

# Don't Wake the Corpse



*By Dale Cochrane*

*Detective Stew Jessup was no postman but he undertook to deliver a most expensive parcel—a beautiful, two-legged item marked “Special Handling.” But a ruthless pair of crooks who used bullets for stamps rerouted both Jessup and his charge—and designated them for “Special Delivery to the Morgue.”*

**D**ID you ever see a terrier playing with a mouse? Have you ever tried to stop him once he begins having his fun? Well, that was just what I was trying to do now. Only it wasn't a terrier I was dealing with. It was a tough-

looking monkey with a broken nose and vegetable ears who was sitting in a phone booth in the Eagle Bar. He was grinning at me, and having his fun because I was waiting to get in that booth and he knew it, and he'd been in there twenty minutes and

wasn't even stirring to get out.

He was grinning at me like it was a terrific joke. He was a terrier making a mouse out of me! That is, if a tiny little guy like me who weighs only two-forty avoirdupois can be considered a mouse. I was beginning to get mad. I was—

Somebody said, "Say, Stupid."

I turned and looked up.

Amadeo, the kindly, white-haired old barkeep, was standing beside my table. Now I like Amadeo, don't get me wrong. But I have never got over being the least bit touchy about the way people can me "Stupid" when my name is Stew. Stew Jessup. Stewart J. Jessup it says on my private detective license. And even if my business has gone to the bow-wows because I have become known as the dumbest dick in seven states on account of a few tiny cases which did not turn out proper, I still prefer "Stew" to "Stupid."

Amadeo looked from my beer paunch to the empty glass in front of me, and then he tapped a little green-tinted piece of paper inscribed with the legend "Please Pay Cashier," which he held in his hand.

"That beer makes it five bucks even," he said. "Fifty beers—five bucks, which you have drunk in a week. We could buy some War Stamps if you would pay up."

So there he went making me feel unpatriotic, when here I hadn't had a cash customer in a month. People weren't even using detectives for getting divorces these days. I was about to make some snappy answer, but he even wouldn't let me get it out.

"A young, strong feller like you should be in the Army anyway," he said. "How come you ain't in uniform?"

I felt a red hot flush rise along the back of my neck. Amadeo was ribbing me now about my girth. "I will be in uniform," I said, "as soon as the iron-hats decide to make one that will fit me. And as for your

five bucks, I will have those simoleons as soon as I complete a phone call which—"

I turned my head back to the phone booth, and I broke off what I was saying. I got real mad then. The tough monkey who had been in there almost a half hour wasn't satisfied in just keeping me out. He plainly had been listening to my little conversation with Amadeo, when Amadeo had been dunning me for the finif, and now he was giving me a merry ha-ha look. His eyes were nasty, sneering.

I pushed out from my table. " 'Scuse me a minute, Amadeo."

I strode over, through the dimness of the bar, to the phone booth, and then I saw the payoff. The receiver on the booth phone was hung up on its hook! The monkey wasn't even using the phone! This was just his idea of fun—of a practical joke.

"I will wipe that sneer off your face," I said, and before he could get up off his little phone-booth stool, I pushed the door in and slid it open.

I grabbed for his collar and hauled back a fist. Then I stopped, and the little men began running around in the pit of my stomach and the goose-bumps on my back chilled like hoarfrost on a grave!

**T**HE tough guy's head lolled. That grin would never come off his thick face, I knew then. His glazed eyes rolled with his head. Then he tumbled slowly forward. I jerked so fast to get out of the way, I slipped. He fell on top of me. I never got out from under anybody so fast in my life!

I never before had a corpse fall on me!

Just then a champagne cork at the bar popped, and somebody, half-drunk, yelled, "The fat guy—he killed him."

I turned and looked and I saw that one of the half dozen customers in the place had jumped up and was pointing at me.

I looked back at the frozen grimace of

pain on the dead man's face and then felt of the blood that was sopped red on his shirt-front, and I knew the poor lug must have crawled in here to die. Why, he must have already been dead almost a half hour ago when I first came in the bar!

Then I saw the bar-boys coming at me, and like a dern fool, I panicked. I knew I hadn't done anything, and they didn't have anything on me, but I had visions of the city commissioner lifting my license. "Just one more boner, Jessup," he'd said.

So I pulled that boner now. I tried to scatter. I felt the breath choking inside me, and I wanted to run. I wanted to get outside. I darted forward, and I bowled over the first gent coming at me.

A swung fist clipped me on the ear. One customer grabbed me. I brought my size sixteen brogan down gently on his toes, and he forgot about holding on to me.

Wh-o-o-o-sh! Out went the air from my midsection as somebody planted his fist there. I doubled just in time to miss a bottle that somebody else aimed at my head. There was a gay tinkle of broken glassware as the bottle made its landing. I grabbed up a barstool to ward off a tackler. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw the bottle-thrower had gathered up another bottle and was about to try it on my head for size.

He never did it. A little pipsqueak whom I'd never seen before, and who had apparently just come in the bar, crashed interference at the bottle-thrower. He grabbed my arm, this pipsqueak, and thrust me out through the door. I gladly obliged by hot-footing.

He ran after me. "No! No!" he yelled. I glanced back over my shoulder and saw him pointing at a big, shiny black car at the curb, motor running and ready to leap.

"In here!" he shouted, pointing at the car again.

A second tough monkey, to match the first one who had tumbled dead out of the phone booth, was sitting and ready to go behind the driver's wheel of the car.

**WE DROVE** down deep through the cockeyed little streets of Greenwich Village toward the Hudson River. Pipsqueak introduced himself as a lawyer, a Mr. Small, and believe me, he wasn't lying. He was a short half-pint, with a shiny egg-dome where his toupee should have been. He introduced the chauffeur too, Muscle-Ears, he called him.

Small said to me, "You want a job? You want to make some money?"

I said, "Do they grow that stuff any more?"

He took a gun out of a shoulder holster and laid it in my lap. He unbuckled the holster harness and laid that in my lap too.

"You'll need it," he said. "I don't want to scare you, but the job you're getting is no milk shake." He trotted out a wad of hundred-dollar bills and peeled off two of them. "You still want the job?" he asked.

I said, "Sure. But how come you pick on me? I bet you don't even know who I am. Do you know I'm a detective?"

He got a sad look in his eyes, almost like pain. "Do I know you're a detective!" he mocked me. "Look, this is a job guarding the life of a beautiful girl. That poor fellow you saw back there in the bar had the job before you. He saved the girl, saw to it she was safe—then gasped his last just as he was phoning me. Sure, I know you're Stew Jessup. A lucky break for me I chanced to meet you because I know you're an ace flatfoot, even if a lot of ginks are jealous of you and call you nasty names. Here." He peeled me off another hundred-dollar bill. "Maybe the job is worth a lot more than this. But it's got other compensations."

“You mean, the beautiful girl?” I asked.

The car glided noiselessly to a stop. Muscle-Ears slithered out. I noticed that his hand was in his coat pocket, and it was easy to imagine he was holding on to a gun as he looked first up the street one way, then down the other. He nodded to Mr. Small.

Mr. Small got out of the car. We were in front of an unhappy looking building that announced itself as being the terminal of a trucking company. Mr. Small keyed his way into a dusty, unused office and turned on the light.

He motioned me to sit down, but I didn't see a chair that looked substantial enough. “Roxanne Ward is the beautiful girl,” he said. His face took on a dark expression. “Some rats have been after her ever since her Uncle Amos died and willed her his fortune. Uncle Amos—my best friend and business associate. You saw what happened to the guard I hired to protect her—protect her from these ruffians who are on her trail. Well, I have a good idea who's behind it all.

“Roxanne has another uncle—Uncle Willis—and an Aunt Lizzie who would be next in line for dear Amos' fortune if Roxanne were out of the way. But Roxanne—silly girl—'likes' her Uncle Willis and Aunt Lizzie. She won't stand for any ill to be spoken of them—thinks relatives must be loyal to each other.

“Roxanne has to be back home in Sistersville for the reading of the will, of which I'm executor, or she'll forfeit her claim to the inheritance, which will then go to Uncle Willis and Aunt Lizzie. Those two will stop at—well, at almost nothing, to put her out of the way.”

“That—being back home for the reading of the will or not getting anything,” I said, “that's not regular.”

Small sighed. “Well, bosom friend though dear Amos was,” he said, “I'll have to admit he was—ah, eccentric. Like his investing his entire estate in diamonds, just because he once made a fortune in gems in South Africa. And again—not removing those diamonds from their vault here in town, when there are just as good and as safe vaults in Sistersville.”

Small stopped and a smile grew on his lips. From nowhere he had produced a long, narrow case. “Take a look at these,” he said. “This is how we'll decoy those killers. Get them away from Roxanne—on the trail of quicker, easier game.”

Small's coat had fallen open as he spoke, and I noticed another, similar case in his inside pocket. He caught my look and pointed to the first case which he had now put down on the desk beside him. He tapped it.

“This is the only one that concerns you,” he said. “Open it up.”

I knew it was a diamond case even before I opened it. Once, long ago, I was a bonded messenger for a credit jewelry house. Inside the case was a diamond wallet, and in the wallet were a half dozen neatly folded French papers.

Expertly, I opened one of the papers, holding the paper carefully between my fingers so as to catch the twenty or thirty graded stones in the trough made by the paper's crease.

I took one of the stones between my fingers, holding the gem by the girdle, culet up. As I raised it for inspection, I turned it neatly so that the table of the diamond was up—as anyone who knows stones will do.

Small watched quizzically. “Hmm,” he mused. “You've had experience.”

“Yeah,” I said, but even as I did I wondered curiously if he weren't laughing at me.

It was night, and the light in the room was strictly artificial. Anybody who knows diamonds at all wouldn't even waste the energy to look at one under such conditions. You can't tell the first thing about them, unless you have daylight.

I didn't trust this guy Small. He wasn't telling me everything.

**R**OXANNE WARD lived in a better furnished room on Seventy-fifth Street, west of Broadway. I punched her bell, and at once the buzzer clicked me in through the door.

I heaved half a sigh of relief. Roxanne was apparently really safely home. But why was the little fool so quick to open the door without knowing who it was? Small had sent me to the Women's Jail at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Greenwich to pick Roxanne up. Cleverly, she'd ducked in there when the boys had hopped her bodyguard. I went alone because with Small along, it probably would have meant getting tailed. Then at the jail they told me that Roxanne decided to leave because they'd send a cop along to see she got home safe.

Now I went up to Roxanne's room, and since she hadn't opened her room door, I knocked. The door opened, and it was Roxanne. She looked very jittery, and I didn't especially relish the way she was welcoming me.

"Put away the noisemaker," I said, indicating the anti-tank gun she gripped in her hand. It looked big enough to be one anyway.

I told her who I was. I bawled her out for leaving the jail, and I told her I had gotten her address from the police. I took out the two tickets to Sistersville which Mr. Small had given me before I left.

"I'm your new guardian," I said. "I'm gonna see you don't get hurt and that

you'll be home safe and snappy for the reading of the will."

She didn't seem very reassured, so then I told her about the diamonds, and Small's plan to decoy her would-be killers. "I got these hundred thousand dollars' worth of stones on me. I'm going to be with you. Small says the killers are going to be so busy trying to get the diamonds away from me, that they won't bother you.

"Sure, they already did one murder," I went on. "But why would they want to risk another when they can get almost all they're after without touching you? Small's passed a few hints around in the right places so the killers will know about the diamonds, which are insured anyway."

Roxanne Ward was a pip. The weather was warm and she wore her sugar-blonde hair combed up off her neck and on top of her head. She had on a dress that was a rusty-brown color, trimmed in blue that matched her eyes. The dress was a sweater-girl fit.

She closed the door and put her back to it. "Have you got the diamonds on you?" she whispered breathlessly. "Where are they?"

I said— No, I didn't say anything. Footsteps sounded in the hall. A quick rat-a-tat-tap sounded on Roxanne's door. I tried to leap like a gazelle to hide behind a wardrobe trunk, but the trunk was small and I stuck out all around it like a hippopotamus. I made a grab to pull Roxanne back with me, but she pulled away, saying, "I know who it is. It's all right." Before I could stop her, she opened the door.

She let out a little shriek. My heart lurched as I grabbed for my gun. Then I saw that Roxanne had shrieked only because she was happy.

"Aunt Lizzie!" she exclaimed. "Uncle Willis!"

**A**DOWDY old battle-puss shoved into the room. She was followed by an ugly gent who looked as if he'd just stepped out of a passport photo. This latter personality was Uncle Willis, and already I could see that wise tailoring wasn't enough to conceal the bulge of the gun he carried in a shoulder holster.

I hated to intrude in the little family scene, but little Roxanne looked like a lamb about to become an assortment of lamb chops and cold cuts.

"Excuse me," I said, and I took Roxanne by the arm. "If you'll excuse me, I'd like to have one word alone with Roxanne in the hall."

Before they could protest I got blondy-bright-eyes out into the hall. I didn't stop there. I kept her walking—but fast—until I had her outside the building.

She tried to jerk and pull away from me.

"Those wolves!" I said. "Can't you see they are no more your uncle and aunt than I am a dickey bird? They are a pair of hired killers out to stop you from ever getting to Sistersville!"

She had to admit then that she had never really seen her Aunt Lizzie or Uncle Willis, only pictures of them, but that they seemed to be reasonably exact facsimiles of same.

We had to go down to the corner hackstand before we could get a cab. I said to the hackie, "Take us down to the Hotel McAlpin on 34th Street. That is where you get the B & O Railroad connecting bus, isn't it?"

"I don't know," said the hackie. "I am a stranger in dis boig meself."

We got to our train, and our compartment sleepers were made up. We had adjoining compartments, and I kept my door open so I could check on Roxanne. I didn't do much sleeping, and it wasn't because the berth was too narrow. I

was worried about Roxanne, and I was worried about the diamonds.

I had the gun which Mr. Small had given me, right beside me, and I had the case of diamonds under my pillow. A couple times during the night I thought I heard somebody poking and snooping around in the aisle between the compartments.

In the morning, when we came back from breakfast in the diner, I knew I hadn't been wrong about prowlers. For there in the pullman coach, sitting side by side, were—Uncle and Auntie!

I grabbed Roxanne's arm and hurried her by quick. She stifled a sob in her throat. "Oh, what you've done!" she moaned. "Did you see the freezing look they gave me? They'll never speak to me again."

My compartment had been remade before I left for breakfast, and I wanted to get Roxanne back and inside it as quickly as possible. I did, and closed the door, so I could think and make my plans about what to do about Uncle and Auntie. Then I had a look at the shape the compartment was in and I forgot everything about plans.

The light fixture was pried off the wall, the carpet ripped up off the floor. The seats in the compartment had been slashed with a knife and the stuffings pulled out and scattered.

The compartment door clicked behind me, and I turned to see that it was one of the train conductors who had opened it.

"Excuse me for not knocking," he said. "But I thought you weren't yet—"

He stopped dead, looking kind of sickish when he saw the damage.

"Seems like you have mice on this train," I commented pointedly. "Or should I say *rats*?"

I pushed out past him and I knew I was in a dangerous spot. Mr. Small was right. Those killers weren't bothering with the

girl. They were after the diamonds. And I didn't feel so 1-A healthy with those glitter-rocks nesting in my pocket. I'd be the next one to be ripped up if they knew I still had them.

My decision as to what to do next was taken out of my hands. Coming along the corridor was Uncle Willis. He scowled when he saw me. "I want to see you!"

He lunged at me. I sidestepped and poked him one in the puss. He upset into an empty seat. I started fast down the train corridor. I heard him coming just as fast behind me. He slowed down, at last, but not before I was all the way front in the baggage car. There was nobody else in the car, but I knew that Unk would be there in a minute.

**I** SAW a long box among the luggage. And then I noticed the tag on it. The box was open. I lifted the top lid, and then the inside, black lid—and a grinning face looked up at me. I gasped surprise. It was the corpse from the phone booth!

I acted quick then in getting rid of the diamonds. That done, I turned back toward the other cars. I got as far as two cars forward, and I stopped. Unk was in one corner of this club-chair car, and with him was Aunt Lizzie. The two of them were talking in whispers—and then I saw there was a third member to their party. Roxanne!

Roxanne's voice was a little harsh and angry. There were two other people in the coach, but they were at the other end.

"Don't act like a couple of twerps," she said. "Do you dig me, Jackson? Take it slow and easy and I'll lift those rocks off that dumb, fat-faced copper myself." Roxanne's voice was suddenly cold and hard, like I'd never heard it. "Wait till tonight and we can conk that stupid walrus and drop him overside, with no one the wiser."

I said, "Dig this one, Jackson!" I waited long enough so he could pull his gun, and then I shot it away.

Aunt Lizzie dived for me then, and I hate to hit a lady. I stuck a fist out at her battle-puss, but what I hit wasn't a lady. For at that moment "Aunt Lizzie's" wig came off, and she was a he. Roxanne swore, like no lady should either, and jerked out a gun from someplace. I stepped gently on her tootsie with my size-sixteen brogan, and at the same time made a grab at Unk. Unk had a bullet-shattered shoulder, but that didn't stop him from yanking at the emergency stop-cord on the train.

My gun-barrel caught Unk behind the ear, and he wheezed down to the floor with a soft sigh as the train ground to a stop with an awful jolt. And that put an end to any idea he may have had of jumping train.

People were shouting and yelling. A conductor swore. "Who the blank-blank stopped the train?" It seemed like everybody was rushing toward us at once.

I grabbed for Liz and Roxanne, and shouted. "Here's three of the crooks who stopped it. Grab 'em. A fourth one just jumped the train. I'm goin' t' get 'im."

And with that I lit out. I was off that train before they could stop me, running and wheezing like an old Baldwin locomotive.

Luckily, it was only about a mile to the next jerk-water stop. I got there ahead of the train, for it was going to take them ten or fifteen minutes to get their air-brakes works fixed after the pulling of that emergency cord. I flashed my private-peep badge to the station master and left him instructions about seeing that my little trio of pals didn't get out of a lockup for the next twenty-four hours.

NEW YORK looked a little sleepy, or maybe it was me. I got off the B & O connecting bus at the McAlpin just as Ike and Mike, the Herald Square bell-ringers, were pounding out two A.M.

I hid myself to West Seventy-fifth Street. I had to ring the superintendent's bell at Roxanne's to get in. I was inside before the super shoved up a window and called sleepily, "Whoozit? Whoozit?"

"It's Brumpfchruf," I mumbled most intelligibly. "Forgot my key."

I went on to Roxanne's door. It was still unlocked after our hasty departure the day before, when we hadn't stopped for any such ceremonies as locking up. I began to search every drawer in the place.

Then I found the sort of thing I was looking for, and I knew how well I'd been suckered, thinking that other dame was Roxanne. This was an identification badge from some defense plant office and it not only had the name and thumbprint of Roxanne Ward, but her picture as well—and she was a different pretty than the one I'd been calling Roxanne!

I took the badge and picture and went down to the street. I was playing a long shot. I went to the hack stand and showed it to the lonely cab driver on the corner. It was the closest and most logical stand for anyone to use, coming from Roxanne's house.

"It's a goil's picture, so what?" he asked me.

"Look hard, comrade," I replied. "Did you see her, ever? Was she maybe sometime a fare of yours?"

His face lit up so and his eyes glowed, I was going to remind him about the dim-out regulations; but it was no time for quips.

"Why, two nights back dis goil was a fare," the cabbie said. "She and two big husky bruisers wid her. Dey went down to

a place on—I remember, 'cause it was way out and such a funny place—"

I fanned a ten-dollar frogback under the cabbie's mustache. "Take me to dat place likewise," I said, speaking a language he could understand.

One hour later I was deposited in front of an edifice that would have scared a ghost. I distinctly remember telling the cabbie to wait, but maybe he had a wife and children to think about and, anyway, he already had his ten bucks.

The place was an old warehouse, next to weed-tangled lots. The windows of it were iron-barred and the doors were iron-sheeted. But from under one of the doors I saw a thin sliver of light.

I knocked on the door with the butt-end of my gun. I heard the scrape of chairs inside, then silence. I knocked again.

"Who's there?" said a voice.

"Little Bo-Peep," I said. "You seen my sheep?"

The door ground open and there stood two unamiable gunmen. "Oh, so we're gonna have trouble with you?"

Cra-a-s-hh!

DOWN came a shillalah on my noggin, and I went soaring into the solar system. When I came to, my head felt like the morning after a quart of two-dollar Scotch. I was supine on a floor, and an angel was ministering to my brow. There was just the right blur to my vision for an artistic effect. It was still dark, but there was the graying light of dawn.

"Those thugs told me who you are," said the angel. "They grabbed me as soon as the cops left, after taking me home. They're keeping me here until they read the will back in Sistersville. I guess they want to be sure there is no hitch before they—they kill me. Oh—are you feeling better now?"

This angel was Roxanne—the real McCoy. I said, “How much is in this will anyway, that people will—will—”

“The estate is all in diamonds,” she said. “Poor departed Uncle Amos was sentimental about keeping his money in diamonds because he made a lot of money in them in South Africa. Besides, it’s a sound investment. They are being taken home from a vault in New York. I realize now that Uncle Willis and Aunt Lizzie will kill me if necessary to get those diamonds. I was wrong when I thought that—”

“Wrong again, Angel,” I said to Roxanne. “Those two thugs are no more your aunt and uncle than—why, ‘Auntie’ is just a man wearing a wig. Your real aunt and uncle are probably somewhere—”

“But they are my real aunt and uncle,” Roxanne insisted with a tear snagging her voice. “She does wear a wig, and she does look like a man, I know. They are tough, hard, cruel. They were both adopted out of some—some orphanage—by my grandfather, to be his children. But the two weren’t related in any way, and when they grew up, they married. Now—”

“Now,” I put in, “we have to get out of here.”

It looked like a tougheroo. The room was bare, and all I had on me was a boy-scout knife. There were two windows in the room, but they were iron-barred. There was a guard outside our door. I could hear him snore. Then I got an idea.

I unscrewed the side-strips in the window grooves and got out the sashweights and the sashcord. It was pie knocking loose the bars from the rotting bricks with one of those five pound weights. It made plenty noise and soon the door opened and the guard came in. Roxanne was waiting for him, with a sash weight as he slipped inside.

I got twenty-four feet of clothesline-

sashcord out of the two windows. That was enough to lower us the twenty feet, from our second-floor perch, to the ground. Wh-ewh! Did I skid down that piece of string before she popped!

I made a couple quick phone calls. The first one was to that jerkwater station where I’d flashed my buzzer, given the order to hold the three who’d stopped the train.

“Eh-h-h?” came back the station agent’s voice. “I tell ye, them three got away—”

It was just the kind of luck I could expect!

I made a call to Sistersville. Then, inside an hour, blondy Roxanne and I were on a plane bound for that little town. In a couple more hours we were smelling the Ohio River, and hearing the clang of the local tank and boiler works.

I was jittery and on edge as we approached the old Amos Ward house on Chestnut Street. I had first circled close to the dirty-red railroad station, glimpsed the pine box on the freight platform, awaiting the call of the local undertaker.

From the time I first read the tag on that box I understood that the dead phone-booth guard must be a local boy Mr. Small picked up for the job. It was natural enough for him to be sent home for his last rest. But I wasn’t ready yet to take those diamonds back that I’d concealed in that grave-box. They were a prop in a little act I still had to play.

I had more than a suspicion that I had been followed by the time I was in the Ward house, shaking hands with peewee Small. But I breathed my relief. Roxanne was safe, and home!

**S**MALL grinned at me. A knowing twinkle came into his eyes. “A nice decoy you were,” he said. He took a flat diamond case out of his inside pocket. It

was a case identical to the one he had given me. “Of course you knew those stones I gave you were fake ones,” he confided. “While you lured the wolves off the trail I—”

He saw the expression on my face, then his own went pale.

“Fake?” I moaned. “Oh, my stars! I thought they were the real ones! That’s why the minute you handed them to me back in New York, I exchanged them for a similar case I saw in your pocket! I figured if you didn’t know you had the real ones on you, you’d probably be able to get them through safely.”

Small blubbered. “So where are the real diamonds?”

“At the railroad station!” I cried in panic. “In the coffin of that guard you were bringing home to bury. If we hurry—if they’re still there—”

Footsteps outside were beating a quick tattoo. But Small didn’t hear them. He grabbed his hat and was turning to run. I grabbed Small.

“You dope,” I snapped in his ear. “How in heck could I have switched those

diamonds on you—you old leech? That anguish act I just put on wasn’t for you! It was for two or three lugs who followed me here and were listening outside that window! They was just about to bust in here when you started to sound off about having the real diamonds on you. You gave me the phoney stones, and *those are the ones I put in that grave-box.*”

There was the sudden, quick *rat-a-tat-twang* of gunfire in the near distance.

“The Sistersville police,” I grinned broadly. “I phoned them from New York, told ‘em I was setting a trap for jewel thieves!”

The screech of a police siren was in the air as we started running for the station. Mr. Small had come out of his coma and was running with me. Little angel Roxanne was close enough behind to throw her arms around my neck and kiss me!

Small was right when he said this job would have other “compensations.”

I slowed long enough to put my arm around Angel.

I said, “Kiss me again.”