

Extract of a radio drama written by Anthony Boucher who knew the Stewarts and respected George Stewart's work. Boucher wrote his friend into an episode of Gregory Hood. If Stewart, who loved radio, had been listening to the Mutual Broadcasting System on the night of August 26th, 1946, he would have encountered his father – or at least an actor playing his father – in “The Ghost Town Mortuary.” A young woman is kidnapped. She leaves a one-word message: “Difficult.” Private Investigator Gregory Hood invites an expert to help decipher the clue...

GREGORY:this place is handy for the one person who I think can help us on this case.

SANDY: And who is that person?

GREGORY: Professor George Stewart, of the University English Department.

MARY: Oh yes! He wrote “STORM” – a wonderful book.

GREGORY: True, but what is more to our immediate point is the fact that Random House recently published his new book: “NAMES ON THE LAND”. It's a classic and definitive study of American place-naming. His virtues are many. (WITH A CHUCKLE)

Including a fine sense of entering on cue. Here he is.

(RAISING HIS VOICE) Hello, George.

GEORGE R. STEWART: (CLEARANCE ARRANGED) (STRAIGHT AND CHARMING) How are you, Gregory?

GREGORY: Fine. Let me introduce you....

STEWART: I got your message, Greg, and it all sounds frightfully mysterious. What's your problem?

GREGORY: I'll skip the details. Briefly, the situation is this. A girl by the name of Kay Martin disappeared yesterday.

ALEX: I'm engaged to her, Professor Stewart.

STEWART: And she disappeared, you say? Dear me. Go on, Greg.

GREGORY: The only clue we have is this telegram. The young lady sent it just before she was seen to leave with an unknown man.

STEWART: May I see the telegram, Gregory?

GREGORY: Sure. Here. I decided the only (way) that the word "DIFFICULT" could make a message all by itself is if it were the name of a place.

MARY: Gregory, that's very clever of you. ...

GREGORY: I looked up "DIFFICULT" in the atlas, George, but I couldn't find a town of that name. So I thought you, being an expert on place names, might be able to help me. What's the verdict?

STEWART: Your hunch was right, Gregory. There is a tiny ghost town in the Sierras called DIFFICULT. It had a mining boom at the turn of the century, but it's been deserted now for forty years or more.

MARY: What an extraordinary name for a town, Professor.

STEWART: (CHUCKLING) It is odd, isn't it, Mrs. Taylor? The legend runs that when the town was originally named Washington D.C. rejected the choice and wrote to the authorities saying: "The name of your post office is difficult..." The local inhabitants took the phrase literally and called their town Difficult.

ALEX: Oh, I remember the place now. I used to work near there on vacations. I can guide you there, Mr. Hood.

GREGORY: Fine. We can fly up there in my Beechcraft, Alex. ... George, I'm very much obliged to you for your help.

STEWART: It was a pleasure, Gregory. I hope you find your girl.

GREGORY: So do we. In any case, George, there's one thing I do promise.

STEWART: What's that?

GREGORY: When next I find a town...I'll name it after you.