

Meyer: Micky Meyer

By Paul Beckman

I had a premonition. This was to be a day that private eyes dream about. I like to start out my days with premonitions.

I had just finished reading the comics and was working on the Jumble when she walked in with a quick knock and then pushed the door closed with her ample *tuchas*. Alan Sherman was playing softly on the hi-fi. I eyed her good. She stood across from my desk smoothing her polyester shirt over and around her hips. My eyes dropped to her stockings - rolled mid-calf, just at the spot that drove me crazy.

She liked me, I could tell. She walked over. I leaned back in my chair with my hands clasped behind my head. With her hands splayed on her hips and head cocked she began to speak. Her double chin moved scant seconds before the words came. She reminded me of my late Sadie. She was driving my fantasy which hadn't been out of the garage in quite a while.

"So tell me," I asked. "How may I be of service?"

"I need a private dick," she said.

Sadie had to be looking down and cluck-clucking and God must have taken a day off from harassing me.

"That's nice." I gulped. "So take a load off." I pointed to the chair. "You came to the right place."

My name is Moishe Meyer. I've been called Mickey most of my life - that is, most of my life in Florida. I took the name from Mickey Spillane after I'd passed the mail order private detective course. I have a certificate hanging in my office to prove it. I'm retired from the wholesale liquor business where I'd been a salesman for thirty-five years working out of the New Haven office. My son, Michael took over my territory. My

daughter, Karen, also lives in Connecticut; she's a psychologist.

It was all I could do not to walk over and pinch those cheeks. All woman. Oy. I stayed cold, though. I opened my desk drawer and took out the Manischewitz Concord and two almost clean Yahrzeit glasses. I splashed some wine in each and passed one. "L'chaim", I said in my best Bogart, clicking my glass into hers. (Uncle Morris & my Mother).

"Do you wine and dine all of your prospective clients, Mr. Meyer?" She flirted.

"Some wine. Some dine. Very few wine and dine." I flirted back. In truth, when Katz is slow in the afternoon, he sometimes comes up for a game of rummy and we have a glass of wine.

It worked. She blushed and was as good as mine. I knew then I could use her as I would. She was mine for the taking. I could taste her chicken soup and matzo balls now. She was a baker, too. I could tell. Oy. What a day.

Reaching into my sweater pocket I pulled out a roll of Life Savers. Peppermint. I rakishly popped one into my mouth. Using Life Saver etiquette I rolled the paper down, exposing one Life Saver and inserting my thumb nail underneath, proffered it.

"Enough Mr. Big Shot private dick," she said taking the candy. "I came for help, not happy hour. I want you to find my Alvin," she said passing me a picture.

I was excited. This was my first case since I set up shop over The Deli by Katz six months ago. I couldn't wait to tell the pinochle guys and my kids. Patience and hard work was finally paying off.

I put the bifocals on now and held her Alvin out at arms length. "Your son?" The young man in the picture appeared to be twenty-one or twenty-two.

"No, that's my grandson."

"He's missing how long?"

"My grandson's not missing," she said.

"Then why did you give me a picture of Alvin and ask me to find him?"

"My grandson's name is Jason. Alvin's my cat that's lying on the chair."

The heartburn came on instantly. So much for the glamour of the shamus life.

"So how long's the cat been missing?" I asked.

"Alvin," she corrected me. "Four days," she said and took a tissue from her purse and dabbed at her eyes.

"The trail may have gotten cold."

"So who said it would be easy?"

"I get twenty-two fifty a day."

She nodded.

"Plus expenses." I pushed.

She nodded.

"Plus ten cents a mile for the car."

She shrugged her agreement.

"Plus phone costs."

She nodded.

"Plus dinner. Home cooked. Weekly, when I give my report." I said, going for broke.

She really nodded. I knew a cook when I saw one. I could taste her latkes already - thin, crispy, brown with lots of pepper and a hint of salt - just greasy enough so one would have to wipe his hands after dipping a latke into sour cream.

I'm five-eight, or used to be, and thin. At sixty-eight I've kept most of my hair, though it's no longer brown but gray with streaks of brown and I know how to wear a cardigan. Also, I know better than to wear my pants up around my chest. Every woman instinctively wants to feed me.

"So? What do you think?" She asked, tired of nodding.

"Latkes."

"Latkes?" She asked.

"Latkes?" I asked.

"You said latkes."

Oy vey. I said latkes out loud. What a shmuck I thought.

"Yes, latkes. It's a private detective term for no problem."

"Oh."

"So tell me. Where did you last see your Alvin?"

"Well? Can you do it?" She held up one of the flyers I'd had printed.

MEYER: MICKEY MEYER

PRIVATE DETECTIVE.

DISCREET. RELIABLE.

REASONABLE RATES.

NO CASE TOO SMALL

I took it and looked at the code I'd written on the back corner. She had gotten this from the bulletin board at Kroger's. It's always good to know how your clients get your name (lesson 2). I made a mental note to put up a new flyer there as soon as possible.

"I'm pretty good at body language, ferreting out clues, and have a strong reliable intuition," I told her, "but you're going to have to help me out on this one. What say we try to start as close to the beginning as possible?"

So help me, her name was Sadie. Sadie Berman from New York City, and a widow for four years. She and her late husband Sol had a restaurant supply store on the Bowery. One daughter took over the business and her other daughter was married and living on the west coast. California.

"I came home from the beauty parlor; I go every Tuesday, ten thirty. I'll only let Marcus do me. Jason, who'd been visiting, was out and so was Alvin. I thought they were together. But Jason told me he hadn't seen Alvin that morning and thought I might have taken him to the vets. Jason left that evening back for New York and I've spent my

time looking for Alvin and finally, when I saw your advertisement, decided I needed some professional help.”

I nodded, thinking about my daughter’s business card in my desk drawer.

“Give me your address and I’ll come over this afternoon and begin my search,” I told Sadie, hoping she would offer lunch.

“Come after two,” she said. “My canasta group will be gone by then.”

I stood up and she followed suit. Thank you Mr. Meyer,” she said and reached for the picture on the desk.

“Call me Mickey,” I said. “And let me hang on to the picture. I’ll bring it with me this afternoon.”

She turned to go and I caught myself staring at her rolled stockings. “Another Life Saver for the road?”

“You detectives are such charmers,” she said popping it into her mouth and smiling with tears in her eyes. She really missed little Alvin. To tell you the truth, if all the cats disappeared from the planet tomorrow I wouldn’t lose a wink. I went back to my desk and finished the Jumble as Mickey Katz was singing. Then I swiveled my chair and grabbed the thick detective lesson book and flipped to the index looking for missing - *subtitle* pets. Sure enough it was there. I made notes on the questions to ask, underlining medical history, previous runaways and unusual habits. Then I closed the book and put it back. The book jacket and spine read Forensics.

I got out my briefcase, a graduation gift from my kids, with the gold initials MM, and put in my steno pad where I’d made my notes and added a packet of crackers, a fresh roll of Life Savers and a freshly sharpened number 2 Ticonderoga. Together with the magnifying glass, tape measure, compass, stapler, roll of crime scene yellow and black tape and my Swiss Army Knife, I was ready. I would stop and get a small packet of cat treats on the way.

I walked to the copy shop down the street and had them blow up the picture of

Alvin.

“You add words to the picture?” I asked.

“What kind of words,” the copy shop kid asked.

“You know, words,” I said.

“The owner does the words and he’s out now,” the kid said.

“So give me a black marker and I’ll do my own words,” I told him.

I went and stood at the counter thinking what to write and immediately WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE came to mind. I came to my senses after thinking about roast chicken with potatoes and chocolate pudding with the skin and wrote MISSING REWARD on the top, and my phone number on the bottom. I handed it to the kid.

“Make me a half dozen.” I paid, got a receipt, put it all in my briefcase and walked over to The Deli by Katz for lunch.

“I’m eating light, Hy,” I said sitting at the counter. “I’m on a case and don’t want to feel tired and have to take my nap.”

“The case got anything to do with the Tomato that went up to your office a little while ago?”

“Maybe,” I said. “But you know I can’t talk about my cases while they’re ongoing.”

“She was smiling when she came downstairs,” Hy said. “Did you tell her the Rabbi and Priest in the boat joke?”

“No jokes. It was all business.”

“Okay, Spillane, what’ll you have?”

“The usual,” I said. “But hold the pickles.”

“He handed me a brisket and tongue sandwich on seeded rye with a small paper cup of slaw and said, “Ess gezunterhait. Eat in good health.”

“You’d better keep the slaw,” I said. “Remember, I’m eating light.”

“I forgot, he said. Double pickles and slaw the next time.”

“And don’t forget,” I said in Bogartese.

I walked down the street to The Rosemont, burping and passing gas, vowing to lay off the tongue while I’m working on a case and felt better after the two block walk. I first went to my garage and put my briefcase in my car and then crossed the drive to my condo. Five, almost six years ago, right after Sadie died, I bought in here from another recent widower and got furniture and all for eighty thousand. Today, we’re looking at two-hundred minimum. It’s bigger than I need, but the three bedrooms, three baths, water views and the nine-hole golf course make The Rosemont one of the more desirable condos in the area. We’re known for our clubhouse with our resident *tumbler*, Sammy ‘Simon Says’ Simon, and our low common charges because of the land we lease out to a strip mall on the far edge of the property.

I washed, brushed and had myself a good B.M. and left for Sadie’s. I was early, but I had some work to do in preparation for our meeting. I backed my Mercury Marquis out of my garage and pushed the close button on the visor. All of The Rosemont garages were extra wide with large overhead doors so few people scraped the sides of their cars. That was another of the famous Rosemont qualities.

Before I pulled out of the lot, I stopped and made sure I hadn’t forgotten anything. Glasses, Tums, Binaca - all there. The brown leather seats looked like new - it was hard to tell the car was coming up on five years old and any day now it was going to hit that magic ten-thousand mile mark. At this rate I should get another five years out of it.

I slowed as I passed Sadie’s house and saw several cars in her driveway. I pulled into the Kroger’s down the street and brought in a new flier to replace the one Sadie had taken. I marked the back once again and before leaving, checked the price of peaches and bought a small package of cat treats and kept the receipt.

I drove into the first strip center and parked. I opened my briefcase and took out one of my ‘wanted’ posters and folded it into a square and slipped it into my cardigan

pocket. I walked into a liquor store, waited for the counterman to finish ringing up.

“Can I help you?” He asked.

I took out from my pocket the poster, unfolded it and faced it towards the man.

“You’ve seen this cat around, maybe?” I asked.

“What’s he done?” The man asked.

“He’s missing, that’s all,” I said.

“He looks like all the other cats in the alley,” he tells me.

“He goes by the handle Alvin,” I say.

The counterman shook his head.

“You see him, you give me a call,” I said, dropping my business card on the counter and scooping up the poster.

“How much is the reward?” he asked.

“More than the feline’s worth,” I tell him and walk out and into the dry cleaners next door.

I came up dry. Either no one saw Alvin or someone wasn’t talking. I went back to the Marquis, took my stapler out of the briefcase and stapled the poster on the common bulletin board. I headed back to Sophie’s and taped posters on the corners of her street and then parked a half-dozen houses away, waiting for canasta time to be over. I took out my steno pad and began making notes. I put a check mark next to the liquor store just because of attitude. He’d get another visit. I looked over and saw a lady on her front porch sitting in a rocker petting her cat. I took a poster and walked over.

“Nice day,” I said.

“They’re all supposed to be nice,” she answered. “What are you selling?”

“What are you buying?” I asked, and could see a momentary confusion (lesson 9).

“Nice cat,” I said.

“Listen,” she said. “I’m on a fixed income and this is the end of the month so whatever your selling I ain’t buying.”

“My name’s Meyer,” I said, handing her a business card.

She looked at it and said matter-of-factly, “Did you come for the cat?”

I opened the flyer and sure enough it was Alvin on her lap.

“Afraid so,” I said. “How long’s Alvin been here?”

“I call him Mittens,” she said.

“Does he answer to Mittens?” I asked.

“Go ahead, take him” she said. “He’s been wandering over for a year or so and finally I decided to adopt him.”

“He wasn’t up for adoption,” I said, taking Alvin off her lap. “I’m going to bring him home and won’t mention you at all but I think you need a Mittens of your own. I’ll keep my eye open.”

“No thanks, Meyer,” she said. “I’m a dog person.”

I got back into my car, pulled into Sadie’s driveway and checked my mileage, receipts, and took another look at Alvin to make sure he was the right cat.

I rang the bell, Alvin under one arm and my briefcase in my other hand, while my thoughts ran to brisket and strudel.

Paul Beckman works as a real estate agent to feed his writing habit.

Some other publishing credits: The Connecticut Review, Onthebus, Other Voices, The Writer’s Voice, Playboy, Northeast Magazine, 5 Trope, Exquisite Corpse, Sugar Mule, Parting Gifts, Web Del Sol, CollectedStories.com & River Babble.