

# MACLEAN'S

CANADA'S NATIONAL MAGAZINE

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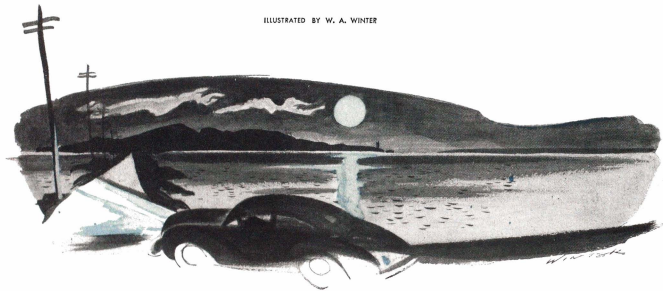
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A hungry cat,  
an innocent cup of chocolate,  
a lonely beach cottage,  
made a horror of

## THE NIGHT OF MR. WADDY

ILLUSTRATED BY W. A. WINTER



By WILL F. JENKINS

**I**T WAS night. Mr. Waddy held in his hands the wheel of a brand-new car. There were clouds hiding the moon and stars. There was nothing in sight—nothing at all—but the highway and the reeds of the marsh on either side, and the desolate, no-longer-used telephone poles that rose from the muck beside the causeway. This, Mr. Waddy knew, was a two-mile stretch of perfectly straight road. It led to the sand dunes of the Spit. There was an abandoned naval installation on the Spit, but nobody would be there. There was nobody anywhere about to see what Mr. Waddy did.

Until the last eighteen months he had been a bookkeeper all his life. His highest hope of adventure had been the discovery of a good murder mystery to read while he sipped the pot of chocolate which nightly prepared him for sleep. This was opportunity. Nobody in the world even knew where he was. So—

He stepped on the gas.

The car surged ahead. The motor roared powerfully under the hood. The tires sang. The car throbbed and quivered. It roared through the night like a meteor racing through blackness. Mr. Waddy's eyes glowed in the light of the instrument board. His expression grew rapt. Exalted. He hit eighty miles an hour, a thrill and triumph unprecedented in his whole existence.

Presently he eased up. There were only two miles of perfectly straight road. When the causeway ended and sandy ground appeared on either side he

regretfully dropped to his usual sedate pace, but he felt the better for his daring. He was subtly if slightly raised above the inoffensive person whom only the loud and firm insistence of Mr. Hatch—the president of the Jamison Corporation—had raised to the eminence of treasurer of that concern. But, having once driven at eighty miles an hour, he was inclined to swagger a little.

**H**E LOOKED carefully for the turnoff to Mr. Hatch's cottage. It was the only cottage on the Spit. No human activity went on here now. A deep-water wharf still stood at the other end of the naval installation this highway had been built to serve, but nobody lived anywhere around. Mr. Waddy felt a thrill at the reflection that there was no other human being within miles. He was alone as he could not remember ever having been before. In such isolation, he told himself with zest, practically anything could happen. But of course he knew that nothing would.

Here was the turnoff. It was a narrow trail, surfaced with crushed oyster shells, which led to the cottage used by Mr. Hatch during the duck-hunting season. Mr. Waddy had never thought such thoughts before, but now he felt a certain rakish satisfaction in guessing that a person of Mr. Hatch's tastes might find such enormous privacy useful at other seasons of the year also.

He followed the winding trail, between dunes and over dunes, through clumps of saltbush and past an occasional straggling, struggling tree. Presently he saw the reflection of his headlights in the windows of the cottage. He drove on. He reached the

cottage. He killed the motor and got out of the car. With the motor silent the sensation of thrilling isolation grew deeper.

He heard the deep-bass roar of unseen surf beating upon a hidden shelving shore. He heard startling, intermittent cries of insects in the night. They seemed remarkable where no humans dwelt. The cottage, beside the car, was creakingly silent. A wind hummed and moaned about its roof.

Mr. Waddy drew in his breath in sharp perception of thrill. He took out the cottage key and unlocked the door. He went in to be greeted by the dry stuffiness of a shut-up seashore cottage. He switched on the electric light. Everything was in order—dusty but undisturbed. He had been here twice before as Mr. Hatch's guest. He carried in his bag and the parcel of documents he had been instructed to bring. He found the flashlight and went out to start the electric-light plant. It was in a small shed only yards behind the cottage. He started the motor to charge the storage batteries. He closed the door behind him and stood still a moment, savoring the lonely noises of the dark. The boom of the surf and the throbbing of the motor. Dark clouds and isolation. This was fascinatingly perfect as the setting for murder, except, of course, that there was nobody around either to kill or to be killed.

**S**OMETHING touched his leg. A tingling chill went all over him. Then the flashlight beam showed a black-and-white cat rubbing in the brazen overtures of its kind when hungry. The crawling sensation at the

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His killer moved to watch in the living room windows.

## The Night of Mr. Waddy

Continued from page 10

back of Mr. Waddy's neck ceased, and he laughed a little. He had a very pleasant laugh.

"Hello, kitty!" he said amiably. "You don't fare so well out here in the wilds, eh? Hungry? Come along. I'll give you something to eat."

He held open the cottage screen door. The cat stalked confidently in before him, its tail held erect. Mr. Waddy chuckled. He had looked forward to this night with anticipation. He would be alone—an unparalleled circumstance—long miles from any other person. No one on earth knew where he was. There was sheer desolation all about. And presently he would make a pot of hot chocolate and set out a cup, and luxuriously settle down in this extraordinary setting to read a new murder mystery by his favorite author. The booming isolation of his position would multiply the thrills of the book. This cat, purring at his feet, would add a perfect touch. Tonight's reading of a murder mystery would be an unforgettable experience.

He went happily into the kitchen. The shelves were stocked with everything storable in cans. He took down a small can of evaporated milk. He started to wipe dust from its top, but there was no need. He poured a saucerful of the creamy stuff and put it on the floor, humming. The cat, its tail swaying grandly, lapped with a tiny pink tongue and perfect table manners.

Mr. Waddy went even more happily into another room. Dusty to be sure. He shifted a comfortable chair comfortably close to a reading lamp. He placed an endtable for his chocolate pot and cup. He went into the bedroom and set out his dressing gown and pyjamas. Presently he would don the dressing gown and his adventure would really begin. With every light but one extinguished he would sit and read his murder story and sip his nightly chocolate. He would be the one man awake in the one house within miles, in a vast and starless isolation with the surf booming heavily nearby. Nothing could be more deliciously exciting than that!

He found hangers for his coat and vest. He was filled with anticipation. Tonight, to match the richness of this atmosphere, he would make his chocolate richer—a few malted-milk tablets added in the pot made a flavor that was very pleasant. He was about to slip off his coat when he heard an obscure sound in the kitchen. It was a peculiar unorthodox thumping. He went to see what it was.

The sauce of milk was spilled. The cat kicked convulsively. It lay on the floor, moving with extraordinary stiffness. Its muscles stood out like cords. They moved without purpose. The cat appeared to be unconscious. As Mr.

Waddy looked at it in absolute stupefaction it made a final, violent contortion of all its body. Then it was still. It was quite dead.

**M**R. WADDY stared at it. He took off his glasses and polished them and put them back on. The cat was still dead. It had been perfectly healthy and playful not more than ten minutes ago. Nothing had injured it. It had been hungry. It had drunk of the milk Mr. Waddy poured out for it. Now it was a corpse.

Blankly Mr. Waddy looked at the almost-empty milk can. He sniffed at it. It smelled all right. It was not sour or spoiled at any rate. There was a very faint aroma—Mr. Waddy's mind said, "Peaches!" and he was impatient with it. The inappropriate smell of peaches meant poison.

He thought for a long time unhappily. Then he gingerly got the limp furry body on a dustpan and carried it out to the lighting-plant shed. He would bury it properly on the morrow. Meanwhile—

He was trying halfheartedly to assure himself that this very small tragedy would contribute to the proper atmosphere for his reading when something occurred to him. He stopped short where he stood. He planned to make his usual, nightly pot of chocolate. He had given the cat milk from the first can his hand touched. But for the cat he would have made his own chocolate from that can. But for the cat he would have drunk the milk the cat had drunk. And the cat had died immediately after drinking it!

A cold, icy feeling went all over Mr. Waddy's body. It started at his spine and spread. He went back to the kitchen. He picked up the milk can again. It had not needed to be dusted. Everything else in the house was dusty but not this particular can. He turned it over. After a moment he cut the top away so that he could examine the interior fully. He felt a very peculiar, unbelieving horror.

Someone had punched a hole in the bottom of the evaporated-milk can and then soldered it shut again. There was no question about it. It was not done at the factory. The punctured metal on the inside was sharp and jagged. And it could not have had any possible purpose—unless to permit the thrusting of a hypodermic needle through such a tiny hole for the injection of a substance that would give a faint scent of peaches to the milk. But of course nobody would do a thing like that! Nobody had any reason!

"It's ridiculous!" said Mr. Waddy in an oddly thin voice.

He could not believe it. But he did. After a moment he took down another can from the shelf. He noticed the dust.

The shelf was dusty. Everything was dusty but the tops of—there had been four but now there were three cans of evaporated milk on which no dust at

all had settled. Mr. Waddy, with trembling hands, lifted them and looked underneath. Each had been punctured and resealed. Two other cans at the extreme rear were dusty. They had not been tampered with.

**SWEAT** came out on Mr. Waddy's forehead. Somebody had come into the cottage within the last twenty-four hours. Possibly the last night. Perhaps the last two! That somebody had replaced the original cans with opened and resealed cans, the contents of which smelled of chocolate. The cat had drunk from one of the newly placed cans. The cat had died immediately. The inference was inescapable but not yet proven.

Mr. Waddy had come here with certain documents and records of the Jamison Corporation. Mr. Hatch had asked him to come here with all due precautions for secrecy. There was a matter of refinancing certain of the company's obligations. Mr. Hatch—as president—had arranged quiet conferences to bypass the usual underwriters and arrange the refinancing at a much lower cost. He might save the company the better part of a hundred thousand dollars. But it had to be absolutely secret until achieved, lest the usual underwriters be antagonized by the attempt to cut their profits. It was, therefore, perfectly legitimate business—dead—necessarily secret at the moment but wholly proper. It was not even conceivably a motive for murder.

Mr. Waddy stood in the doorway to the kitchen of Mr. Hatch's cottage. He had narrowly escaped death. Perhaps he had not escaped it! The device had been intended for him and no one else. He might get chocolate was traditional. Everybody knew about it. This murder scheme was tailored to his habits. Anybody who knew could find it. He arrived this in absolute certainty that once he arrived here they would only need to wait a reasonable time to find him dead. Then the certain documents would be at the killer's disposal. When Mr. Hatch arrived there need not be any sign at all that he had ever gotten here. He would have vanished from the face of the earth.

His murderer would be waiting outside now for him to die. Sooner or later he would be waiting in the windows to see Mr. Waddy very dead. And if he saw Mr. Waddy plainly discovering the murder scheme the killer would make more than necessary the work of Mr. Waddy, shaking, put the emptied cans into the garbage can. He turned on the burner of the stove which was used with the matches. He went to the matches before he could strike a light. Then he half-filled a pan from the tap and put it on to boil. When it boiled he would normally use milk, cream and chocolate, and malted-milk tablets, and let it simmer up. So, desperately, to deceive his possible watching murderer, Mr. Waddy followed the routine as if he suspected nothing.

**WHILE** the water heated he went to the bedroom. He moved like an exceptionally well-trained automaton. His mind seemed frozen by the knowledge of his intended murder. He could sense at that moment what it would probably be to see—but even that knowledge could not help. He was alone and unarmed and unbelievably alone. The sun shined brightly on the beach. The wind whined and mourned about the cottage. Outside there was unrelieved blackness and absolute emptiness. And by the time the wind would have erased the footprints his murderer made and there would be no sign anywhere . . .

Mr. Waddy's throat seemed to twist into a strangling knot. He felt the presence of someone resolved upon his death. He groped numbly in a paralyzed mind for some way to postpone his killer's impatience. But surely while he acted as if unsuspecting as if he moved regularly toward the fruition of the murderer's plan, that murderer would not break into the cottage to destroy him with a bullet.

Mr. Waddy tried to swallow and failed. He turned out the light in the bedroom and composed his features in the blessed dark. Then he went off to the kitchen. There were two windows there. He played for the audience of the man who intended that he should die by the light of the moon and evaporated milk, by adding chocolate to the merrily boiling water. He put in the malted-milk tablets . . .

The chocolate attempted. It rose in the pan and he turned down the flame, watching it, his face grey, hearing the surf and the wind and the monotonous throbbing of the motor. He should be drinking it. Mr. Waddy's throat was dry as he poured the foaming chocolate into an earthenware teapot. As he half-filled a cup. Then he should drink it.

No . . . Grasping at a straw for delay, he carried it, stumbling, into the next room and set down the pot and cup on the bed. He should be drinking it. His killer undoubtedly moved to watch in the living room windows.

Mr. Waddy looked down at his coat. He had not intended to go in there to remove it. He went into the bedroom—now darkened—as if to put on his dressing gown. In the blessed dark of the bedroom he felt the presence of a stranger. But instead he tiptoed across the room to the window nearest the ocean. He stood there panting. He listened for a moment. He heard the surf boom. He waited until it had reached its loudest, and then with clattering teeth he eased up the window. In desperate stealth and desperation he attempted to cross the beach. He fled into the darkness.

**ALONG** time later he realized that he had not escaped. He was a mile and more from the cottage with his lungs bursting and no sign anywhere that anything had happened. The surf on the beach was still rolling in and still blew. There was a tiny rustling sound of wind-blown sand grains rustling into upon each other. Over the sea he saw a faint glimmer of light. There was nothing else at all in the world.

Mr. Waddy found a hiding place. A half-buried tree still struggled to survive though the wind was cruel and cold. He crouched in the foliage and waited, shivering. The wind would erase his footprints and he could not be tracked in this place. Surely his killer began to track immediately. Surely all persons murderously inclined would go away when the parties to the business conference began to arrive. But Mr. Waddy would not attempt to cross the two miles of causeway before dawn! He would be exposed to detection and murder every foot of the way. His killer would surely find him. He attempted the instant he discovered Mr. Waddy's flight.

So he stayed hidden all night long, looking and gathering some shreds of confidence as the long hours passed and no dark shape came plodding through the night to destroy him. He even thought out murdering the murderer of the murderer's plans. Ultimately he came even to perceive a peculiar beauty in his surroundings. He noticed, certainly, the faint glimmer of light on the eastern horizon. He watched from his hiding place as the miracle of dawn progressed. The whole eastern quad-

rant of the sky acquired a ghostly radiance, the waves which rolled toward the shore showed moving liquid surfaces of dull steel color above their ink-black troughs. Later there was a dim but low twilight over all the world. Mr. Waddy saw the shapes of the dunes about him.

It was then that he heard the faint murmur and saw the headlights of a car come into the causeway very far away and moved fast.

It reached the solid sandy ground of the Spit, purred confidently on and disappeared into the shadows between Mr. Waddy and the highway. He knew, suddenly, that it was Mr. Hatch, the president of the Jamison Corporation, who had driven a party of a town two hundred miles away. He'd told Mr. Waddy that he would leave the party as if to retire, but instead would get into his car and drive all night long. He and Mr. Waddy would have a final conference after his arrival and be ready for the negotiations with the other parties arrived at ten o'clock or nearly.

**MR. WADDY** waited until he was sure his superior had reached the cottage and the car was advanced by then. There were rose-colored clouds to eastward and it was already morning though the sun was not yet in sight. He had a headache. The wind had made his way to the beach and walked in its firm sand toward the cottage. Presently, with an odd knot in his stomach and a sense of foreboding toward the cottage. He surmounted a dune and saw Mr. Hatch's car.

Mr. Hatch himself was outside and waiting for him to get out of the car. His short rotund figure was unmistakable. Mr. Waddy opened his mouth to call but Mr. Hatch disappeared around a dune. He gazed about him hurriedly, but he had searched for something that would be lying on the sand.

Mr. Waddy swallowed. He felt rather foolish, but he probably looked very much like a fool. Mr. Waddy trudged on and into the house. He went into the living room. He started. The pot and half-filled cup of chocolate had been taken from the end table beside the easy chair. He went into the kitchen. The dishes had been emptied and rinsed and were ready to be dried. The coffee had been brewed and set aside. Then Mr. Waddy saw a paper bag on the sink. Mr. Waddy looked inside. It contained four cans of evaporated milk. They had not been opened and he still tasted them. They were the way cans of evaporated milk should be, without their soldered punctures.

Mr. Waddy hesitated, puzzled. Mr. Waddy looked to see if there were any fresh footprints about the house other than his own and Mr. Hatch's. He was not in sight when Mr. Hatch came walking heavily back to the house looking uneasy and scared and baffled. He stared about him in every direction. Mr. Waddy watched through cracks in the shed which he had left the electric-light plant. Mr. Hatch wiped sweat from his face and went into the cottage. Mr. Waddy still gave no sign of his presence. He stood in the shed watching through cracks and in the window of the kitchen—as Mr. Hatch made coffee and once went hastily out to the car in the driveway room of the cottage again. He watched while Mr. Hatch, trembling, gulped down a cup of smoking coffee, heavily laced with sugar. The cans he had brought in the paper bag. But he did not sit down. He paced restlessly, his forehead creased as if in mounting anxiety. He looked toward the beach. At long last Mr. Waddy went quietly out of the shed and to the cottage. He consciously straight-

ened himself before he went in. He met Mr. Hatch in the kitchen, and did not seem to see the expression of sheer unbelief—of terrified unbelief—with which Mr. Hatch regarded him. Instead Mr. Waddy said, "The worst of it is—"

"I—hope you haven't eaten or drunk anything, Mr. Hatch. I—didn't recognize you when I first got back, and I set a trap for someone who tried to murder me. You haven't?"

Mr. Hatch made a wheezing noise, staring at Mr. Waddy.

"They were going to murder me and look at me," Mr. Waddy said. "Mr. Waddy with difficulty"—in the car you told me to drive down here. They were going to run it off the wheels and burn it. I had a party. I'd probably never have been found, and if I ever was it would be thought I'd committed suicide—You haven't drunk any coffee, have you?"

Mr. Hatch made a choking sound. He shook visibly.

"There was—something wrong with the machine. Mr. Hatch, seated in his lap. "So—when I found somebody'd brought new cans of milk to replace the ones that were wrong, I—switched them. The—cans in the bag are the ones that were wrong. I hope you didn't use any of them."

Mr. Hatch stiffened. Not by violence but because every muscle in his body was rigid. He made jerky, purposeless gestures. Then he tried to scream. But only a reedy whispering noise came out of his throat. Then he collapsed quite abruptly.

Half an hour later Mr. Waddy drove away from the cottage. Mr. Hatch looked as dead as a cocoon in the back seat, swathed in a blanket pulled from strips of a torn-up sheet. Mr. Waddy drove with anxious care. He was very unhappy. Of course after Mr. Hatch was killed he thought he would not really have risked letting him drink poison. But he was still unconscious in the back seat and Mr. Waddy was obliged to shake him awake about him. Just however, as the car reached the main highway Mr. Hatch made groaning noises. Mr. Waddy looked relieved. He drove on more briskly. Presently—

"Waddy!" croaked Mr. Hatch. "Waddy! What—? Mr. Hatch," said Mr. Waddy reassuringly. "I just wanted to be sure you'd tried to murder me. You didn't drink any poison. I was sure you hadn't. I was sure you used one of the cans you brought—not one from the shelf. I didn't switch them at all. So your only chance was to get out of the car and be fixed for me, and you failed. But you were unconscious so long that I was worried about you."

Mr. Hatch gasped. Mr. Waddy said unapprehensively:

"Of course, I see that if I'd—vanished into thin air—or off the wharf dead at the other end of the Spit—so that it might have been convenient for you. It was—rather a shock to realize that that's what must have been going on. I—I feel terrible. But I think that it's possibly the reason you used your influence to get me elected treasurer of the Company. And I can't help worrying about it. I'm sure you got it from the company, Mr. Hatch, that you were going to pretend I had embezzled after you'd murdered me?"

Mr. Hatch said, "I'm sure you brought the car reached the causeway across the marsh. It was two miles of perfectly straight road. Mr. Waddy stepped on the gas and the car started to move. The car surged ahead, the motor roared. Mr. Waddy's eyes gleamed. "The car hit eighty. ★