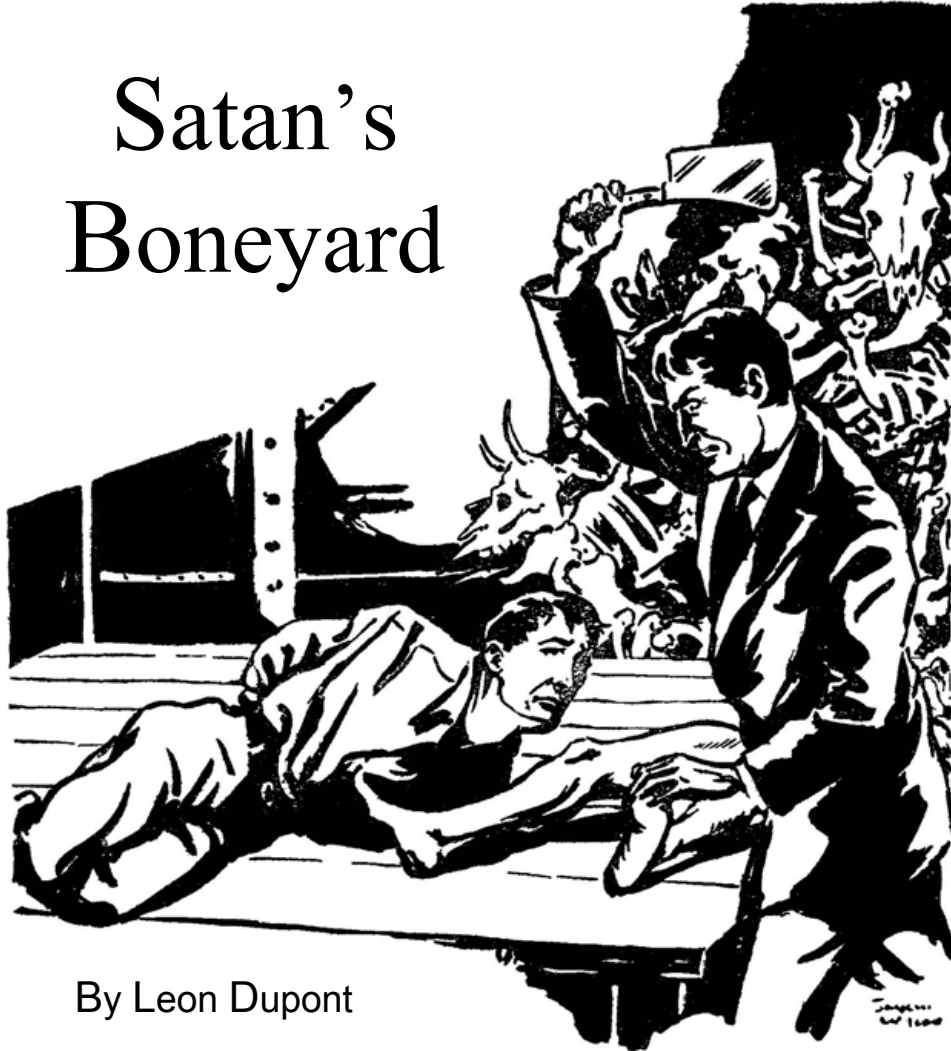


• Eerie

Detective Lanigan spent too much time watching a weird old watchman grinding bones in that somber meat-packing plant. For as he watched, the gloomy building was transformed into . . .

Satan's Boneyard



By Leon Dupont

YOUNG JIM LANIGAN, newly appointed to the detective division, faced old, white-haired Inspector Cochran stubbornly. The eyes of both were grim.

“You can’t go it alone,” growled Cochran. “It isn’t a solo job, I tell you. Gabrillo’s wanted for murder. Even before he went in for big-time box cracking he was one of the toughest mugs in the slaughterhouse district. Now he’s turned killer.”

Lanigan nodded quickly, soberly, said: “I ought to know. We lived on the same block when we were kids. We used to fight—and we’ll keep on

fighting till one of us shoves off. I don’t want any help when I go after him.”

“Grandstanding, eh?” jeered Cochran. “Lone wolf stuff!”

Lanigan shook his head. He smiled suddenly, a hard, bright smile that had no humor in it and that made his lean young face look older. “More than that, chief. It’s a personal matter. Gabrillo crippled one of the best pals I ever had, wrapped a piece of pipe around him and put him in a wheelchair for life. That’s why I want to handle this tip in my own way and try to get him.” He paused, touched his

2 ☆ ☆ ☆ 12 Adventure Stories

watch chain where a small silver horseshoe dangled. "I've even got my lucky gadget with me—the one Dad used to wear when he was on the force."

Inspector Cochran glowered, then snorted. "There's no such thing as luck in this man's game. It's the wits and nerves of the coppers against the crooks. The only guys who are lucky are the ones who make the breaks for themselves."

"Maybe," said Lanigan. "But luck or no luck, I want to go after Gabrillo. I've got a hunch, and I want to play it. I'm asking you for a break."

A glint shone in Inspector Cochran's eyes. He spoke with grudging admiration. "You're just like your old man, Lanny—stubborn as hell and superstitious. But go ahead if you think you can do it—bring Gabrillo in. I'm warning you, though—if you get yourself shot up I'll have you demoted."

"Thanks, chief, thanks!" Lanigan reached forward and grasped Cochran's horny hand. He turned and walked from the office with a buoyant, swinging stride.

His own ancient flivver was parked at the curb outside headquarters. He used it in preference to one of the sleek police cars he could have commandeered. He was on his own tonight, going after Gabrillo the killer, running down a hot tip that had reached him that afternoon.

The tip had come indirectly, but its source was right. A disgruntled moll of Gabrillo's had spoken out of turn. The big cracksman had looked at another woman and the first one had blabbed in a fit of jealous anger. Gabrillo was hiding where the police couldn't find him, but he had boasted to his moll that he was going back to his old home territory to make a cleanup. He claimed to know where money could be found.

Lanigan had acted quickly. He'd spent the afternoon quietly gathering facts. Now he was playing a hunch that seemed a certain bet.

There was only one place on Slaughterhouse Row where there was enough cash on hand to interest the big-time peterman that Gabrillo had become. That was in the safe of the United Packing Company's plant on Dover Street. Eighteen thousand dollars in payroll money lay there waiting to be handed out to the workmen tomorrow. Lanigan had learned that at the bank. He knew that Gabrillo had ways of getting information, too. Eighteen grand was a big enough haul to bring a murderer out of hiding. Dover Street was near the

section where Gabrillo had once lived. The two things added up.

GRIMLY, Lanigan headed his flivver toward the slaughterhouse district. It wasn't a cheerful place at night. A macabre air of death hung over the great, gloomy buildings that housed the packing companies. Lanigan remembered watching the cattle and sheep and poultry come in truckloads when he was a kid. He remembered the animal noises that had sounded; the bellows, bleats and cackles. He recalled the odd, deathly, stillness that had settled over the place when the day's work was done.

Gabrillo hadn't minded such things even then. Stocky, thick-set, brutal, with a crafty light in his sloe-black eyes, he had been the neighborhood bully, beating up every kid he could handle. Then for a time he had got a job as a slaughterer, until crime had lured him away from even that honest work.

Lanigan parked on Dover street and stealthily moved forward in the early darkness, toward the United Packing Company's plant. Gabrillo surely wouldn't come out of hiding for some time yet. He had become a night-prowling creature. Lanigan wanted to be ready when he arrived.

The buildings around him were dark, for the most part, and deserted. A few basement lights and an occasional watchman's lantern glimmered. Lanigan passed a patrolling cop and exchanged a brief word of greeting. The cop was curious, but Lanigan gave no explanation for his presence.

He hurried on along the gloomy street and turned left down an alley that skirted the United Company's plant.

There were a few dim bulbs burning on the street floor. The office where the safe was located was toward the building's front. Lanigan suddenly stopped and listened.

From somewhere in the rear there came a metallic rumble. His hand tightened over the butt of his police automatic for an instant. Then he relaxed his grip. No use getting jumpy! Gabrillo couldn't be at work so soon. And if the peterman was here he wouldn't be making such a lot of noise. Gabrillo had made a reputation for himself as a silent worker.

Lanigan shoved forward cautiously to see what the rumble was. He recognized it as the sound of machinery. A big electric motor was turning over.

3 ☆ ☆ ☆ Satan's Boneyard

But its purring was interrupted from time to time by a grating, crunching vibration that set Lanigan's teeth on edge. Someone was at work inside, and this surprised him. He thought the place would be empty at night, except for a watchman.

He located a side window opened outward for ventilation. He deftly reached in and loosened the sliding catch. In a moment he had raised the sash higher and squeezed his lean body in.

There was a dank, unpleasant smell of meat inside the building. The rumbling motor and that weird crunching vibration jarred the whole floor. A single light overhead shed an orange glow.

Lanigan walked cautiously toward the sound of the motor, keeping along the walls where the shadows were thick.

He reached a door, edged through it, and stopped beside a big refrigerating unit.

He now saw what caused the strange rumbling. An old man, evidently the watchman, was at work before a giant motor-driven grinder. There was a heavy, table-like chopping block beside him. On this was a pile of bones and hoofs and strips of skin. A nauseous animal odor filled the air. The ancient watchman was swinging a huge cleaver, cutting the biggest bones in two and tossing them into the hopper of the grinder. Every time he did so the crunching vibration that Lanigan had heard outside sounded again.

The man was cleaning up the day's residue. Nothing was wasted in this modern plant. The grinder, Lanigan realized, deposited the ground bones and skin and hoofs in a bin in the basement. There the rank grist would be used for gelatin, or sold for fertilizer or the making of glue.

The old watchman's thin face was as withered and impassive as a corpse's. His bony hands moved with the perfunctory rhythm of a machine. *Chop* went the cleaver, and another remnant of animal carcass sailed through the air. The grinder souged and vibrated again.

When the pile on the great table block was disposed of, the watchman went to a big lever switch at the top of a box beside the motor, and shoved it forward. The grinder stopped, filling the building with a sudden vacuum of silence.

Lanigan shrank back in the shadows and saw the watchman go to a bin behind the chopper and gather up another basketful of crimson-stained bones. When he had collected a pile, he threw the switch once more, and the spine-chilling grinding

began again.

Lanigan cautiously moved away, went the rounds of the bottom floor and edged into the building's office. He let his small flashlight play over the safe for an instant.

It was still intact, holding its eighteen thousand dollar treasure. But it was an old-fashioned type. It would offer little resistance to a cracksman's "can-opener." Gabrillo wouldn't even have to use "dope."

The grinder sounded, as Lanigan came out of the office, gratingly, persistently, rising and falling in a monotonous dirge that seemed to announce over and over that this was a place of death.

Lanigan shivered and walked back across the cement flooring to the room in the rear where the watchman worked. He believed that Gabrillo, if he came, would first overpower the watchman. He'd take no chances on being interrupted while he was opening the safe. But it might be hours yet before Gabrillo arrived. Lanigan moved forward, stealthily, planning to hide himself, wait in silence and catch Gabrillo red-handed.

He jerked to a sudden stop. Every muscle in his body tautened. There was a deathly cold feeling along his scalp. He stood as though rooted. For something hard had been pressed against the middle of his back, and a harsh voice sounded plainly above the rumble of the grinder. "Don't go for your gun, copper—or you'll get it sure."

LANIGAN turned his head ever so slightly. His tongue felt suddenly hot and dry in his mouth. He was conscious of rage and disappointment so keen that it seemed to numb his whole body. He knew that voice. The face of Mike Gabrillo, ugly, pockmarked, vicious, stared out of the gloom behind. Mike Gabrillo's thick lips were drawn back over his cracked teeth in a mirthless grin. And in the peterman's black eyes was a look of unholy, cruel triumph.

For an instant, fury drove Lanigan to risk everything in a quick attack, regardless of the cold snout of the gun against him. But Gabrillo's huge hand was steady as rock. Lanigan knew that the instant he flicked so much as a single muscle Gabrillo would send a bullet crashing into his spine.

Gabrillo spoke between clenched teeth, softly, menacingly. "Lanny—the hero cop who got himself made into a detective! Lanny—who'd like

to make himself a big shot by landing his old pal, Mike Gabrillo, in the chair. Frisk him, Johnny.”

Another figure came softly out of the gloom carrying a satchel. He was a young, chalk-faced gunman with eyes as lifeless as a snake’s. He dropped the satchel. His thin hands passed over Lanigan’s clothing, removed his automatic, while Gabrillo still held the gun steady against his back.

Gabrillo gloated, then scowled blackly. “That lousy dame squealed! I get it now. And little Lanny, the hero cop, thought he’d make a killing. He went around to the bank, snooped out about the dough and came here to park.” Gabrillo showed his fang-like teeth. “You didn’t figure how fast a worker I am. There’s an old saying, copper, that the early bird catches the worm.”

The dead-eyed gunman who had frisked Lanigan stood waiting.

“Get some rope, Johnny,” Gabrillo said. “We’re going to tie up this bum. Then we’ll tease him.”

Sweat beaded Lanigan’s forehead. Helpless rage filled his heart. He stood waiting while Johnny disappeared. Gabrillo twirled Lanigan’s automatic, holding his own gun steady. “Ever since we were kids,” he said, “I’ve hated your guts, Lanny. This is a break for me. This is gonna be fun. You wanted to be a cop, and now you are one. That makes it still better. You’ve had it coming to you a long time, and tonight you’re gonna get it!”

“You know what happens to cop killers,” said Lanigan through slitted lips.

Gabrillo smiled hideously. “Sure, sure, I know. But even the best D.A. can’t do a thing if they don’t find a body. You came to the right place, Lanny, if you wanted to disappear. Hear that?”

Lanigan heard it, the dull, steady throb of the grinder as the old watchman worked, unmindful of the thing going on so close to him. A look of sadistic hate filled the eyes of Mike, made them shine in the semi-darkness like a leopard’s. “I always was a neat worker,” he said. “Tonight it’s going to be two birds with one stone.” He kicked the satchel of tools that his assistant had dropped. “Those will fix up that box in there, and that grinder will take care of you—after I’ve bumped you.”

Lanigan wondered, a little dizzily, what Gabrillo was waiting for, why he didn’t fire the slug that would end it.

But Gabrillo seemed in no hurry.

Johnny came back with a length of rope he had

found somewhere. They bound Lanigan’s arms and legs securely. Gabrillo caught hold of a twist of it and dragged Lanigan forward, tripping him as though he were already a lifeless carcass. He pulled him as far as the door of the room that held the grinder.

Lanigan twisted his head. He could see through it, see the old, cadaverous watchman still working. The man was almost finished with his second pile of bones. Now Gabrillo was bringing new grist for the hopper.

But Gabrillo made a clucking sound and a sudden gesture to Johnny. He clapped a hand over Lanigan’s mouth to prevent any outcry, while Johnny crept forward. Silently as a stalking cat the chalk-faced assistant lessened the distance between himself and the watchman. The old man’s back was turned.

JOHNNY was directly behind the unsuspecting watchman now. Lanigan saw him lift his gun by the barrel and bring it down on the old man’s head in a savage, skull-crushing blow. He saw the watchman pitch forward as a man does when life has left him. He saw ruthless murder done before his eyes.

Gabrillo then dragged him into the room where the slain watchman lay, left him for a moment and walked to the switch, with which he shut off the motor. The rumbling ceased and Gabrillo looked around in gloating triumph.

Horror pulsed through Lanigan’s veins like icy water as he heard the cracksman’s orders to his assistant.

“Take off the old guy’s clothes, Johnny,” Gabrillo said. “Then we’ll lay his carcass up there on the block and put this copper beside him. I want to show him how we get rid of carrion. And”—a cunning gleam came into Gabrillo’s eyes—“we ain’t gonna leave any evidence. Take everything out of his pockets, cut off the buttons and burn the clothes in the furnace. Turn on the drafts. They can sift the ashes if they want to—and won’t find nothin’! And that grist won’t tell ‘em anything either. That grinder chews too fine. I know—I used to work here.”

They lifted Lanigan up on the big block beside the still, shriveled body of the old watchman. Gabrillo himself went through Lanigan’s clothes and removed everything from his pockets; his wallet, coins, key ring, and his watch and chain

5 ☆ ☆ ☆ Satan's Boneyard

with the silver horseshoe. Gabrillo grinned sardonically as he ripped this off and dangled it. "Luck!" he gloated. "You'll need it where you're going! Maybe the devil will give you a break."

He tossed the gleaming horseshoe on the pile with the rest of Lanigan's and the watchman's belongings. He made sure that Lanigan's head was turned, so that he could see the fearful work in hand. He picked up the crimson-stained cleaver.

Even the dead-eyed assistant, Johnny, seemed nervous.

Holding the cleaver tightly, Gabrillo stalked forward and threw the switch of the motor. The dull throbbing rumble of the grinder commenced again.

Lanigan lay still and sickened, wondering if this horrible nightmare would ever stop. Yet every nerve in his body was screaming, and he was wide-eyed, alert.

He saw the cleaver go up above the watchman's leg. He heard it come down—*chop*. He closed his eyes, almost sobbing, opened them for a brief instant as Gabrillo leisurely put the cleaver down and tossed something white and wrinkled into the giant hopper.

Lanigan's blood seemed to congeal. He shrank within himself, in horrified loathing, as he heard again that vibrating, crunching crack. And, with a wave of dizzying nausea preceding it, his brain suddenly came clear.

He drew up his trussed legs suddenly, fiercely; lashed out toward the end of the chopping table, with quick, deliberate aim. The instant he did so the grinder stopped with a clacking cough. The dim lights in the packing house went out.

GABRILLO gave an angry bellow. Lanigan rolled over sidewise with desperate haste. His shifting weight almost tipped the table with him. It tilted. The body of the watchman slid sidewise and fell to the floor.

Gabrillo was swearing madly. Lanigan heard the sound of striking metal close beside him. He hunched himself forward frantically, moved across the still warm body of the watchman. He groped near his feet with his tied hands—groped and felt something sharp and sticky. He pressed his fingers under it, drew back and sawed frantically with slashing motions of his wrists. The rope strands gave way.

With terror gnawing at his stomach, he lifted the cleaver and pressed its sharp edge down on the

ropes at his feet. He sawed again quickly, desperately until they parted.

He rose up trembling as the body of Gabrillo hurled against him in the dark. Fingers of steel clutched at his arm that held the cleaver. A light in the hands of the dead-eyed assistant flashed on. Lanigan looked for an instant into the sloe-black eyes of Gabrillo, face to face, again grappling in fierce combat, as they had when they were kids.

Lanigan's brain worked like lightning. A quick coup was his only chance. Johnny held a gun and was only waiting a chance to shoot. Physically Lanigan knew he was no match for Gabrillo. The man was twenty pounds heavier and built like a gorilla. Lanigan pushed the cracksman back in a sudden, calculated shove.

Gabrillo's heels came against the fallen body of the watchman. He tripped and Lanigan and he went down in a fighting, clawing heap.

Gabrillo's gun was out. He tried to use it, tried to twist up and shoot Lanigan in the stomach. Lanigan saw flame spurt, felt the hot lash of lead along his side. He got his right hand free for an instant, swung it around and brought the flat side of the cleaver against Gabrillo's head.

He felt Gabrillo shudder, wilt. Lanigan dropped the cleaver and plucked the gun from his flexing hand. He whirled and flung himself backwards as the gun in the fingers of the chalk-faced assistant belched flame twice.

Something twitched at the side of Lanigan's coat sleeve. He pressed the trigger of Gabrillo's gun, saw flame spurt, and heard the chalk-faced assistant give a cry. The light dropped, and the next instant a falling body slapped the floor.

Lanigan straightened, walked stiff-legged a dozen feet and picked up the flash. He sprayed it over Johnny's torso, saw the hole in the cloth of the coat, and the soggy stain. He turned and pointed it at Gabrillo and saw that the cracksman was breathing but still knocked out.

There came a sound of pounding fists on the door that led to the street. Lanigan opened it, and the cop he had spoken to outside barged in. He held a flashlight, too, played it over the room, while Lanigan spoke slowly.

"Mike Gabrillo there almost got me," he said. "He was going to feed me into the grinder the way he'd started to do with the watchman that his punk assistant killed. But the motor stopped, the lights went out, and I had a chance to fight it out with him

in the dark.”

“I saw them go and figured there must be something wrong in here,” said the cop. “Lucky for you that the fuses blew when they did.”

“Lucky!” said Lanigan softly. A thin smile twitched his lips. He pointed to the control box of the motor that turned the grinder, pointed to the slot on top where the lever switch moved. He walked over suddenly, fished down with two stiff fingers and drew something out. It was a blackened pit of

metal—a silver horseshoe. He wonderingly looked at it himself for a moment, shook his head.

“Call it luck if you want to—but I kicked this and the rest of the stuff off the end of the table, figuring I might drop something in the right place, make a short circuit and stop the works. It was the only chance I had, so I took it. But the chief, old Cochran, is right. Even a horseshoe can’t bring a guy good luck—unless he goes out after the breaks himself.