

O'SHEEN'S PHOTO FINISH

By LEROY YERXA

“PADDY” O’Sheen tried to ignore the soft hand that fell across his own in the darkness of the Sixth Street Theatre. The contact with cool, dainty fingers wasn’t unpleasant, but there was the little matter of Marta, O’Sheen’s wife, sitting in the seat at his other side.

O’Sheen had long since solved the murder that bothered Rudolph Raphle, the movie hero. At present Rudolph Raphle was pursuing a huge ape across a roof-top and Paddy, very bored, was paying very little attention.

The woman whose fingers now rested on O’Sheen’s right hand had entered the theatre just behind him and Marta and occupied the seat at the end of the row.

O’Sheen drew his fingers away slowly, but the hand remained on his knee. His face became unpleasantly warm. He chanced a quick glance at the owner of the smooth fingers.

Paddy’s blood immediately turned several degrees cooler. The woman’s head had fallen forward and her shoulders drooped pitifully. With great concern, Paddy realized that she was quite dead.

He excused himself to Marta and moved carefully into the aisle and up toward the lobby. He found a red-coated usher.

“I’ll have to see the manager right away,” Paddy informed him.

The kid in the uniform was filled with self-importance.

“Sorry, Mister, he can’t be disturbed. Anything I can do?”

“There’s a dead woman in there,” O’Sheen

answered dryly. “I suggest you remove her.”

INSPECTOR MIKE HUMPHRY of New York Homicide liked O’Sheen. Perhaps it was Paddy’s blarney that endeared him to the rough-talking, hard-hitting Humphry.

The corpse had been removed with dispatch and several persons sitting near the murdered woman were questioned. Humphry, O’Sheen and his attractive spouse, Marta, sat in the manager’s office. A couple of plainclothesmen waited near the door.

“Her name was Peggy Walters,” Humphry said. “Wife of Ed Walters, a big gambler from downtown. He’ll have an alibi all sewed up.”

Peggy Walters had been shot with a .32 equipped with a silencer. It was lying in her opened purse. There were no prints on the gun, and Peggy Walters had worn gloves.

“Someone murdered her, all right,” O’Sheen offered. “I remember we came in when the picture changed. She must have been right behind us, and there was a lot of noise and commotion.”

Humphry snorted.

“Walters will swear she came to the theatre alone, pulled a gun and committed suicide.”

O’Sheen grinned nervously.

“Guess I’m a little out of my own territory,” he confessed. “Me and Marta don’t know much about this city police work. Up home the criminals ain’t so much on alibis and such.”

He drew his watch from his pocket, separated it from a handful of assorted junk and whistled.

“After midnight,” he said. “Come on, Mrs. O’Sheen, I’m needing a pillow under my head.”

She came in and sat down in the seat beside O’Sheen. A moment later she was dead, from an unheard gunshot!



The woman next to Paddy was quite dead

Marta stood up, smiling uncertainly at Mike Humphry.

"I'm wishing we could help Mr. Humphry," she said regretfully. "Seems like we owe him something for being so nice."

Humphry took her hand in his.

"Forget it," he said gruffly. "I'd almost forgotten Irish girls could be so fresh and pretty until tonight."

Marta blushed and Paddy cleared his throat loudly.

"Enough of that blarney, Mike Humphry."

He took the Inspector's hand and shook it warmly. "Maybe you could tell us where the Globe Wide Photo Service is. They took a candid picture of Marta and me when we came in. I'd kinda like to take it home for a souvenir."

Humphry gave him the proper directions and the O'Sheens left. On the street, Paddy hailed a taxi.

"I think we'll take a little ride before we turn in." He squeezed her arm affectionately. "It's fun I'm having, after all."

INSPECTOR HUMPHRY was tired. It was three in the morning. Ed Walters had been in his office since midnight, Walters, a slim dark-faced man with a trimmed mustache, sat at ease on the far side of the room. Three sleepy-eyed police detectives lounged near the door. The room was a blue haze of smoke.

"As I mentioned several hours ago," Ed Walters put just the right inflection of sarcasm into his speech. "I'm all busted up about Peg's death. I didn't know she knew about the gun. But, so help me, Humphry, I've got two dozen witnesses who will swear I was at my club from five to midnight this evening."

Humphry shook his head.

"We know—we know," he growled. "You can *pay a hundred* witnesses, but you still knocked off the kid."

Walter's sneer grew more pronounced.

"I'd *like* to go home," he said. "This is all pretty silly."

A knock sounded on the door. One of the detectives opened it and turned to Humphry.

"It's that hick cop and his wife from upstate," he said.

Humphry nodded and Paddy came in. Marta, tired and looking unhappy, was at his side. O'Sheen looked quickly at Ed Walters.

"Her husband?" he asked. Humphry nodded.

"We been on his neck all night," he admitted. "His story is air tight."

The light in O'Sheen's eyes went steely cold.

"Sure and I'm not agreeing with that," he produced a small envelope from his pocket, took a tiny photo from it and tossed it on Humphry's

desk. "There's your killer."

Humphry picked up the picture and his face turned several shades redder.

"This is a picture of you and your wife approaching the theatre," he protested. "I don't understand . . ."

O'Sheen smiled.

"It's *still* a picture of your killer," he insisted.

Humphry's eyes hardened. His voice became cuttingly sarcastic.

"Are you trying to tell me that you did this job?"

Marta was at Paddy's side, her hand clutched tightly on his arm.

"Paddy, you're tired. Sure and I'm thinking the pixies are in your head."

Paddy was enjoying himself immensely.

"There's dozens of people in that print," he insisted. "See that taxi cab behind us at the curb. Who's getting out of it, Inspector?"

Ed Walters crouched forward nervously on his chair. His cheeks were suddenly drained of color.

"I can't make out," Humphry squinted at the tiny picture. "Could be anyone, I guess."

O'Sheen fumbled in his coat and drew out a crumpled 8"x10" blow-up of the same print, and passed it to Humphry.

"I figured Mrs. Walters was just behind us when we came into the theatre," he said. "With a hundred people outside when our picture was taken, there was a chance that they might be in the crowd. I was right. That enlargement shows both Ed Walters and his wife leaving the taxi. It proves the time . . ."

"That's a lie." Walters sprang to his feet, his lips parted in an ugly snarl. "I wasn't. . ."

The dicks at the door tossed him down quickly and snapped on the cuffs. Marta O'Sheen beamed proudly upon her husband, and Mike Humphry stared with a new respect.

"By Golly, O'Sheen, that was quick thinking," he admitted. "If it hadn't been for your hunch to enlarge a candid shot we would never have pinned him down."

Paddy O'Sheen chuckled.

"What you might call a photo finish," he agreed.

THE END