



Penguin Crime

2/6

No pockets in a shroud

Horace McCoy



Penguin Book 2800

A Mother's Kisses

Born in 1930, Bruce Jay Friedman lives on Long Island, New York, with his wife and three boys. His first novel, *Stern*, was published in 1962; then followed *A Mother's Kisses*. He has also published two collections of short stories, *Far from the City of Class* (1963) and *Black Angels* (1966). His first full-length play, *Scuba Duba*, was produced at the New Theatre, New York, in October 1967. As well as writing fiction Bruce Jay Friedman writes journalistic pieces for *Esquire*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and various other magazines.

Horace McCoy

NO POCKETS IN A
SHROUD

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For Helen

WHEN Dolan got the call to go up to the managing editor's office he knew this was going to be the blow-off, and all the way upstairs he kept thinking what a shame it was that none of the newspapers had any guts any more. He wished he'd been living back in the days of Dana and Greeley, when a newspaper was a newspaper and called a sonofabitch a sonofabitch, and let the devil take the hindmost. It must have been swell to have been a reporter on one of those old papers. Not like now, when the country was full of little Hearsts and little MacFaddens beating drums and printing flags all over their papers and saying Mussolini was another Caesar (only with planes and poison gas), and that Hitler was another Frederick the Great (only with tanks and homosexual pyromaniacs); and selling patriotism at cut-rate prices and not giving a good goddam about anything but circulation. (Gentlemen, we are very sorry we cannot lend you our trucks this afternoon to move the loot from the City Hall, but we simply must deliver our night final. After six o'clock we will be very happy to let you have them. Or: oh yes, sir, Mister Delancey, we understand perfectly. Those two women *wandered* in front of your son's car. Oh yes, sir, hahahahaha! That alcoholic odour on his person was from somebody *spilling* a cocktail on his suit.)

'The yellow bastards,' Dolan said to himself, meaning the newspapers, going into Thomas's office, the managing editor.

'Where'd this story come from?' Thomas asked, holding up two sheets of typewritten copy paper.

'That story's all right,' Dolan said. 'That's one story that'll stand up.'

'I didn't ask you that. I asked you where you got it.'

'I got it the day before yesterday. At the last game of the series. Why?'

'It sounds pretty fantastic -'

'It not only sounds pretty fantastic, it is pretty fantastic. When a pennant-winning ball club deliberately throws a

championship series for the benefit of a few gamblers, that's what you call pretty fantastic. I suppose you're going to throw that story away too?'

'I am - but that's not the only reason I sent for you. Forget the story. The business office -'

'Wait a minute,' Dolan said. 'You can't forget a thing like this. Hell, the ball club's crooked. Everybody who saw the series knows they were in the can. They weren't even clever about it. Besides, that story's not exclusive with us. The other papers have got it too - they're using it this afternoon. We've got to protect ourselves.'

'Oh, I don't think they'll use it,' Thomas said. 'Maybe this is not as terrible as you think it is.'

'It's as terrible as the old Black Sox scandal. Baseball would be in a swell fix today if nobody had printed that story, wouldn't it?'

'And Landis still would be just another judge. Now look, Mike,' Thomas said soberly, 'there's no sense in us having these arguments every time you want to vent your personal spleen on somebody. You know the policy of this paper -'

'Sure, sure, sure. I know the policy of this paper. I know the policy of every paper in town. I know the policy of every goddam paper in the country. There's not one inch of gut in all of them put together.'

'Why are you always going out of your way to offend people? Why are you always trying to kick up a stink?'

'I'm not trying to kick up anything. That story you threw away is NEWS! You're always throwing away news. Last week it was the Delancey kid -'

'We played that story down, because there is no sense in ruining a fine kid's life -'

'Well, good God, *he* ruined a couple of fine lives. He got drunk and went clear across the street into the safety zone to kill those women. Yes, sir, he had to work like hell to bag that pair. Of course, we played the story down. The fact that his old man is one of our biggest advertising contracts had nothing to do with it -'

'You're too quixotic,' Thomas said.

'Is that what it is?' Dolan said, pressing his thin lips together.

'What was it a couple of weeks ago when I brought in that story about the reorganization of the Ku Klux Klan?'

'The Ku Klux Klan is dead. That was not the Klan.'

'All right, all right, the Crusaders then – or whatever the hell they call themselves. A rose is not the only thing you can call by another name and get the same odour. They wear sheets and helmets and hold secret meetings –'

'I've tried to tell you before that no newspaper in town can touch that Crusader angle. That is pure dynamite. And the sooner you give up these reformer ideas the better off you'll be too.'

'For God's sake, don't keep telling me I'm a reformer,' Dolan said angrily. 'People can do anything they like right out in the middle of the street for all I care. That's unimportant. But what *is* important is printing some news about these political high-binders and about the big-time thieves . . . why, even the goddam Governor of this state is crooked, and you know it. What happened to that story I brought you last year that a drunken Congressman had given me – with his sworn affidavit? You threw it away. All right, the hell with that now. But you've got a story in your hand about a ball club selling out, and I give you an argument about printing it and you remember all those other arguments we've had about stories, and you think I'm a reformer. How about those hundreds of kids who go out to the park every day and make heroes of these same crooked ball players – literally worship the ground they walk on? How about them?'

'That's quixoticism,' Thomas said. 'Sit down and cool off.'

'Hell. I won't ever get cooled off. This is no newspaper, this is a goddam house organ.'

'All right,' Thomas said grimly. 'I've let you pop off like this, because I thought you'd make up my mind for me if I gave you a chance. Up to now I've had some hope for you. I've put up with your belligerency and your profanity, because I thought sooner or later you'd get wise to yourself. I've been fighting just as hard as you have – to keep the business office from firing you. A dozen times they've asked me to let you go. You don't think so, eh? Well, take a look at this,' he said, reaching over into his communications box. 'Read it –'

THE DAILY TIMES-GAZETTE
INTER-DEPARTMENT COMMUNICATION

To Mr Thomas
From Mr Womack

Date 10-3
Subject Michael Dolan

Mr Luddy of Display called on O'Hearn Sporting Goods yesterday about their new contract. This is, as you know, one of our best accounts. O'Hearn flatly refused to talk new contract, because Dolan has been owing his firm \$154.50 for more than a year for golf balls, tennis rackets, golf clubs, etc. He feels, and rightly, that if he is going to do business with this paper, our employees ought to pay what they legitimately owe him. I wish you'd see me about this.

'I'm always getting notes from the business office about bills you owe our advertisers,' Thomas said.

'Slightly ironic,' Dolan said, laying the note back in the box. 'The business manager wants me to pay my debts - apparently it never occurred to him that this paper owes some debts too. Some debts to the public -'

'I'm not going all over that again,' Thomas said, a note of finality in his voice. 'I guess maybe we just can't see things the same way. Maybe I'd be doing you a favour if I fired you -'

'You can't fire me,' Dolan said. 'I don't work here any more -'

He was cleaning out his desk when the door opened and Eddie Bishop came in. Bishop was the police reporter, fifteen years on the beat. He looked like Pat O'Brien would look if O'Brien were really a reporter. He had a girl with him.

'What's this, what's this?' Bishop said. 'I hear you've quit.'

'I did,' Dolan said, looking at the girl standing beside him (the office was so small that three people filled it pretty full), thinking how red her lips were, the reddest lips he had ever seen on anybody.

'Meet Myra Barnovsky,' Bishop said. 'You ought to know Mike,' he said, winking slyly.

'I've seen you in some Little Theatre plays,' Myra said, extending her hand. 'You weren't bad.'

'Thanks,' Dolan said politely. When he touched her hand he shivered and his shoulders twitched. He was embarrassed, but the girl apparently paid no attention. . . .

'What was the fight about?' Bishop asked.

'Oh – same old thing. Another story he wouldn't print.'

'Well, I envy you having the nerve to quit,' Bishop said. 'I envy the hell out of you. Weren't for the wife and kids I'd have told Thomas years ago where to stick this gutless gazette of his –'

'Don't let us interrupt you,' Myra said to Dolan. 'Go ahead.'

'I'm practically finished,' Dolan said. 'I was just cleaning out some junk –'

'What are you going to do now?' Bishop asked.

'I don't know. First of all I've got to make up my mind whether I'm glad this happened or whether I'm sorry.'

'Look out, now,' Myra said, aiming her finger at him straight from those red, red lips; 'don't weaken –'

'You're glad,' Bishop said. 'Take it from me, you're glad. At least you've got your self-respect back.'

'What's left of it,' Dolan said, looking at him, trying to smile. He liked Bishop. He had always liked him. Bishop was his friend. Bishop was the sort of friend you could go to and ask how to pronounce hard names like Goethe and Beethoven without him laughing behind your back. He wished now, suddenly, that Bishop had come in alone, without Myra Barnovsky (he wondered who she was and where she had come from and why she made him feel so funny), so he could have sat down with him and confessed that his smile and his indifference were faked and that he really felt panicky and helpless inside, and that because this was the only job he knew, maybe he'd better go back to Thomas and apologize and promise to be a good boy in the future and keep his mouth shut. But Bishop hadn't come in alone, he had brought Myra Barnovsky. . . . 'Yes,' he said, 'what's left of it –'

'You'll be okay. We'll see you for lunch,' Bishop said, starting out.

'I don't think we'd better leave him,' Myra said. 'He's on the verge of going back to his boss and apologizing and begging for his job back. Just to be sure he doesn't, we'd better take him with us –'

Dolan turned around and looked at her in astonishment.

'Don't be surprised,' Myra said. 'There was nothing difficult

about it. It's written all over your face. It's strange how these things work out,' she said to Bishop. 'If I had been one minute later getting out of bed this morning, if I had stayed in the johnny one minute more, if I had missed that particular street car, if I had stopped to get my usual cup of coffee – and why didn't I stop? That's odd, because I haven't missed my morning coffee in years – if I had been one second longer doing any of those things, if I *had* stopped for the coffee, I would have missed seeing you. And if I had missed being here Dolan undoubtedly would have gone and begged for his job back. And he would have gotten it, too. But now he won't. He's finished with this. Don't you think that's odd?' she asked Dolan.

'I suppose so . . . ' Dolan said, shivering again, looking at her with the look of a man who knows the woman he is looking at is his for the asking, and that lying on the bed with her clothes off, her body will be beautiful and demand loving, and he knew, too, or he sensed (which are one and the same thing in sensual philosophy) that the act itself would be no more satisfactory than taking a beautiful corpse for a mistress.

It was this that startled him, and now he knew why he had shivered when he had touched her hand, and all of a sudden he was aware of what this girl had been trying to say in that confusing speech about how she had happened to be here. She had been confused, too, and had said it badly, but now in this split second he understood. She had felt the same something he had felt. Suppose she *had* stopped to get that cup of coffee. . . .

'I'm ready,' he said, picking up his stuff, starting out.

Myra Barnovsky stopped him at the door. 'Take a good look around,' she said. 'You won't be coming back here any more. . . .'

*

The three of them had lunch at the Rathskeller, and later that afternoon Dolan went over to the Keystone Publishing Company to see George Lawrence. This was a firm that printed trade magazines for insurance and hardware and implement and motor-car companies. . . .

'Here's what I wanted to see you about, Mr Lawrence,' Dolan said. 'You've got a big printing shop here, and I've got what I think is a big idea. I want to start a magazine.'

'What's the matter with the newspaper business?'

'Nothing. I quit. I wasn't getting anywhere.'

'What kind of a magazine've you got in mind?'

'Oh, one a little like the *New Yorker* – maybe not quite so sophisticated. I haven't got the whole thing set in my mind yet, but I'd play up the society angle and amusements – with an occasional topical article that told the truth.'

'The truth about what?'

'Oh, anything that happened to come along. Politics, sports. Sort of keep an eye on things and look out for the people.'

'That's more in the province of a newspaper, isn't it?'

'Theoretically, it is. But none of them do it. They're afraid. Only they call it diplomacy.'

'Not a bad name for it,' Lawrence said. 'How many copies would you want? What quality paper would you use?'

'Wait a minute,' Dolan said, 'you evidently don't understand. I don't want to pay you to put out this magazine. I want you to put it out and let me edit it and write it.'

'I certainly didn't understand,' Lawrence said, frowning. 'I don't want the responsibility of publishing a magazine. It's too much of a headache.'

'You wouldn't have any responsibility,' Dolan said. 'I'd take all of that.'

'I'd be paying for it, wouldn't I? What do you call that?'

'You'd furnish the paper and print it, but I'd take care of all the rest. Distribution and advertising and the copy –'

'I'm sorry, Dolan. I don't think I'd be interested.'

'But, Mr Lawrence, you're the only man in town who's got the equipment to do a job like this. It wouldn't cost you much – you've got the paper and the machines – and a magazine like this will make a hell of a lot of money. Of course, there's such a thing as the four hundred thousand people in this town getting *Justice*, too – but I'm not going to talk about that, because you're a business man, and this is a business proposition. If you back this magazine for me, I'll guarantee you two thousand circulation on the first issue. That's a lot of circulation, isn't it?'

'It's considerable,' Lawrence admitted.

'And it'll go a hell of a lot more than that,' Dolan said. 'I'll

rip this town wide open. You can't tell me people won't read it.'

'Sounds as if you might be biting off more than you can chew,' Lawrence said.

'Well, somebody has to bite it off,' Dolan said grimly.

'You'd make a lot of powerful enemies –'

'Sure, you would. Look here, Mr Lawrence, do you realize that a magazine like this would probably be preserved for posterity in the Smithsonian Institute? Why, there's not a single goddam newspaper or periodical in the whole country that's playing fair with its readers! They're all subsidized by advertising contracts or political affiliations – why, for God's sake, this is the greatest opportunity you'll ever have in your life! Sure, we'll make enemies. We'll make enemies out of all the crooks and thieves. But the decent element will be for us.'

'The decent element is not in power,' Lawrence said.

'Well, by God, we'll put 'em in! Don't get the idea,' Dolan said, hurrying on, a little alarmed by the frightened look in Lawrence's face, 'that I intend to devote the whole magazine to raising hell. In the main, it will be a social magazine appealing to the Weston Park crowd. But every once in a while we'll roll up our sleeves and really get to the bottom of things.'

'Dolan, I'm in perfect sympathy with your ambitions. But I can't afford it. I simply haven't got the money to take a chance.'

'How much do you think the first issue would cost?'

'Why, I haven't any idea.'

'Well, roughly, how much?'

'How big would you want it?'

'The size of the *New Yorker*. About twenty-four pages.'

'Let me see,' Lawrence said, frowning, mentally calculating.

'Around fifteen hundred dollars for two thousand copies.'

'Well, suppose I got fifteen hundred dollars together and paid for the first edition and it went over. Would that prove anything?'

'It might –'

'If the first edition was a success, would you be interested?'

'I might –'

'See you later then,' Dolan said, going out.

That night, between scenes of the rehearsal of *Meteor*, he cornered Johnny London in the dressing-room. Johnny London was but two generations removed from the log-cabin settlement that had grown into the great metropolis that was now Colton – and the twenty-storey London building now stood on the exact spot of his grandfather's hut.

'Now, what the hell is fifteen hundred bucks to you, Johnny?' Dolan said. 'You got all the dough in the world.'

'You're nuts,' Johnny said. 'You're absolutely nuts. I'm damn near broke.'

'I hate to ask you to help me out again, but fifteen hundred bucks is only a drop in the bucket to you. – and it means everything in the world to me.'

'What are you going to do with that much money? What do you want it for?'

'I want to start a magazine. If you'll let me have it I'll sign half-interest over to you.'

'Un-unh. I can guess what that magazine'll be like. What about your newspaper job?'

'I quit,' Dolan said. 'I quit this morning.'

'The hell you did!' Johnny said. 'You shouldn't have done that, Mike. Hell, you were on your way to being famous. Everybody in town read your column – look, here's your pal, David,' he said, dropping his voice.

'Fellows, please cooperate,' David said, sweeping into the dressing-room. 'The last act is about ready to start, and you should be out there with everybody else waiting for your cues.'

'We came back here because we had a little business to talk over,' Dolan said.

'Well, now that you've quite, quite finished, will you get on stage?'

'But we haven't quite-quite finished,' Dolan said.

'We're coming,' Johnny said.

'Thank you so very much!' David said, sweeping out.

Dolan growled. 'He forgets this is a Little Theatre. He forgets we're not getting paid for this.'

'Don't let him annoy you. He can't help being that way.'

'I don't mind him being a pansy. It's his goddam arrogance that gets me.'

‘He doesn’t mean anything by it. As a matter of fact, he admires you. But, look, you’d better get out there. You’re the big star, and you’re supposed to set a good example for the rest of these amateurs.’

‘What about the dough? Will you let me have it?’

‘I’ll talk to you after rehearsal.’

‘It means a hell of a lot to me, Johnny.’

‘*Dolan!*’ a voice shouted.

‘That’s the Major,’ Johnny said. ‘Come on. . . .’

‘Could I speak to you a moment, Dolan?’ the Major called from the audience.

‘Sure,’ Dolan said, going down over the footlights to where the director was sitting with David and a couple of other stooges.

‘Do you realize we’ve only got six more days’ rehearsal?’ the Major asked.

‘I know that,’ Dolan said.

‘There’s a tremendous lot of work to be done. I wish you’d do your part.’

‘I will –’

‘I’m producing this play especially for you. For two seasons you’ve been begging to do *Meteor*, and now I think the least you can do is to be ready for the curtains and cues. That’s only common politeness.’

‘I was only talking to Johnny London a minute –’

‘That’s no excuse for rudeness.’

‘I’m not deliberately trying to be rude. I’ve got a lot of things on my mind.’

‘Well, get up there and try to keep this play on your mind. All right,’ the Major called to the people on stage. ‘Last act! . . .’

The rehearsal was over a little before midnight.

‘Well, it wasn’t good and it wasn’t bad,’ the Major said. ‘You can do better. Please brush up on your lines. Especially you, April. Tomorrow night, seven-thirty. Good night, everybody.’

“‘Especially you, April.’” Dolan said to her, as the cast broke up and started drifting around.