

# EBONY TORSO

By John C. Woodiwiss

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"Good night, sir," answered Hopton, as the divisional inspector opened the door of the chief's car which was waiting for him.

Sir Hallard jumped in, and the big car disappeared up the street.

"And that's that, Sergeant," remarked Carlingford, as it rounded the corner.

"Yes Inspector," agreed O'Mara, blowing his nose loudly. "A very pleasant gentleman he is, too."

"Very," nodded the other. "You'd better order your men to get to work on that allotment and the factory premises, as soon as it's light, Sergeant. I must get along now, and see that the other men are alright. Good night, Hopton."

"Goodnight," returned the detective. "I'm going to call at the Vicarage."

"O.K.," said Carlingford, sourly, "but I'm afraid you'll find you've been barking up the wrong tree," and turning sharply away, he walked quickly up the street and disappeared into the enshrouding fog.

"Queer man the Inspector," mused the Sergeant. "But you mustn't take too much notice of his ways."

"I don't," Hopton assured him. "Now listen Sergeant, I want to have a chat with this man Smith; get me?"

"I do that, sorr," agreed the Irishman with a humorous twinkle in his blue eyes. "That shouldn't be difficult, providin' you can shout loud enough, Mr. Smith's very deaf."

"Five minutes would do," the other assured him, "but I don't want the Vicar to over hear our conversation. I want five minutes' chat alone with the old boy."

"Folse minutes," repeated O'Mara, scratching his chin. "Then I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll go to a public phone box and put through a call to the Vicarage askin' the father to come down here a moment, as I'd loike to have a word with him. You hang about in the shadows outside his house

and get in as soon as you see him leave. How's that?"

"Admirable; provided you can invent some reason for bringing him down here at this time," said Hopton approvingly. "I don't want him to think it's a trick. Once a man like that's on his guard it'd be the very devil to catch him a second time."

"It would that," agreed O'Mara. "You can leave that part of it to me, sorr. Not a thing will he suspect, I assure you. But ye know, sorr, I can't help agreein' with Inspector Carlingford that Father Galesbourne's not the man we're after."

"Well, we shall see," repeated the Inspector doggedly.

"Very good, sorr," agreed the Sergeant in a resigned tone as he pulled out an enormous watch. "It's now exactly half past eleven, and I'll ring the Vicarage at 11-40. If that'll suit you?"

"That'll do splendidly," the detective assured him. "I'll be getting into position. Don't forget to keep him there a bit," he warned his assistant and left him to carry out his share of the plot while he made his way to the Vicarage. Hopton carefully chose a position where he was partially concealed by the high iron rails of the church and waited impatiently for the fun to begin.

The minute hand of his watch crept forward very slowly until it reached the quarter to, and he was just beginning to wonder if something had gone wrong when the Vicarage door opened, and in the flood light from the hall, Hopton saw Galesbourne come out, carefully close it after him, come down the steps and walk swiftly in the direction of the news.

The trick had worked, and as soon as the padre was out of sight, Hopton came from his hiding place and rang the bell loudly. Almost stamping with impatience he waited for what seemed an incredible time, until the door was opened by an old man in a black, tailed coat and stripped trousers

who blinked at him stupidly and, cupping his right palm behind his ear, asked the visitor's business in a high pitched, quavering voice.

**MYSTERIOUS TELEPHONE CALL**  
"Good evening," roared the detective. "I'm Inspector Hopton and the Vicar was kind enough to invite me here for a cup of coffee."

"Oh, I see, sir," nodded the old man; "the Vicar's out for the moment."

"Couldn't I come in and wait for him?" bawled the Inspector, fearful lest the old man should shut the door in his face.

Mr. Smith registered nothing but a vacant stare, but he leaned forward and remarked, "I beg your pardon, sir?"

Hopton repeated the question and, to his delight, the old servant nodded several times and held the door invitingly.

"Yes, sir, I expect that would be the best thing to do," he said as the Detective stepped quickly in. "I don't think the Vicar will be very long, if you'd care to wait in his study."

The wide hall was papered in red, and bright with copper and brass ornaments of Eastern design which were suspended by cords from the picture rails. The old man pattered in front of the visitor and opened a door on the right.

"Like to take off your coat, sir?" he asked, as the Detective passed him and entered the study.

"No thanks," he replied, gazing round at the lines of bookshelves and the big, fumed oak writing-desk with its heavy brass-mounted, writing-pad, Oriental pen tray, and portable typewriter.

The old man went over and poked the fire into blaze.

"Please sit down here and wait, sir," he said indicating a cosy looking chair as he spoke Hopton lowered himself into it.

"Very nasty night, sir," went on Mr. Smith, taking his hat.

"Very," agreed the Detective. "That

## To Wed Dodge Heir



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fire looks good!"

The man exposed his toothless gums in a grin as he once again put his hand to his ear.

"I'm rather hard of hearing, sir," he apologized.

"I said, the fire looks good!" shouted Hopton.

"Oh, yes sir," the old servant agreed. "I'll go and get the coffee if you'll excuse me."

He turned and made silently for the door, but Hopton had no intention of letting him go without making some attempt to get the information he required.

"There's no hurry!" he cried in a voice which pulled the deaf man up. "I want to talk to you for a few minutes, Mr. Smith."

The old man turned with a scared look on his face—the look of a cowed animal, and shook his head slowly.

"Sorry, sir," he replied in a low tone, "but the Vicar don't allow me to talk to visitors. I'd get—well—I'd probably get the sack if he came in and caught

me gossiping—so, if you'll excuse me, sir."

He broke off abruptly, and ended the sentence with a little hopeless gesture which drew back his immaculately starched cuffs. To his surprise, Hopton caught a fleeting glimpse of the man's wrists and saw that they were black with bruises. Obviously Mr. Smith was not nearly so senile and foolish as he appeared. In an instant he had read the suspicious look on the Detective's face and, awkwardly shuffling his cuffs down over the suggestive marks on his arms, he went out of the room muttering to himself.

Hopton sat pondering over this new fact and decided one point was quite clear, namely, that Mr. Smith was in terror of his master and that it would be hopeless to extract any information from him unless he could be got away from the Vicarage. He had just reached this conclusion when the telephone on the desk began to ring. Hopton hesitated, but remembered that the old servant was probably too deaf to hear the bell and then, prompted by a sudden overmastering temptation, rose and put the receiver to his ear. Hardly had he done so when a thick guttural voice began to speak.

"That you, Vicar?"

"Yes," replied the Detective, feigning Galesbourne's voice as nearly as he could.

His reply was followed by a short pause, as if the caller was suspicious, before his voice began again in a queer stream of foreign-sounding words:

"Kil mawka, dessima denta raban, il dewcot. Wass jasima?"

The rising inflection on the last word assured Hopton that the other had put a question.

"Um," he replied, muffling his voice as much as possible.

The person at the other end waited before he began again.

"Wass dessima dewcos Hopton?"

The Detective started involuntarily as he heard his name. The fellow was talking in a pre-arranged code! Whatever the cost, he must try to discover its meaning.

"It's quite safe," he said, prying with excitement. "This line's bad tonight—I can scarcely hear you. Repeat your message in English."

The only reply was a grunt of fury from the other end:

"Wass Basta!" and the receiver was crashed down.

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"Curses!" muttered Hopton and was about to return to his chair when a sarcastic voice began to speak behind him.

"Irritating things, these phones, Inspector. So kind of you to answer it during my absence!"

Hopton wheeled round to find the Rev. Charles Galesbourne standing before the fire, a smile wreathing his mouth as he observed the other's discomfort.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## Two Good Stories from the Newspapermen's Tour

(From Fergus News-Record)

We pause here to tell a couple of stories of actual happenings on the trip.

On the following day, at Kirkland Lake, it was pouring rain at noon. Just walking from the bus to the room where we were to eat, we were soaked. We were walking with a Quebec editor and the Hon. Paul Leduc, Minister of Mines, who is a quick-witted French-Canadian. The Quebec editor, shaking the water off his hat, said: "If this rain keeps up after lunch, I think we'd better let the mines go to hell." "Well," said Mr. Leduc, "at the rate they are sinking their shafts, they're going in

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