

Excerpt:

Dangerous Medicine, Book 3 of *Medicine for the Blues* trilogy
pages 3-6

When Jimmy had been gone about a week, I got a call from St. Mary's Catholic Hospital. Dr. Osborne wanted help removing a bullet from a man's leg. The patient was a bootlegger who had been shot by a rival outfit while making a delivery to a local speakeasy. Osborne knew I'd served in the medical corps during the War and had experience with gunshot cases.

After I removed the bullet and changed back into my street clothes, I was talking with one of the nuns at the nursing station when a tall man in a suit approached us. He introduced himself as Steve Bateson, a vice officer with the local police. After a run-in with MPs in the service, I'd never felt comfortable around policemen, but now I remembered hearing Bateson's name before—he was said to be a member of the KKK.

"I need to talk to the doc who removed the bullet," he said.

"That would be me," I said.

"Your name?"

"Carl Holman."

He fixed his cold green eyes on me. "Ah, yes. You work with Gowan and Bleeker."

I nodded.

He looked to be sizing me up for a police crime report. I imagined his description: Caucasian male around 30, dark hair, hazel eyes, medium build, slightly above average height.

"I would have thought you'd do the surgery at Lutheran," he said.

So that's where I knew the name from. I'd overheard a conversation between him and Dr. Ferguson at the Lutheran Hospital a month or so earlier when he was investigating another shooting. Bateson had asked Ferguson about me and when Ferguson praised my work, Bateson wanted to know if I was connected with "the Catholic hospital." His tone implied a disdain for Catholics. But when Ferguson mentioned that I worked with Gowan, Bateson sounded like he was on familiar terms with Gowan and Bleeker. I had taken that to mean they all knew each other through the Klan.

"The patient was brought here to St. Mary's straight from the speak, and Dr. Osborne called me in to help," I replied.

Bateson stared at me just long enough to make me uneasy. "I'll need the bullet for evidence."

"Sure, Sister Gertrude can show you to Dr. Osborne's office."

Bateson gave the nun a derisive glance. "I'd rather you did."

I smiled and nodded at Sister Gertrude. "Follow me," I said

and led him down the hall in silence. I tried to think of something to say, but being alone with him made me increasingly uneasy. After I left him with Dr. Osborne, it occurred to me that I could have opened a conversation by telling Bateson about the operation.

As I was preparing to leave the hospital, a familiar face greeted me. Tom Harris, my neighbor across the street, was at the nursing station. He smiled at me as he ran his hand through his wiry hair in a futile effort to subdue it.

“Just the man I wanted to see,” he said. “The paper told me to get out here pronto.” He adjusted his thick horn-rimmed glasses. “I need to find out about this bootlegger who got shot. We want the story for the evening edition.”

He took out a small notebook and made notes as I summarized what little I knew, including a description of the bullet involved. “Sister Gertrude can give you more information,” I said. “I went right into surgery when I got here. Dr. Osborne didn’t even give me the man’s name.”

After Tom spoke with the nun and made some more notes, I asked if he would walk with me to the parking lot.

“First I need to talk with Osborne,” he said.

“I believe he’s with Vice Officer Bateson right now.”

Tom raised his eyebrows.

I nodded. “Come have a chat with me before I leave. I have to get back to the clinic.”

He seemed to understand that I wanted to talk privately, so we went outside to the portico at the front entrance. It was raining hard and the cool air felt refreshing. The stairs down to the sidewalk glistened with rain and across the street the leaves on the trees were showing their fall colors as they swayed in the wind.

“You mentioned Bateson to me a while back, remember? What more can you tell me about him?”

“Well, as I said, he’s with the Klan. He seems to have it in for sexual deviants. He’s pretty much the one responsible for shutting down Dixon Calder’s saloons.”

“I wonder if he’s on to me.” Besides being my neighbor, Tom was an old friend and he knew about my relationship with Jimmy. “When I spoke to Bateson just now, I got a bad feeling. A while back I got the impression that he figured I was okay when he heard I worked with Gowan.”

“Could be, since they’re both Klan members. Hard to say. But I can tell you this—since you announced your engagement—phony as it is—the neighborhood gossip seems to have died down.”

“You were right about all that. Gowan seems pleased with my engagement too.” I looked out at the rainy street and thought of Jimmy. “The rumors about Jimmy and me haven’t come up, now that he isn’t around.”

“He’s in Chicago now?”

“Well on his way anyhow.”

“I’ve been hearing about the gang wars back there. Sounds brutal.”

“Hmm.” I glanced at Tom. “That’s troubling. Anything else I should know?”

“Since you never read the papers, I should tell you about an incident down in the Willamette Valley. Some Klansmen abducted a couple of Japanese farmers. They roughed them up and put on a mock hanging, just to scare them. Then chased them out of town.”

I was reminded of the time last spring when I went to a rural dance that Jimmy and the band played at the Bisby Grange outside of Portland. The Klan had prevented him from singing because they thought the lyrics were indecent. Later on my way home I’d driven past a group of Klansmen in their white hoods harassing a young couple they’d found spooning in a car.

“Since that Alien Land Law was signed in February,” Tom went on, “there’s been a lot of bad feeling directed against the Mongolian races, especially among the white farmers.”

“Good grief. Is my Chinese houseboy in for trouble?”

“Hard to say. You know the Chinese aren’t exactly well liked. There seem to be factions within the Klan. Most don’t seem to condone violence, but some groups have been thrown off the rolls for vigilante actions.”

Just then, Bateson emerged from the building. He spotted us at the end of the portico. I felt a chill, but I smiled and tipped my hat. Bateson paused and stared at us as he took out a cigarette and lit up before proceeding down the stairs to the street.

“He gets around,” Tom said.

Since I knew Tom reported on crime, I gathered that they often covered the same incidents.

I showed Tom to Osborne’s office before driving back to the clinic.