

THE MOUTHPIECE

By Dickey Dustbane

The wind and the rain were setting up a helluva racket on the tin roof of the college library as I opened the door of Marion Hall. Perhaps I should explain. My name is Mike Hatchet, and I'm a private eye. Yesterday I accepted the case of what I call "Espionage in Marion Hall"—the spy was alleged to be a "saint". It's only a small case, but its better than trying to make a living off the pinball machines.

As I swung the door of Marion Hall open and strode in nonchalantly, my arms were suddenly pinioned to my sides, and I was struck over the head with a sap. Luckily my head is very hard and it was only a glancing blow.

I wrestled myself free from my attacker's grip, and, still seeing stars, yanked my service .45 Betsy from my well-oiled shoulder rig. I couldn't risk fireworks and bring their whole mob down on my head so in one motion I laid open one punk's jaw to the bone with the butt and kicked the other mug in the guts. Both of them went down, but one rolled over groping for his rod that had skidded away from him across the floor. I crushed the back of his hand with my size eleven platforms and then kicked his teeth in. They were both out like lights in a pool of blood.

I frisked them and found nothing but a black cloak—my first real clue that I could work on. I fired a Lucky from a fresh deck and ran over to the pay phone across the street to call my boss, "Crafty", and report my findings. As usual, "Crafty" was in the Lab, and he sleepily answered the phone. I told him what happened and arranged a rendezvous for the following morning.

On the way back down the stairs, I tripped over an article of furniture that wasn't there when I entered the building. I cursed and struck a match. It was a fresh corpse. He was very dead. I rolled him over to get a look at his face and saw it was McGinnis, the building superintendent, his head bashed in with his own flashlight.

In a pool of blood on the floor he has started to write a name but as far as he got was the first initial "D". Then I heard footsteps coming down the hall. A private dick with my reputation couldn't afford to be seen with a stiff. Quickly I dragged the body into the broom closet,—at least what I thought was the broom closet. It was the same size as the broom closet, and the interior looked like a broom closet, but it wasn't a broom closet. It was the Administration Office.

Whoever was coming down the hall knocked at the door, and, receiving no answer, went on down the stairs; and as I looked out the window I saw him pull away in a light grey '49 Chev.

I switched on the light, propped the corpse in the closet, and made a thorough search of the room. All that I found was a sawed-off shotgun, a box of dum dum shells, one slightly used Christmas tree, a yo-yo (with no string), a typewriter, a Superman comic book, and a case of Moosehead empties (cans), nothing suspicious. I pocketed the yo-yo, doused the light, and shut the door. The next thing I remember was waking up with a cerebral throbbing. I had been sapped and then mugged. My only clue (the black cloak) along with my heater, buzzer and private eye card No. Tf75739H 180nt64QUEBCALT (also doubles for an eye chart) were gone. It wasn't until later that I discovered that the ambushers had taken my Tom Mix compass ring.

The only thing left for me to do was to go home and freshen up. I hopped a cab and paid the driver with my pinball winnings. I took the stairs to my apartment two at a time and inserted the key softly in the lock. I gave it a quick twist and flattened out on the floor. Nothing happened; don't get excited.

I discarded my socks and underwear, took a cold shower and opened a new pack of Luckies. I fired one, took one drag and threw it in the sink. Then I withdrew a fifth of bourbon from my dresser, tapped some ice-water off the radiator and flattened the fifth while shaving. Then I picked up a fresh change of clothes, dug my Luger Pistol out of mothballs, inserted a fresh clip and tried the action once or twice. It was well oiled and ready for use. Somebody was going to pay for that sapping.

On the way down town I dropped into a local one armed beanery and ordered java and sinkers. The java tasted like lava but it shook the cobwebs from my brain. On the way out I paid the check and made a pass at the cashier. She was a hot number. After I picked my self up off the floor and brushed myself off, I hailed a hack and gave him an uptown address.

"Crafty's" office was buzzing with activity when I got there. The bulls were going over the Administration Office with a fine-toothed comb. The cleaning lady had discovered the body in the closet. The Dean of Studies was sitting under a floodlight and three coppers were grilling him. The heat was on. I had to get out of there fast. I backed out the door before anybody spotted me and walked across the street to a tobacco store.

I replenished my supply of Luckies and bought a morning paper. I took the last Luckey from the old pack, fired it and tossed the crumbled package into the gutter. Then, something in the building across the street caught my eye. I walked into the building

and knocked on a door on the first floor. The door swung open and the room was empty. I entered and closed the door behind me.

There on the window sill was what had caught my eye, my buzzer. Just then the door swung open and I wheeled around with my Luger drawn. A punk known along the waterfront as just plain Don started spraying lead. My first shot hit him high in the shoulder and his gun clattered useless to the floor. He stood there cringing, begging for mercy but any mug that would bash an old geezer's brains in with a flashlight didn't get any mercy from me. The roar of my heavy pistol filled the room as I pumped three dum-dums into his guts. He was dead before he hit the floor.

I ground out my cigarette on his forehead and retrieved my private eye card and old Betsy off his body. I walked out into the cool, damp air and left another problem for the cops. They should be grateful I saved them the price of an execution. Just across the street an old blind lady was selling pencils and she heard my foot-steps; she waved her tin cup. I slapped her across the teeth and pocketed what little change she had in the mug. The case of the Espionage in Marion Hall was closed forever as far as I was concerned. Who was the spy? Don was, but he's dead now and dead men tell no tales. How did I guess? I found a black cloak in his room and the initial that McGinnis left was another clue. The solution was very easy. After all, I was with him when he entered Marion Hall

Ode to Artsmen

I think that I shall always see
An artsman with most classes free.
An artsman who can loaf all day
And then go out at night to play.
An artsman who will try to shirk
At any time—his share of work.
And one who claims to be the peer
Of that great man the Engineer.

Time, place, and action, may with pains be wrought,
But genius must be born, and never can be taught.

—Dryden