

# TREAD LIGHTLY



**G**rinny Jerome appeared on the island every July and left promptly on Labor Day. In the interval she slept wherever there was a roof, and she ate mostly from the refreshment tables at gallery openings, of which there are many. Occasionally, when pickings were lean, she broke into a house and stole some food, usually sweets.

Sam hated to arrest her for raiding a cookie jar, but he wished he had when Melissa Kindly went looking for mushrooms in the Felix Neck Wildlife Sanctuary and instead of finding *Pluteus umbrosis*, she found a body. It turned out to be that of Grinny. She was killed by a single bullet, and the gun, never traced, lay next to her.

Because Melissa immediately went for help and disturbed nothing, the probable time of death was established, and Sam was able to photograph the nearby shoe prints, as shown. They were particularly clear in the muddy area where a few planks had been left as part of a nature trail.

Sam's investigation moved swiftly. His first step was to locate the abandoned shack where Grinny had been living. There he found a change of clothes and \$800 in new twenty-dollar bills. His next step was to learn that one of the Sperlings had withdrawn \$800 in new twenty-dollar bills.

Sam was aware that Noah Sperling, known as the Moped King, operated his business with his three sons—Abel, the oldest, and the twins, Babel and Cabel—and that the business was usually in violation of some kind of regulation.

Sam tried to question Noah, but Noah said, "I don't shoot women," and kicked Sam out of his office.

Abel was more amenable. Despite a recent moped accident that left him hobbling around on crutches, he'd been seen near the Felix Neck headquarters on the afternoon of the murder. He admitted being there for a few minutes, but claimed he'd been in Gay Head the rest of the afternoon. As for the twins, Babel said he and Cabel had gone fishing, and Cabel backed him up with identical details.

Sam, armed with a photograph of the footprints and officer Pudge Bartlett to back him up in case of trouble, asked permission to examine the shoes of all four Sperlings. When nobody objected, Sam made his search and found a single mud-encrusted sneaker that matched the prints in the swamp. The shoe was Abel's, and pointed to his good foot.

Instead of asking further questions, Sam made his arrest on the spot.

Whom did he arrest, and how did he figure things out?

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## Questions

1. Do you think that Grinny was blackmailing Abel Sperling?
2. Do you think that any of the alibis have merit?
3. Does Abel's shoe print constitute enough evidence to hold him for further questioning?
4. Does Abel's acquiescence to the search tend to clear him or implicate him, or neither?
5. Whom did Sam arrest, and on what basis?

*Solution on page 53.*