



Martin fired
without taking the
gun out of his pocket

MURDER IS NO VACATION

By DONALD BAYNE HOBART

Detective "Mugs" Kelly gets a de luxe commission—with a corpse, a frame-up and a murder charge all thrown in!

THE trouble with hotel lobbies is that they are just places where you wait until it is time to go somewhere else. If I wanted to be impolite I might say this hotel I'm staying in is a dump, but I've seen some fair-looking dumps in my time. I picked the Hillcrest Hotel to get a change of scene while I was on a little vacation, and what a mistake that was on my part.

"Mugs" Kelly is the name. I'm big, tough, and have a face that not even a mother would trust. One look at me and babies cry more—but it has been said I'm repulsive in a nice way. I've found that looking like a hard lug does no harm when you're a private detective, and that's my job.

Anyway, I was sitting in the hotel lobby when an old man with white hair

and whiskers sits down beside me. He looks like Santa Claus without the red suit.

"I've been watching you," he said in one of those low, soothing syrup voices. "Very interesting. Yes, very."

"Meaning my rough-hewn features?" I asked.

"No." The old man shook his head. "Even though in your case beauty must be more than skin deep, I'm not a taxidermist. You're Mugs Kelly, aren't you?"

"That's right." I nodded. "But so far the pleasure is all mine."

"I am Clayton Carter," he said, looking around the lobby as though he expected spies to come out of the woodwork. "Would you be interested in five thousand dollars, Mr. Kelly?"

"Passionately interested," I said quickly. "But who is handing out five grand for what?"

"I am," said Clayton Carter. "I'm offering you the money for your services as a private detective."

"What do I have to do to earn this dough?" I asked, never having been the type who rushes into a bank carrying a shotgun. "Tell me more, Mr. Carter."

"Not here." Carter looked around again, and I got the idea the gent with the whiskers really was expecting trouble. "Come to room Eight-twenty in fifteen minutes." He stood up and looked at me anxiously.

"Please don't fail me, Mr. Kelly."

"I'll be there," I said.

"Good!" Carter said. "I'll stop worrying then."

He strolled over to the elevator and the operator took him up. I sat there wondering what was on the old man's mind and making a lot of wild guesses that didn't seem to prove much. I was doubtful whether he really would be willing to pay five thousand for the Empire State Building, let alone my services.

When the fifteen minutes was up, I took the elevator to the eighth floor and found Room 820. The door was closed so I rattled the knuckles on the panel. Nothing happened at great length so I knocked again.

THEN I tried the knob and the door opened. There was a stout bald-headed man sitting in a chair, and he didn't look happy. I never saw a corpse who did when he happened to be a murder victim.

The stout gent had a knife sticking in his chest. Clayton Carter was conspicuous by his absence. I stepped into the room, and then it dawned on me that I was being conspicuous by my presence.

I took a close look at the dead man. There was an evening paper lying on the floor beside his chair. The lights in the room were all turned on. He was wearing a bathrobe, pajamas and slippers. He didn't look like he had expected to be murdered. But then who does?

"Having fun?" asked a gruff voice from the open doorway behind me. "Why did you kill him?" I turned and there was a husky looking man standing there who had a face like a house detective. I felt my evening was going to progress unhappily.

"You made a bad guess," I said. "I don't even know the deceased. Mr. Clayton Carter wanted me to come to his room where we could talk privately. I'm Mugs Kelly."

"Yeah, I know," said the hotel detective. "I've heard about you. You're a private investigator from New York, and you're staying here on a vacation. Hap Martin is my name."

He quietly closed the door of the room from the inside and walked over and seated himself on the edge of the bed. He looked at me and then at the corpse and shook his head.

"The local police aren't going to like your story, Kelly," Martin said. "There's nobody named Clayton Carter staying at this hotel."

"But I was just talking to a man who called himself Clayton Carter," I protested. "Down in the lobby. He offered me five thousand dollars for my services. Said for me to come up to Room Eight-twenty and talk it over."

"The police will have a short and ugly word for that story," Hap Martin said, with a sigh.

"What word?" I asked.

"Fantastic," said the house detective. "You've been framed—but good!"

"Careful, Martin," I said. "You're not in character. You should be the first one to suspect me. After all, you found me alone in here with the body. I could have killed him."

"Sure," Martin said. "But—"

He broke off abruptly as we heard a scream coming from out in the hall. I ran to the door and drew it open. Martin was right behind me. There was a gal standing at the door of a room across the hall and it was easy to see she had pulled the vocal noises.

"What's wrong, Miss?" asked Martin, closing the door behind us quickly as we stepped out into the hall. "Why did you scream—"

She looked at us, and she sure was a dish. Slender and blond, with a figure that was a figure. She was nicely dressed and I didn't remember having seen her around the hotel up to now.

"There is a man in my room," she said. "I—I think he's dead!"

"Nice hotel you have here," I said to Martin. "All we need is a gent who doubles for a werewolf and the party is complete."

The elevator door opened and a man came stalking out. He was tall, dark, and

thin and looked like a character that Boris Karloff might play. Martin looked at him, and then glanced at me and frowned.

"Stop wishing," said the house detective. He stepped around the girl and entered her room. "You're too good at it."

I didn't say anything.

There was a white-haired man lying on the floor of the room. He looked familiar. I had found Clayton Carter again.

"Dead?" I finally asked as Martin knelt and examined the still figure on the floor. "That's Clayton Carter."

"He's still breathing," Martin got to his feet. "Looks like somebody knocked him out." The house detective stared at the man on the floor. "So this is Clayton Carter."

"And I am John Smith, gentlemen," said the man who looked like a Karloff character. He'd followed us into the room. "Dealer in caskets. I was told that someone on the eighth floor wished to make funeral arrangements." He looked to me like he would always know where the bodies were buried because he handled the spade.

"Tomorrow I'm to be Queen of the May," I said. "This is getting too much for me." I looked at the house detective. "You better call the police, Martin."

"Guess you're right, Kelly," said Martin. He picked up the phone in the girl's room. "Hello, Mabel? . . . This is Hap . . . Connect me with the police . . . Yes, I said police . . . There's been a murder in Room Eight-twenty."

"Good!" John Smith said. "I love a good murder." He looked at the girl, who shuddered. "Don't you?" he asked her.

She didn't say anything.

MARTIN was talking to someone at Police Headquarters. He made it brief and to the point. The white-haired old man moaned and opened his eyes. He

looked at the faces around him, frowned, and then sat up.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"You're not waiting for a street car," I told him. "What happened to you, Mr. Carter?"

He didn't say anything. Martin helped him to his feet. Carter stared at me as though he was trying to place me, and finally he nodded.

"I remember you all right, Mr. Kelly," he said in that soft sticky voice that gave me the creeps. "We had a little talk in the lobby earlier. You told me that you were a private detective and that James Pope had hired you to protect him."

"Too bad," I said sadly. "There I go talking in my sleep again. Did I happen to mention who James Pope might be?"

"He's the stiff in Eight-twenty," said Martin. "Somebody is lying, Kelly, and it could be you. You said that Clayton Carter offered you five grand to protect him."

"I didn't make any such offer," Carter said firmly. "But I gather Mr. James Pope is dead. Is that true?"

"Very true," said Martin. "He's been murdered."

"How unfortunate," said Clayton Carter. "And he was such a nice man. I knew James Pope well. You see I'm an actor—and I've been at liberty for the past year. Just haven't been able to find a part that really suited me. Pope was kind enough to lend me five hundred dollars to tide me over."

"I'd hardly call Pope a nice man," Smith the werewolf remarked, "and I didn't care for his expression. "He was a blackmailer, and a nasty one at that."

"That's right," the girl said. "I came here to plead with him to give back some foolish letters that my sister wrote to a married man. Pope refused to return the letters. He just laughed at me."

"You're Miss Nancy Norton." The

hotel detective studied the girl. I was beginning to suspect the only literature Hap Martin ever read was the hotel register. "And your sister is Gay Norton, the actress. Right?"

"Right," said Nancy Norton. "If those letters of Gay's are ever made public they will ruin her career."

Carter gave her a beaming smile. "Tush, tush. Don't be old-fashioned, my dear. Publicity is publicity whether it is good or bad. I know that. I've had both."

"Judging from what Smith and Miss Norton have said," I remarked, looking at Carter, "you're the only one around here who liked the late James Pope. Personally I dislike him even as a corpse."

"Perhaps you killed him." Carter said.

"Oh, sure." I nodded. "Hang me up in the living room, boys. I've just been framed."

"Could be," said Martin.

Mrs. Kelly hadn't raised any dumb children and I had a strong hunch that there was method behind the hocus-pocus. In the first place Carter had been quite anxious for me to come to Room 820 fifteen minutes after he had gone upstairs. Which looked like he wanted me to find the body and perhaps be accused of the crime.

There was another angle that interested me. Why had Carter been in the girl's room? Who had knocked him unconscious? Those struck me as the sixty-four dollar questions.

The police arrived, and the local constabulary knew their onions. I suspected all of them must have Victory gardens. It was no fuss, no bother, just run in with those cops.

Since Bankford is only a fair-sized city, the Chief of Police himself was in charge. Chief Fred Lang was big and shaggy and reminded me more of a tired polar bear than anything else. He didn't

believe in wasting words.

"Who found him?" Lang asked, when Martin and I showed him the body of James Pope in Room 820. "And when?"

"I did," I said. "About twenty-five minutes ago, I guess. It was like this, Chief."

I told him about talking to Clayton Carter in the lobby and about the old man wanting to hire me, and the whole smear. Two of Lang's men were going over the room taking fingerprints, and another was making flash shots with a camera.

IN THE room across the hall some detectives were questioning Carter, Smith and Nancy Norton. It was all very hush-hush and the rest of the hotel guests probably didn't know there was anything wrong.

"And you say that when he talked to you, Carter offered you five thousand dollars to protect him?" the chief asked when I had finished. "Is that true, Kelly?"

"Right, Chief." I nodded. "And when I told Martin that, he said there was no Clayton Carter registered here at the hotel."

"There wasn't early this evening," said Martin. "He could have checked in after I came upstairs tonight."

"Your story is pretty wild, Kelly." Chief Lang shook his head slowly. "And because of that I'm inclined to believe you."

"Huh?" I looked at the Chief in amazement. "How come?"

"If you were lying I think you'd try and tell a more convincing story," said Lang. "You don't look that simple, Kelly."

"Flatterer!" I said, but I was feeling relieved. "But who killed James Pope, and why, Chief?"

The Chief frowned. "That's what we've got to find out. Suppose you go down to the desk and see if this Clayton

Carter is registered now, Martin."

Martin started for the door. "Okay, I'll be right back."

The house detective left and Chief Lang looked at me. The local coroner had arrived and was examining the body.

"Tell me the part about your coming up here and finding the body again," the chief said. "You came up and knocked on the door of this room."

"And when nobody answered my knock I opened the door," I said. "Then I saw the dead man sitting there in the chair."

"The lights were on?"

"They were." I nodded. "And that evening paper was lying there on the floor beside the corpse. Pope didn't look like a man who expected to be murdered."

"Exactly." Chief Lang nodded in his turn. "So he must have been killed by someone he knew and trusted. Since he was a blackmailer I doubt he had many intimate friends."

"You've got something there, Chief," I said. "John Smith acted like he hated Pope, and Nancy Norton didn't seem exactly fond of him."

"But Carter said he was a nice man, according to what you told me," the chief said. He glanced at the coroner who had finished examining the body and filling in his report. "How long would you say he has been dead, Doctor Fell?"

"Hard to guess exactly," said the coroner. "But not more than an hour. Let's say the death occurred at eight-thirty."

"Eight-thirty!" I exclaimed. "But it was ten minutes to nine when the old man with the white beard left me in the lobby and asked me to come up to this room in fifteen minutes. Pope must have been dead when Carter was talking to me."

"Probably." The Chief's brows were knitted. "If Carter asked you to come up here it would have been foolish for him to

do it before he knew his victim was dead, particularly if he wanted to frame you with the murder.” He looked at me thoughtfully. “I’m going to do what everybody expects, Kelly.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Arrest you for the murder of James Pope,” said Lang.

“And I thought you were a nice man with brains,” I said sadly. “You’ve got to admit it’s a novel combination.”

“That all you want me for, Chief?” Doctor Fell asked, who was thin and looked like the world might be his oyster, but he’d never found any pearls. “The deceased was stabbed in the heart and died shortly thereafter. Good night.”

The coroner departed and the chief’s men took the body away in a basket.

“So I’m under arrest,” I said when I was alone with Lang. “You think I killed Pope?”

“I know darn well you didn’t do it,” the chief began to grin. “But I want the real murderer to think the police are sure you’re guilty. When we start to take you to the police station you’re going to escape—”

“Oh, sure,” I interrupted. “And one of your men just bursting with law and order will put a couple of bullets in me and what will poor Kelly do then? I never figured I’d make a pretty corpse.”

“Don’t worry about that,” said Lang.

“If I don’t worry, who will?” I asked, as I wandered about the room. “The idea of being a fugitive from the Law doesn’t appeal to me much.”

“But it’s the best way,” said the chief. “Come on—we’re leaving now.”

WE STEPPED out into the hall. The door of the girl’s room opened and Clayton Carter, John Smith and Nancy Norton came out with two detectives behind them. Hap Martin appeared from the direction of the elevator.

“I’m arresting Kelly for the murder of Pope,” the chief announced as we joined the suspects. “I may want to question the rest of you again tomorrow, but the police aren’t holding you now. I advise you not to try to leave town, though.”

John Smith looked disappointed. From his expression I got the idea the werewolf didn’t think I was the murderer. The old man with the white whiskers smiled sweetly. I was willing to bet animals didn’t love Clayton Carter.

“I’m sure Mr. Kelly didn’t do it,” said Nancy, and right then she became my favorite pin-up girl. “Did you find the ten thousand dollars in cash that Mr. Pope told me he had with him, Chief?”

Chief Lang blinked and acted like a polar bear shaking the water off his fur.

“The ten thousand that Pope had with him!” growled Lang. “Why doesn’t somebody tell me these things?”

“She did,” I said. “And why was James Pope carrying ten grand with him?”

“You should know, Kelly,” the Chief said in a nasty tone. “Since you must have killed him to get the money.” He drew a pair of handcuffs out of his pocket and started to put them on my wrists. “You’re under arrest, and I do mean arrest!”

“Wait a minute.” I moved quickly away from him. “This isn’t in the script.”

“Neither was the ten thousand,” Lang said, giving me a dirty look.

I suddenly wanted to go away from there. I looked into the girl’s room—and gasped.

“Look!” I said. “What’s that under the bed?”

They all looked under the bed. It was too dark there for them to see anything, but they kept looking.

I decided that now was my chance to get away. I started to run down the hall. Carter reached out and grabbed me by the arm. The old boy was strong. I landed a

good a sock on his jaw and kept going.

Lang and the two detectives had stepped into the room to see what was under the bed. Smith slammed the door shut with the Chief and his two men inside. An automatic appeared in the werewolf's other hand.

"Move fast, Kelly," he snapped. "I'm on your side."

Hap Martin was a little distance away. He fired without even taking his gun out of the side pocket of his coat, and he didn't miss. Smith reeled back with a bullet in his chest, his automatic dropping to the floor. Martin's gun had only made a popping sound.

I snapped my own automatic out of the shoulder holster. If the boys were going to fling lead around I wanted to be able to play, too.

Carter recovered from my blow and I dashed for the far end of the hall. Martin didn't try to use his gun again, for I had him covered. By this time doors were opening all up and down the hall and guests were rushing out to see what was wrong.

"Come on, Nancy!" I said quickly. "We're getting out of here."

I kept Martin covered with my gun and he didn't try to stop us as Nancy and I ducked down the exit stairs, letting the door slam behind us.

"Upstairs instead of down," I told her. "They won't expect that."

We went up until we reached the tenth floor and came out in the hall there. It was quiet in that corridor. I saw an open door and motioned Nancy into the vacant room. The bed was made up and it looked like no guest had taken this room yet tonight. I followed Nancy in and closed and locked the door from the inside.

"I know who the murderer is now," I said softly. "But I've got to prove it."

"You will," Nancy said quietly.

"What's your first name, Mr. Kelly?"

"Martin," I said. "But most people call me Mugs."

"Mugs." Nancy smiled. "I like that. It's cute. Who is the murderer?"

"I'd rather not tell you yet," I said. "If you knew his name that might place you in danger, Nancy."

"And I suppose running away from the Law with you like I'm doing isn't at all dangerous," Nancy said.

"I wanted you where the murderer couldn't find you," I said. "That's why I told you to come with me."

"Oh!" Nancy sounded disappointed. "I thought you liked having me around, Mugs."

"I do," I said. "I—"

THERE was the sound of a key grating in the lock of the room door. I looked at Nancy and she looked at me. I waited with my gun in my hand. The door opened and Clayton Carter stepped into the room. He looked at us, then peered back over his shoulder and closed the door from the inside.

"I saw you sneak in here," Carter said. "I came up to the tenth floor by elevator when I ran away. I was just in time to see you two come in through the fire exit door. I want to have a little talk with you."

"That will be nice," I said dryly, still covering him with the gun. "Go ahead and talk."

"I was acting for Pope when I offered you five thousand dollars to protect me," Carter said. "I didn't want to explain down in the lobby that I made the offer for him. That's why I asked you to come up to his room, Kelly."

"Because he was afraid of being killed?" I asked.

"That's right." Carter nodded. "So I left you down in the lobby and came up to talk to Pope. I found that he had been

murdered, and decided I had better get away from there quickly. I was frightened and thought they might believe I killed him."

"What did you do then?" I asked.

"I saw that the door of a room across the hall was open—Miss Norton's room, but I didn't know that then. I decided to hide in there, as it was dark in the room. I stepped into the room and someone leaped at me in the dark and knocked me out."

"Why did you lie about having offered me the five thousand?" I demanded. "And make it good, this time."

"Because I haven't that much money," Carter said. "It was Pope who might have been willing to pay you that to protect him. I was afraid you might insist upon our going through with the deal. Besides I thought the murderer might try to kill me if he knew I felt my life was worth that much money."

"You know who the murderer is?" I asked.

"Of course," said Carter. "It must be John Smith. He admitted he hated Pope."

"I think he may be right, Mugs," said Nancy. "My room was dark when I came upstairs and entered. I turned on the lights, and screamed when I saw Mr. Carter lying there unconscious."

"I'm glad to get all these details straight in my mind," Chief Lang said as he stepped in through the door that Carter had left open just a crack. Martin followed the Chief into the room. "I've changed my mind about arresting you, Kelly. It looks as if Smith is the man we want."

"There's no doubt of it," said the house detective. "Good thing you left him down in the girl's room with those two detectives guarding him, Chief."

"Just ducky," I said. "Suppose we all go down there."

"Why not?" said the Chief.

We all went down in the elevator to

the eighth floor and walked along the hall to the girl's room. We found Smith lying on the bed. The hotel doctor had taken care of his shoulder wound. Martin's bullet had hit high and Smith wasn't badly hurt. He sat up when he saw us.

"You've got the murderer?" he asked weakly.

"We have," I said. "But he doesn't know it yet." I walked over to the bed. Then I glanced at Lang. "If you had ten thousand dollars in cash that you had killed a man to get and you were hiding in this room in the dark and someone else came in, what would you do, Chief?"

"Why get rid of the money for the time being I guess," Lang said in surprise. "What do you mean, Kelly?"

I felt inside the pillow cases on the two pillows on the bed and drew out the ten thousand in fairly large bills. The others gaped at the money in amazement.

"Carter came in here," I said. "The killer had just murdered Pope and when he heard the elevator stop at this floor he ducked in here. Carter found Pope dead and he came in here, too. So the killer socked him over the head and knocked him out, but the murderer didn't want to risk having the money on him so he left it where he hid it in here."

"And who is the killer?" asked the Chief.

"Why Hap Martin, of course," I said. "He murdered James Pope for the ten grand."

"You're crazy!" shouted Martin. "You can't pin this on me."

"But I can," I said.

"Go on, Kelly," said the Chief. "You interest me."

LANG'S interest encouraged me.

"There was nobody in the hall when I first came up here tonight," I went on. "I opened the door of room Eight-

twenty and found the corpse. The door was open behind me and I would have heard the elevator if it had let anyone out on this floor. It didn't stop, but Martin appeared.

"He knew my name, he knew Pope's name, he knew Nancy Norton's name and claimed there wasn't anyone named Clayton Carter staying at the hotel. That wasn't natural. A house detective doesn't usually check on the guests to that extent unless he has a reason for doing it."

"You've got something there," said the Chief. "I was a bit suspicious of Martin myself. That's why I sent him down to check about Carter registering when I talked to you, Kelly."

"I just checked into the hotel a little before I talked to you in the lobby, Kelly," Carter said. "So probably Martin didn't know I was registered here."

"You can't prove a thing!" protested Martin. "I didn't do it."

"A house detective who carries a gun with a silencer on it seems suspicious," I said. "And I noticed your gun made little noise when you shot Smith."

"That doesn't prove anything," insisted Martin.

"Had a nose bleed lately?" I asked, looking at him closely.

"Nose-bleed?" Martin exclaimed. "What are you talking about?"

"You've got freshly dried blood on the cuff of your right shirt sleeve," I said. "Careless of you, Martin. You should handle a knife better than that."

The two detectives grabbed him then. He finally broke down and admitted the whole thing.

Nancy found her sister's letters among Pope's possessions, and that was all there was to it.

I'm finishing my vacation in New York where the Homicide boys take care of the murders. I've got something more important to do. There's a new musical that's just opened that's a wow and Nancy wants me to try and get tickets. Try and get tickets—mind you—and her with a sister in the profession!

But I'll get them—and if I'm not careful, I'll get the gal.