

# THE SUIT

By Rob Steele

It worries me a bit that I don't mind this kind of thing anymore. Not the death itself. It still bothers me that people kill people. What kind of person would I be if that didn't bother me? A politician, I suppose. But it's seeing the bodies that doesn't bother me. At least not as much as it used to. This one is pretty straight forward.

Maid finds a body in a hotel room. One bullet wound to the forehead. Bullet is likely in the wall behind him, where his grey matter is doing a Jackson Pollock imitation. It's not really grey though, is it? I mean there is some greyish to it, but it's almost a pastel pink with a lot of grey in it. See, that's it not bothering me as much as it used to. I'm thinking about making sure the color is described more accurately and not worrying so much about the poor man whose internal coloring I'm worrying about.

"Here's his wallet, Coop." Dr. Seong-ho Young is doing his cursory field examination of the body and hands me his wallet. Driver's license says our victim is named *Roger Sims, six-foot-two, 175 pounds. Lives a couple miles from here.* I look back at the body. 175? Looks like he's put on weight since his last renewal. 210 easy. But those kinds of things happen – it's to be expected. Although I'm sure he wasn't expecting the reception he got.

My guess, since he lives nearby, he was meeting someone here discretely. Probably an affair. No pictures in his wallet. Probably has some on his phone though. No one seems to carry photos anymore. Of course, no one seems to use film anymore either. No film, no hard copies of the pictures. That's rather sad. "Hey, Doc. You find his phone?"

Dr. Young pats down Mr. Sims suit and looks puzzled. "He doesn't have one. Who doesn't have a phone these days?" He looks up at me and pulls his own phone from the inner pocket of his coroner's office windbreaker showing that even he has one. "Your killer probably took it with him." Doc resumes his examination and discovers a button and piece of thread in Mr. Sims inner jacket pocket. Sims suit is a dark, charcoal color – this button is silver and the thread is beige. It doesn't match. I turn to Mark Davis, the CSI on this case, and tell him to see if he can track down what kind of suit the button and thread come from. After all, it could belong to our killer.

I leave Mark and Doc Young to finish up the scene and make my way to the security office. I've been in the Marlin hotel a few times over the years, on cases, of course. So, security is familiar with me. They usher me into the control room where I'm bombarded with a cacophony of images being shown on at least 20 monitors. "This is new."

"New ownership of the hotel," replies Peter Green, the new head of security. "They decided that having better security would mean we could charge more, or something like that. Make the people feel safe and they'll pay a premium. Anyway, we figured you'd want to see the footage of the guy when he checked in. Here's what we got." He motioned to the big monitor in the middle. I have no idea how you'd keep track of everything on *all* the monitors *all* the time. The main one was, thankfully, nice and big and clearly showed Mr. Sims checking in with someone in a beige suit wearing a fedora.

"We tried looking for other angles that showed hat-boy's face. But we can't find one," Mr. Green apologized while handing me a DVD in a case. "Here's a copy of the footage. Maybe your people can

find something ours can't. And before you ask, we even checked with the staff. They don't remember the guy."

I thanked him for his time and made my way back to the station to do some research into Mr. Sims. Didn't find much though. No outstanding warrants. Clean record. One speeding ticket about ten years ago near August Acres. I know that place though. It really is a speed trap. Nothing suspicious on his credit cards. Basically, what I've got here is: Mr. Roger Sims. Banker. Single. Lives in a small apartment near his work. The only real odd thing is a complete lack of a social media presence – so no posts anywhere about who he was seeing socially or who he was meeting at the hotel. That pretty much means it's up to the CSI lab guys and Dr. Young.

That's when my cell phone makes the most bizarre noise. I look at it and there are several numbers on the screen and a couple names. Thankfully Detective Manny Vasquez is not only in the office but more tech savvy than I am. He takes my phone and presses a couple buttons I can't see before laying the phone on my desk and telling me "You had two calls come in at once. I just conferenced them for you. Ok, Doc, you're up first."

"Thank you, Manny," said the voice of Dr. Young. "Nothing of real importance here. It was the gunshot to the head that killed him. Small caliber. Probably a .22. No other signs of foul play. Time of death puts his murder at about eight o'clock last night. Hopefully you'll have better luck with that button and thread."

"That we have had better luck with," said Mark Davis from the phone. "We've not got much on the button but the thread is a special weave of a metallic rayon and silk called "Maylk" that we've tracked down to a specialty shop on Cody Avenue called, and I didn't name it, Tailor Swift. They'll make you a new hi-quality suit in about a day. Well, according to their slogan, anyway."

I thank them both and get the address of the tailor. I know there's a joke in there somewhere about "Tailor Swift" but I'm not getting it. As I enter the shop, I notice the mannequins all have nice suits and there is an actual hard-copy catalog on the counter. The shop isn't that large, but it doesn't need to be. I suspect people come in, choose a suit, get measured, and everything else takes place in the back. I'm greeted by a waifish man with a nametag that reads "Daniel – Manager."

"Oh honey, that suit is just not going to do it for you. You should have come to me sooner." He rushes around the counter, grabs one of my arms and lifts it out to my side and begins measuring. After a brief struggle, I eventually have my arm back and finally get out an introduction.

"Daniel! I'm Lieutenant Cooper Wright with homicide. I'm investigating the death of a man who was killed by someone wearing one of your suits!"

Thankfully that got him to stop measuring long enough to look appalled. "I can't believe someone I made a suit for would kill. I've never had that happen before. Oh, but it is a little exciting in one of those awful but exhilarating ways. What can I do to help? I've always wanted to do a *Jessica Fletcher* kind of thing."

I sigh quite heavily. "Look. Daniel. I just need a list of people you've made a suit for out of..." I have to look back at the name of the material. I take out my notebook and flip a couple pages until I find the word "Maylk."

Daniel seems fascinated by the notebook (a real police notebook) but eventually calms himself enough to say, "Oh gawd! Maylk? Really? Wouldn't have guessed that one. I've only made one suit out of that stuff. It's awful. So many people are allergic to it. Of course, I find that out *after* I order three bolts of the stuff. The man you're looking for is a city councilman, you know. Alexander Horn. Oh, he seemed so nice, too."

I know the name. Never met the guy but he's popular around town. Just dedicated a park downtown and has worked a lot with children's programs. He's been really good for this town. And now I have to bring him in and interrogate him about a murder.

I run it by the chief and clear it with everyone before I put in the request for someone of his stature to be summoned to headquarters. I decide to play politics and usher the councilman and his attorney into the conference room. "Gentlemen, I have an issue. There was a man murdered last night named Roger Sims. Evidence collected puts you in proximity to..."

"What evidence?" barked his lawyer. I hate it when lawyers interrupt.

"We found a button and some thread that match a suit made for your client at Taylor Swift."

"She never gave him a suit!" the lawyer spat. *She* never gave him? Oh, wait. *Taylor* Swift. Now I get it. That's horrible. The singer was in town a couple months ago and Councilman Horn did make a big deal about it. Thankfully, he also realized how annoying his lawyer was being.

"It's my tailor shop, Steve," he said putting a restraining hand on his lawyer's arm before turning to me. "But I haven't worn the suit, yet. There is an upcoming event, perhaps you've heard of it, the Beige Brothers Birthday Bash? It's a big to-do in my circles, what with the Beige Brothers being one of the largest construction firms around. I had planned on wearing it then. Besides, I don't know anyone named... Mr. Sims, was it?"

Gee, no trace of smugness there. Just like there's no sarcasm here. "Can you account for your whereabouts last night around eight? Our primary suspect was wearing your suit and a fedora."

Councilman Horn seems to sit back a little bit. His lawyer puffs himself up a little before answering, "he was with the Mayor and several city councilmen and a television crew. The press conference last night? The one where we praised the work of this city's police force? Surely you watched it."

I heard it was happening. I think I even got an invitation to it. I also try to avoid situations like that much in the same way I try to avoid the plague or being run over by a bus. As I attempt to come up with a retort, the pair rise and begin to leave. "Before you go, gentlemen. We'd like to take a look at the suit." I hand the lawyer a warrant. He examines it and shrugs.

"It's all yours, Lieutenant," says the councilman. "It's in my bedroom closet on the right-hand side. Now if you'll excuse us, we have another function to attend. By the way, I don't own a fedora." I send Detective Vasquez and CSI Davis to retrieve the suit. I also ask them to look for the fedora. It's covered by the warrant.

While they're gone, I contact one of the local television stations and acquire all their footage. I skim through it and just about every shot has the Councilman in it. Television and the Mayor as an alibi. That looks pretty good for him – but horrible for me.

Manny returns to the office with a couple sandwiches and hands me one. Good ol' Manny. It's not until the first bite that I realize that I'm not sure I've eaten all day. Manny tells me they found the suit right where Councilman Horn said it would be. They found a fedora, too, but in the hall closet. It wasn't really hidden, but it wasn't terribly obvious either. Both were in the lab now being tested.

I suppose that's something. About an hour later, I get an excited phone call from CSI Davis. "We found something interesting, Coop. Actually, two things. One, there is gunshot residue on the suit. Someone fired a gun wearing it recently."

Awesome! We might just have to arrest a councilman tonight. That should be fun. I do so love dealing with the media, much like dealing with... well, before I can come up with a quip in my head, Davis continues. "But here's the kicker the hat had some hairs in it. Preliminary DNA shows, female hair." I think it's time to go back to the tape. That was a woman in the hat? Of course, all we have to go on here is this video. It might not even be related to the councilman. Maybe someone else could have gotten a suit like that in another town.

I return to the hotel footage and examine it myself. Not that I don't trust the lab guys, and it's not like I kicked them out of their lab either – we're all there watching and mumbling to ourselves. "That's a woman?" "Built like a guy." "Who wears a fedora these days?" "Wait!" I finally exclaim. "Check out the fingernails!" The video is rewound to where we get a distant but distinct shot of longer fingernails that are colored. At this distance, it's hard to tell exactly what color, but it is enough for us to conclude, that is a woman. Now the \$64-thousand question, "who is she?" Better yet, "how did she get the suit?"

I ask the lab guys to make a hard copy print of our suspect and head back to the office. It takes Manny less than five minutes to track down where Councilman Horn is – a benefit for the homeless. Of course. After an initial declination to enter the establishment, the head of security, Phineas Jones of all people, not only lets me in but escorts me to Councilman Horn, who, expectedly, looks displeased.

"Lieutenant, I thought we'd been over this."

"We have, sir. But I need you to look at this picture," I reply holding up the printed image from the video. "That's your suit. We tested it and there is gunshot residue on it. We found the hat at your house, too. But the hair in the hat belongs to a woman who isn't in our database. We were hoping you'd know who she is."

He took the picture, and, after donning the reading glasses from his suit jacket pocket, examined it. It didn't take long before there was a resigned sigh. "Carla. Carla Stanton. She works for me as a maid. She's a hefty woman but I didn't realize we wore the same size. Not sure why she's wearing my suit. Does that help you Lieutenant?"

I thank the Councilman (and Phineas), and call Manny, who after a moment, comes up with Carla Stanton's address, which is the other side of town. Manny says he's already dispatched two squad cars to pick her up.

It wasn't long before we had Ms. Stanton in interrogation room one. Councilman Horn was right, she wasn't a terribly feminine woman. She was certainly as tall as the councilman and did also seem to have his... girth. Frankly, there was nothing feminine about this woman. Right down to the rather butch haircut. She wasn't wearing the councilman's suit, of course, she was in something a little more

feminine, but not much. She was found with a Ruger LCP, the one with the little laser sight on the trigger. Not a big gun, but certainly a possible match for the murder weapon. Ballistics were testing it now.

“Ms. Stanton, I’ll come straight out and say it. You are our most likely suspect in the murder of Roger Sims.” I place the printout of the video on the table between us. “What I’m not understanding is, why are you wearing Councilman Horn’s suit? And why did you shoot Mr. Sims? Actually, why were you even carrying the gun?”

She stared at the picture for a good long moment. “I looked good in that suit. Alexander hadn’t even put that suit on yet, but I knew it would fit me. We wear the same size, you know. As for Roger,” she trailed off and looked into the distance. “I met Roger a while ago at one of Alex’s functions. I thought we hit it off. We exchanged numbers and emails and kept in touch.

“After a while, the conversations did turn romantic. He’d mentioned having a fetish for Maylk and I knew Alex had a new suit made of the stuff. Actually, I recommended it. I knew the councilman wouldn’t be paying attention if I borrowed his suit. He never does. I like wearing men’s suits. They fit me better. So, I wore the suit when I met with Roger. It was going so well. We’d met for drinks. He flirted. I flirted back. We got a little... touchy feely, and decided to get a room so we could be more... well...

“But when we got to the room, it was a disaster. Oh, we kissed. Which was great. But then he touched my breast and then, I don’t know.” She began to sob. “He said there had been a mistake. He thought I was a man. I know I am not very feminine. I know I wear men’s clothing. But I am a woman!” She pounded the table with her fists and it shook profoundly. She sniffed and regained her composure.

“I had the gun with me for protection. You never know how these things are going to turn out, right?” She stared off into the distance again before continuing. “He said he’d never been with a woman and he didn’t want to start now. And certainly not with a woman who looked like me. He wanted a man. I was furious! And that’s when I shot him.

“Is that sufficient enough for you Lieutenant Wright?”

“Oh, that’s sufficient. Thank you.” I rose and exited the room. I was greeted by the District Attorney who had been listening in the other room. He says that the ballistics came in and it matches. We have an iron clad case and we have our man.

I winced at that. “I’m not sure I’d phrase it that way, sir. She already killed one man for saying that.”