



*He pulled his trigger, heard a  
scream.*

# The Ogre from the Depths

## By Cyril Plunkett

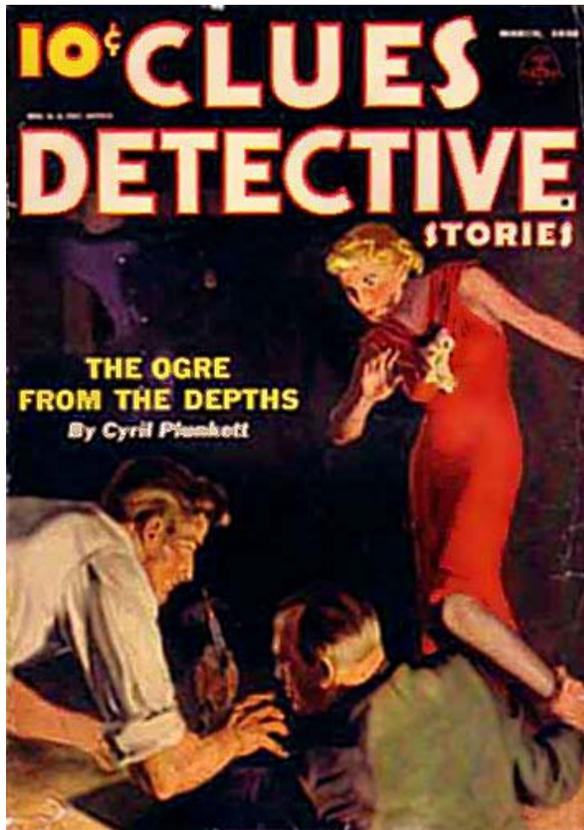
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**U**NTIL July, Patrolman Peter Porter would have told you trouble is something a good cop prevents. It was true that Pete had never had much trouble on the Orange Street beat, and that, moreover, he was a good cop. Both these things were a matter of record, but to keep the records straight, young Officer Porter,

furthermore, towered six feet three without so much as a sock beneath his heels. And he looked like a beach guard in mufti.

With July, however, Pete Porter began to wonder if trouble wasn't a lot like rain.

The shower started shortly after midnight, a quick breeze, a few scattered drops; the sky above



grumbling and worried and streaked with jagged, lightning. Pete cocked his blue eyes upward, grinned at the prospect of cooler weather, and went on trying doors. The graveyard trick on Orange Street was like that, with nothing save, perhaps, a few broken arc lights to mar its even pulse.

The thunder came again, louder, and suddenly Patrolman Porter paused, frowning. Seconds from the rumble overhead he'd heard another sound, closer, sharper. "Like an explosion," Pete muttered, and he anxiously scanned the block before him. Stores—grocery, drug, clothing. Jeweler Abrams's glistening front; Cort's flower shop, two doors farther on. The sound had seemed centered between these two, and Pete began to run, lightly, swiftly, right hand close to his gun.

He reached Abrams's, pressed his big body against the wall as he peered through the door. All seemed right inside, workbench light glowing patiently up front, curtain behind the display window softly fluttering. *Fluttering!* As though the freshening wind were circling in the store!

Softly Pete tried the knob, found the entrance properly locked. His mind leaped ahead, to the

alley behind, the rear door and windows, and whirling, he raced for the corner. He hadn't gone ten feet into the alley when he saw the blot of a moving figure, and Pete yelled:

"Halt!"

For a startled second, the shadow froze with the building. Then it became a blur, streaking along the wall. Pete's gun cracked once, and simultaneously he saw there were *two* of those shadows, and both of them were spitting flame!

Lead smacked his shoulder, spun him. The very alley itself was spinning, but through the cloak of stabbing orange he saw those crouching figures straighten, turn to flee. He pulled his trigger twice more, instinctively; heard a scream. For a moment then, his eyes refused to focus.

When he regained his feet, stumbled forward, a single twisted body lay upon the ground. The other plainly had escaped. Pete fought his swimming senses, stubbornly refused to faint, and worked free his flashlight. Its ray picked up Abrams's rear door, open, as the prowler car roared into the alley.

A haul of fifty thousand in unset gems, Pete read next morning in the hospital. The clues were a kit of tools found lying in the alley, and the man Patrolman Porter had killed. But, the newspapers added, the tools were without prints; the man was unidentified, a stranger without record.

Pete dumped the papers off his bed, sighing. He'd got the wrong guy; he'd failed. The other gunman had raced free with a fortune.

"Too bad," Varney, his lieutenant, told him gruffly. "But we've got every available man in the Orange Street section, Pete, and we'll get leads."

Pete grinned and said he hoped so, and cursed the two full weeks he would be off duty.

A flower shop war flared across town; more important, shots were again exchanged on Orange Street. The papers said business men along the thoroughfare were installing new locks, burglar alarms. Pete began to fume. If Orange Street was going tough, it was his job to subdue it. A good cop couldn't *always* fail!

Within a week from his return to duty, Cort's flower shop was bombed.

This time Pete wasn't even in the block, but he got there seconds later. A cruising cabby yelled he'd seen a guy running, but where he'd gone to, no one knew. When Cort, the owner, appeared

upon the scene an hour later, he blamed the flower war, and that, apparently, was that. This time a bigger failure.

Cort was a thin man, middle-aged and nervous. "I got two calls the last week to go out of business. I thought it was bluff, but——"

He spread his hands disconsolately at the wreckage; and although Pete didn't realize it then, his own troubles were steadily closing in.

Lieutenant Varney, at the precinct house, began to regard Pete Porter with suspicion.

"Here's Orange Street, always like a church," he snarled. "And suddenly two times in one month things happen. Listen, Porter. You're there to keep your eyes open, understand? We got to have arrests!"

"Yes, sir," Pete muttered.

He told himself trouble and failure, like lightning, *might* strike twice in the same spot, but it simply couldn't keep on coming. Pete plainly didn't know trouble—and, at that time, Darleen Dane,

**C**ORT sold his flower shop, abruptly, gladly. "You see, officer," he told Pete Porter one morning at the end of the month, "I'm a family man. If it's war, I'm out."

"But that's the very thing these bombers want, Mr. Cort!" Pete cried angrily. "Make you sell, pick up the place cheap."

"It went cheap enough," Cort admitted, "but not to any one who meant me harm. I was talking to a friend of my wife's, and she's been looking for a little business."

"A woman?" Pete gasped.

"A girl," Cort corrected him. "Don't worry; she knows what she may be in for, but she's spunky, and she wanted the shop."

Pete couldn't understand it, albeit he felt a thrill that a mere girl showed such courage. Cort's was boarded for repairs, and change day came the first of the month, and Pete went on at eight a. m. The very first morning he met Miss Dane.

She wasn't very tall, and she was slim and blond. She had gray eyes, clear and unafraid. She had, also, when he saw her, a smudge on her turned-up nose.

"I've been putting in my winter coal," she explained crisply, noting Pete's gaze. "I suppose I'm terribly dirty, but now's the time to buy coal,

before prices go up, and I've got to watch my pennies. You like it?"

She meant the store, gleaming in new paint, ready for its opening, but Pete was still looking at her nose.

"Yes, ma'am," he said. She was cute—hell, no, *beautiful!* "You've partitioned off the back, I see."

She smiled. "My living quarters. It's ever so handy. Perhaps you'd spare me a few minutes and put in hooks for a curtain pole over the rear window? I don't seem to be able to do a thing with them."

Pete went back behind the partition and showed her how a strong man could put in hooks. He adjusted the cross pole, hardly higher than his head, and when he faced her again, she was still smiling.

"Are you fond of flowers, officer?"

There were imps in those gray eyes, and Pete began to gulp.

"Y-yes, ma'am," he stuttered.

"Then perhaps you know their language?" Back in the store, she added briskly: "For example, white clover. I love clover, don't you?" She plucked a blossom and stood on tiptoe to reach his lapel. "There! I've got to be nice to policemen, don't I, so they'll always be nice to me?"

"Y-yes, ma'am," Pete mumbled, wondering if the dancing lights in her hair were real.

"You must come in every morning. I—I'll feel safer."

"Yes, ma'am," Pete said once more and fled.

He thought of flowers all that day. Off duty finally, he stopped at the library and looked up this flower talk. White clover meant "think of me"! She'd had red clover handy, too, and red clover stood simply for "industry," but she'd chosen white! Either she was a consummate little actress, or—Pete decided to concentrate on the "or." She was one sweet kid!

Trouble to stop in at Darleen's Flower Shoppe every morning? He'd have laughed if you suggested it. He couldn't wait for morning! And regularly thereafter, Pete wore clover on his coat.

"What the hell is this?" Lieutenant Varney growled one day. "An Easter parade? Lay off the flowers, Porter!"

THERE weren't any rules against a cop slicking up a bit, Pete told himself in defense. Besides, if it was a question of telling Darleen Dane he couldn't take her flowers because of rules, the rules could go hang.

But Darleen ran out of clover, and Pete began to leave the store with a pansy on his breast. It was the next best thing, he knew. Pansies meant "thoughts," so to begin with, he didn't mind the pansy.

"You do know what they mean, don't you?" Darleen had asked.

"Me?" Pete chuckled. "I know the alphabet, arborvitae to witch hazel!"

It was late in August by this time, and though sunlight was a halo round her hair, he saw for the first time that her smile was strained.

"I wonder, Pete, if a girl—any girl in business—could be a mistake?"

"Say, listen. What's wrong?" he demanded quickly.

She hesitated only a moment. "Two nights ago some one tried to get in my back window. I screamed and turned on the lights, and he ran down the alley."

"And you didn't tell me yesterday?" Pete gasped.

"I didn't think it mattered then any more, although a week ago Sunday evening, when I returned from a show, I'd discovered that the bolt on the alley door was bent, as though some one had tried to force the door and failed.

"Pete, maybe I wouldn't have told you now, but—but *last* night I got a phone call. It said what happened to Cort would happen to me, too—unless I got out."

Pete strode past her to the back door, and looked at its fastenings. Strong enough. The window? A good catch, but no bars outside. Dangerous, that window.

"You'd better not stay here nights for a while," he suggested slowly.

"But where else can I stay? This is my home!"

It ended like that, and Pete, frowning all the day, forgot about the pansy on his coat. When he checked in at the "house," he met with a roar.

"Get this, guys!" some one yelled. "A pansy!"

Pete turned around, fists doubled. "Who

made that crack? I'll take the guy apart."

"You and who else?" sounded behind him, and Varney stood there, scowling. "Porter, we ain't got rules about pansies, I'll admit. You don't figure cops would need such rules. But get this, you overgrown bouquet, the next time you march in here sporting a thing like that, I'm slapping on a suspension. And what for? For carelessness on duty, that's what for! Cort's bombing, and the Abrams's looting. So help me, I'll make it stick!"

He was Peter "Pansy" Porter after that, and to a guy with maul-like fists it was hard to take. The worst of it was, he could not justify himself by breaking those two unsolved cases. A detective could rove the town, but harness cops had to pound the same old pavements, waiting. He'd reported Darleen's statements, and the men who spelled him on the beat were cautioned to be watchful, but Pete was not satisfied with that. He had to *watch* Darleen. He couldn't so much as spend his off hours elsewhere, searching for clues. Pete realized at last that trouble was a lot like glue.

MEANTIME, he slept with nightmares, bombs exploding, figures like shadows darting through the night. When he wasn't sleeping, he haunted the Orange Street alley, cursing the detective bureau, which, so far, also had met with steady failure.

With September he took the four-to-midnight trick. And with September, Darleen's lovely face began to show her constant worry.

"Pete, you shouldn't miss your rest." Her voice trembled a little this Friday evening. "I saw you go by the door at four this morning."

She looked up at him almost pleadingly. "I had another call today. The man said there wouldn't be many more."

Pete said huskily: "We got to do something, all right." But the one sure way to help her, he was afraid to speak of. Sure, she *liked* him—but would she answer "yes" to marriage?

Pounding the street again, he debated this, and here, away from her, his courage grew. He'd make the break. Yes, sir, he muttered, he'd take her out of the Shoppe by Sunday or know the reason why!

That night again, from one to five, he squatted in the alley, grimly waiting, watching.

But Saturday, afternoon and evening, she was busy with her customers each time he passed the store. It was nine thirty, thirty minutes to her closing hour, that he saw her halfway down the aisle, coming toward the door, alone.

Pete swung in.

For a moment she stopped, staring at him, as though startled.

"This next half hour will be a year, won't it?"

A simple question, but back of it was complex feeling.

"Yes," she said faintly, "it will."

"You're not ill?" he asked suddenly, anxiously.

"No, Pete, I'm all right. I—I'm just tired."

"Listen, Darleen." He hadn't meant to say it so abruptly, but the words tumbled out. "I'm going to take you out of this. I—I guess I'm crazy to be proposing at this time, but——"

"You're not crazy, Pete."

Sure, his heart was thumping! Why wouldn't it? But he had to stand there, as stiff as a fool, not knowing what else to say.

"Anyway," he managed at last, "don't worry tonight. I'll see that nothing happens. And tomorrow——" He stopped again, seeing tears in her eyes. "Aw, don't cry, Darleen. Everything's going to be all right."

"I can't help crying, Pete. You'd better go now. Please go, Pete."

"Sure." He nodded glumly. "I understand. But my flower? Don't I get one tonight? Especially tonight?"

She sobbed again, and curiously it seemed as though she shuddered, chewing it. But she crossed the aisle, broke a stem, and returned with the flower. She handed it to him, her eyes avoiding his.

"Good-by, Pete."

"Not good-by; good night," he heard his voice correcting hopefully.

"Yes, of course. Good—good night."

He turned away, walking stiffly. It seemed as though his feet trod on air, but not the air of exultation. He reached the door, turned once. She stood quite as he had left her, lips parted, quivering. She tried to smile—and failed. He opened the door, went out.

With each step his puzzlement grew, and yet an awareness already gripped his mind. When he

paused, frowning, and looked back, he saw the lights within the flower store go out.

**F**OR a moment Patrolman Porter stood frozen. His heart began to pound. He looked down at one clenched hand, the flower lying crushed in its palm, and a curse broke from his lips. Quietly then, grimly checking all emotion, he moved toward the darkened doorway.

The door was locked.

He didn't rap or rattle the knob; a sudden caution would not let him. True, Darleen had been tired. She *might* have closed the Shoppe before the regular hour. Yet Pete groaned aloud, and seeing the front room forlornly empty, hit the street again, bound for the corner. At the corner he began to run.

A few of the alley windows showed yellow light, but the alley was a dim and crooked chasm none the less. He passed Abrams's back entrance, saw that Darleen's rear room was unlighted also, and softly reached its door. It was barred within, quite as it should have been, but the window to one side was lowered from the top. Listening, hearing no sound inside, Pete tested the lower sash. Silently it raised, and as silently he hoisted himself over the sill and into the room.

The smell of flowers was curiously oppressive here. Gun drawn, flashlight in the other hand, Pete heard voices. They came as though from far away, from below, and he dared briefly the light. Its sweeping ray picked up a ring in the floor, the outline of a flat cellar door. Simultaneously, the sound below came louder, harsher, and Pete dropped to his knees in the darkness, saw now the glint of feeble light in the crack beneath his fingers.

"Wise jane, eh?" the voice was saying. "Cop for a boy friend? Well, he won't help you. Listen, baby. My buddy took a slug for that ice. Sure, I bombed Cort's front. Sure, I warned him and you. I had to take that way. The monkeys along here were putting in burglar alarms, and besides, cops were swarming this street for weeks."

"But what do you want?" It was Darleen's voice, pleading, sobbing!

"Baby, you've been sitting on fifty grand! Only, damn you, I couldn't act quick enough and you put in that coal. A black chamois bag Gummy shoved down the coal chute that night, laying in

your bin, waiting big as you please.

“Ten ton I knew I had to move! Me, Tracy, that never used a shovel in my life! I had to plan on working hours—and you in this dump day and night. Kid, you had your chance to get out. You wouldn’t take it, so now——”

Darleen’s sob was abruptly strangled, and cautiously Pete Porter lifted the ring, began to raise the door.

The light from below, so faint before, showed stronger. From where he crouched, he could not see into the cellar; but the door was coming up, slowly, silently, and he could hear quick breathing, the movement of a body, the quick scrape of shovel on cement.

The past, like a picture, flamed in his mind. He didn’t remember the coal chute in the alley—doubtless it had been so obvious that no one had considered it—but those creeping shadows weeks before had felt it in the darkness. They’d tried to hide their haul in jewels, hoping later to retrieve it. And here, at last, in Darleen’s cellar, was the answer to all Pete’s troubles.

Clearly Tracy had been in the store when he, Pete, talked to Darleen earlier. Now he understood her strange actions. She’d known a gun was trained upon them! She hadn’t dared so much as whisper a warning, lest Pete, taken by surprise, might be killed. She’d chosen to face death alone—for him!

Pete couldn’t help a thrill of exultation. He knew at last how much she cared! He knew now, too, that he couldn’t fail her, and breathlessly, inch by inch, the cellar door moved steadily higher. It touched the wall support, hung there, and his big body flowed up to take the steps. One foot touched that step, drew back sharply.

The board creaked loudly in the tense silence!

There was a startled curse; a second later, the crack of a gun. The lead tore into the wall beside Pete Porter, and instantly the dim light below went out.

**P**ETE crouched beside the opening, teeth clamped upon his lower lip. And the silence lasted, *lasted*. He knew he had to do something, but that something appeared like a mountain to be moved. Oddly as it seemed, Tracy held all the trumps. With no light below, and the alley

window, moreover, behind him, the stairs would be faintly visible from the cellar. To lunge headlong down them would invite a quick disaster. For though Tracy should miss the target of his plunging body, Pete realized despairingly that he still could not hope to shoot it out on even grounds. Tracy had Darleen.

Summon help? In the seconds since the shot he’d considered, quickly accepted that necessity. Obviously the shot itself, muffled by the thick walls of the basement, had not been heard outside. But, whistle to his lips, Tracy’s snarling voice abruptly stayed him.

“Copper? Listen, copper. Send out a warning, or let off your gun, and the frail gets it in her back!”

Pete didn’t answer. The whistle came down, and silently he groaned. Bluff it might be, but he dared not risk Darleen’s life to call it. No aid then, no call for help; no way, without danger to the girl he loved, to gain an edge through light. Only darkness, and the torment of a clock, somewhere near, ticking passing seconds. Pete’s nerves began to leap and scream.

“Copper,” Tracy called again, “you’re stuck and you know it. Throw your gun down the steps.”

Pete didn’t move.

“Damn it, I mean business!”

Pete’s fingers gripped the steel of his flashlight, sensing hope. He leaned over, tossed it, heard it hit cement. Glass tinkled.

“I said the gun,” Tracy snarled. “Trick me, eh? Guns don’t have glass. Copper, I’m counting three!”

A good cop never gave up his gun, but Pete did not think of record now. Tracy had him right enough, and when trouble turned calamity, you gave it all the odds. This time there was no mistaking the sound of metal striking the cellar floor, and Pete’s teeth drew blood.

“Swell, copper! I’m coming up. I’m going out, see? If the dame stays living, you’ll be standing at the window, arms raised. Get it? Against the light so I’ll *know* you’re there.”

“Start coming,” Pete Porter gritted, and he could feel his heart again, the thump of racing blood in both temples.

“O. K., baby,” Tracy gloated. “Up those stairs—and take ‘em slow!”

There was a moan, *her* moan, as though she, too, understood that freedom alone was not Tracy's goal. He'd come up, all right, but to leave witnesses to his name and face? Plus a fortune in jewels, forever lost? He'd come up shooting!

"Be there!" Tracy snapped once more, and then came sounds of footsteps on the stairs.

They came on slowly—Darleen's bravely, stabbed by stifled sobs; the other's softer, wary shuffles. The blot of her head appeared in the opening, swaying as it rose again, barely visible in the gloom. She stared at the window, the shadowy figure limned against it. She gasped "Pete!" despairingly—and a second head loomed behind hers. One instant it showed, still rising; then Darleen screamed as her shoulders were flung forward. There was a flash of metal, a streak of flame, and Tracy *laughing*, pumping lead squarely at that window!

**H**E shot twice, gun wrapped in his coat, its sharp challenge muffled. Twice, too, the spread-eagled figure before the window jerked in answer. But fury, like a thunderbolt, descended then, from *behind* the gunman. A brawny body no longer asking quarter and giving none. Tracy twisted in his tracks, tried desperately to pull the gun around. But his legs refused to hold him, and both dim figures hurtled down the stairs.

Somehow, Pete heard Darleen's voice above, screaming again, her footsteps racing for the street. He didn't consciously care that she was on her way for help. He'd caught the gun, wrenched it free, and his fists were driving hard. The two men rolled across the basement floor, Tracy like a cat, clawing, biting, kicking to fight free. Pete hung on grimly, scarcely feeling the teeth and raking nails. All his pent-up rage, the result of weeks of worry, was released. They rocked to their feet, and a crushing right drove Tracy to the

wall. The man bounded back like rubber, fists invisible in the darkness, but his body again in Pete's embrace. This time he caught an arm, swung it, felt the shrieking body whirl above him. It hit the floor, bones cracking, and Pete fumbled for his handcuffs.

When he got upstairs, carrying the groaning gunman, lights were flashing on. Varney came first, charging like the bull he was. But he stopped, began to grin, and the men behind him stepped aside for Darleen Dane.

"Pete!" she sobbed, swayed beside him. "Pete—he *shot* you!"

Pete grinned, too. "He shot what he *thought* was me. Honey, when I put up curtain hooks, I don't forget them! I slipped out of my coat, hung it over the window on those hooks, and was at the *other* end of the door, waiting?"

Darleen, though still trembling, inched, away. There was a sprig of green upon her dresser. She picked it up, reached for Pete's lapel.

"More flowers." Varney sniffed.

"Just the same," Pete retorted stiffly, "it was a flower that broke this case. If it hadn't been for the sprig of oleander Darleen handed me before I left the store——"

"Oleander?" Varney growled. "What did that have to do——"

"Everything," Pete said firmly. "You see, oleander means 'beware.' So I——"

"Anyway"—Varney chuckled—"you're wearing the right thing now. A four-leaf clover—and I sure know what that means! Luck—plain dumb luck!"

Pete looked down, into Darleen's smiling eyes. They said nothing to each other; they didn't have to, for the four-leaf clover spoke for them. Luck? Varney couldn't be expected to know its *real* significance. "Be mine"—a talisman for all trouble.