER, TELL ME ABOUT (someone or something).

*EXAMINE (something) - This allows you to look at something with an eye toward detail. You will probably use this a lot.

*FINGERPRINT (something) - This is the same as ANALYZE (something) FOR FINGERPRINTS.

*SEARCH (someone) FOR (something specific) - This is a search for something in particular, whether unusual or not.

*SEARCH NEAR (something) - This allows you to look closely at the area immediate to something, possibly providing more information than simply examining it.

*SHOW (something) TO (someone) - You may get an interesting reaction.

*SHOW ME (something) - A request to another person to show you or lead you to something.

*TIME - This tells you the current time of day in the story. You can abbreviate TIME to T.

*WAIT FOR (someone or some amount of time) - You may wait for some specified amount of time; if something interesting happens in the meantime, however, your wait will terminate then. You may also wait for a character to arrive; if something interesting happens in the meantime, or if the character doesn't show up after a long time, DEADLINE will ask you if you want to keep waiting

*WAIT UNTIL (time) - This causes time to pass until the desired time arrives. If anything interesting happens during this time, you will have a chance to stop waiting

*WHAT'S WRONG? - This is a request to another person to discuss what's on his or her mind

*WHERE IS (someone or something) - This is a request to another person to help you find someone or something.

Official Memo

Lakeville, CT Police Department

July 8, 1982

RE: Evidence on File

The transcribed interviews which follow were obtained July 8, 1982. Interviewees were persons found in and about the Robner household at the time police arrived. Also attached are representations of physical evidence including fingerprints, a lab report and a photograph of the scene of the incident, which have been processed as matters of record. Taken together, the findings indicate that the deceased was suffering from acute stress due to business difficulties, possibly exacerbated by marital discord. Of particular interest is young Robner's hostile reaction to questioning; however, the undersigned would not characterize his remarks as being suspicious in nature. More probably they reflect the respondent's ambivalent feelings toward the deceased.

In conclusion, it is the opinion of this investigator that all known facts show this to be an open-and-shut case of suicide by poisoning.



G. K. Anderson

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ROBNER

DETECTIVE ANDERSON: How did you come to find Mr. Robner?

MRS. ROBNER: When I woke up this morning, I noticed that Marshall was not in his bed. I wasn't alarmed, really, as it was not unusual for him to work late at night in the library and fall asleep there. I went down the hall to the library and knocked on the door. He didn't answer, so I knocked even harder. When that didn't work, I started calling his name loudly. So loudly, actually, that I woke up Mrs. Dunbar and George. We all were gathered there, knocking and yelling, and finally Mrs. Rourke, our housekeeper, was alarmed enough to come upstairs. She suggested calling the police, which we did. They arrived about twenty minutes later, and started breaking down the door with axes. When we entered the room, we found Marshall lying on the floor, face down.

ANDERSON: Did he usually keep his door locked when he worked?

ROBNER: Almost always. He was pretty secretive about his work, and he liked to be alone when he worked.

ANDERSON: Do you know of any reason why your husband might have wanted to take his own life?

ROBNER: He's been very depressed lately, you know. His business, Robner Corporation, is not doing well, and there is talk of selling out to a larger firm. Marshall founded the company, what, about twenty-six years ago, and he has been desperately trying to find some way of saving it.

ANDERSON: The pills we found by his body, do you know what they are?

ROBNER: Yes. They were Ebullion tablets. It's an anti-depressant his doctor prescribed for him just last week.

ANDERSON: Had he been acting less depressed since then?

ROBNER: I really don't know. I haven't noticed much change.

ANDERSON: Did your husband ever talk of suicide?

ROBNER: He did, actually, though I never took it seriously. He would talk about how everything would be easier if he were dead, but when he would start again talking about how he was going to have to keep the business going. I'm...I'm... stunned, really.

ANDERSON: Mrs. Robner, do you know of anyone who might have wanted to kill your husband?

ROBNER: Why, no. Of course not. He wasn't a very friendly man; he was very quiet. But he was a great philanthropist, you know, and everyone that knew him respected him. I can't imagine anyone wanting to hurt Marshall. Do you really suspect he didn't commit suicide?

ANDERSON: I don't suspect anything. I just want to understand what's happened.

INTERVIEW WITH MS. DUNBAR

DETECTIVE ANDERSON: You were Mr. Robner's personal secretary, is that right?

MS. DUNBAR: Yes, sir.

ANDERSON: I understand that you were the last person to see Mr. Robner alive. Could you tell me about that?

DUNBAR: Why, yes. I brought him some tea at about 11 PM that night. On nights when he expected to work late, he would always expect tea at that hour. I brought him the tea and he asked me to leave. That's all.

ANDERSON: Did Mr. Robner seem at all upset?

DUNBAR: He did appear quite nervous, but he had been upset for some time, as you know.

ANDERSON: Do you know what he was working on that evening?

DUNBAR: No. I wasn't with him, except for that one time.

ANDERSON: Do you recall whether the pills, the Ebullion pills, were on the desk when you came in?

DUNBAR: No, I don't remember that.

ANDERSON: Ms. Dunbar, were you with Mrs. Robner when the door was opened by the police?

DUNBAR: Yes.

ANDERSON: Do you remember her reaction? Anything she might have said?

DUNBAR: She didn't really react much. I don't think she said anything except "He's dead," or something of *that sort*. She just stood there with the rest of us until you people arrived.

ANDERSON: How were the Robners getting along? I mean, were they happily married?

DUNBAR: I don't think so, really. He was so quiet and, well, dreamy. She was always scolding him for paying too much attention to the business and to his "good works." They rarely went out lately, which seemed to upset Mrs. Robner quite a bit. She had friends of her own that she used to visit. I think she would have gone insane, otherwise.

ANDERSON: Thank you, Mrs. Dunbar. Oh, one last thing. You prepared the tea for Mr. Robner?

DUNBAR: Yes, I started the water boiling about a quarter of, and then poured the tea when I heard the whistle from the living room.

ANDERSON: You weren't in the kitchen during that time?

DUNBAR: I just told you no.

ANDERSON: Was anyone else awake in the house while you were waiting?

DUNBAR: Yes, I believe that both George and Mrs. Robner were awake. I remember George coming down, reading for a bit, then retiring.

INTERVIEW WITH MS. DUNBAR (cont.)

ANDERSON: Do you believe anyone might have a reason to kill Mr. Robner?

DUNBAR: No, I can't imagine

ANDERSON: Thank you Ms. Dunbar. Oh Ms. Dunbar, were you at home all night, last night I mean?

DUNBAR: Well, no, actually. I was out with a friend last night and we didn't get back until 10:30 or thereabouts.

ANDERSON: Thanks again, Ms. Dunbar.

INTERVIEW WITH MR. BAXTER

DETECTIVE ANDERSON: You were Mr. Robner's business partner, is that correct?

MR. BAXTER: That's right.

ANDERSON: How long have you and Mr. Robner been partners?

BAXTER: For about twenty-five years now. I was his partner almost from the start of the business.

ANDERSON: Mrs. Robner tells me that there have been problems lately with the business. Could you tell me what that's all about?

BAXTER: Yes, the business has its problems, some of them quite large. Marshall and I were working on a plan to solve those problems and get the company back on its feet again before we would be forced to take drastic action. I hope that I can hold things together now that Marshall is dead. He was the founder of the business and controlled many things by himself.

ANDERSON: Did Mr. Robner ever talk to you about personal problems, or how he felt?

BAXTER: No, we were business partners, not intimate friends. I don't think he really had any close friends. I know he had gotten himself very upset about the business, but that's the extent of it.

ANDERSON: When was the last time you saw Mr. Robner?

BAXTER: Yesterday afternoon, at our office in town.

ANDERSON: And where were you after work?

BAXTER: Last night was my concert night at the Hartford Symphony. I go there quite regularly. After the concert, at about 10 o'clock, I went home. I received a call from Ms. Dunbar this morning telling me of the tragedy, and I arrived here just a few minutes ago.

ANDERSON: Were you at the concert alone?

BAXTER: Quite alone.

ANDERSON: Do you know of anyone who might have wanted to harm Mr. Robner?

INTERVIEW WITH MR. BAXTER (cont.)

BAXTER: No. Except for George, of course. During some of their shouting matches I've heard George threaten Marshall, but I don't really think he ever would have followed through.

ANDERSON: Shouting matches?

BAXTER: George and Marshall were always at odds. You see, George has been living like a spoiled child all of his life. He's twenty-five now and has never held a job. Just spends money, or gambles it away. Being the Robner's only child, he gets away with murder. Marshall would lecture him and threaten to cut him off without a cent, and then the yelling would start. Eventually Marshall would give in.

ANDERSON: When was the last time you heard this?

BAXTER: Actually, I heard it again just last week. Strange, now that I think of it, they went at it just last week. I hear that Marshall told George that he had decided to disinherit him. He even mentioned it to me at the office the next day. He seemed pretty serious. I suppose that the financial troubles at the company may have been responsible for his attitude.

ANDERSON: Are you at the house often? You say you have heard some of the 'shouting matches.'

BAXTER: Well, I'm really not here often. Only on occasion. I have heard it once or twice and have been told of other times.

ANDERSON: Thank you, Mr. Baxter.

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ROURKE

DETECTIVE ANDERSON: Mrs. Rourke, how long have you been working as housekeeper for the Robners?

MRS. ROURKE: Ever since the house was built, six years ago.

ANDERSON: Tell me all you remember from the night of the murder.

ROURKE: I remember that by about 10:30 or so...

ANDERSON: You mean 10:30 PM.

ROURKE: Yes. By 10:30 when I went to my room to do some reading, everyone was upstairs excepting Ms. Dunbar, who had just returned home. She went upstairs at about 11, bring Mr. Robner his tea. He almost always takes his tea at 11. I remember saying goodnight to her on her way up, and that's the last I heard until this morning, with all the shouting and banging going on upstairs. No, that isn't right. George was downstairs also for a while, only about 10 minutes or so.

ANDERSON: Could someone have gone upstairs during the night?

ROURKE: I don't rightly think so, at least not before 3 or 4. You see, I like to do some reading late at night, and I was reading this really exciting mystery story, and, lord, I was up until nearly 4 o'clock before I finished. and who do you think the murderer was?

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. ROURKE (cont.)

ANDERSON: Really, Mrs. Rourke, let's stick to the matter at hand. Do you keep your door closed at night when you are reading?

ROURKE: Yes, sir.

ANDERSON: So then it's possible that someone might have entered the house and gone upstairs without your knowledge.

ROURKE: No, sir. I don't believe so. Why don't you try the stairs yourself?. For a new house, these stairs are the noisiest I've ever heard. My door's right beside them, too. When the Robners owned a little cat, I can remember hearing every footstep creaking up the stairs. Don't know why they don't ever fix it up. I guess it don't bother them any.

ANDERSON: But it is possible that someone might have entered after you went off to sleep.

ROURKE: Well, I suppose it might be, but not before.

ANDERSON: How long has Ms. Dunbar been living here?

ROURKE: Ever since the place was built. She does an awful lot of work for Mr. Robner, you know. I don't think he could have gotten along without her, although that's not my business to say. He was always so nervous, fretting about everything, and forgetting to do this and that. It seemed that she was always covering his tracks, if you get my meaning.

ANDERSON: Do you have any reason to suspect anyone of wanting to harm Mr. Robner?

ROURKE: Well, of course I've heard all of the screaming and fussing with George and Mr. Robner. That's been going on for years, now, so I don't make much of it anymore. No, I can't imagine anyone wanting to hurt poor Mr. Robner. He was such a sweet man.

ANDERSON: Thank you, Mrs. Rourke.

INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE ROBNER

DETECTIVE ANDERSON: Mr. Robner, I have been told by Mr. Baxter that you and your father had some serious arguments lately. Could you tell me what they were about?

GEORGE ROBNER: I don't think that's your business.

ANDERSON: I'm told they had to do with you habit of wasting or gambling away your father's money.

ROBNER: So?

ANDERSON: I've even been told that he threatened to disinherit you.

ROBNER: Yeah. He said he was going to. I'll bet he didn't, though. He never has.

ANDERSON: Mr. Robner, let me be frank. I'm told that you threatened violence against your father as recently as a week ago, and now he's dead.

INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE ROBNER (cont.)

ROBNER: Look, I don't get what you're driving at. You find the poor guy dead in his room. The room was locked. His bottle of medicine is nearly empty. What sort of detective are you, anyway.?'

ANDERSON: I'm doing the asking, if you don't mind.

ROBNER: Then ask someone else.

NOTE: G.R. left abruptly at this point.

Lab Report

Lakeville, CT Police Department

Case: Robner, Marshall

File#: H657/SJ43. 1

Officer of Record: Detective G.K. Anderson

Mat'l(s)analyzed: Porcelain teacup

Analyzed for: Fingerprints, foreign substances

Date: 7/8/82

Laboratory findings:

The teacup was analyzed. The cup contained tea only, No trace of Ebullion or other substances was found. Fingerprints on the cup belonged to the deceased and Ms, Dunbar.





Official Memo

Lakeville, CT Police Department

File # H657/SJ43.1

G.K. Anderson, Detective 1st Class

July 8, 1982

RE: Robner Case

Although it appears that at least one member of the Robner household had a reason for wishing Mr. Robner dead, the findings of the Medical Examiner and evidence gained from interviews with the family and family associates are only consistent with the conclusion that Mr. Robner died of a self-administered overdose of Ebullion.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "G.K. Anderson".

G.K. Anderson

Chief of Detectives
Edindale Police Department
Edindale, CT 06103

July 9, 1982

Dear Chief:

I must once again ask for your assistance on a case involving one of my clients,

As you are no doubt aware, Mr. Marshall Robner, the industrialist and philanthropist, was found dead yesterday morning in his home. As far as I can determine, he was found dead on the floor of his library, the victim of an overdose of Ebullion, a medicine which he had been taking lately for severe bouts of depression. He had been alone during the night, and the door to his library had been bolted from the inside. Police had to break the door down with axes, I'm told, to get inside.

While I am completely convinced that there was no foul play involved in Mr. Robner's death, it is disturbing that Mr. Robner had called me only three days earlier for the purpose of informing me that his will was to be altered. In fact, I was expecting to hear from him this week so that he could deliver the papers to me. Given the size of the Robner estate, I feel that a more complete investigation should be undertaken, if for no other reason than to quash the suspicions which are inevitable in these circumstances.

I phoned Mrs. Robner this morning and informed her of my intention of having you take on the case. She was reluctant to be of assistance, but I convinced her to allow you to come around at eight o'clock tomorrow morning and spend the day.

I will be at the house at noon tomorrow for the reading of the current will, which Mr. Robner wrote a few years ago. I hope to see you then.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Warren Coates".

Warren Coates

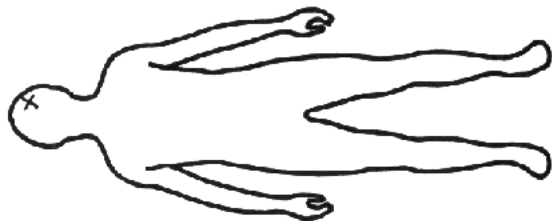


CORPUS DELICTI

Union Memorial Hospital, Lakeville, CT

Summary of findings from Coroner's Examination

Name Robner, Marshall		File No. H657/SJ43.1			Date 7/8/82	
Sex Male	Race Caucasian	Color of Eyes Brown	Color of Hair Gray	HL 5'11	WT 192 lbs.	Distinguishing Marks None
Apparent Cause of Death Drug overdose (Ebullion)						



Front



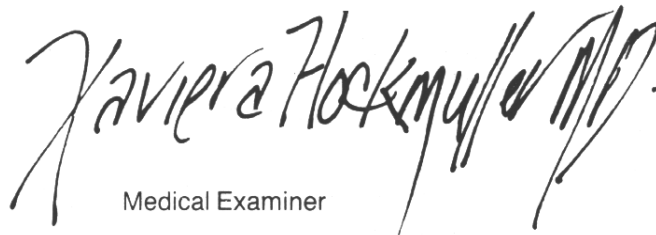
Back

There were no injuries or marks of a suspicious nature, except a small bruise on the left temple (consistent with falling to the floor from a chair).

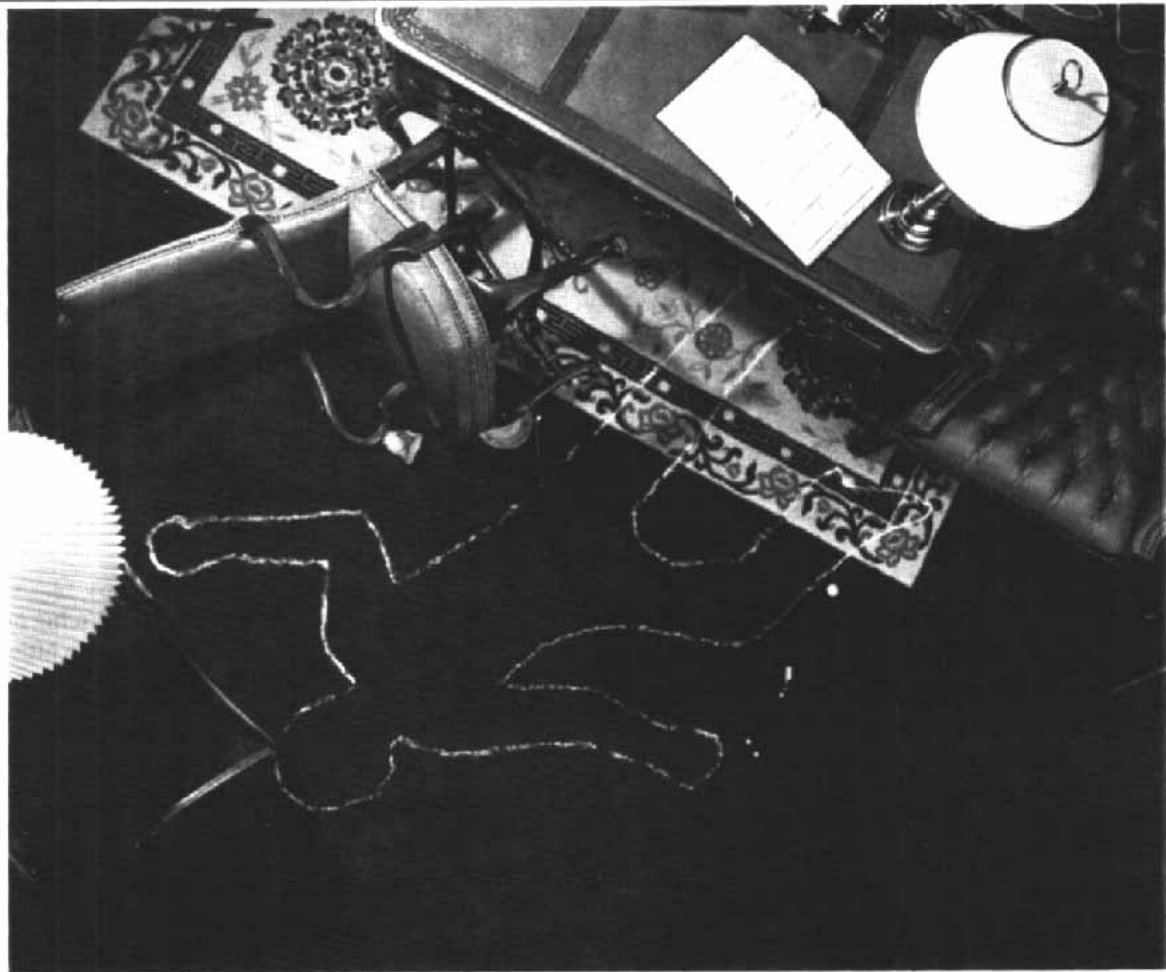
Analysis of the blood of the deceased revealed a blood level of 27mg% for Ebullion. The therapeutic range of this drug is normally 4 to 6mg%. A fatal dose, while not specified by the manufacturer, has been found to be in the 10-20mg% range. A routine analysis for other common drugs was unproductive.

Findings were unremarkable except for massive liver damage consistent with overdose of Ebullion, and 10mg of Ebullion recovered from the stomach. Death occurred at 1 AM, plus or minus one hour.

The blood level of Ebullion and the massive liver damage consistent with Ebullion toxicity lead to the inevitable conclusion that the deceased died of an overdose of that drug.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Xaviera Hockmuller MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a period at the end.

Medical Examiner





Physical Evidence

(A)

Tablets found
Near the Body

SP-4. 7/14/72