

DISTURB THE DEAD

By
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"Three Left Hands," etc.

*A Murder and a Jewel Theft Take
Bill Post on a Strange
Graveyard Trail*

WHEN Bill Post finally caught up with Pete Mydans, the dapper thief grinned at him amiably from behind bars. Bill, usually a pretty hard-shelled citizen, felt like swearing violently or bursting into tears. But, being a pretty mature young man, he did neither. Instead, he managed a grin:

"Planning to stay awhile?" he asked.

Mydans shrugged. He was a hawk-faced man whose dapper exterior covered a long experience with prison and violence. He had not yet exchanged his two-hundred-dollar suit for prison shoddy. A white carnation, tipped with cerise, adorned his buttonhole.

"A couple of years, I guess," he replied. "Depends on how I behave."

"Where'd you put the Mallory jewels, Mydans?" Bill inquired.

"And what would I be doing with the Mallory jewels?" said Mydans. "I'm a pretty ordinary sort of fellow. Why an insurance dick like you would think I have them beats me. You must have run up a sweet swindle sheet chasing me around, Post."

"I know you took 'em," said Bill, his smile fading. "No one else leaves pink and



A terrific haymaker sent the detective crashing into the furniture

white carnations lying around a rifled safe.”

“But I was miles away,” said Mydans with a look of bland innocence. “My friends told you all about it in court.”

“I know that fake alibi of yours stood up,” said Bill. He turned away in disgust. By giving himself up on this old charge in Central City, Mydans had effectually spoiled Bill’s pitch. It meant the jewels—a six-figure collection of them—had been safely hidden.

“You might do me a favor,” said the crook insolently. “They don’t give us carnations around here. I’d appreciate if you’d send me one every day. I’d do the same for you.”

“Except that you’re not free, and I’m not in jail, and I don’t like carnations,” growled Bill.

Mydans’ insolence had gotten under his skin. Knowing that further talk was useless, he left the prison abruptly.

He’d only missed by a few hours, after a two-week chase. Mydans had gotten away with the loot, and the Twin-American Insurance Company was taking the rap for two hundred G’s. It was Bill’s job, as an investigator on the Twin-A payroll, to get at least some of it back.

So far, his efforts had amounted to absolutely zero. Mydans had been as elusive as a greased pig. He’d ducked to Canton, Ohio, then to Memphis, getting clear each time just before Bill caught up with him. The detective was quite certain that Mydans had not yet fenced his loot. If it had gone on the underworld market, there’d have been indications the Twin-A couldn’t have missed.

All he’d done was make it so hot for the crook that the latter had gone to earth in Central City, where a jail sentence was waiting for him from a previous encounter with the men in blue. Evidently Mydans had decided jail was the safest place for

him until the heat on the Mallory job died down. Which meant that he’d safely hidden the swag.

BILL was in a nasty temper when he strolled back to his hotel.

Newsboys did their best to make buildings topple with their shrill yells. Finally the shouts of one of them broke through the detective’s angry mood. Unable to learn what the shouts were about, he grudgingly bought a paper.

With a grunt he read the bold headline on the front page and the story, below it.

**MURDERER STILL AT LARGE!
SLAYER OF UNDERTAKER ELUDES
POLICE DRAGNET**

While Central City police search feverishly for clues, the killer of undertaker Harlan Brown is still a large X today. Brown, who was slain last night in his office, was listed high in Central City professional and political circles. As police reconstruct the crime, he was at his desk, going over the accounts of the company which bears his name, when some person or persons walked in and put a thirty-eight calibre bullet between his eyes.

Patrick Regan, a gravedigger, the only other person near the establishment, heard the shot, but was unable to reach his late employer in time to stop or identify the murderer. Regan had been in charge of the burial of Miss Mary Smith, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Belvedere Smith of this city, which took place two hours earlier. He had returned to the office to report to his employer, and had stopped in the wash room to clean himself up.

Bill read the story without much interest. His mind was on the telegram he was going to have to send the Twin-A folk. In view of the dead end to which his investigation had come, it wasn’t a pleasant prospect. His boss would be sore and rightly so. Bill had done his best, but he wasn’t paid for that. He was paid for

bringing in the bacon, in this case the Mallory jewels.

That blasted Mydans! Every time he closed his eyes, Bill could see that blandly insulting hawk face. He could still hear the thief ask for more carnations. The detective reached his hotel, moved toward the elevators, then detoured to the bar cafe. A drink might help him think up something to say to the old man.

It didn't, of course. Nor did the second, nor the third. By the time he raised the fourth rye and soda to his lips, he had mentally consigned Mydans and his employer to a very warm place. His boss stayed put there, frying nicely, thank you, but Mydans kept popping back into Bill's maudlin thoughts—Mydans and those pink and white carnations.

With the fifth drink, Bill decided those carnations were becoming a fixation. Grimly, he decided to do something about it. With the precision of a brain slightly muddled by alcohol, it seemed to him that the only logical way to rid himself of this fixation was to buy up all the cerise and white carnations in Central City and send them to the thief. This done, he could forget about the whole business for a night at least.

The first florist he called on, shook his head.

"I got white carnations, pink carnations, red carnations, but no pink and white. There's no demand for them here."

"Thanks just the same," said Bill.

The same thing happened at three other flower shops.

"For Pete's sake!" said the detective to the proprietor of the fourth shop when the answer was again no. "A friend of mine likes them. He was wearing a fresh one this morning. Where'd he get it?"

"I don't know," said the florist dolefully. "I'd sure like to fill your order, but I don't know where. Wait! There's a

man who raises carnations over across the river. He sells directly to some of the hotels and funeral parlors."

"What's his name?" Bill asked.

SOMETHING in this jarred him, brought him out of his drink-induced fog. He wrote down the florist's name, went to a drug store and called the man up. It was late, but he got his man at home.

"Yes," said the flower dealer, "I do raise them. There isn't much demand for them in Central City, but I like to have them on hand to play safe. Unfortunately, I sold all I had on hand yesterday."

"Who'd you sell them to?" asked Bill. He felt a hot hunch burning inside him, just below his diaphragm.

"I sent them over to a funeral—to that chap Harlan Brown who was shot last night. It was Dr. Smith who ordered them."

Bill hung up cold sober. If the Brown funeral parlor were the only place that had pink and white carnations, then Mydans had been there. And police were still looking for the undertaker's killer. Riding to the establishment on the rim of town, Bill thought it over.

It had seemed logical enough that the thief would be willing to serve a short jail sentence with such valuable loot awaiting him on his release. If Mydans had a murder rap hanging over him as well, it seemed many times more logical.

And why would Mydans murder the undertaker? Since he was no fool, there had to be a good solid reason. Well, two hundred Gs in pearls, diamonds, rubies and the like were plenty solid. If the undertaker had hidden the stones, Mydans might have decided to rub him out. In Mydans' mind, no friend is true against the temptation of such a haul.

At first, Bill thought the place was deserted. It was a rambling one-story structure on the very rim of town. Behind

it, over rolling hills, were dotted the seemingly endless monuments of Central City's leading graveyard. A big blue roadster was parked in front of it.

Finally the door was opened. A hulking hairless Hibernian whose rough hands and weather-beaten face gave the lie to his neatly-pressed dark suit answered it. This, Bill hazarded, was Patrick Regan.

"I'm from Twin-American," Bill said smoothly. He could be smooth when the occasion demanded it. "Mr. Brown had a small policy with us. It is to be paid over to whomever carries on with the business. Can you tell me a little about how things are fixed?"

"Sorry, bub," said the Hibernian. "I only work here. I wouldn't know who gets the business."

He stayed in the door, blocking most of Bill's view of the interior. The detective got an impression of hulking strength and—vague fear.

"Who is it?" asked another voice. Bill tried to get to look at its owner without success.

"Just an insurance guy," said the hairless man. "I don't know from nothing."

"Well, snap it up, Pat," he said. Bill smiled, turned to go, managed to stumble against the door. Through it, he was able to take a quick mental photograph of a hulking, long-jawed man with a red face, loud clothes and a glittering diamond horseshoe tie pin. He apologized, went back to his cab.

"Drive around a bit," he said. "I want to think."

A dollar and twenty cents later by the meter, he rapped on the window that partitioned the vehicle.

"Hey, cabby," he said. "Do you know a big guy who wears high-powered clothes and sports a diamond horseshoe in his tie?"

"Who don't?" said the driver. "I've been payin' him most of my dough since I

was fourteen. Central City ain't big enough to have two of him."

"Okay," said Bill as patiently as he could. "But who is he?"

"That's Sean Logan, unless he's got a carbon copy. He runs the biggest book on the races in town."

BILL did some more figuring while the meter mounted. What would a big-time bookie like Logan be doing with such a son of poverty as Pat Regan? It didn't make sense, unless—

Harlan Brown had been killed after the Smith funeral. The only pink and white carnations in Central City had adorned that funeral. Mydans had been sporting an unwilted pink and white carnation that afternoon. And now Regan, a gravedigger, was in consultation with a big-time bookie.

Bill had the cabbie take him to within a quarter of a mile of the mortician's establishment. It was getting dark now, and he kept in the deepest shadows as he moved carefully toward the one-story structure. Yes, the office lights were still on. Resisting the impulse to light a cigarette, Bill Post sat down at the base of a hedge and prepared to wait it out. The big blue roadster was still out in front.

His wait was not a long one. As soon as night had fully fallen, the light in the office went out. Regan, attired in coarse grey working clothes came out carrying a pick and spade over his shoulder. With him was Logan, a lantern in his hand, his coat collar turned up against the chill night air.

Bill felt excitement rise within him. He knew he was onto something when he followed them, working silently from monument to monument, to keep out of sight. They covered some three hundred yards before they went down into a little ravine. There they stopped by a fresh grave, and Logan lit the lantern.

Steadily the shovel gouged into the

freshly turned earth. Keeping well out of the range of the lantern's rays, Bill worked closer. His hand slipped under his topcoat, emerged with a very businesslike automatic. Then, he squatted behind a headstone and waited.

"You're sure you saw them, Pat," said Logan.

"It weren't no dream," said the Irishman, digging stolidly. "I wasn't supposed to be in the office at all. But my spade broke and I had to go back for another. I saw this friend of the boss' showing them to the boss."

"A nice friend," said Logan thoughtfully. "I knew Harlan Brown had his fingers in a lot of pies, but I never figured he'd go for hot stones."

"You haven't got a load of these yet," said Regan.

His shovel scraped metal a moment later. Peering cautiously around the monument, Bill saw that the grave was open. The hairless Hibernian was busily putting the rollers in place to bring the coffin up.

He moved with the precision of an experienced veteran. The casket came up evenly, and only a few moments were required to open it. It was lined with white satin. Inside lay a young girl, also in white, still lovely in death.

Disregarding her as if she were the body of a mangy dog, Regan plunged both hands into the foot of the coffin. Despite the cold, his bald dome shone with sweat. He came up with a small casket, ripped at its cover feverishly. A moment later he dangled a loop of pearls in front of Logan, whose eyes narrowed at sight of them.

"Holy suffering cow!" said the bookie softly. "You were right, Pat."

"I told you so," said the Irishman aggrievedly. "This ought to even up for what I've been owing you and leave a bit over besides."

"It does, Pat. It does," said Logan.

"All right," said Bill, covering them with his pistol. "Let's be getting this stuff back where it belongs."

LOGAN and Regan froze. Bill stuffed the stones into his overcoat pocket, kept them at bay with his gun while Regan recovered the casket. Then, leaving it lying atop the reopened grave, he marched them back to the office.

And there his two prisoners made a break. Both jumped him at once. The gravedigger literally ripped the coat from his back and fled for the door. Bill put a bullet through his leg and put him out of action. But Logan wasn't wasting the seconds. He hailed heavy punches off the side of Bill's head, knocked him reeling to the wall, his senses fading.

A terrific haymaker sent the detective crashing into the office furniture. For a moment, he wondered if he were going to lose the game now when he'd come so close to winning. But the very power of the blow gave him his chance.

It knocked him clear of his opponent, enabled him to recover sufficiently to get his gun down and shatter the man's kneecap.

Feeling groggily triumphant, he picked up the telephone and called the Central City Police.

"By the way," he concluded, "you'll be interested to know that Brown's murderer has been caught."

"Where the blankety blank so and so is he?" bellowed an excited police lieutenant.

"In jail," said Bill hanging up. He'd let them stew for a bit. Then he picked up the phone once more and got the florist across the river.

"Get a bale of those pink and white carnations tomorrow," he said. "Yes, and send them to Carl Mydans in the city jail. Just say it's a favor to a friend."