



Clancy had only a fleeting glimpse of the man's hand

SALMON FOR SATAN

By HAL K. WELLS

*By using a sinister fiery-eyed feline to solve a mystery,
Patrolman Clancy proves black cats are unlucky—for killers!*

BEYOND the glow of the streetlights along Barton Street's unlovely length, the night was dark with the blackness of the first hour after midnight. The cheery whistle died upon the lips of Patrolman Michael J. Clancy as he turned the corner to start the second half of his nightly prowling.

Clancy had a grim and deadly

premonition. Somewhere in those darkly deserted blocks ahead of him, Satan would be waiting for him tonight. The thought sent the reddish-gray hairs on the back of Clancy's broad, sun-burned neck bristling eerily erect.

It was not that Patrolman Clancy was lacking in the matter of courage. If it had been merely a few gunsels lurking in the

shadows of Barton Street, Mike would have barged cheerfully into battle with his blue eyes blazing, his night-stick lustily swinging, and his Police Positive spitting lead—if he remembered to draw it, which he seldom did in moments of emergency.

Satan, however, was a menace of another and quite different color. You can't use a night-stick on a banshee, and .38 calibre slugs are of little value against a leprechaun. Satan was one-third banshee, one-third leprechaun, and four-thirds devil—and if you said that those figures seemed to add up to a slightly incredible total, Clancy would tell you that you simply didn't know your Irish arithmetic.

Most of the human inhabitants of Barton Street had gone to bed for the night. The ground-floor business places were closed, and the windows of the upstairs flats were dark. The only sign of life that Patrolman Clancy could see was Joe's Place, halfway up the block.

For a moment, Clancy's thoughts flirted wistfully with the idea of dropping into Joe's for a hamburger on rye. Then he reluctantly dismissed the idea. There was a certain night-prowling sergeant who had a quite unreasonable prejudice against patrolmen being parked on restaurant stools when they were supposed to be pounding their beats.

Clancy squared his broad shoulders and barged grimly on up the street. The first block passed without incident. Clancy's drooping spirits started to revive. Maybe, after all, Satan was prowling elsewhere tonight. Or maybe—oh, happy thought!—some benevolent truck or street-car had obliterated the ebony menace for all time.

Then, midway of the second block, hope died abruptly in Clancy's chest. The shadows of a narrow alley moved and a large piece of blackness disengaged itself and emerged upon the sidewalk. Two fiery

eyes blazed at Clancy in baleful malignance while a huge bristling tail swung from side to side in taut belligerence.

WHOEVER had originally named the brute Satan had been a good judge of cat-flesh. It was big enough to lick any four dogs in the neighborhood, and frequently did. In the matter of general disposition, it was seventeen degrees meaner than a grizzly bear that has just sat down on a hornet's nest.

If Satan ever had an owner, his identity was lost somewhere in the mists of antiquity. Ever since Clancy had landed in the precinct the big black brute had roamed the alley strictly on its own—gaunt, battle-scarred and perpetually hungry, but never relaxing the grim and bitter hatred that it held for all mankind in general, and for Irish patrolmen in particular.

To Clancy's vividly superstitious soul, it was bad enough to have any black cat cross his path. When Satan did the crossing, it was seven times worse. Every time that happened, Catastrophe with a large and capital "Cat" promptly descended upon the luckless shoulders of Michael J. Clancy.

Clancy faced the big cat and raised his night-stick in what he knew would be a quite futile gesture.

"Begone, ye imp of the outer darkness!" he ordered. "Scram, ye owl-eyed divil of bad luck! Scat!"

Satan's lips writhed back from a set of teeth that would have looked good on a jaguar. From somewhere deep in his furry throat there came a snarling wail that was an open invitation to battle on any terms and with any weapons.

Clancy warily shuffled forward. Getting past Satan was a feat that he had never accomplished yet, but maybe this

was his lucky night. It wasn't. Satan waited until the last possible second. Then he went into action with the flashing speed of black lightning.

He not only crossed Clancy's path—he crisscrossed it, circling Clancy's burly figure in a speed-blurred arc of yowling black fur and blazing yellow eyes. Clancy raised his night-stick but before he could throw it, Satan was gone, fading back into the alley from which he had come.

Clancy stood for a long and profane moment, staring up the alley. Then, with his broad shoulders slumping, he grimly plodded on up Barton Street. He walked with the dreary hopelessness of a man to whom the worst has already happened. The only thing that remained now was to find out just what the worst was. The bad news was not long in coming.

He was nearly past Manny Epstein's little delicatessen before he noticed that something was wrong. The interior of the shop was dark, which was as it should be. Manny closed at eleven o'clock. But the street door wasn't closed. It gaped open in a crack some two inches wide.

Opening the door the rest of the way, Clancy stuck his head inside. The pleasing odors of cheeses and spiced meats and smoked fish wrinkled his nose. Back at the rear of the narrow room he could see a thin line of light under a door. There was a small store-room there, Clancy knew, with a desk where Manny often worked for an hour or two on his accounts after closing time.

You don't prowl the streets of a district month after month without getting to know the personal habits of most of its residents about as well as you know your own. Clancy knew Manny Epstein well enough to be certain that there was something wrong. Manny would never be careless enough to leave his front door unlocked when he closed up for the night.

Clancy tiptoed cautiously back along the single narrow aisle of the shop. Midway, his groping foot came down on a loose board. It promptly gave out with a groaning creak that to Clancy's startled ears sounded loud enough to wake the dead. He discarded caution after that, and closed the distance to the rear door in half a dozen quick steps.

He flung the door open, then stood frozen in the doorway as his eyes took in the scene in the windowless little back room. Manny was there, but he wasn't working on his accounts. So far as Manny Epstein was concerned, all earthly accounts were forever closed.

His small body was crumpled on the floor in front of his old-fashioned roll-top desk. The back of his head looked like it had been caved in with the blunt side of a cleaver.

Manny had apparently put up a desperate fight before going down. The room was a mess. Splintered wall-shelves and shattered racks had disgorged their contents in fantastic confusion over the floor.

There were tins of every size and variety, from anchovies to corned beef. The contents of an overturned keg of marinated herring had been trampled into a silver-scaled mush in which fat lengths of liverwurst suggested the half-buried bodies of great purplish-brown worms. In the middle of the weird debris, an unbroken Edam cheese stared like a baleful eye of orange-red death.

Clancy picked his way gingerly through the mess and knelt beside Manny's body. There was no need to grope for any heartbeat. No man could possibly live with that hideous head wound.

Nor was there any need to seek the motive for the killing. Manny's worn leather bill-fold lay on the floor beside

him, emptied of the thick sheaf of bills and small checks that Manny always carried.

Rage flooded redly through Clancy's brain as he stared down at the limply huddled body. That was the trouble with pounding the same beat month after month. You got to know your people too well.

This wasn't just a nameless stiff waiting for the meat-wagon to haul it to the morgue. This was Manny Epstein—a swell little guy who lived in a cozy flat just around the corner, where Clancy had often dropped in on his night off, to play two-handed pinochle with Manny and to gorge himself upon the steaming bowls of flaky matzo ball soup and thick slices of spicy kosher salami that Mrs. Epstein set before them.

THE faint rustle of a sleeve against the wall snapped Clancy's attention back to his surroundings, but he looked up a fraction of a second too late. He had only a flashing glimpse of a man's hand reaching for the wall-switch from behind a tall pile of packing cases. Then, before he could get to his feet, the room clicked into utter darkness.

There was the sound of a large body blundering in blind flight through the blackness. Clancy lunged to his feet and charged in the general direction of the shop door. He heard a grunt of pain from somewhere in the shop as his quarry apparently collided with something. Then one of Clancy's feet came down upon a cylindrical glass jar of olives.

He made a one-point landing squarely upon the back of his neck. By the time that he shook the wildly dancing stars from his dazed brain and groggily groped his way into the shop, it was too late. The street door now stood wide open. The shop was empty!

So was the street outside. The killer

had had plenty of time to make it around the corner, and he had apparently used it. The only living thing visible in the block was Satan, haughtily stalking along the sidewalk some forty feet away.

"G'wan, scram, ye owl-eyed hoodoo!" Clancy said angrily. "Bad cess to your black soul, and haven't ye already brought enough evil luck to me this night, ye ill-begotten spawn of misfort—"

Clancy's maledictions died suddenly upon his lips as he realized that there was something very peculiar about Satan's actions. The big black cat was paying no attention to him whatever. His blazing eyes were fixed upon a deeply shadowed doorway. He began stalking the doorway, his furry body close to the ground, and his bushy tail twitching with eagerness.

From somewhere in the gloom of the doorway, a foot lashed in a vicious kick at Satan's battle-scarred head. Satan dodged the kick with practiced ease, then remained crouched just out of range. He yowled. But it was not his usual belligerent war-cry. It was a low wail of wistful yearning.

Clancy barged purposefully down the sidewalk.

"All right, you!" he ordered. "Come on out of there!"

A hulking figure slowly came from the doorway. He was a big brute, with the sloping shoulders of a wrestler, and the heavy, flat face of a not particularly intelligent bull ape. He walked with a decided limp.

"So that's the reason ye couldn't make it on around the corner, or up an alley," Clancy said exultantly. "Ye banged your leg on your way out of Manny's."

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," the fellow said sullenly. "I just stopped in that doorway to light a cigarette."

"And to play with the cat?" Clancy

asked derisively. He jerked his head toward where Satan crouched a yard away, his tail twitching as he watched "Ape Face" with singular intentness.

"Can I help it if cats like me?" the fellow demanded.

Clancy's face darkened. "Listen, mug!" he said savagely. "Let's quit blarneyin' around. That cat don't like you, or nobody else. What it likes is fish—and you got enough marinated herring smeared on your shoes to draw every cat in this end of town. Ye got that herring on your feet when ye slugged Manny Epstein to death there in his back room!"

Ape Face's right hand came from behind his back. It clutched a short length of blood-stained pipe that whistled in a murderous arc toward Clancy's head. Clancy's nightstick flashed. There was a crack of locust against wrist bone and the lethal pipe dropped from Ape Face's numbed fingers.

Ape Face swung a wild left hook that bounced harmlessly off Clancy's lifted shoulder. The night-stick cracked again, and this time it was against skull bone.

Clancy knelt beside Ape Face's stertorously snoring body for a moment, then rose with grim satisfaction upon his face. Any lingering doubt that the blood-stained pipe was the weapon that had crumpled Manny's head was dispelled by the name on the checks tucked in Ape Face's pocket.

Clancy hooked a hand in the sleeping killer's collar and dragged him down the

sidewalk toward the call-box on the corner. Satan followed him at a discreet distance, his eyes blazing in indignation over losing his fragrant find.

"Cheer up, baby," Clancy said, and for the first time since he had known the big black cat there was something almost like affection in his voice. "Before the night is over, I'll be bringin' ye something a lot more stomach fillin' than the smell of fish on a murderin' blackguard's shoes."

It was well over an hour before things were cleared up enough that Clancy could keep his word, and he had to talk Joe into delving into his private larder to do it. Clancy leaned against a light-post and surveyed the result with pardonable pride. It was a large can of salmon—not the pale pink kind, but luscious ruddy hunks of genuine, and expensive Alaska red.

Satan crouched happily beside the salmon-covered newspaper spread out on the sidewalk and ate until his black sides bulged.

"I'm apologizin' to ye, spalpeen," Clancy said contritely, with the precinct captain's words of praise still warm within his ears. "'Tis no hoodoo ye are, 'tis a mascot. And with the splendid nose for crime ye have, 'tis a fine and outstandin' credit to the force ye are!"

Satan looked up at his former enemy. He couldn't purr, because purring was an art that he had never learned. But he did the best he could. He put all the affection and gratitude in his heart into a large and magnificent burp.