

# **Relentless: The Search For Typhoid Mary**

## **Part I – Discovery**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **Peach Ice Cream**

Who could ever have foreseen that the George Townsend House would be the epicenter for the solution of one of the world's great medical mysteries? That house, located near the southern tip of Long Island in Oyster Bay, New York was, for want of a better description, gracious. From its large central chimney with four distinct flues - that guaranteed heat throughout the cold, damp winters - to its multiple steeply slanting roofs, expansive porches, sloping lawns and ancient trees, it spoke of wealth, comfort and grace at a glance. Built in 1885, it combined a first story of red brick and second and third stories of wood that had been painted a rich enamel gray. Striped canvas awnings extended the porches, providing shade during the hot, muggy summer months.

A long drive curled up the hill from Prospect Street at the top of which the house sat like the featured piece in a Victorian novel. The drive rounded the barn that had once provided shelter for carriages and horses and now served as a garage for the horseless carriages that more and more were the transportation of choice for the wealthy tenants who summered at the house. Maple, oak and linden trees lined the drive and sheltered the house from the worst of the muggy summer heat. From the house Oyster Bay Harbor itself could be seen and beyond the bay Long Island Sound glittered in the brilliant sunshine.

The occupants of the house could walk to the beach, followed by their servants carrying picnic baskets, blankets, towels and the umbrellas that sheltered them from the relentless summer sun. The house was perfectly positioned for New York's wealthy seeking escape from the cholera-riddled city in the summer months.

The Townsend House kitchen was large and white. Its floors were covered with linoleum tiles. Linoleum, which had been invented in 1860, was considered a state of the art floor covering. The installation of this revolutionary floor covering made the house even more

attractive to the wealthy summer tenants. The tiles were white - like the kitchen - and inlaid with a popular pattern of small black squares at each of the corners of the larger squares which had been set side by side and end to end.

There were two large sinks in the kitchen, one for washing vegetables and one for washing dishes. Between the two sinks were wooden areas, slanted for draining. The stove was coal burning and large enough for a restaurant. It radiated heat that made the kitchen almost unbearable during the heat waves of summer. In the center of the kitchen was a large cutting table made of gray marble slab. Cabinets for dried and canned foods, herbs and spices, lined the wall opposite the sinks. A small room off the kitchen contained stacks of pots, pans, coffee grinders and general cooking equipment in sufficient numbers to prepare parties for up to 100.

At the far end of the kitchen, away from the working end, was a long table for a staff of between six and twelve. Dishes and cutlery for the staff were kept in tall cabinets that lined the far wall. Dishes for the family and guests were kept in the pantry, a room between the kitchen and the dining area. The pantry had its own sink and access to such luxuries as butterball, melon scoops and the crystal dishes in which fresh celery and olives were served.

Off the pantry was a cutting room with its own door leading to the outside of the house. In the cutting room Onofrio, the gardener, would leave buckets of fresh cut flowers for the mistress of the house to arrange in a collection of vases. Fresh flower were regularly distributed throughout the house by the various maids who oversaw the different areas of the house. Onofrio also left baskets of fresh vegetables from the gardens for the cook which, because the room had its own entrance, he could do without tracking mud into the kitchen.

A long passage that led to the laundry room at the end of the house completed the servant's area of the house. The laundry had been placed at a distance from the kitchen because its steaming vats of simmering starch in combination with its giant, steam driven mangles created their own heat and, in combination with the cast iron coal stove in the kitchen, would have driven the staff to insurrection during the dog days of summer.

Across the hall from the laundry was the servant's toilet, which had taken the place of a very small closet, once used for coats in winter. The fact that the Townsend House boasted indoor plumbing had been the selling point for the Charles Henry Warren family, which had rented the house for the summer. Doris Warren had been adamant. She insisted that she would never again rent a house in which she would be subjected to the foul odors and inconvenience of an outhouse, even if the family privy was separate from the one used by the help. The General, a

banker who could afford to cosset his much adored bride of ten years - as he liked to refer to her - had been delighted to indulge her with the gift of the Townsend House. It was a perfect summer establishment, close enough to the city- in case business required his attendance in the office - far enough away to provide a haven for his wife and children.

The crowning glory of the house was its proximity to Sagamore Hill. The summer White House of Theodore Roosevelt, 26<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, and his family. The General and his wife were invited to dine with the Roosevelts on occasion, as were other well-positioned families in the area.

On this day in early August, Mary Mallon, who had recently been hired to replace the Warren's regular cook - who had inconveniently developed appendicitis and was recovering from complications of surgery - was preparing her signature dish of peach ice cream, designed to justify Mrs. Warren's choice of her as a summer replacement. Mary believed that half of her sterling recommendations were the result of peach ice cream. To cement her position in the household even more firmly, Mary had invited the two Warren children to help in the preparation of this much admired rarity. Mary had discovered - during her years as a cook for the wealthiest families of New York - that the sure path to acceptance lay in the children.

She was, in fact, a rather intimidating woman; tall, broad in her body, extremely strong and apt to move more like a man than a woman in a society that prized the simpering steps of femininity. Her only attractive features were her eyes, crystal blue and shining with intelligence.

Set out on the table was an ice cream machine comprised of a bucket with a large bowl in it that could be turned with a crank. A smaller bowl of peeled and sliced peaches sat waiting to be mashed in the ice cream machine's inner bowl together with four large brown eggs. The wire potato masher, which would be used for mashing and mixing, rested beside the eggs.

The children's wide eyes followed Mary as she carried the ice cream machine's bucket to the vegetable sink where a large block of ice could be seen glistening in the warm summer air. They stared in awe as she took an ice pick in her large, strong hand and attacked the block, stabbing at it so that chips, large and small, flew into the sink around it. Twice she stopped chipping and handed a small wedge of ice to each of the children to suck on as a treat. When she judged there were enough chips, she stopped the attack on the ice, and scooped up the frozen water with her hands and dumped the chips into the bucket.

"Is it the ice that turns the cream to ice cream, Mary?" Abigail asked her voice breathless with awe.

"Of course it is, that's why they call it 'ice cream,' silly bean," Constance informed her younger sibling. Constance was at an age where she knew everything and her voice was thick with superiority. Abigail made a face as if to say that she had only been making conversation. If she had dared stick out her tongue she would have. Constance regularly used her two years seniority to great advantage with Abigail much to her younger sister's great consternation.

"Mind you, you don't add the ice to the cream. You just cool the cream with the ice until it thickens in a certain way," Mary instructed, ignoring the atmosphere of disagreement between the two children. "It's quite a miracle. Without the ice it would just turn to whipped cream or butter."

"Where did the ice come from?" Abigail asked.

"Well now, there's a great ice house on the grounds. I suppose they'll be bringin' the blocks in from some big river, like the Hudson, durin' the winter. They store it in straw and then use it all through the summer for cold drinks and the like. It's a great luxury," Mary's strong Irish brogue and Gaelic rhythms punctuated her speech like a song.

"We almost never have it," Constance mused, her voice dreamy with expectation of the treat.

Mary smiled knowingly as she drew the bowl with the peaches toward her and picked up the potato masher. "There's undoubtedly a very good reason why the good Lord made the things that taste the best, take the longest to prepare. Perhaps so we wouldn't ever be tempted forget that we're eatin' something special.

"Would you like to take turns mashin' the peaches?" she asked, as she demonstrated the way to mash the fruit. Both children nodded enthusiastically. Mary handed the bowl and masher to Constance, "You first Miss Constance."

It was at this moment that Doris Warren, in her soft flowing white-flowered gown with its Lego' mutton sleeves, pinched waist and high bustle chose to make her appearance in the kitchen. The antithesis of Mary, Mr. Warren's bride wore her soft brown hair piled high with gentle ringlets cascading down her narrow back. She was a walking statement of the hours it took to scrub her grass stained hems, lace her into her breath restricting corsets and coif her ringlets to perfection.

"Don't let the children bother you Mary," she drawled, her perfect English spoken with the clenched jaw that symbolized all the restrictions of the upper class.

"Children never bother me, Mrs. Warren. I've a spot for them and that's a fact," Mary smiled. She stood almost a foot taller and at least that much wider than the diminutive Doris Warren and might have seemed threatening in other circumstances.

"Do you have children of your own?" asked the ever-inquisitive Abigail.

"I had a daughter, once." Mary replied, a cloud dimming the brilliance of her startlingly blue eyes.

"Where is your daughter now?" Abigail asked.

"Miss Abigail, are you big enough to go to the ice chest and get the pitcher of cream all by yourself?" Mary asked, diverting the child from what threatened to become an uncomfortable conversation.

"Oh yes. Thank you, Mary," Abigail said, dimpling with happiness.

"Where is your daughter Mary?" Constance pursued, not satisfied with the change of subject.

"Constance," Doris chided. "Prying into other people's personal lives is bad manners."

"I was just..."

Doris fixed her with an angry stare and Constance backed down.

"I'll be needin' the sugar jar, Miss Constance, " Mary said after enough time had passed so that it wouldn't appear as if she was undermining her employer. "Would you be able to be findin' it for me?"

"I know just where it is, Mary," Constance replied, putting down the potato masher and dashing off to the shelf where the sugar jar was stored.

"If they get to be too much Mary, just send them to Nanny. Though I must say, she's appreciative for a little time to herself now that you're here," Doris Warren said, taking advantage of the girl's absence. "We're so grateful that you could come to help us on such short notice."

"It's my pleasure Mrs. Warren," Mary replied.

They were able to exchange only those few words before the girls returned, racing each other to be the first to bring the treasures they had been sent to find.

"Don't bump your sister, Constance," Doris Warren scolded.

Constance deflected the reprimand by instigating a happy chant, "We're making ice-cream, we're making ice-cream..."

"This is such a treat for them. Thank you for letting them help, Mary," Doris said gazing at her oldest daughter with a knowing eye.

"I enjoy havin' 'em in the kitchen and that's a fact," Mary replied, her horsey face splitting into a wide grin. "Thank you Miss Constance. Now I'll be needin' the measuring cups. Miss Abigail, you didn't spill a drop."

"I was very careful," Abigail said, pride filling her voice.

"So I see. Would you like to have a turn mashin' the peaches now?" Mary asked.

"Oh, yes please," Abigail said happily.

"Here are the measuring cups," Constance announced dragging attention back to herself.

"Thank you, Miss Constance."

The girls settled down to taking turns with the masher.

Minutes passed until Mary said, "That's fine now, Miss Abigail. Lets be settin' the peaches on the ice." Mary took the bowl and the potato masher from Abigail, banged the masher against the rim of the bowl to rid it of any remaining chunks of peach, and placed the bowl in the bucket of ice. "Miss Constance would you be wantin' to measure half a cup a sugar and pour it over the peaches while I separate the eggs?"

"Yes please," Constance said. She carefully poured the sugar until it reached the top of the half cup, then she transferred it slowly to the peaches.

Meanwhile, Mary removed the eggs from the bowl, cracked one, pried it into two halves and, tipped the yolk back and forth between the shells allowing the white slide into an empty bowl she had set aside for that purpose. When the yolk was free of white, she dumped them onto the peaches. She repeated this process three more times to the wide-eyed approval of both children.

"This is called separatin' the eggs," she explained. "We'll just keep the whites separate and I'll make you a meringue to eat with the ice cream later on. The recipe calls for yolks only."

"Can we help with the meringue too?" Abigail asked.

"We'll see if you want to after all the stirrin' you're going to do. Meringue takes a great deal of stirrin' and beatin' as well. Now Miss Abigail, please pour the cream over the peaches," Mary instructed. "Miss Constance you may take this fork and pop the egg yolks."

When the cream had been added and the egg yolks popped, Mary fitted the lid of the ice cream machine in place and the clamped the bucket to the side of the table.

"Now let's see who is goin' to turn first? Miss Abigail I think it will be you because Miss Constance was the first to mash the peaches. You'll turn twenty times and then it will be Miss Constance's turn." Constance opened her mouth as if to protest. "Now don't be frettin', Miss Constance. You'll each have so many turns at the crank before we're through you'll never be wantin' to make ice cream again."

"I'll want to make ice cream every day," Abigail smiled as she pushed against the crank. It was difficult at first because the ice then hardened against the bowl. Mary had to help Abigail get started but once the bowl was spinning the crank moved easily and the child had no trouble turning it.

"One, two, three... Keep it turnin' Miss Abigail; you don't want to let it rest. If you let the cream rest, it might turn into somethin' all together different from what you expected."

"Like what?" Abigail asked, laughter coloring her voice.

"Oh, like liquorice stew, or hot cross buns," Mary smiled.

"No it wouldn't," Constance said derisively.

"Twelve, thirteen... Keep turnin', Miss Abigail. That's a girl," Mary said.

Doris Warren slipped out of the kitchen and let herself into the flower room where fresh cut flowers and greens stood in buckets waiting for her to arrange them. She smiled happily as she busied herself with a chore she truly enjoyed. The joyful sounds of her children added to her satisfaction. It was truly a memorable afternoon.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Wonderful Summer**

Summer passed with a joyful similarity of days. Although there were a sufficient number of marvelous moments to last them through the dark and cold of winter, the spectacular evening of the peach ice cream was outstanding in everyone's mind.

"We helped cook it," Abigail announced to her father, pride reflected in every part of her being.

"And we helped make the meringue even though Mary didn't think we would want to after we cooked the ice cream for so long," Constance added.

"I didn't know you cook ice cream," General Warren mused, delighting in the girls' pride and excitement.

"Well, you don't really. You put it in ice and you stir it for ages until it gets thick. Mary says that if you only let the cream sit in the ice, without stirring it all the time, it will become liquorice stew but I don't believe her," Abigail giggled.

The children watched with high concern as the General dipped his spoon into the pale dessert with its flecks of peach. They didn't relax until he groaned with pleasure.

"This is the best dessert I have ever tasted in my entire life," he announced. And with that, Doris and the children dug into their own delicious mounds exclaiming, with deepest satisfaction, pure enjoyment of the miracle that had been created out of mashed peaches, cream, sugar and ice.

For the rest of their time in Oyster Bay the family stuck to a fairly rigid routine. The General felt that routine had a stabilizing influence on the girls and insisted that the days be scheduled even if they were on vacation. Each morning at precisely ten, the family strolled along the side walk that wound through the village, children in tow. Doris delighted in showing off her flowing morning finery. Every day she sported new and magnificent hats bearing fruits and feathers to match the colors of the acres of material that had gone into her gowns and matching parasols as befitted the wife of one of New York's important bankers. The General - who sported a fashionable handlebar moustache - wore his cutaway morning coat, with a high-buttoned waistcoat over a high-collared shirt all this above his creased fly-front trousers and highly polished leather boots. As they walked, the General tipped his top hat in formal greeting to the other males of his class who took their own morning constitutionals with their own families. They were trailed by servants who would carry whatever shopping Doris might be inclined to do. For her part she laved her gloved hand through the General's arm and held her parasol against the summer sun to protect her delicate skin.

On occasion they stopped in the park that surrounded the Derby-Hall Bandstand so that the children could meet and play with summer friends some of whom they already knew from the City. The girls played on the swings, the merry go round, slides and seesaws. They engaged in endless games of tag, skipped rope and chased hoops that the servants had brought with them.

While the children played under the watchful eyes of their nannies, the parents sipped tea at the soda fountain at nearby Snouder's Drug Store - the only place in all of Oyster Bay that boasted a telephone. Even President Roosevelt did not have a telephone either at the Summer White House at Saganaw Hill or at his offices on the second floor of Moore House. Snouder's son Arthur had the important task of delivering messages from Washington whenever they arrived. Because of the phone, Snouder's was the most frequented gathering place for the summer businessmen and their wives. While the women gossiped about the new fashions from Paris, the men discussed whatever news had filtered in from the City via the Oyster Bay Guardian or the day-old New York Times.

In the afternoons, the family went bathing together at the nearby beach. In their bathing costumes and robes they marched down the hill to the bay, once again followed by several servants carrying an incredible amount of paraphernalia required for bathing as they called it. Doris and the girls wore black, knee-length, wool bathing dresses with puffed sleeves each of which featured a white trimmed sailor collar. The dresses were worn over bloomers trimmed with ribbons and bows which in turn were worn over long black stockings and lace-up bathing slippers. The outfits were topped off with fancy mop caps to protect their hair. Doris carried a parasol to protect her skin even when cooling herself in the water. Pale skin was the mark of her class and she valued it as much as she valued her clothing.

The General was covered in black wool as well. His outfit was more along the lines of a long sleeve T-shirt and tights that ended in stockings and his own bathing slippers. The family was grateful for the calm waters of the bay which allowed them to enjoy the cool water without the threat of being knocked over by waves or pulled under by their clothing. The Atlantic side of Long Island with its constant waves was considered too rough for the women.

While the servants set up chairs and umbrellas and set out snacks for the children, the family watched the local people who came out to the beaches to dig for clams. Like most of the summer visitors, the Warrens were particularly intrigued by the weather beaten Indian woman who lived in a tiny cabin on the beach. It was from her that the Warrens had bought a bucket of clams in the middle of July for a magnificent feast of oyster stew and whenever they saw her they talked about having clams again before they departed for the city at the end of August.

"I don't like clams," Constance insisted, arranging her face in a scowl that indicated a battle over dinner.

"Don't worry darling, I promised you that we wouldn't eat them raw ever again. We'll give them to Mary and she will make us steamed clams that you will love almost as much as you enjoyed that stew we had in July," Doris soothed, trying to keep the laughter off her face as she remembered the first and only time Constance had tried raw clams.

"I don't like steamed clams either," Constance said, stamping her foot.

"Well then Mary will make you something you do like. Mommy and Daddy will eat the clams and you can eat them when you're older and have a more refined taste," Doris replied, ignoring the look on Constance's face that bespoke a wrestling match between her assumed dislike of clams and her desire to be old enough to eat them.

"I like clams," Abigail piped in, sealing the argument for Constance. She would eat the clams even if they made her sick.

But they never did get around to buying them, although in late August Doris had planned to have company over for that clam dinner and had asked the General whether to invite the Morris family as well as the Sinclaires over to join them.

Most evenings the family would play 20 questions and sing popular songs around the spinet that Doris Warren played so well. They read poetry, taking turns guessing the poet, or simply listened to Doris Warren read from the books they found at the People's Library and Reading Room on East Main Street. As she read, the children drew pictures or cut out clothing for paper dolls.

On Sundays they attended the Christ Church of Oyster Bay which was the house of worship that the Roosevelts also attended. Mary and the rest of the staff went to services at St. Dominic's Church and Chapel, which boasted a magnificent original pipe organ that was the pride of the congregation. It was an American made Hook and Hastings Opus Tracker organ one of only three of its kind in all of America the congregation boasted. But, although the staff was inordinately proud of the church pipe organ, they never mentioned its existence inside the house fearing that the family might take exception to their conceit.

On a sunny Saturday, two weeks before they were scheduled to return to New York to take up their winter lives, the Warren family gathered for a professional photograph on the front porch of the large house. Doris was dressed in her finest lavender gingham gown, a hat with orioles and cherries perched atop her pile of curled hair and a lavender parasol. The children wore matching frocks with large lace trimmed collars, and the General was in his finest black

suit with his high starched collar, his black high top perched at an angle atop his head, his handlebar moustache carefully waxed into quarter-size curls.

The photographer brought a large box camera which he set up on a tripod. The family was assembled. Doris sat in a rocker with Abigail on her knee and Constance standing beside her. The General posed just behind, all of them smiling his contentment. The photographer pulled a dark cloth over his head and the view finder. He held a tray of flash powder high in the air to light the scene for the photograph. When the picture was properly centered, he squeezed the bulb that set off the flash powder and simultaneously took the photograph. This process was repeated numerous times to assure that the family had at least one perfect picture as a memory of their perfect summer.

It was the night of August 27<sup>th</sup> that typhoid struck Constance. By September 3<sup>rd</sup> it had taken Onofrio, Irene - the downstairs maid, Tom - the footman, Hatti - the laundress, Abigail and finally the exhausted Doris - who had spent the early part of the week nursing her children.

Mary knew exactly what to do. She had seen typhoid more times than she cared to remember. Most of the time it just made people sick in varying degrees. Sometimes it was fatal. She knew that she should bathe the children in tepid water to keep their fevers down. She knew that she should make them drink cool water to keep them hydrated. She knew enough to watch those who were not yet sick carefully to make certain that they were cared for early in the development of the disease. She hurried from patient to patient bringing them water and sponging their pain wracked bodies.

On the night that Doris contracted the disease she had been nursing Abigail and Constance who were lying in separate beds both deathly ill. Doris had relieved Mary of the task of sponging Constance so that she could attend to the members of the staff who had been stricken. Without warning blood seeped from Doris' nose. Without realizing that she was bleeding, she wiped the viscous fluid, smearing the blood across her face, just as Mary came into the room carrying a fresh pitcher of ice water.

"Here we are, Mrs. Warren. We'll just get a little more fluid in them. It's good for bringin' down the fe--. Oh look, she's got the rose spots on her belly. She'll be all right now," Mary said, turning and looking at Doris for the first time. "Oh, dear God, Mrs. Warren, you'd better come and lie down."

"I'm fine, Mary," Doris Warren said, her voice reflecting the exhaustion she felt.

"No you're not, Mrs. Warren. You're as sick as your daughters. And if you don't lie down you might even die. I know this sickness. You have to respect it, or certainly it will do you in." Doris did not protest as Mary helped her to her feet and half carried her to her bedroom.

"Come along now, Mrs. Warren. I'll take care of the little ones, never you worry. I'm very good at this. I've had a lot of practice," Mary said, reassuring Doris Warren even as she took control of the household.

When they reached the Warren bedroom, Doris swayed on her feet, seemingly unable to figure out what to do next.

"Will ya' be wantin' some help with getting in your night clothes, Mrs. Warren?" Mary asked, pouring some water into the bowl on the night stand, rinsing off a rag and cleaning Doris Warren's face.

"What's the matter, Mary?" the General asked from the doorway. He had heard Mary's voice in the hallway and hurried upstairs to see what was happening.

"Mrs. Warren has become sick, General," Mary said through tightly compressed lips. "Do you mind if I help her change into her night clothes?"

"No, I'd be grateful. Is there something I can do to help?" the General asked.

"You'd best be protectin' yourself General," Mary said.

"I've had typhoid," the General replied. "I won't get it again."

"Well then, I brought some water up for the children," Mary replied. "If you'd encourage 'em to drink a glass that would be good for them. I'll call you when I have gotten Mrs. Warren in bed. We'll be needing to get her to drink water too."

It was a terrible time. Mary lovingly cared for the children, nursed Doris Warren, cared for Onofrio, Irene, Tom and Hatti. Mrs. Townsend, the owner of the house, came to supervise the care of Onofrio - who, for several days stood at death's door. In those intense days Mary did not sleep in her bed once. When she was not sponging, spoon feeding or cleaning up after her patients, she sat in a chair in the children's room soothing and comforting them. She was there as Abigail began to show the signs of having turned the corner developing her own rosy rash that proclaimed the turning point of the infection. But even on the road to recovery the children remained very sick.

Toward the last days of their illness Mary hardly dared to sit, so profound was her exhaustion. She was afraid that she would fall asleep and miss a moment when the children

needed her. But on the morning that Abigail finally awoke from her fevered torpor Mary had succumbed to her exhaustion and sat snoring in her rocking chair.

"Mary?" Abigail said her small child's voice filled at the wonder of finding Mary asleep in the chair.

"Good mornin', darlin'. You're feeling better I see," Mary said, squinting at the child through eyes that still burned with exhaustion.

"I'm hungry," Abigail announced.

"Me too, Mary," Constance joined in, awakening at the sound of her sister's voice.

"I'll make you some eggs," Mary said, smiling at the certainty that the children were now on the road to recovery.

"And bacon," Abigail said.

"And bacon," Mary replied.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Without Cause**

It was the kind of wet, cold and windy winter day that chilled New Yorkers to the bone. The streets of lower Manhattan were crowded and treacherous. Unmelted, slush mixed with the filth of hundreds of horses that pulled carts and carriages that kept the city's commerce alive. The mixture had covered the roads with a slippery brown mush with an underpinning of ice where water had pooled during a recent warm spell.

The street was crowded with people on foot competing for space with carriages, trolleys and carts. Occasionally backfiring, from the impurities of the gas that fueled an increasing number of automobiles, caused a ruckus with the horses when they passed through, exploding like gun shots with magnified echoes as the sound ricocheted against the brick buildings that lined each street.

Esther Townsend, a genteel, slender, dignified septuagenarian, as dry and wrinkled as an old apple doll, dressed in fur-trimmed black, picked her way across the street after debarking from a Hansom Cab. Her objective was a massive brick structure which pronounced itself "The New York Department of Health" in gold leaf above the door.

On entering, she stamped the collection of snow and horse droppings that marred her laced boots and walked purposefully to the section of the wall marked "Office Directory". George Soper, Ph.D.'s office was listed on the fifth floor. Esther Townsend eyed the new fangled Otis elevator with apprehension. She had read in the paper that the device was safe. Obviously hundreds of people used it every day, but she had never ridden in an elevator and the thought of standing in a moving cab, with a drop of five stories below her, made her nervous. She was a country mouse.

The elevator bell rang and a voice called out, "Going up." If an elevator operator could spend days going up and down in perfect safety, she thought derisively, I certainly can go up and down once. Stiffening her spine and thrusting her shoulders back, she stepped resolutely into the tiny box and watched as the operator closed first the outer door and then the inner mesh. He moved the handle, imbedded in a brass box, to the right. Slowly the elevator rose as Ester Townsend's heart beat rapidly against her ribs and her breath came in short stabs that betrayed her fear.

"Floor please?" The uniformed operator asked impersonally, keeping his eyes forward toward the door.

"Five," Ester Townsend replied, her own eyes riveted to the front of the cab as she watched the steel framework of the building pass by on the other side of the mesh door. Despite her terror, the elevator rose slowly and smoothly past one floor after another without a hitch.

"Fifth Floor," the operator announced, swinging the handle to a center position on the brass box. The cab of the elevator stopped and bounced perceptibly. Esther Townsend felt a rush of adrenalin course through her circulatory system, which caused her knees to feel weak and slightly electric. She breathed deeply and stepped quickly from the elevator.

"Thank you," she said to the elevator operator.

"Ma'm," he replied, tipping his hat politely.

Mrs. Townsend moved deliberately down the corridor, reading the numbers and names painted in gold leaf on the glass windows of the doors that led into the many waiting areas on the fifth floor. Finally she found what she was looking for, opened the door and stepped in.

The office was paneled in dark brown wood. The furniture well used, institutional and also made of wood. In the late afternoon, gas lamps brightened the room even though it was still daylight.

Elihue Brown, George Soper's secretary, dressed in the standard wool suit of the office worker, stood and greeted Esther Townsend with a business like, "May I help you?"

"I am Mrs. Townsend, Mrs. George Townsend. I have an appointment with Dr. Soper," Esther Townsend explained.

" Ah, yes, Mrs. Townsend. Won't you please have a seat? Dr. Soper will be back in a few minutes," Brown replied, gesturing to a high backed chair in the waiting area.

"Oh dear me," Mrs. Townsend replied, her voice a little fretful. "Isn't he here? I'm just a little worried about my return to the country, don't you know. It wouldn't do to be delayed. I came all the way from Oyster Bay, don't you see."

"A long trip," Brown commiserated. "They say it will be much quicker when the tunnel is finished."

"Oh my, yes. But I'm not certain about riding in a train under the water and all. Don't seem quite natural does it," she said, deciding in the moment that she should stay in a hotel over night and make the return voyage to Oyster Bay in the morning. Her eyes traveled around the office but found no distractions that could take her mind away from worrying about the long trip home. After a prolonged pause she said, "Is it true what they say in the paper?"

"Is what true, Mrs. Townsend?" Brown inquired politely.

"That the typhoid is brought on by Hudson River ice?" Mrs. Townsend replied.

Brown was about to reply when the door behind him opened and George Soper, a short, slender man with sunken cheeks and the penetrating look of a religious zealot, stepped into the room. George Soper, who sported a handsome drooping moustache, gave the impression that all his clothes had been freshly starched only that morning and that so much starch had been used that his clothes could never crinkle. From the tall stiff Arrow shirt collar, to the crease in his pants, his clothes looked as if they had just been ironed only minutes before he had walked in the room.

"Mrs. Townsend," he said, removing his gloves and offering his small narrow hand.

"George Soper."

"Dr. Soper," Mrs. Townsend said, smiling graciously.

"I apologize for having kept you waiting. Won't you come in?" He held open the door to his private office for Mrs. Townsend even as he spoke to his secretary. "Would you get us some cold water, Mr. Brown?"

"Certainly Doctor," Brown replied, his tone deferential.

Soper's office was not much more interesting than his waiting room. The noticeable difference, which Mrs. Townsend could recognize even after a cursory glance, was that it was stacked from floor to ceiling with book cases that contained hundreds of leather bound, weighty toms with titles in at least four languages.

"Chilly outside, isn't it?" Soper said, placing his homburg hat atop the coat wrack, unwrapping a scarf from his throat and removing and hanging his top coat. "May I take your coat Mrs. Townsend, you must be warm."

"Yes I am, rather," she said, smiling at him and turning her back so that he could remove her coat more easily.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come," said Soper.

Elihue Brown entered carrying a small tray on which stood two classes of ice water.

"Thank you Mr. Brown," Soper said, dismissively.

"Oyster Bay is even chillier, if I may say so. Very damp on the Sound. Gets my joints something fierce, don't you know," Esther Townsend prattled as she took the chair Dr. Soper had offered before settling in behind his own his desk. "I was reading in the paper that your department thought the Typhoid might come from Hudson River ice. Is that true?"

"We have a great many theories about the origins of typhoid, Mrs. Townsend. River ice, like all of them, is under investigation," Soper replied solemnly. "We believe river ice carries typhoid, but we are quite convinced that it is not the cause of the infection."

"How do you investigate it?" Esther Townsend asked. She wasn't simply making small talk, although she was very skilled at the art of conversation. She was indeed genuinely interested in the subject. It was what she had come to New York and this office to talk about.

"We take samples from the cut ice when it is brought ashore before we send it off for storing. Hudson River ice is used year round throughout the city and even in parts of Long Island, and Westchester County," Soper explained.

"Indeed, we have an ice house on our property," Esther Townsend said. "That's one of the reasons I was so interested. Do you test to make certain that stored ice does not contain typhoid?"

"Indeed we do. You wanted to talk about a typhoid epidemic, I believe," Soper said, ending the small talk.

"They say you're the world's leading authority on typhoid, Dr. Soper," Esther Townsend said, her voice turning from polite conversation to concern.

"If one can be an authority on a miserable illness that kills thousands of people every year, strikes without warning from no established direction and for which there is no known cure, then I suppose I am an expert," said Soper bitterly. "Although I doubt that I'm the world's leading authority."

"I heard you were at Ithaca and that you turned that epidemic around," Mrs. Townsend said gravely.

"Yes," Soper replied.

"...and the same in Watertown..."

"Indeed. My secretary, Mr. Brown, informed me that you had an epidemic in Oyster Bay."

"Last summer. Only a small one. One household," Mrs. Townsend replied, fidgeting nervously with her gloves. The subject obviously upset her.

"I don't regard any incident of typhoid as small, Mrs. Townsend. Last year alone this country lost twenty three thousand people to Typhoid Fever. When one considers that the bacillus kills only ten percent of those infected, one grasps the enormity of the problem."

Mrs. Townsend cut across his little speech, "The people in my house didn't die, Dr. Soper. They were terrible sick though. It's somethin' I never hope to see again."

"They weren't your family then?" Soper inquired.

"No, summer people who rented my house." She halted for a moment and then spoke in a rush of words that betrayed the terrible fear that had brought her to Soper's office. "I don't understand it, Dr. Soper. We don't get typhoid fever in Oyster Bay and certainly not in my house. My house is quite large, you see. I inherited it from my late husband, rest his soul. At one time I thought to sell it and invest the money. After Mr. Townsend passed, I couldn't handle the expense of running it, if the truth be known." She looked down at her gloved hands in slight embarrassment as she reached the end of her sentence

"...and the typhoid?" Soper prompted.

But Mrs. Townsend would not be distracted from the arc of her tale, "The summer that my husband passed was a bad year for real estate sales, but summer rentals have always been good in Oyster Bay. On the advice of my husband's lawyer, I leased the house to a fine young banker and his family. The rent more than met my needs for the whole year and I have been

renting it every summer since. I live on the income, don't you see. The house has turned out to be a God send.

"The wealthy of New York discovered Oyster Bay some years ago, don't you see. They come out to escape the heat of the city and enjoy Long Island Sound and the company of others like themselves. Of course the popularity of the place has increased mightily since Mr. Roosevelt was elected President and established his summer White House at Sagamore Hill. The house is my income, Dr. Soper. It's important..."

"And the typhoid?" Soper prompted once again. "You had typhoid in the house?"

"This summer past, I rented the house to General Charles Henry Warren and his family. Nice people, don't you know. He's a banker. He and his wife have two children. Lovely little girls, Abigail and Constance."

"The Warrens contracted typhoid?" Soper prompted again.

"They arrived with six in help. Onofrio, who takes care of the garden, comes with the place. He works year round for me. To tell you the truth I'd be lost without him."

"How many people in the household?" Soper asked, trying a different point of entry.

"Eleven in all. Fine people. Did I say the General was a Banker?"

"Yes, you told me that. Did they all contract the fever?"

"Six of the eleven were struck down including my Onofrio. It's a terrible disease, don't you know."

"Yes it is, but no one died?" Soper asked.

"Thank the Lord no, though we nearly lost Onofrio."

"Has this happened before?" Soper questioned.

"As I said, we don't get typhoid in Oyster Bay. I can't ever remember an outbreak of typhoid fever in all of the years I've live in the area, though it is located on the Sound so you might suppose we would get it from time to time," Mrs. Townsend replied.

"I can't say it's a story that I haven't heard a hundred times before," Soper said. "What was the cause of the outbreak?"

"That's just it," Mrs. Townsend replied. "There was no cause."

"There had to be a cause, Mrs. Townsend," Soper responded. "There's always a cause if you look closely enough. Who did the investigation?"

"The Oyster Bay Department of Health But, as I said, they didn't find anything. The authorities were ever so anxious, what with President Roosevelt and his family being in

residence just across the Bay and all, but they could find nothing that caused the problem. They found traces of the disease in the septic system, which they said they expected, but no cause of the origins disease. That's why I'm here."

"Why you're here?" Soper asked with increased interest.

"My house was the only house in Oyster Bay to be stricken last summer or indeed any summer that I know of. I've heard about typhoid houses..."

Soper cut her off, "Typhoid houses have a long history of typhoid not just one incident in one summer, Mrs. Townsend."

"My house is my livelihood, Dr. Soper. I cannot afford to lose that income. If people think it's a typhoid house and I can't prove it's not..."

"You're afraid people will blame the house?" Soper asked, cutting her off again.

"I'm afraid word will get around that my house is a typhoid house. I'm afraid no one will rent it next season. I asked my Dr. to tell me who was the most qualified typhoid expert in New York. He named you. Said that people call you 'the epidemics man.' Said that if anyone could find the cause of the outbreak it would be you. So I came all this way to ask you, if you would investigate the outbreak, Dr. Soper." Mrs. Townsend sat back in her chair and waited.

"It will be extremely difficult," Soper said at last.

"I am willing to pay," Mrs. Townsend replied.

"It's not a matter of money. The epidemic occurred more than six months ago. The trail will have grown cold," Soper mused, as if contemplating whether he could overcome the difficulties of the investigation.

"Do you think you could at least give my house a clean bill of health, Doctor? A clean bill of health from a man of your reputation would really mean something to people." It was her last argument, her final chance, as she saw it, to save her house and herself.

"I could probably do that," Soper said, nodding his head in agreement.

"Thank you Dr. Soper," Mrs. Townsend said, her wrinkled face breaking into a great smile of relief. "Thank you so very much."