
THE MAGAZINE OF WEIRD MYSTERY!

10¢ DIME 
MYSTERY
MAGAZINE
NEXT ISSUE OUT JULY 5th

Volume 30

July, 1944

Number 3

GHOULISH CRIME NOVEL

BROTHER, CAN YOU SPARE A GRAVE?.....Day Keene 8

After courting death in the battle-torn Pacific, Tom Doyle thought it would be easy to locate the little old lady's lost grave. He didn't know he would be stirring up a secret so sinister that the very dead in their coffins would rise up against him!

THREE STRANGE AND GRIPPING NOVELETTES

THE LITTLE GREEN DOOR OF DOOM.....Frederick C. Davis 26

Can a dying person switch souls and remain on earth as a living, breathing—but entirely different—personality? This story of bizarre mystery is calculated to make you tinglingly unsure of the answer!

IN BED WE DIE.....Curtiss T. Gardner 44

Did creaking, howling Devils inhabit the windmills at Stevenson's woods? Val Vickers, Specialist in the Impossible, had an answer—but to prove it he had to risk his own life in the strange bed where, horribly, three others had slept and died!

YOU'LL NEVER KNOW WHO KILLED YOU.....Francis K. Allan 62

Each time the hooded killer struck, the murder guilt piled higher against innocent Steve Wall . . . until, appallingly, he found himself actually being forced to aid in his own—and his trusting wife's—destruction!

TWO MENACE-DIPPING SHORT STORIES

HIS BEARD WAS LONG AND VERY BLACK.....Stewart Toland 38

A beard is a strange thing. It completely moulds and masks a face—in life as in death!

CLAWS FOR THE TIGER GIRL.....Duane Yarnell 55

The Great Kerrigan, stage magician, had no trouble slipping out of a pair of trick handcuffs. But how could he get out of his own coffin?

—AND—

MYSTERY'S DARK PORTALS.....The Editor 6

THIS SEAL PROTECTS YOU  AGAINST REPRINT FICTION!

Published bi-monthly by Popular Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago 16, Illinois. Editorial and executive Offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York 17, N. Y. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary; Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice-President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter March 4, 1941, at the postoffice at Chicago, Ill., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Title registration pending at U. S. Patent Office. Copyright, 1944, by Popular Publications, Inc. All rights reserved under Pan American Copyright Convention. Single copy price 10c. Six-issue subscription in U. S. A. 60 cents. Foreign postage 38 cents additional. Subscription Department, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts kindly enclose stamped self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable, and send to 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of uncollected manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them.

His Beard Was Long and Very Black

By STEWART TOLAND



I watched a hole dug beside
a large boulder. . . .

Facing prison execution, bearded Peter Draik alone held the secret knowledge which would have freed him. Then why was he so strangely, stubbornly silent about what he had seen on that winding moonstruck road during the long night of horror?

PETER DRAIK had gone west to Arizona. Just another stranger standing on the Pullman step, gaze intent, even anxious in the blazing sunshine, then swinging gently down into people's lives. Not many came to Canotee; it had been six years since any bought land. But Peter took the old Wilsey place. Paid cash. That in itself caused talk.

He hired Mrs. Evett as housekeeper—old



Mrs. Evett who had minded everybody's business for sixty years. Afterwards it was a local wonder it had taken her so long to get onto Peter Draik. Almost a whole year.

But that was because always he'd kept that particular closet locked.

The Wilsey place had been on the slow

road to ruin, the house sagging in a kind of terrible defeat. Rattlesnakes had made paths in the dust and sand upon the floor; no door would close over warping boards. No man in his right sense would have bought the place. Save it was out of town. Alone. Acres and acres, thick with cacti and quartz rocks and scuttling desert creatures. And a drainage ditch sparkling in the sun. Water.

THAT was what Peter Draik bought. Water and an Arizona sun. What he did first was to plant sweet peas, row upon row. The seeds vined green, and while he waited for the miracle of their blooming he patched up the old house. He worked until it stood straight and proud again. As proud as Peter Draik.

The town thought him strange, peculiar, even distinguished. His back was so straight, in spite of the slight limp that kept him out of the war. His eyes were clear and gentle, with just a touch of sadness, as though they wanted to smile—and couldn't.

Mrs. Evett was remembering that smile as she traded her last bit of gossip over her ration points at the butcher's on that day almost a year after taking service with Mr. Draik. The day that was to be a milestone in her life, in all the lives in Canotee.

Mrs. Evett swished her skirts and her tongue and when she got back to the old Wilsey place that was now the new Draik place, she found the closet door unlocked. And there wasn't a thing inside. For all the mystery about that door there wasn't a thing inside. But wait— On the shelf, way in the dark of the corner so she could only see it by standing on tiptoe, was a small black bag. She snatched at it. This was Peter Draik's secret.

That he had one she held no doubt. A body couldn't cook three meals a day for a man for almost a year without learning more than that he liked his meat well done and plenty of pepper in the sauce.

There were initials on the bag. G.H. And she knew what it was even before she opened it. A doctor's bag.

There were instruments inside and mustiness and a newspaper crisp and noisy to her touch. It was from far away, a little town in New York State she'd never heard of. There was a man's picture on top. Middling aged he was and handsome, laughing so his eyes were almost tight shut. He had a long black beard. Under the picture were words:

Dr. George Heathton, wealthy physician feared murdered. His bloodstained car has been found. Nothing else. Statewide search for the pauper he befriended who has disappeared. A mental patient named P—

There it was torn, just the letter P, and

George Heathton. G.H. Mrs. Evett looked quickly at the initials on the bag, then back at the date on the paper. Five days before Peter Draik had hired her. Peter Draik whose name began with the letter P. Five days, and it took around four to get from New York to Arizona. . . .

Peter Draik saw her coming, stiff and quick, justice with the blindfold gone. And in her anger she was blind to her own danger. She held the bag accusingly, and the paper, and looked to the gun he'd always worn. For potting rattlesnakes he'd said. Indeed!

"You killed him! You killed the man that owned this bag. That's why you're here. You're not an honest farmer nor yet no lunger. You're hiding because you killed him!"

The man just shrugged and smiled, "Yes, I killed him." He went on working with his sweet peas.

He was still there when she got back with the cops. He stood and watched them come through his new green fields and he was glad. It was time. Time and enough. Eight months was too long for a man to lie dead. Murdered.

The police licked their jowls like hungry wolves and Peter Draik didn't keep anything from them. Why bother? The bag did belong to Dr. Heathton. The New York cops had his car, and the bloodstains, and the thin air he'd vanished into, and not in all the months since had they found anything more. Until this bag.

Fingerprints flashed across the continent and Draik's matched some of those found so long ago in the bloody car. He admitted they were his. That much he'd give them. But no more. And he smiled at the handcuffs, at the man getting on the train with him.

"No murder without a corpse. Find the body." That was what he said when he left Canotee.

He said it to all who would listen. Even to Francis Heathton, the murdered man's stepbrother. They met in the jail, thick with tobacco and reporters and the lust for drama in men's eyes.

IT WAS Mr. Heathton who did the talking.

Hesitant, a bit sadly, he nodded to indicate Peter Draik. "Yes, this is Peter. He was homeless, no-good, when he came to our house six years after the first world war. He had a story to tell. Not many knew, but 'brother' George and I were adopted, unrelated except by the love of the man we learned to call father. It was a very real love, and it was of father that Peter Draik told.

"He had tried to rescue our father from death. The battle of Belleau Woods. He told the story well. We saw and felt every minute of that horror in which men died and some lived. He had father's silver identification tag,

with Y.M.C.A. on one side and his number on the other. It had not been hard to get, lying loose in the mud of France, for father's arm had been blown to blood and pulp. The tag was washed clean now. It was something to stare at and feel and to hang thoughtfully from a watch chain.

"After that we kept the stranger, this Peter Draik, year after year in memory of that last day he had shared with Father. A man's last day on earth. It was something to be treasured.

"Then we found he lied.

"That was when my brother George told Peter Draik to go. Told him in threat and wrath. That was the night George's car was found all red and soaked with blood."

Francis Heathton stopped his talking. There was nothing more to say. Silence lay like a thick, black hand over all the staring people in that room. And it was laughing that broke it! Peter Draik's laughing, deep and hearty and strangely contented.

Weeks passed and a million questions and still Peter Draik sat unperturbed in the midst of all the hate.

"No murder without a body."

He always smiled when he said it and the police had come near to breaking his bones, yet they hadn't broken his spirit. There had been no trial, there was no body. He was booked on suspicion merely.

Finally they let him go. It was a beautiful day—a nameless space of time, filled with wide blue sky, and a sun, a living wonder, so warm, so close. That was what Peter thought, standing on the steps of the jail. Almost he had forgotten. The cell window had held such a narrow view, and this was all the world.

By and by he began to walk, slowly at first, pausing by each store window, seeing each thing as though it were new. All of the necessities man had educated himself into needing! In jail one learned a different sort of need. A shirt, a pair of pants, a razor, and a smile now and then.

It was while he was looking at a pink flowered dress that Francis Heathton walked by.

Mr. Heathton stopped short. Stunned. The glistening whiteness that crept up from his neck into the roots of his hair, made him rather terrible to look at. Strange.

He turned and ran, as if already the devil's pitch fork burned deep between his shoulder blades. That was how he came to the jail to tell the story he had so long withheld.

"You had no right to let Peter go! Murder has been done. I can prove it!"

He sobbed the first words and then calmness came, there in the safety of the jail, in the circle of these blue-coated men he had known most all his life.

"I know where the body is." Words trem-

bled, to match the shaking lips. "I saw the murder. I didn't tell before because I wasn't sure who the murderer was. Not at the time. He was just a dim shape that made up a horrible nightmare.

"It was a hot night and I had accompanied my brother on a late call. I'll never forgive myself. I went to sleep, waiting in the back seat. When I awoke, the car had been moved into the country. I looked out and there was my brother lying on the ground, eyes wide and sightless and dead. There was no doubt of it. And the man above him threw a knife away and stooped low and grabbed George's beard—the beard was long and very black—and he pulled him by it, pulled him all down the winding, moonstruck road.

"I followed in the distance, witless with terror. I watched a hole dug beside a large boulder and when the hole was done the killer took a pen knife, slashing at the beard . . . and I turned tail and ran. I'm not proud of that, but my bones had turned to jelly. They had done more than that. They laid in bed for days afterwards beset with fever and delirium."

Francis Heathton twisted and broke the pencil in his hand. Then once again he looked to the listening men.

"Long ago I thought the murderer might be Peter Draik. But I couldn't be sure. And then when he practically confessed, still I wouldn't tell, wouldn't sign a man's death warrant. I thought that, then. For days I've fought with myself, hoping Peter would break. But he hasn't. Now I'm telling, for Peter Draik is free. He will tire of looking in windows, he will remember what I have said of him. He will come to kill me."

Francis Heathton shrugged, licked his lips twice.

"I will show you where the boulder is."

SO Peter Draik was sent to the Death House to wait for a certain 15th and midnight. To wonder how many volts there would be. Did a man feel their burning or die first?

The world forgot. Even the jury that convicted him. All save Peter Draik, worrying about his sweet peas in the garden in Conotee. An old man had come to care for them. A man so old and hungry he didn't mind working for a murderer.

Then the week before the 15th Peter Draik asked the young jailor who brought him his food if he might see the judge who had sentenced him. The judge was kind and fair. He came.

And when he got to the cell door he stood transfixed.

The man inside smiled, and stroked the beard he'd been so many weeks growing. It was short still but very black.

"Come, judge, don't tell me you've for-

gotten. You've known me since I was little enough to crawl under your fence and steal apples."

"George Heathton! The likeness is amazing!"

"It should be. I am Dr. George Heathton. Though none of you recognized me without my beard. A beard is a strange thing, it so completely molds and masks a face. But then that's why I grew it in the beginning. I looked so ridiculously young when I got out of college, I thought no one would hire me to cure their aches and pains. Remember? Or is it too many years ago. . ."

The judge was skeptical. "If you are George Heathton why have you masqueraded as Peter Draik? Why did you sit so passively all through your trial? Why wouldn't your own brother know you?"

"But he does. He's known all along who he was sending to the chair." A laugh, grim and sardonic came out of the beard. "I was curious, wondering how far he would go. Now I know. I have only seven days and seven nights to live."

The judge shook the bars in his very vehemence. "You are mad! This can't be so. If it were it would mean Francis Heathton is a fiend!"

"And clever. Don't forget that. Francis is clever."

"Why should he send you to the chair, and if you are George, where is Peter Draik?"

"Dead. Buried under the name of Dr. George. My name. His was the body found beside the boulder. He was the reason I went away to Arizona, the reason I waited eight months and more to find where he lay.

"Come, judge, sit on the cot beside me and let me tell you a bit of the story that hasn't yet been told. You never knew Peter Draik. None of the townspeople did. He was an invalid all the years he lived with us, and never left the comfort of our grounds. If you had known him I wouldn't need to tell you that Peter Draik didn't lie about father. I was never disappointed in Peter. But I was in Francis.

"Francis hated Peter Draik. With each year the hate grew greater. It was because of the affection between Peter and myself, and the money I lavished on Peter. Francis even started counting the mouthfulls Peter ate at the table, to resenting every dime. There was no need, there was money enough for all three, money I earned—for Francis dabbled at painting and made nothing.

"And then one night poor, invalid Peter disappeared. Just like that. Without a trace except for blood all over my car, all over a pair of white ducks stuffed in the laundry. The clothes of Francis.

"There was a terrible argument between us, and the end was nothing. Nothing but blood on Dr. George Heathton's car, and no doctor. Just a vast silence with Francis taking all the estate and living contentedly and the neighbors forgetting to whisper . . . until 'Peter Draik' came from Arizona." The blue eyes smiled.

"This last part everyone knows. But there is something that hasn't been told. The little bit before that last, before my car was found, after my argument with Francis.

"I still held the bloodstained trousers, and Francis only laughed. What did they prove?

You can't spell murder without a body. He swore an oath and raced wildly into the night and I laid the trousers down and picked up the phone. I'd been very fond of Peter. Maybe I could find a way to spell murder without a body.

"But as I stood there I saw my brother stalking through the trees. That was why he had gone out, to be in the shadows while I was in the light. But there was a moon, and I saw the gun in his hand, and a terrible hate in his face. I laid the receiver back; it would do no good to call the police, we both were bloodstained now, people would say we two had killed together.

"They aren't saying that now, they are saying only one man killed Dr. George. And they are right. But you can't electrocute a man for killing himself. That's what I did, what Dr. George did. I laid the telephone receiver down, picked up my bag and disappeared in the night. I shaved my beard and called myself Peter Draik and for eight months I waited in Canotee for my nosy housekeeper to find the bag with its so carefully careless and incriminating paper. She was the type to read evil in anything; that's why I hired her.

"I was sent home a hunted criminal, and the opportunity was too great for Francis' hating will. That was what I hoped, that in his hate, in his joy at hurting me, he would lead me to the body. It was the only way I'd ever find Peter. Peter Draik's body."

The man with the prison pallor lying thick upon his hands smiled. "I've been waiting ever since the trial, growing this beard, that someone might know me for myself and call me George."

The judge sent for Francis Heathton.

FRANCIS HEATHTON laughed in their faces. And then he showed them what fools they were, how clever Peter Draik. For it was Peter Draik. He swore it on the bible.

"Yet I can't much blame the man for making this last desperate gamble." Francis Heathton shrugged. "George and Peter were of a near age, both had blue eyes and black hair, they were of the same build, their fingerprints were jointly all over the car. Peter knew this, and played upon it. They lived so long together, they knew each other's thoughts and habits."

And then for the first time the man in the prison suit lost his composure. He beat upon the table and screamed.

"I am Dr. George! Bring me my bag, and a wound. I will dress it, I will operate. I will prove that I am Dr. George!"

And Francis Heathton laughed, with strange amusement. "You forget, Peter, that

we know you are a doctor, too. There are the war records . . . you were in the medical corps. Remember?"

"But the beard! The body found had no beard, no more than normally grows after a man dies. That proves it was Peter Draik."

"It proves that Peter was clever when he cut George's beard off before burying him. I saw you do it, Peter, and you did it just for this. To wriggle out of your own crime."

The listeners, the silent pawns in this game of death, went away, marveling at this brazenness, and another came to shave the beard off the prisoner's face.

A whole morning he sat in his death cell rubbing the smooth shaven skin, then in the afternoon he wrote the governor a letter, quite as calm and strange as Peter himself.

Your Honor:

You probably have read the papers and know my story well. This is to add just a little.

If in your clemency you will go to the records in the soldier's hospital of Montreal, Canada, you will find that Peter Draik laid there for five years after the first world war. There was shrapnel in his lung. They said he would carry it to his grave and bring him an early one. This is why I have been so patient. Perhaps foolish. Men look very much alike behind beards, I'll grant Francis Heathton that, or with the mold in their bones . . . but if you will again exhume the body found beside the boulder you will find the shrapnel.

Francis didn't know about that. He was never interested in Peter's health. If he heard of it he didn't remember or he would never have disclosed the body with which to railroad me to the chair.

Peter Draik and I had been so similar, I couldn't even claim a specialized knowledge. We were both doctors. Francis could find no loophole, so he sent me down the long road to death. And I took the trip willingly, all this weary way, that Peter Draik's murder might be avenged and he be buried for the last time with all a soldier's honor. Poor Peter, who was so fond of sweet peas.

Sincerely,

George Heathton.

There were more letters. Questions—pounding and ceaseless, to break the courage of a Samson. Then they let the man they had known as Peter Draik go back to Arizona where he picked up the threads of his life and his medicine kit and let his beard grow full again. The beard that was long and very black and by which he hadn't been pulled down the winding moonstruck road, except in the fiendish cleverness of his step-brother's mind, Francis Heathton, who died by the will of the State of New York, November 21, 1943 at midnight.