



How could McMurdo help the woman he loved when he knew she was hopelessly in love though not with him? He was only a dumb flatfoot—but McMurdo the dick, wasn't as dumb as he looked!

Sweet Dreams, Darling

By Paul W. Fairman

MCMURDO was up early, walking in the dawn. But, somehow, it wasn't the beginning of a new day. It was the death of an old day. He carried the last of its darkness with him, up a lonely street.

McMurdo stopped walking. This was it. The lunchroom. Not open yet. Quiet, waiting. This was where he had met her—a long time ago. His mind went inside while he stood in the street with the night around him.

She gave him that first smile, all over again, and asked:

"What's your pleasure, copper?"

McMurdo had probably scowled. He didn't remember now. Copper? Did it show that much? The smile turned into an imp's grin. "The feet," she said. "I saw them come in."

McMurdo, tough Homicide dick, colored up and writhed like a school boy. He mumbled, "Coffee and a hamburger," and wondered what to do with his hands.

He didn't watch her that first time. He stared straight ahead at a pumpkin pie on the shelf. He wolfed his sandwich. He gulped down the coffee and got out of there.

But he came back again. McMurdo, to

whom women hadn't meant a thing. Women were pictures on magazine covers. Women were unreliable witnesses. Women screamed and carried on. You found them dead, sometimes, and they didn't look as nice as they did on magazine covers.

But impersonal—always impersonal. Until he saw Wava. Then he began coming back.

The same smile every time. The friendly eyes. A crack, maybe, about the feet, while she got prettier, and the gnawing in McMurdo's stomach got more demanding.

The tenth time in he asked her. Casually: "What are you doing tonight?" Casual? Like hell! He'd rehearsed it a thousand times. McMurdo, the tough dick. He'd stood in front of the mirror and watched his own lips while he said it. Stiff, clumsy lips.

They went to the movies and he walked along beside her on wooden legs, like a puppet, freakishly happy. They went out a lot. Wava, with the far-away eyes, and McMurdo, the tough dick; the boy they were all afraid of; the lad who smacked them and watched them bleed; the cop who could get answers out of wooden Indians. McMurdo.

He didn't have to tell her. She told him. They were having a drink one night and she laid her hand on his doubled fist and said, "You love me. You love me don't you, Steve? She said it in a catching, far-away voice, that matched her far-away eyes. Not gaily—not even happily. She could have been saying: "It's a long way to Brazil."

He didn't answer. He didn't have to.

Her eyes softened. She said, "I don't know. I—wouldn't want to hurt you. You're so—damn swell."

Suddenly there wasn't enough air to breath. He said, "Let's get out of here."

It hurt him like a soft nosed bullet.

McMURDO walked on down the empty street. He walked and stopped again.

This is where he had brought them together, Tony's Dine and Dance. McMurdo didn't dance, but Larry Sales did. Sales was smooth. He had graceful, smooth hands. They could make a deck of cards violate every law of chance on the books. He had a smooth way about him, a glossy, confidential manner, that brought plenty of suckers to his floating poker game. He could inflame the greed in a man's heart, or the sleeping desire in a woman's eyes.

McMurdo didn't care about the poker game. A Homicide man, McMurdo. But he cared about the way Sales came over to the little corner table that night, a long time ago, and said, "So this is the gal I've heard about, copper. No wonder you've kept her under wraps."

McMurdo introduced them. They danced. Sales brought her back and went away. That was all. It didn't look like much, but McMurdo knew, and his stomach froze into a lump. Three weeks later, in the lunchroom, he said it, and tried to make it sound like not much of anything. He said, "You've been seeing—"

She nodded swiftly and went into the back. He paid his check and left. But it wasn't a breakup. Nothing like that. Not for another month.

McMurdo walked on, hunched into his coat. It wasn't cold, but he shivered. After a while, he looked up. This was where she'd told him—over a chocolate soda. She told him while a crowd of school kids bounced around the juke box and made it a happy place.

"We're going to be married Steve, she said. She was happy underneath and sad on the surface. He could see that the

sadness was for him.

He sat there like a man whose guts had been ripped out and thrown on the floor.

He said, "Swell."

They got out of there and he took her home and she kissed him, swiftly, and went in without saying anything.

That was the last he saw of her for six months.

It was a bad six months. All he had was his work, but he'd always had that, so it didn't help much. He began seeing it in a different light, though. The impersonal feeling he'd had about it faded away. The shabby little human drama, which had meant nothing before, now made him think.

Like the affair of Henry Treble, for instance. Henry Treble's landlady had found him one night, and had called the law. McMurdo went in and pieced the thing together. Before, his mind would have catalogued it and filed it away in two words: Suicide—despondency. Cold. Impersonal.

It meant more to him now. Treble, a middle aged man, all alone, living in a boarding house. He'd come home late one night, wrapped a towel around a .38 automatic, so as not to bother anyone, and dealt himself one through the skull.

McMurdo gave it thought. With good years ahead, Treble didn't want anymore of life. Why?

Alone. That was it. You had to have somebody. Somebody had to care whether you came home or not. Somebody had to be sore as hell if you stayed out and didn't call up. Alone, everything eventually lost its meaning, lost sense. It had ceased to mean anything to Treble. It had reached a point, with him, where a gun was the answer.

McMurdo thought a lot, about Henry Treble, and other people.

McMURDO walked along a street with shiny street car tracks splitting its middle. He stopped under a large red sign: Palm Gardens. He had met her again here—after six months. She'd phoned him. He waited for her at a small table in the back. She came in and gave him the old smile and sat down.

After a while, she said;

"He's going to kill me, Steve."

It was as if it hadn't quite registered. He looked at her, without shock, and asked, "Why?"

She talked for quite a while and it came to McMurdo as through a mist. He remembered exactly the way she said most of it.

"He's tired of me and he's afraid of me. For me it's one man, Steve—for always. You can't doubt that. It's just my luck that it had to be a heel. That one guy.

"I told him he'd never get away. The only way he can leave me is dead. I told him that and he knew I meant it and he's afraid of me. But he doesn't want me anymore and when I look at him I can see his mind working. It's working out a way. I don't know how he'll do it, but he's going to kill me."

There was something in her eyes, then, that McMurdo would never forget. A look. She stared at her glass and said, "He'll have to kill me, because I'll never let him go."

McMurdo flunked out miserably. He didn't know what to say. He didn't know what to do. There were no rules covering this.

He tried to talk her out of it. He told her that Larry Sales would settle down; that she didn't have anything to worry about. He said a lot of things that meant nothing to him, or to her.

He dropped her a block from her home and he didn't see her again for a month. Not until the call came in.

Then he went over to her house and saw her huddled by the gas stove—her head on the burner, the gas on.

She was dead.

Suicide. That was the way they wrote it down. Open and shut. There was a note. And there was Sales' beautiful alibis.

They wrote it off as suicide, but not until McMurdo beat himself to a pulp trying to make a case. He worked like a fiend, but it was no good. To put a man in the chair, you have to go before a jury. The butcher, the baker, the hair dresser, and the accountant. Twelve good men and true, who have to go to bed with their consciences afterward. They don't want some guy's blood dripping on them in their dreams. You've got to give them something' solid. Beyond a shadow of a doubt. You've got to give them a case against the defendant.

McMurdo had no case. Sales had had time to plan. He'd done a good job.

McMurdo saw him afterwards. He met him in the street and stopped him and said, "You killed her, you rat! You murdered her as sure as Hell's full of gamblers. I don't know how you did it, but you killed her."

Sales was safe. He luxuriated in a little gloating. The gloating was in his eyes, his handsome face. They sneered: Sure I killed her, copper. What are you going to do about it? Aloud he said, "Couldn't make it stick, could you, sucker? Maybe you ought to turn in your badge. You're stealing your salary from the taxpayers."

Sales sneered and walked on.

MCMURDO stared somberly at his watch. Blood pounded through his head. He was visualizing a big gray building, upstate. A building with narrow, high windows, and iron bars.

In that building, right now, *they were slapping the seat of Sales' pants into the electric chair.*

Standing there, in the early morning, on a deserted street, McMurdo laughed. Sales wasn't dying for Wava's murder. He was dying for Henry Treble's suicide.

McMurdo remembered, with relish. He remembered finding out about the thousand dollar gambling debt Treble owed Sales. From there it had been easy. Funny what a few bucks could do—McMurdo's bucks.

The pawnbroker who had sold the gun, for instance. Money changed the buyer from a middle aged, lonesome faced man, to a handsome young gambler. Look upon the defendant. Is that the man? Sure, that's him.

The landlady too. She was a poor woman. A few dollars and she could remember seeing a figure duck out of Henry Treble's room and leave the boarding house just before the body was found. She told all about it in court.

There was more. McMurdo got it all together, tied it up with a pink ribbon, and threw it in Sales' face.

It stuck.

Twelve good men and true said, burn the skunk. Then they went home and slept all night with their consciences and got up in the morning with bright shining faces.

Sales had skidded into hell, by now, on a bolt of man-made lightning.

McMurdo walked down the street. His back was a little straighter. There was more spring in his step. He was whispering into the dawn. He was whispering,

"Sweet dreams, baby – Sweet dreams."