

# THE GARGOYLE SPEAKS

By

ALFRED I. TOOKE

“**I**MAY BE the best revolver shot in the country,” Spindles Martin drawled with heavy sarcasm, “but bullets can’t be fired around corners, so how could I have shot Buck Maddison?”

“You swore you would get Maddison,” square-jawed Barney Drummond—“Bulldog” Drummond to his fellow detectives—shot back at him.

“Now don’t get excited, Sarge. Buck swore he would get me. I just said he wouldn’t if I saw him first.”

“Exactly! And Buck was shot just as St. Martin’s clock struck twelve-thirty. We have ten witnesses to prove you fired a shot from your gun at that identical moment.”

Spindles chuckled as though some private thought pleased him.

“Sure!” he said. “But I was around the corner from him. And they proved the death bullet didn’t come from my gun.”

“You had some reason for firing that shot on a crowded city street during the noon lunch hour.”

“Well, Sarge, I’d had a couple drinks for my cold, and—”

“That wasn’t the reason!” Drummond snapped. “Our witnesses say you stood there some time before you whipped out your gun and fired.”

“And they said I fired in the air if they told the truth. Now I’ll give you the lowdown, Sarge. A sparrow on top of the Metropolitan Building was making faces at me, so—”

The detective scowled. “It’s more than a coincidence that you fired a shot in the air and Buck dropped with a bullet in his chest around the corner at the same moment,” he growled.

“Which brings us back to the start again!” Spindles yawned. “Bullets can’t be fired around corners.” He leaned forward confidentially. “It was Providence, Sarge! Buck was out to get me, but Providence saved me and handed me a short stretch for disturbing the peace instead. Seeing that I don’t like the menu in this jail, would you mind getting me a nice juicy steak with plenty onions, Sarge,

and I’ll pay you when—” He paused to chuckle as the Sergeant strode angrily away. “Let me know when they begin firing bullets around corners, Sarge!” he called.

Once more “Bulldog” Drummond stood on the spot from which Spindles had fired the shot in the air. At the intersection, a dozen yards away, was a large mirror set at an angle in a clothing store window across the street. In that mirror the detective could see up the cross street.

“From here,” he mused, “Spindles could see around the corner, even if he couldn’t shoot around it. He could see when Buck came up the steps out of his basement pool-room, so—”

Always he stuck at that point. Bullets could certainly not be fired around corners.

He strolled to the intersection and stared up at the grotesquely sculptured gargoyles on the building opposite. If only those grinning monstrosities could speak, they could tell from which direction the bullet hit Buck. The path of the bullet was downwards, suggesting that it came from an upstairs window or low roof, but the body had rolled back down the steps, so there was nothing to tell from which direction the bullet came. Drummond had searched every possible room and roof, but in vain.

As he gazed at the gargoyles, musing upon the mystery, he became aware that his eyes had focused themselves on a particularly hideous one. Perhaps the horribly sardonic expression had first attracted his subconscious attention, but as his conscious mind became riveted upon it, a startled exclamation left his lips. Then he smiled slowly back at the gargoyle, and nodded.

“The gargoyle speaks!” he murmured.

Every fiber of him alive now, he hurried purposefully across the intersection.

Spindles Martin completed his ten days without further visits from Sergeant Drummond, but when

the time for Spindles' release came Drummond was present.

"We're holding you awhile longer, Spindles," he said.

"What charge?" the other snapped.

"That Buck Maddison case! Won't be for long, though."

The detective's tone brought a startled flash to Spindles' eyes.

"Just long enough for the jury to say 'Guilty,' and the sentence to be carried out," Drummond continued.

"You haven't got a thing on me on that case, and you never will have!" Spindles snapped.

"We found the gun that fired the death bullet!"

A gasp of incredulity burst from Spindles' lips, and fear flickered in his eyes. "It's a frame-up!" he shouted.

"It has your fingerprints on!"

"I was around the corner when Buck was shot!"

"Sure you were!"

"Well! Bullets can't be fired around corners!"

"No?" Handcuffs suddenly clicked about Spindles' wrists. "Just to prevent you snatching the gun. Here it is."

The sergeant removed a sheet of paper from the

desk, revealing a revolver. Cunningly wired to the trigger was a short steel bar with an end soldered to a flat disk. In the center of the disk was a single small dent in which lay a flattened bullet.

"The bullet you fired from your gun, Spindles! See!"

Drummond turned over a photo showing the weapon tightly wedged in the mouth of a grotesquely grinning gargoyle, and lying beneath the disk, in the gaping maw of the monstrosity, was the flattened bullet.

"Not a difficult matter for a crack shot like you to hit the disk from where you stood, Spindles!" the Sergeant drawled. Then, the words leaping from his lips: "You watched the mirror till you saw Buck come up the steps. He reached the spot the gun was trained upon. You whipped out your gun and fired. In the air? Yes! But you hit the disk. And what followed? An echo? No! The report of the hidden gun as the disk snapped the trigger back, speeding the death bullet to its mark."

A groan of defeat left Spindles' bloodless lips as he slumped back in his chair.

Drummond's eyes flashed triumph.

"The gargoyle speaks!" he murmured.