

*Murder on
Train
Of
History*

by Ron Capshaw

This is an original shorty story and has
never appeared elsewhere.

Blazing! Adventures Magazine

Publishers

New York

2007

***"When the train of history makes a sharp turn,
some passengers fall off."***

--Lenin.

***"Why the hell were they so evasive? Why did they hide behind the fifth?"
--Hollywood supporter of the Hollywood Three***

1948.

She should have let me sleep...

"I know he's in here somewhere, Aha! Meet Llewyn Nash!"

The covers come off and light hits me. I blink several times and see Miriam and three men-three very well-dressed men.

The thoughtful one with the pipe says, "Bad time?"

"Extremely. I-"

"It's never a good time for Nash. These men are, as you know even in your hung

over stupor, the latest victims of HUAC. Next of course will be the Jews, the homosexuals, and even you Nash.”

I wave my hand at Miriam; it's too early for agitprop.

I reach for my checkbook.

The one with the glasses and permanent scowl shakes his head.

“We don't need your money-yet. We need you to halt them. You're unique: a leftwing policeman. We need you to dig up the dirt on HUAC.”

I lean back.

“You guys are rich. You can hire someone besides me surely. I haven't been a cop for twenty years.”

“No one will touch us,” the pipe smoker says. “HUAC has everyone scared. They want to tar everyone in the Party with a Stalinist brush. So we're stalling with the fifth.”

“Dumb.”

“What?”

“By doing that, you're leaving a void for them to fill. Why not just tell them you're in the Party and that you're patriotic and to piss off?”

“So you're urging cooperation with fascism?” Mr. Glasses said.

“Ugh. I'm urging you to leave.”

After they left, I waited for the storm from Miriam.

She sat down, facing the wall.

“You owe me,” she whispered.

“When you were having the dts, I got you back on your feet. Now, I'm cashing in. Fight fascism, Nash. Get back in the fight.”

Shit, I thought. Guilt: the lefty's Achilles heel.

Terry Quinn ran his hands through his dandruff-ridden hair and sighed.

“Not interested in Orson Welles and little girls, eh? Oh well. What then?”

“Donald Stoker.”

He leaned back and whistled.

“You commies don't mess around, do you? Forget it. I wouldn't last ten minutes. Besides, he's clean.”

“C'mon Terry. No one is clean. You scandal-mongers have something on everyone, including and especially politicians.”

I toss the packet on the table.

He smiles and says, “Most people on that side of the desk slip it under.”

“I'm exposing the corrupt nature of capitalism.”

“Ha. He's gay.”

“Come again?”

“Gay. Fruit. I've got the testimony of the movie ushers since 1940.”

“C'mon. That's what the party press peddles.”

“Nope. Honest Injun-”

“*Pull!*”

Stoker blew the skeet apart without even looking at it.

“Sure you don't want glasses?” he says.

I shake my head.

“A lot like life, skeet shooting. The skeet fly through the air, oblivious to the changing winds, and then-blam.”

“Yeah. Sometimes the skeet can fire back though.”

I hand him the files.

He scans through them and laughs.

“Nothing you commies won't use. Go ahead. Broadcast it. I'm still nailing your pals.”

I take a step back.

He smiles.

“I'm on a sacred mission, Mr. Nash,” and he blows apart the next skeet.

...

“Let me tell you a story.”

I tell the drunk no thanks and dodge the producers and starlets and waiters and find the Hollywood three in the corner, nursing their drinks.

“Ah, the people's policeman,” the pipe smoker said saluting me with a martini.

“Shut up Donald,” Mr. Glasses said. “Well, what do you have to report?”

“Stoker won't back off.”

All three look down.

“Well, there are other ways besides blackmail,” the one with the slick hair says.

“Oh yes, ” Donald says. “We all know about the other methods don't we? We commies can always break some eggs when we have to.”

“Shut up Donald.”

“Nothing too immoral for us. Kill the message and the-”

Glasses throws his drink in Donald's face.

I leave. I've had enough of parties and the Party.

....

I'm about to nod off to sleep, having earned some quiet from Miriam, at least for a while, but I can't.

I rummage through the newspapers and find the sessions of Stoker with the three and am surprised.

It's hardly the stuff of red-baiting:

Stoker: "I'm not so much concerned about your party membership as I am your membership in something called the League of Peace and Antifascism. Can you at least offer some insight into your membership?"

Donald Mayhew: "Wha-? I decline to answer on the grounds-"

The rest of the defense showed even less humanity:

Stoker: "What is wrong with admitting membership in the League; it was full of liberals and pacifists, not just Stalinists."

Rambo: "This is fascism, pure and simple. You are a red-baiter."

The library has this on Stoker:

Two term Congressman from Iowa. Had a brother who fought on the Loyalist side during the Spanish Civil War. Has been missing since 1939.

Missing?

And he was a screenwriter in Hollywood.

The League of Peace and Antifascism was a Hollywood-based front group hurriedly raised after Stalin announced his military partnership with Hitler in 1939. It's membership lists included the Hollywood three.

Stoker's not in his office. His secretary tells me he's probably taking his lunch in the building.

He's not in the commissary. I give up and am heading into the elevator when the colored janitor tells me the congressman's probably down in the basement.

“He eats his lunch in the basement?”

“Yeah. In my living quarters.”

“Take me to them.”

He unlocks the door and all I see is a bed and a radio.

“What's that room there?”

“Old storeroom. No one's had the key for years.”

I lean on it and it pops open.

“Judas priest.”

I light a match and see a storeroom full of file cabinets.

.....

I drive across town, park my car, and pick the lock on the front door of the house.

I make my way past the movie posters and awards and head down to the basement.

Clay earth. Yeah, this could be it, I think.

“Cossack,” a voice hisses above me.

Dawson Rambo comes down the stairs with a snifter in one hand and a pistol in the other.

“You did it here, didn't you?” I ask. “No. Wait. Individual murders don't fit your philosophy. All or nothing. Collectivist or nothing at all. Let me guess: you and Clewes and even Mayhew drug him down here and then stomped him to death. But I'm betting you put the most effort into it.”

Rambo smiles.

“You are a detective.”

“Can't have anything disputing the Party version of the Pact could you? Not even a comrade returning from Spain with proof Stalin and Hitler were playing footsies.”

“Enough talk,” He cocks the pistol.

“Dawson, no” Mayhew says from the top of the stairs. “It's over. Stoker's digging. He won't give up, fifth or not.”

“It's never over. We're marching toward universal health care. We will not be stymied by some crybaby congressman or this turncoat.”

Rambo aims and Mayhew rushes down. Rambo calmly shoots him in the head. The momentum takes Mayhew down the stairs into a heap.

Rambo leans against the wall.

“Let's see. HUAC drove him to this. No, no mileage in that. Stoker hired you to kill us. You shot him and then I shot you.”

“Good editing,” Stoker said behind Rambo. He was flanked by cops.

“I want a lawyer,” Rambo says and drops the pistol behind him.

He gets one, the best progressive Hollywood has to offer. But after they found Steward Stoker's body, beaten to death in those prewar days, not even the doctrinaires can save him.

I turned to Stoker when they dug up his brother and said, “That's quite a basement office you've got.”

He smiled thinly.

“It's not an office; it was an evidence room.”

I return home. To the country, I am a hero. To Miriam, I'm not. I find the note on the bathroom mirror.

It's in red.

The End