



SUMMER SLAY RIDE

By C. S. MONTANYE

WHEN big Dave McClain, the homicide man, entered Apartment 12E, "Doc" Lorton, the medical examiner, greeted him with a staccato summary.

"Dead about eight hours," Lorton said. "Shot through the throb with a twenty-two. Gun held close. It couldn't miss. Powder burns all over his form-fitting waistcoat."

Mac merely nodded.

It was 7:30 a.m., and he was never at his best so early in the morning. Besides, for the past ten days he had gone around with a bad case of nerves. It was due entirely to this Doc Lorton, who was now

putting his examining tools away.

While suffering a dizzy spell in late June, McClain had asked Lorton for a pill. The M.E. had taken Mac's blood pressure and listened to his ticker. Lorton's prescription had been for McClain to cut out the black, oily cigars he sucked on from morning to night, unless the detective wanted to feature a stroke or two.

The diagnosis had been good for McClain's health, but bad for his disposition. The detective cut out the Havana product instantly. It was like cutting off his right arm. He was scared. Fear of himself was the only bogey in

Mac's make-up.

McClain munched candy all day, when he could get it. This substitute didn't make his nature any sweeter. It gave him a good start on the road to diabetes.

Ten days without a stogie! That was like trying to fly a B-29 without motors.

Now Mac gave the medical examiner a sour look.

"Look, Doc, how long will my blood pressure stay in the upper brackets?"

Lorton shrugged.

"Dunno. Give me a nudge when you get time, and I'll put the clock on you again. Well, so long. I'm all cleaned up here. It's your turn now."

A cop from the local precinct gave Mac a nod as the detective went deeper into the apartment. Nice dive. Expensive and expansive. Rugs and oil paintings. Handiwork of some interior decorator. Nice neighborhood, too. Near the East River, in the Forties.

The apartment belonged to Sam Patrick, a solid citizen, head of Patrick, Holden and White, realtors. The firm had a big office in Radio City, and specialized in business rentals. Everybody knew Sam and had a good word for him.

THE corpse in the back room had been Sam's brother, "Mickey" Patrick. McClain had obtained this information from a report by Captain Fred Mullin, head of Homicide.

Mickey Patrick hadn't been a man of sterling virtue. Broadway floater, gambolier and sleight of hand operator, he had been in trouble with the cops several times in the last few years. The police charges had mostly been preferred by out-of-town visitors, who had been trimmed by Mickey in the Broadway manner.

Mac stepped into a small library upholstered in brown leather.

Mickey Patrick's body occupied a small sofa. The upholstery was pretty well crimsoned. So was Mickey, who had leaked considerable plasma.

McClain walked up slowly, studying the murdered man with professional interest.

Mickey had had iron-gray hair. His clothes were all right, neither cheap nor custom built. He wore a white shirt, a challis tie and cordovan shoes. His socks were good with hand-done clocks.

Joe Lorton had unbuttoned the vest of the corpse and pulled up the white shirt and undershirt.

Mac, chewing a day-old piece of gum, gave the library a routine examination. He came up with absolutely nothing.

But he had slightly better luck with Mickey Patrick's dark blue jacket. A few hairs on the right shoulder of the body interested him. Mac put them in an envelope. As he finished, he heard a step behind him, and Detective Wheeler wandered in.

Wheeler had been checking with the apartment house super, the elevator operators and the doorman.

"I got this, Mac. Sam Patrick is in Canada. Vacation. He let this tout use his suite. That's about all. Nobody around the building knows what time Mickey came in last night, whether he had callers, or he was alone when he came up. Find anything?"

"Not much," McClain grunted.

"No gun, huh?" Wheeler squinted at the windows half-open to the warm, summer morning. "They might have thrown the gun out yonder. Twelve stories. I'd better look around the backyards."

"Go ahead," Mac murmured without interest.

Wheeler started for the door, stopped and came back.

“By the way, there’ll be a private investigator around later. That Professor Morgan. You know. The party who writes those crime documents. Sam Patrick hired him when he got the flash on his brother’s fade-out. I guess Sammy don’t think the Department has much of an I.Q.”

After Wheeler went out, a precinct cop came in.

“There’s a gent outside who claims he’s working for Mr. Sam Patrick. Says the name is Morgan. Is it okay to let him in?”

Mac nodded wearily, and waited for Professor Morgan’s appearance. The detective had heard quite a lot about the private sleuth. Morgan was supposed to be an eminent criminologist, a man who solved tough cases by scientific methods. He was a grand slam in spades when it came to unraveling tight knots.

Morgan entered the library with an authoritative air. Although tall, the professor was slimly built. Horn-rimmed spectacles added to his scholarly demeanor. His Palm Beach suit was a crisp pale gray, the brief case he carried pre-war leather.

“Homicide?” Morgan asked.

“McClain is my name. Help yourself.”

“I had a long distance call from St. Anne de Beaupre, from Mr. Samuel Patrick. He was very much upset. Despite his brother’s—shall we say ‘recent activities’—Mr. Patrick was very fond of him. How did it happen?”

“Twenty-two, through the heart. Clean as a whistle.” Mac shrugged and sat down. “Just one of those things. No gun, no clues, nothing.”

“We make our own clues,” Morgan murmured, opening his brief case.

Mac stared. He wasn’t used to scientific methods. When he went on a case, he cracked it with time-tested, regulation police technique. No fancy

embroidery. If it were a matter of bloodstains, vital and important, he let the lab take care of it.

Mac’s job was to put the arm on the guilty person or persons. He had been pretty successful over a period of time. And right now, as he watched Morgan layout his paraphernalia, ideas were buzzing in the back of his mind.

Mac had trouble keeping from making sarcastic cracks. The professor examined the dead man’s nails, the palms of the hands, the cordovan shoes. He took a sample of dust from one rubber heel. He used a tape measure to determine the distance from the couch to the doors and windows. He went through complicated hokus-pokus that made Mac’s eyes bulge.

When the homicide detective could stand it no longer, he climbed to his number twelves.

“Guess I’ll ramble. Good luck, Prof.”

“Just a minute, please,” Morgan interrupted, getting up from the broadloom carpet. “What have you discovered, if anything?”

Mac grinned.

“Not a thing, Prof. Not a thing. Be seein’ you. And that reminds me, I know something.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s going to be a lovely hot day,” Mac told him.

WHEN Mac left the apartment, he walked through the side street until he found a cafeteria. Minus cigars, he couldn’t gear up until he had something under his belt. He made it a double in coffee, decided corn muffins were better than pseudo English-toasted, and finished with a half of grapefruit.

Then he took an envelope from his pocket, and looked at the hairs he had found in Samuel Patrick’s library. Long, pale gold, a dame’s hair, undoubtedly. But

what dame? That was the question. Mac decided the first thing in the book was to hoof out and learn.

Fortunately, Mickey Patrick had been a familiar figure around Hilarity Highway, as Mac's favorite columnist dubbed that portion /of Broadway from Times Square north to the Winter Garden. The late Mickey had been known in all the fluid clinics, cigar stores, dollar-fifty restaurants, bowling alleys, and the cheaper grade of cafes featuring floor entertainment without cover charge.

Mac picked up an earful along the way. But it was conflicting and confusing. The barman at the first oasis knew all about Mickey's girl friend. The murdered man had been in the bar with her a hundred times or more. Her name was Sue Mangum. She did a piece of terpsichore at a movie house.

That sounded swell until the bartender told McClain that Sue was a brunette.

The next bar brought out the information that Mickey Patrick usually had a redhead for company. A couple of more tries divulged the fact that the murdered man's feminine luggage came in all shades, except blond.

Mac chucked it a couple of hours later, and went down to Headquarters.

Cold-eyed, poker-faced Captain Mullin was waiting for him.

"What have you been doing?" Mullin growled.

"Checking."

"I've got a new angle for you. You thought Mickey Patrick was a bachelor, didn't you?"

"That's the way my information ran," McClain answered. "Wasn't he?"

"Some broad who claims she's his wife, showed up an hour after the news of his demise became public. Nice looking. Blond as a canary, and straight from the Jersey coast. If you want to hear her chirp,

she's staying at the Belgrave."

"I might as well listen," Mac said, reaching for his stained dicer.

The Belgrave was a medium-priced hostelry. Mrs. Mickey Patrick was at lunch in the dining room when Mac broganed in. He gave her time to finish her lemon sherbert and cookie before he intercepted her at the door of the dining room.

"Police business," McClain said letting her see his badge. "Let's go up to your room and talk it over."

She was really a blonde. Lovely hair, long and lustrous. Mac sighed when she ushered him into her small room and indicated for him to take one of the two chairs.

"How do you feel about Mickey?" Mac led off.

Mrs. Patrick smiled faintly.

"I'm not broken-hearted, if that's what you mean. I haven't lived with him for two years. He was no good. Nothing like his brother, Sam. Sam's been sending me a check each month since I quit. Sam's a gentleman."

Mac nodded.

"You're down on the Jersey coast. Were you there last night?"

"Until nine this morning," she answered. "I didn't kill him, if that's what you're hinting at. A lot of times, when we were living together, I had the notion. I've got an airtight alibi. People at my hotel in Jersey know I didn't leave my room from twelve-thirty last night until the desk clerk telephoned up with the news he heard on the radio. I got dressed and came to New York as fast as I could."

A little breeze came through the window. Outside, it was as hot as a firecracker, but Mona Patrick didn't appear to feel the heat.

Mac gave her an approving glance. Smooth-looking doll. In addition to her fourteen-carat tresses, she had a peach-

skin complexion, delft blue eyes and a good figure.

While not a beauty connoisseur, McClain knew a good-looking chick when he saw one. He found himself hoping her alibi would stand up.

"I guess that's all. Sorry to bother you." He reached for his skimmer. "I suppose Captain Mullin told you to stick around until we wind this up."

"I'll be right here."

"Before I go, you can tell me one thing. From what I've picked up, your husband was quite a ladies' man. A girl in every port. You wouldn't know his one big fancy. Her name, for example."

"That isn't hard." Mona Patrick smiled faintly. "Sue Mangum. She dances in the stage presentations at Loxy's."

"The brunette?"

"Yes. You know her?"

"Not so far," Mac replied. "That's one omission I'm about to correct."

HE bowed out and went up to a cinema cathedral that occupied a half a block midway along Longacre. Mac didn't go in to see the show or make any effort to meet the Mangum girl. Instead, he got her address from the books in the office, and, after a bite of lunch, wandered back to Center Street.

"Anything new?" Mullin inquired, when Mac lowered himself into a chair beside the captain's desk. "You look a little sallow. What did you think of Mrs. Patrick?"

"Didn't do my eyes any harm." Mac shrugged. "How about her alibi? Did she level on it?"

"I checked via phone with the hotel manager. If she got out of her room, went up to Sam's apartment, gunned Mickey and got back, she's Superwoman."

For some reason McClain felt relieved.

"Glad to hear it." He grinned slightly.

"Shame to lock up a sweet like that."

"Sam's en route." Mullin looked at some memoranda on his desk. "Bump into Professor Morgan up at the apartment?"

Mac stirred himself.

"Yeah. I wish you'd been along. Morgan did everything but dry-clean the drapes. When I left him, he had just finished measuring the carpet. He's a panic on legs, long ones."

"He's no push-over." Captain Mullin rubbed his chin. "What have you got that he hasn't?"

"The right answer." Mac yawned. "Some rib blacked out Mickey with a cute little twenty-two. She was parked on his lap at the time. Had her head on his right shoulder. A cinch for her to open her bag, shake out the shooter, shove it directly over his heart, and squeeze the trigger."

"That's the way you figure it?"

"Sure. It accounts for a perfect aim and the powder marks on the vest. And also," McClain added, "for the fact there wasn't any hole in Mickey's coat. Let the prof better that one, if he's able."

Captain Mullin opened his mouth. He closed it and turned around in the chair.

"Why don't you bring the woman in, if you've got this thing on ice?"

"I intend to, but there's only one difficulty," Mac said. He laughed under his breath. "There are so many frails in this cock-eyed burg. Mickey Patrick seemed to avoid blondes."

"Meaning?"

"It's a blonde I'm after," McClain said shortly.

The information he had obtained at Loxy's took him up to the Sixties toward four o'clock that afternoon.

McClain's destination turned out to be an ordinary, brick apartment house midway down a block bounded at one end by Columbus Avenue and Central Park at the other. The house had been standing a

long time. It needed a renovation job.

Mac sniffed when he put his attention on the mail boxes. He went through a front door held open by a hook.

He went up to the second floor and knocked on a door to the left of the stairs. He rapped because he couldn't find the bell. After a few minutes the door opened. A girl with nut-brown hair and eyes to match peered out at him. She was wearing lounging pajamas and was smoking a cigarette.

"Whatever you're selling, we have plenty of," she said, starting to shut the door.

McClain's big foot discouraged that.

"Never mind the comedy. Open up, sister. Here's why."

He held his badge in her vision line and got service. He heard the girl gasp. Unsteadily, she opened the door wider. Mac followed his feet inside, to a shabby, sub-leased flat.

"Police!"

"You're not Sue Mangum."

"My name's Virginia Pierce. I live here with Sue. If you're looking for her she's at Loxy's. She won't be back until--"

"Until any minute now." Mac picked out a lumpy sofa. "I'll wait."

The girl didn't say anything.

Mac parked himself among the lumps and ran a handkerchief over his face. The room was hot and stuffy, as if all the day-long heat had backed up in the room, to be tainted with the odor of stale tobacco and un-aired beds.

Virginia Pierce went back to her nail-shining job. She kept one surreptitious eye on McClain, the other on the door. Mac yawned and shifted his gum from one side of his jaw to the other. All the flavor had long since been spent. It was like munching an old piece of tire.

The telephone rang. Mac started. That annoyed him. He had never done any

nerve-jumping in his cigar-smoking days. It indicated what shape he was in, without his favorite nickel-brand.

"Yes, this is her," Virginia spoke into the phone. "No, I didn't hear from Miss Opperkay. Opperkay," she repeated as Mac listened lazily. "I don't know what time she'll be in. I don't know if she'll be home at all. Okay."

She hung up and went back to her orange stick and bottle of polish. Twenty minutes dragged past. McClain finally got up. The telephone call was working.

"Guess I'll mush along. Don't look like your friend is going to show."

"I'm sorry," Virginia said. "You can't figure Sue. Sue gets a date, and she never comes home."

"Thanks. Tell her I was here. I'll look her up later at Loxy's."

MAC went heavily down the stairs. But, instead of proceeding out into the street, he reversed himself in the hall, and went quietly back to the second landing. Cat-quiet, he edged himself close to the door of the apartment that he had just left. He nodded to himself when he heard Virginia Pierce's voice on the phone again.

She had evidently just obtained her number.

"He's gone. Says he'll look you up tonight at the theater. Ten minutes? Right."

Mac tiptoed further into the gloom of the landing. He sat down on the lower step of the stairs. He pushed his hat back on his head and brooded.

Was Mickey Patrick's widow on the level? Mac had run up against foolproof alibis before. He told himself that the blond girl had plenty of motive.

Ten or fifteen minutes passed before he heard someone come in below. Then steps on the stairs, light and quick.

Squinting over the handrail beside him, Mac caught a glimpse of a girl inserting a key in the door of the flat he had visited. She went in, shutting the door behind her. McClain got up.

He knocked.

This time he didn't stop to ask questions. The minute the latch clicked and the knob turned, he gave the door a shove and barged directly in, to bring himself up short and stare frowningly at the girl who had just entered the stuffy, super-heated room.

She was no brunette. Her uncovered hair was a beautiful shade of light gold. The sun, slanting across the outside of the air shaft and lancing in through the open window, seemed to set it on fire.

Mac paid no attention to the brown-haired girl, Virginia Pierce. He walked slowly over to the blonde. Things were beginning to shape up in better style. Light that wasn't sunshine started filtering through his mind.

"So you waited for the 'opperkay' to duck," Mac said to the blonde. "'Copper' in pig gab. What did you want, a breather, before I dropped in at the theater, and found you weren't there?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," the blonde said harshly.

"You will in a minute, Susie." Mac pulled his hat back in place. "You and me are going to take a taxi ride down to Center Street. I think the captain will get a thrill out of talking to you, about what happened in Sam Patrick's little library."

Her carmined lips parted in a sardonic smile. McClain usually guarded his back, but it might have been the heat that made him careless. Afterwards, he knew Sue Mangum wasn't smiling for nothing. It was inspired by what the other girl in the room was doing.

Virginia was thrusting the business end of a gun between the McClain

shoulderblades. He couldn't see her behind him.

"Stand still, dick!" The blond Sue Mangum in front of Mac ripped the words out vehemently. "Don't make mistakes. We play for keeps!" Her voice was like ice. "Get your dirty hands up. High!"

Mac followed directions. Sue reached in and helped herself to his service gun, holstered on the left side, deep under his armpit. She toyed with that while McClain winked away perspiration.

A nice mess. He was glad Captain Mullin wasn't there to witness his embarrassment. Two gals, and he had flat-footed in on them like a schoolboy with a stick of candy!

Mac drew an uneven breath. He had never battled with dames. He could enter a hot spot and slug it out with a bunch of tough monkeys, and have the time of his life. He could throw lead at mobsters, duck slugs and get a kick out of it. But to be in a spot like this with two dolls making a fool of him, was beyond his reasoning power.

"Look, sisters." Mac got the words out with an effort. "Where do you think this is going to get you?"

"Far! I'm leaving, right away!" The blonde laughed.

Mac shook his head. Without his cigars, he felt like Pop eye without his spinach. But he was still able to talk.

"No good," he said. "A bleached head of hair isn't going to get you out of town. You'll be picked up before you can reach the Hudson Tube. Last night you smeared Mickey Patrick, but the count on me won't help you any. The whole Department knows I'm looking for you, that I came up here to get you. If you think they're going to sit around with folded hands—"

"I knocked Mickey off," Sue said in anger, "because he crossed me up with his sweet talk. Promised he'd marry me. All the time he was hiding a wife out. Tried to

take me for a sleigh ride. He got what was coming to him, and so will you. Keep him there, Gin," she said to the brunette in the same quick toneless voice, "until I get my bag and blow."

The blonde started to back away. "What do I do with him?" Virginia asked from behind Mac.

SUE MANGUM was half-way across the room. McClain's fascinated gaze was riveted on his gun. She had to do something with it. She couldn't go to the street, holding the weapon in her hand.

"Give me ten minutes and then you can blow him up," Sue called to Virginia. "Do a good job while you're at it. Better leave him in the bathroom."

Mac felt the nose of the gun in Virginia's hand twitch nervously against his back. That made him feel a little better. The brown-haired girl's toughness was all surface. He expelled a breath and relaxed a trifle while Sue Mangum stepped into a bedroom.

She returned almost immediately, carrying a valise. Sue no longer carried Mac's service revolver.

Mac moved back, as if to let the blonde pass. At the same moment, he swung his foot. The heel of his well-walked shoe cracked against the shinbone of the brunette behind him. She gave a yelp of pain, and the gun's nose went away from Mac's back.

He grabbed her wrist and swung the brunette around in front of him. His left arm acted as a brace holding Virginia as a shield.

Sue Mangum had evidently bunked Mac's gun in the bedroom. She didn't wait to argue or help her girl friend.

Mac saw the blonde slide by them and make a dash for the door.

He wasn't interested in Virginia Pierce. He wanted the other dame. He

tossed the brown-haired girl aside and made a dash after the blond-dyed girl. She wheeled around at the door and went into action with tooth and nail.

"Get him, Gin!" Sue cried. "Quick! Plug him!"

She gave a reasonable copy of a cornered tigress. Mac tried to grab her clawing hands. Her nails were like small daggers. Her knee was a battering ram. The fury of her attack beat him back.

Momentarily he expected to be ventilated from the rear by Virginia. He could hear the brunette breathing hard, fumbling around. Then, abruptly, like thunder out of a summer sky, there was a knock on the door.

"Help!" Mac yelled. "Break it in!"

The blond dame renewed her efforts. McClain stumbled back. At the same moment, the brunette triggered the gun and a shot whistled past Mac's head.

He had them coming at him from two sides. Mac threw himself at the brunette number. She fired again, point-blank, but missed. He wrenched the .22 caliber revolver out of her fingers. The instant he had it, the world seemed a better place to live in.

When Sue Mangum saw what had happened, she ducked for the window opening on the fire-escape. Mac tripped her en route and she went down in sprawling fall. The valise opened, cascading lingerie all over the floor.

Then the door broke open.

McClain's eyes popped as Professor Morgan walked in!

"Grab that blonde!" Mac cried. "Then use the phone. Get Headquarters. Tell Captain Mullin to send a wagon up with a pair of straitjackets in a hurry!" . . .

Some twenty minutes later, Dave McClain and the eminent criminologist bought a pair of beers in a Columbus Avenue tavern. Professor Morgan looked

cool and comfortable. Mac was still hot and disheveled.

“Well, I got her,” Mac growled. “Mullin will shake a confession out of her without trouble. The gun that did it and the motive are on the hook. Looks like it’s wound up. Everything’s clear, except what you were doing knocking on their front door.”

The professor sampled his brew and smiled faintly.

“My usual methods,” he explained modestly. “I found a couple of hairs on the coat sleeve of Mr. Patrick’s unfortunate brother. They were blond. But when I gave them one of my tests, they proved to be bleached. All I had to do then was find

some girl with bleached hair, who had been running around with—”

“Mr. Patrick’s unfortunate brother.”

“Exactly. Where did I go for the information? The Broadway places, naturally. Almost the first one I tried yielded information. Miss Mangum, of Loxy’s stage show, a brunette last week and a blonde the day before yesterday. I got her address and—”

McClain nodded. He finished his drink and put the glass down. The barman came back and gave him an inquiring look.

“Anything else, mister?”

“Yeah. Two cigars. Big ones, black and oily!” Mac grinned. “Swell for the nerves,” he added.