

quarter-million was received by everyone—police, press and public—with a great deal of merriment. But, now that the responsibility for the money's safety rested with the Seattle police, he slept soundly that night, as well as those that followed; and when he appeared in the courtroom in Spokane two weeks later, to plead futilely that he was not one of the men who had held up the Fourth National Bank's automobile, he was his normal self again, both physically and mentally.

### FOR DISCUSSION: The Green Elephant

1. According to Doc Haire, what is Joe Shupe's major weakness as a criminal? Is this weakness evident in the noncriminal aspects of Joe's life? Did it play any part in Shupe's turning toward crime?
2. The scene of the robbery begins with the sentence: "Across the street two automobiles were twisting and turning, backing and halting, in clumsy dance figures." The entire scene is reminiscent of the jerkiness and air of unreality of a marionette show. What does this suggest about Joe's angle of vision and about the relationship between him and the robbery?
3. Shakespeare once wrote: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings." The "stars"—or Fate—gave Joe Shupe the one big chance he had always coveted, and he muffed it. Shakespeare had one explanation. How might modern psychology explain Joe's actions?
4. Which haunted Joe more: the statute laws or the laws of society? Explain the significance of your answer.
5. There is a deep and poignant irony in the last paragraph of this story—an irony that clarifies Joe's basic personality. What was his real need? His most pervasive fear? Was his real need in conflict with his conscious desires? Explain.

### INTRODUCTION: Bubble Bath No. 3

Most criminals who commit more than one crime develop a *modus operandi*—a regular pattern or procedure of operation. Among police this is known as an "M.O.," and it can be exceedingly helpful in tracking down the perpetrator of a crime.

The fact that a *modus operandi* is recognized does not guarantee that the criminal will be caught quickly, but it certainly decreases the number of suspects and facilitates investigation. Knowing this, why do criminals still adhere to a *modus operandi*? Because it is human nature to do so. If something works once, we are tempted to try again and again. We are creatures of habit, and past success makes us feel secure. It is a human need that criminals share with the rest of us.

## Bubble Bath No. 3

Margery Allingham

At five o'clock on a September afternoon Ronald Fredrick Torbay was making preparations for his third murder. He was being wary because he was well aware of the dangers of carelessness.

He knew, way back before his first marriage, that a career of homicide got more chancy as one went on. Also, he realized, success was liable to go to a man's head.

For an instant he paused and regarded himself thoughtfully in the shaving glass of the bathroom in the new cottage he had hired so recently.

The face which looked back at him was thin, middle-aged, and pallid. Sparse dark hair receded from its high narrow forehead and the eyes were blue and prominent. Only the mouth was really unusual. That narrow slit, quite straight, was almost lipless and, unconsciously, he persuaded it to relax into a half smile. Even Ronald Torbay did not like his own mouth.

A sound in the kitchen below disturbed him and he straightened up hastily. It might be Edyth coming up to take her long discussed bubble bath before he had prepared it for her, and that would never do.

He waited, holding his breath, but it was all right; she was going out of the back door. He looked out the window to see her disappearing round the side of the house into the small square yard which was so

exactly like all the other square yards in the long suburban street. He knew she was going to hang some linen on the line to air, and although the maneuver gave him the time he needed, still it irritated him.

Of the three homely, middle-aged women whom he had persuaded to marry him and then to will him their modest possessions, Edyth was proving easily the most annoying. In their six weeks of marriage he had told her a dozen times not to spend so much time in the yard. He hated her being out of doors alone. She was shy and reserved, but now that new people had moved in next door there was always the danger of some overfriendly woman starting up an acquaintance with her, and that was the last thing to be tolerated at this juncture.

Each of his former wives had been shy. He had been very careful to choose the right type and felt he owed much of his success to it. Mary, the first of them, had met her fatal "accident" almost unnoticed in the bungalow of a housing development very like the present one he had chosen, but in the north instead of the south of England.

At the time it had been a growing place, the Coroner had been hurried, the police sympathetic but busy, and the neighbors scarcely curious—except that one of them, a junior reporter on a local paper whose story was picked up by the wire services, had written a flowery paragraph about the nearness of tragedy in the midst of joy, published a wedding-day snapshot, and had titled the article with typical northern understatement, *Honeymoon Mishap*.

Dorothy's brief excursion into his life and abrupt exit from it had given him a little more bother. She had deceived him when she told him she was quite alone in the world. An interfering brother had turned up after the funeral to ask awkward questions about her small fortune. He might have been a nuisance if Ronald had not been very firm with him. There had been a brief court case duly recorded in a small item in newspaper. However, Ronald had won his case handsomely, and the insurance company had paid up without a murmur.

All that was four years ago. Now, with a new name and a newly invented background, he felt remarkably safe.

From the moment he had first seen Edyth, sitting alone at a little table under the window in a seaside hotel dining room, he had known that she was to be his next subject. He always thought of his wives as "subjects."

Edyth had sat there looking stiff and neat and a trifle severe, but there had been a secret timidity in her face, an unsatisfied, half-frightened expression in her nearsighted eyes. She was also wearing a genuine diamond brooch.

He had spoken to her that evening, had weathered the initial snub, and finally got her to talk. After that the acquaintance had progressed just as he had expected. His methods were old-fashioned and heavily romantic, and within a week she was hopelessly infatuated.

From Ronald's point of view her history was ideal. She had taught in a girls' boarding school during her twenties before being summoned home to look after a demanding father, whose long illness had monopolized her life; now at forty-three she was alone, comparatively well off, and as much at sea as a ship without a rudder.

Ronald was careful not to let her toes touch the ground. He devoted his entire attention to her, and in exactly five weeks he married her at the registry office of the town where they were both strangers. The same afternoon they each made a will in the other's favor and moved into the villa which he had been able to hire cheaply because the holiday season was at an end.

Two things signed her death warrant earlier than had been Ronald's original intention. One was her obstinate reticence over her monetary affairs and the other was her embarrassing interest in his job.

Ronald had told her that he was a junior partner in a firm of cosmetic manufacturers who were giving him a very generous leave of absence. Edyth accepted the statement without question, but almost at once she had begun to plan a visit to the office and the factory and said she must buy some new clothes so as not to "disgrace" him. At the same time she kept all her business papers locked in an old writing case and steadfastly refused to discuss them, however cautiously he raised the subject. Ronald had given up feeling angry with her and had decided to act.

He turned from the window and began to run the bath.

The bathroom was the one room they had repainted. Ronald had done it himself and had put up the little shelf over the bath to hold a small electric heater of the old-fashioned type. He switched it on now and stood looking at it until the two bars of glowing warmth appeared. Then he went out onto the landing, leaving the heater alight.

The fuse box which controlled all the electricity in the house was concealed in the bottom of the linen cupboard at the head of the stairs. Ronald opened the door carefully and, using his handkerchief so that his fingerprints should leave no trace, pulled the main switch.

Back in the bathroom the heater's glow died away; the bars were almost black again by the time he returned. He eyed the heater approvingly and then, still using the handkerchief, he lowered it carefully into the water. It lay close to the foot of the tub where it took up practically no room at all. The white cord of the heater ran up over the porcelain side of the bath, along the baseboard, under the door, and into a wall socket just outside on the landing.

When he had first installed the heater, Edyth had demurred at this somewhat slipshod arrangement. But he had explained that the local Council was stupid and fussy about fitting wall sockets in bathrooms since water was said to be a conductor, and she had agreed to let him run the cord under the linoleum.

At the moment the heater was perfectly visible in the bath. It certainly looked as if it had fallen into its odd position accidentally, but no one in his senses could have stepped into the water without seeing it. Ronald paused, his ugly mouth narrower than ever. The beautiful simplicity of the main plan, so swiftly fatal and, above all, so safe as far as he was concerned, gave him a thrill of pleasure—as it always did.

He turned off the faucet and waited, listening. Edyth was coming back. He could hear her moving something on the concrete outside the back door below and he took a paper sachet from his jacket pocket.

He was reading the directions on the back of it when a slight sound made him turn his head, and he saw, to his horror, the woman herself not five feet away. Her neat head had appeared suddenly just above the flat roof of the scullery, outside the bathroom window. She was clearing the dead leaves from the gutters and must, he guessed, be standing on a stepladder.

It was typical of the man that he did not panic. Still holding the sachet lightly, he stepped between her and the bath and spoke mildly.

"What on earth are you doing there, darling?"

Edyth started so violently that she almost fell off the ladder. "Oh, how you startled me! I thought I'd just do this little job before I came up to change. If it rains, the gutter floods all over the back step."

"Very thoughtful of you, my dear." He spoke with that slightly acid amusement with which he had found he could best destroy her slender vein of self-assurance. "But not terribly clever when you knew I'd come up to prepare your beauty bath for you. Or was it?"

The slight intonation on the word "beauty" was not lost on her. He saw her swallow.

"Perhaps it wasn't," she said without looking at him. "It's very good of you to take all this trouble, Ronald."

"Not at all," he said with just the right amount of masculine, offhand insensitivity. "I'm taking you out tonight and I want you to look as nice as possible. Hurry up, there's a good girl. The foam doesn't last indefinitely, and like all very high-class beauty treatments, it's expensive. Undress in the bedroom, put on your gown, and come along."

"Very well, dear." She began to descend while he turned and shook the contents of the sachet into the water. The crystals, smelling strongly of roses, floated on the tide and then when he turned the water on hard, they began to dissolve into thousands of iridescent bubbles. The bubbles grew into a fragrant feathery mass which obscured the bottom of the bath and overflowed the porcelain sides of the tub.

It was perfect.

He opened the door to call to her and just then she appeared. She came shrinking in, her blue dressing gown strained round her thin body, her hair thrust into an unbecoming bathing cap.

"Oh, Ronald!" she said staring at the display. "Won't it make an awful mess? Goodness! All over the floor!"

Her hesitation infuriated him.

"That won't matter," he said savagely. "You get in while the foam is still there. Hurry. Meanwhile I'll go and change myself. Get in, and lie down. It'll take the sallowness out of your skin."

He went out and paused, listening. She locked the door as he had known she would. The habits of a lifetime do not change with marriage. He heard the bolt slide home and forced himself to walk slowly.

He gave her sixty seconds—thirty to take off her things and thirty to hesitate on the brink of the rosy mass.

"How is it?" he shouted from the linen cupboard.

She did not answer at once and the sweat broke out on his forehead. Then he heard her.

"I don't know yet. I'm only just in. It smells lovely."

He did not wait for the final word; his hand wrapped in his handkerchief had found the main switch.

"One, two . . . three," he said with horrible prosaicism—and pulled.

From the wall socket behind him there was a single spluttering flare as the fuse went, and then silence.

All round Ronald it was so quiet that he could hear the pulses in his own body, and he could hear no sound at all from the bathroom.

After a while he crept back along the passage and tapped at the door. "Edyth? Are you there? Edyth?"

There was no response, no sound.

"Edyth?" he said again.

The silence was complete, and after a long minute he straightened his back and let out a deep sighing breath of relief.

Almost at once he was keyed up again in preparation for the second phase. As he well knew, this next was the tricky period. The discovery of the body must be made, but not too soon. He had made that mistake after Dorothy's "accident" and had actually been asked by the local police inspector why he had become alarmed so soon; but he had kept his head that time, and the dangerous moment had passed.

This time he had decided to wait half an hour before he began to hammer loudly on the door, then to shout for a neighbor, and finally to force the lock. He had planned to stroll out to buy an evening paper, shouting his intention to do so to Edyth from the front step for any passer-by to hear; but as he walked back along the landing he knew there was something else he must do first.

Edyth's leather writing case in which she kept all her private papers was in the bottom of her hatbox. She had really believed he had not known of its existence, he reflected bitterly.

He went softly into the bedroom and opened the wardrobe door. The

case was exactly where he had last seen it, plump and promising, and his hands closed over it gratefully. There were bundles of savings certificates, one or two thick envelopes whose red seals suggested the offices of lawyers, and, on top, ready for the taking, one of those familiar gray books which the Post Office issues to its savings-bank clients.

He opened it with shaking fingers and fluttered through the pages. The sum made him whistle. £7250! Then a drop as she had drawn out £50 for her trousseau.

£7200. He thought that was the final entry but on turning the page saw that there was one more recorded transaction. It was less than a week old. He remembered the book coming back through the mail and how clever she had thought she had been smuggling it in.

He glanced at the written words and figures idly at first, but then, as his heart jolted in sudden panic, stared at them, his eyes prominent and glazed.

She had taken almost all of it out. There it was in black and white: *September 4th: Withdrawal seven thousand one hundred and ninety-eight pounds.*

His first thought was that the money must still be there, in hundred-pound notes perhaps, in one of the envelopes. He tore through them hastily, forgetting all caution in his anxiety. Papers, letters, certificates fell on the floor in confusion.

The envelope, addressed to himself, pulled him up short. It was new and freshly blotted, the name inscribed in Edyth's own unexpectedly firm hand—*Ronald Torbay, Esquire.*

He wrenched it open and stared at the single sheet of bond paper within. The date, he noted in horrified amazement, was only two days old.

Dear Ronald:

If you ever get this I am afraid it will prove a dreadful shock to you. For a long time I have been hoping that it might not be necessary to write it, but now your behavior has forced me to face some very unpleasant possibilities.

I am afraid, Ronald, that in some ways you are very old-fashioned. Has it not occurred to you that any homely, middle-aged woman who has been swept into a hasty marriage to a stranger must, unless she is a perfect idiot, be just a little suspicious on the subject of *baths*?

You must know that I am a dedicated newspaper reader, and after reading about two women who had met with fatal accidents in bubble baths soon after their marriages, I rather began to wonder.

Frankly, I did not want to suspect you because for a long time I thought I was in love with you; but when you persuaded me to make my will on our wedding day, I could not help wondering. And then as soon as you started fussing about the bathroom in this house, I thought I had better do something about it rather quickly. I am old-fashioned, too, Ronald, so I went to the police.

Have you noticed that the people who have moved into the house next door have never tried to speak to you? We thought it best that I should merely talk to the woman over the garden wall, and it is she who looked up the newspaper items I told her about. She even went a little further and found some cuttings from local provincial newspapers, each of which contained a press snapshot of the husband taken at the funeral.

They are not very clear, but even so, as soon as I saw them I realized it was my duty to agree to the course suggested to me by the Inspector. He told me that he had been looking for a man answering that description for over three years, ever since the two photographs were brought to his notice by your poor second wife's brother.

What I am trying to say is this: if you should ever lose me, Ronald—out of the bathroom, I mean—you will find that I have gone out over the roof and am sitting in my dressing gown in the kitchen next door. I was a fool to marry you, but not quite such a fool as you assumed. Women may be silly but they are not so stupid as they used to be. We are picking up the idea, Ronald.

Yours,  
Edyth

P.S. On reading this I see that in my nervousness I have forgotten to say that the new people next door are not a married couple but Inspector Batsford of the C.I.D. and his assistant, Policewoman Richards. They assure me that there cannot be sufficient evidence to convict if you are not permitted to attempt the crime again. That is why I am forcing myself to be brave and play my part, for I am very sorry for those other poor wives of yours, Ronald. They must have found you as fascinating as I did.

With his slit mouth twisted into an abominable O, Ronald Torbay raised haggard eyes from the letter.

The house was quiet, and even the whine of the mower next door had ceased. In the hush he heard a sudden clatter as the back door burst open and heavy footsteps raced through the hall, up the stairs toward him.

## FOR DISCUSSION: Bubble Bath No. 3

1. Ronald Torbay had an unusual *modus operandi*. How did he establish the setting during the weeks preceding the planned murder? How did he plan to commit the murder? How did this fact (that he had an M.O.) lead to his discovery?
2. Unlike Joe Shupe in "The Green Elephant," Torbay is a sophisticated, experienced criminal. Find within the text of the story the following items:
  - a. three things Torbay said or did that prove premeditation;
  - b. three things Torbay said or did that prove his efficiency with regard to detail;
  - c. three things Torbay said or did that turned out to be mistakes.In light of your answers, would you consider Torbay a "successful" criminal? Explain.
3. Usually the suspense in a mystery story comes from the reader's struggle to identify the criminal. How does Allingham create suspense even though she starts off by telling us that the main character is a murderer?
4. Edyth wrote: "Women may be silly but they are not so stupid as they used to be. We are picking up the idea, Ronald." What exactly did Edyth mean? What skills and abilities were available to her that would not have been available to a woman even a century ago?

## INTRODUCTION: A Very Special Talent

Accidents can happen. In fact, accidents *do* happen all the time in this very human world. Someone leaves a basket at the top of a flight of stairs, or pours some leftover lye into an old, no-longer-used salt shaker, or neglects to mention that the steering wheel of the family car has turned uncooperative, especially on hairpin turns. Most of the mishaps that result are real accidents—and therefore tragic. But a few of them are not accidents at all.

Everyone knows that there are some unpleasant people one cannot warn; to them, a warning is a challenge. Is it wrong—is it criminal—to exploit that weakness to destroy them, or are they really destroying themselves? The answer demands rational analysis, not rationalization; but since rationalization is part of almost every human's mental equipment, it is difficult to answer the question honestly.

## A Very Special Talent

Margaret E. Brown

"But he used to hit me," Angela explained, rubbing her shoulder in memory of past bruises. "What else could I do?"

"You could have divorced him," I said firmly.

"He wouldn't let me. You know what the grounds for divorce were in this state then. Don't you care that he beat me?"

Of course it enraged me that that brute had hit my lovely, fragile-looking wife, even if it had been before I'd met her. "Nevertheless," I said, "it's the principle of the thing. It just isn't done."

"It was his own fault," she insisted. "I told him it was dangerous to have the radio that close to the bathtub when he'd been drinking, but that was like waving a red flag at a bull. He would have done it then or died."

She giggled suddenly, remembering that he had, indeed, died.

I was appalled. What does a man do when, after seven blissful years of marriage and two lovely children, he discovers that his adorable little fluff of a wife is a cold-blooded murderess who goes around killing people who aren't nice to her?

"I am *not* a cold-blooded murderess," Angela flared indignantly, "and I

