The Further Adventures of **DICK PISTON, HOTEL DETECTIVE** (but not much further)

"Murder By Midnight" a 10-minute mystery

by Jeff Goode

CHARACTERS
DICK PISTON
WOMAN
BELLHOP

<u>SETTING</u>
Dick Piston's office

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Scene: Dick Piston's Office

(Enter DICK PISTON, hotel detective, in his office.)

PISTON: The story I'm gonna tell you, you're not gonna believe. But every word of it is true. I know because it happened to me—But enough about me. We really don't have time for that

And by we, I mean, me: Dick Piston, hotel detective.

It was a Friday night in the big city. And on a Friday night, you'll find me making my rounds at the Lakeview Hotel: a two-bit armpit on the upside of downtown. Anytime before midnight, that is. After midnight, you'll catch me drowning my proverbial sorrows at the five-star dive bar in the lobby of that hotel. But at ten minutes to midnight, I'm always here in my office, watching the clock.

Not that I'm a proverbial stickler for whatever punctual people stickle for. And not that I couldn't use the overtime. But my employer had made it clear that anyone who *did* use the overtime would be spending *all* their time xeroxing resumes at the discount copy shop on the corner.

You see, the hotel had been wallowing in red ink for quite some time now. And it was likely to continue hemorrhaging proverbial money until it stopped hemorrhaging potential hotel guests. And I only wish that was a metaphor. The Lakeview Hotel had the highest mortality rate of any luxury accommodations west of Baghdad. Or east of Baghdad. Or in Baghdad.

In fact, as hotel detective, I had personally investigated six unsolved murders in the last five weeks. And committed four. So the management wasn't entirely happy with my proverbial job performance. So that's why they told me anyone who clocked even one minute of unauthorized overtime would be out of a proverbial job. Literally. And by anyone, they meant me, Dick Piston, hotel detective.

And that's why, at ten minutes to midnight, I had my proverbial eyes glued to the literal clock. Because when that strikes twelve, my Friday night nightmares become somebody else's Saturday morning problem. So if my luck holds true—

(A naked WOMAN bursts into the office wearing nothing but a bath towel.)

WOMAN: Dick Piston! I need you!

PISTON: Lady Luck. You could set your watch by her.

WOMAN: I need your help.

PISTON: I'm afraid I'm not the man you're looking for.

WOMAN: You're not Dick Piston?

PISTON: No, I'm not helpful.

WOMAN: But you are the hotel detective?

PISTON: For nine more minutes I am. But there's not going to be a tenth, so I'm afraid if it's anything more time-consuming than a stuck pickle jar, I'm going to have to refer you to the day shift.

WOMAN: But you have to help me! I'm the victim of a crime!

PISTON: Well, unless that crime is unnecessary wetness, there's really not much I can do, in the time allotted.

WOMAN: It's not unnecessary wetness.

PISTON: Are you sure? Because I've got a blow dryer in the desk.

WOMAN: Mr. Piston, please! You can't just turn your back on me.

PISTON: Not in that outfit, no.

WOMAN: Then you'll help me?

PISTON: For eight more minutes, I will. But that's all the time we've got.

WOMAN: Will that be enough?

PISTON: Depends on the crime. What's yours?

WOMAN: I think they call it ... murder.

PISTON: Uh huh. And you say you're the victim?

WOMAN: Yes, it happened just now, up in my hotel room.

(Beat.)

PISTON: You know what murder is, right?

WOMAN: It's the one where somebody kills someone, right?

PISTON: That's the one.

WOMAN: (celebrates the correct answer) Yay!

PISTON: Hoo boy. (taking out an egg timer) All right, I'm going to take your case. But I'm also going to set an egg timer. When this goes off—No matter what: Case dismissed. Is that understood?

WOMAN: Mr. Piston, I can't tell you how grateful I am for this.

PISTON: Coming here in a towel is thanks enough.

WOMAN: You're welcome.

PISTON: Now, if you'll take a seat, I have to make a phone call.

WOMAN: But aren't you going to rush up to my room and examine the scene of the crime?

PISTON: Ordinarily, I would. But we don't have that kind of time. *(on phone:)* Hello, front desk? It's me, Dick Piston, hotel detective! Put me through to the kitchen.

WOMAN: What are you doing?

PISTON: Ordering room service.

WOMAN: Will that speed up the investigation?

PISTON: Not at all.

WOMAN: Then why are you doing it?

PISTON: Because no man in his right mind would ever be alone in a room with a woman in a towel without at least a bottle of champagne and a half-order of oysters on the way. *(on phone:)* I'll have the honeymoon special. Send it to my office pronto. And a box of condoms.

WOMAN: Thank you, Mr. Piston. How I can ever repay you?

PISTON: Well, there's condoms coming.

WOMAN: Mr. Piston! I'm a married woman.

PISTON: You can never repay me.

WOMAN: And how did you know this was our honeymoon?

PISTON: Just tell me about your murder and get it over with. If we make this quick, maybe I still have time to xerox some resumes before morning.

WOMAN: Well, I was up in my room, taking a shower before dinner.

PISTON: So you haven't eaten?

WOMAN: No, not yet. But those oysters sound delicious.

PISTON: And the murder took place in the bathroom?

WOMAN: No, it was in the bedroom.

PISTON: After your shower?

WOMAN: No, during.

PISTON: So you were shot in the shower...by someone in the bedroom?

WOMAN: What makes you think I was shot?

PISTON: Because if it was a stabbing, you would have been in the same room with the

killer.

WOMAN: My God! You think he was in the shower with me?!!

PISTON: No, I think you were shot.

WOMAN: But I wasn't shot. Look!

(She throws open her towel. He looks at her.)

PISTON: Or stabbed, for that matter. But it looks like you've had a close shave of some

kind.

WOMAN: No, that's waxing.

PISTON: All right, given that you're not harmed in anyway—

WOMAN: Have you ever been waxed?

PISTON: —What makes you think you were murdered?

WOMAN: Oh, I wasn't murdered.

PISTON: But you said you were.

WOMAN: I said I was the victim of a crime.

PISTON: And the crime was murder!

WOMAN: Oh, well done, Mr. Piston! With your keen eye for detail, we'll have this case

sewed up in no time!

PISTON: If the crime is murder, and you're the victim, why are you here?

WOMAN: Well, I had to report it, didn't I? He was my husband, after all.

PISTON: The killer?

WOMAN: No, the killeree.

PISTON: The murder victim is your husband?

WOMAN: Yes, he was shot in my room. In the head. On the bed.

PISTON: So you're the victim by marriage.

WOMAN: And this was supposed to be our honeymoon!

PISTON: I see. And is that how you were dressed when you discovered the body?

WOMAN: Yes. I had just stepped into the shower – where I was nude, Mr. Piston, can you imagine? – when I heard what sounded like gunshots and a blood-curdling scream. Naturally, I finished my shower, put on some make up, and raced into the bedroom right away to see what was the matter. That's when I found him: dead on the bed with a slug in his head.

PISTON: Were there any signs of forced entry?

WOMAN: Well, he'd been dropping hints all weekend. So I was hoping. This is our honeymoon, after all.

PISTON: No, I mean to the room.

WOMAN: Oh. No, everything seemed perfectly normal. Except for that horrible dead guy lying there.

PISTON: You mean, your husband.

WOMAN: Yes, that was his name: Guy.

(Beat.)

PISTON: And he was horrible?

WOMAN: Oh, yes, brains everywhere.

(A knock at the door.)

PISTON: Well, Mrs. Guy, normally, this is the point in the investigation, when I would rush up to your hotel room to examine the body. But we're short on time, so let's just cut to the proverbial chase—

(A BELLHOP comes in with champagne and oysters.)

BELLHOP: Room service!

(Piston shoots him dead: BANG!)

PISTON: There's your killer!

WOMAN: Oh! Oh my! ...But how could you possibly know that?

PISTON: Was your husband clinically insane?

WOMAN: No, not clinically.

PISTON: That's how I know.

WOMAN: I don't understand.

PISTON: And there's no time to explain. (looking at the egg timer) No, wait, there's four minutes. Allow me to explain... If there were no signs of forced entry, then your husband must have let the killer into the room himself. Which means the murderer must have been someone your husband knew personally, or expected shortly. A bellhop, for example.

WOMAN: Why would he be expecting a bellhop?

PISTON: Because your husband was *not* clinically insane. And since no man in his right mind would ever be alone in a room with a woman in a towel without at least a bottle of champagne and a half-order of oysters on the way, and your husband knew that you were about to enter the room, we know that your husband must have ordered something from room service.

WOMAN: It makes perfect sense!

PISTON: And, as you've just witnessed, the service in this hotel is incredibly prompt.

WOMAN: Yes, I'm impressed. We ought to make sure and leave him a big tip.

PISTON: So your husband's order must have arrived at the room while you were still in the shower. Yet you haven't eaten.

WOMAN: Because there wasn't any food.

PISTON: Exactly! And if there were no edibles in evidence, it can only mean that whoever brought the food removed it immediately after the murder to conceal the fact that the killer came from the kitchen.

WOMAN: I don't know why I didn't see it before!

PISTON: Which means, your husband had to have been murdered by the night shift bellhop, who gained access to your room under the pretense of delivering a romantic appetizer, which you never got the chance to enjoy, because after murdering your husband in cold blood – and not wanting to leave any evidence that the killer was a member of the hotel staff – he removed the tell-tale oysters and champagne from the scene - something that only a member of the hotel staff would do - leaving in their place, the even more tell-tale *absence* of oysters and champagne which confirms his guilt.

WOMAN: But why would this bellhop want to kill my husband?

PISTON: Because unbeknownst to your late husband, this bellhop was having an extramarital affair with his wife!!

WOMAN: (to the Bellhop) You're married???

(She kicks the dead Bellhop.)

PISTON: No, you. He was having an affair with you!

WOMAN: What?! How could you possibly know *that*?

PISTON: Because you still haven't asked me the one question that any widow in her right mind would want to know the answer to, in this situation: Why would this bellhop want to kill your husband?

WOMAN: But I did ask.

PISTON: You did? When?

WOMAN: Just now. Just a second ago. I said it right away. It was practically the first thing that popped into my mind.

PISTON: Oh. Right. Well, never mind. Hmm.

WOMAN: You really haven't been paying attention to anything I've said, have you, Mr.

Piston?

PISTON: For God's sake, you're wearing a towel!

WOMAN: That's no reason to accuse me of being an adulteress, and worse yet, an

accomplice to murder!

PISTON: You're right. I'm sorry. I apologize.

WOMAN: Accepted. ...Shame about the bellboy, though.

PISTON: Yeah... Listen, my boss'll have my proverbial head if she finds out I shot another innocent bystander. Do you think we could just agree that this was a self-

inflicted?

WOMAN: Yes, of course, Mr. Piston. He looked suicidal the moment he walked in here.

PISTON: Aha!!

WOMAN: (startled) Oh!

PISTON: A likely story!

WOMAN: But it's *your* story!

PISTON: Yes, it is! But what widow in her right mind would agree to cover up the murder of a man who had nothing to do with her husband's murder, unless he, in fact,

had everything to do with the murder, and she was in on it?

WOMAN: But that could only mean two things!

PISTON: No, one. It could only mean one thing.

WOMAN: I think you're forgetting one possibility, Mr. Piston.

PISTON: What's that?

WOMAN: That the widow is not, in fact, in her right mind! (jumping around like a

chimpanzee:) Oo! Oo! Ee! Oo oo oo!

PISTON: Hmm... Well, this is a little embarrassing. (looks at her jumping around) For both of us. But it looks like I was wrong again. (looks at the timer) And my shift is almost over. ...So I guess you're free to go.

WOMAN: Oh, thank you, Mr. Piston. You don't know what a relief this is. You may not have solved my husband's murder, but knowing I'm innocent of all charges is a huge load off my mind. What little there is left of it, I mean. Oo! Oo! How can I possibly thank you?

PISTON: Well, we've got champagne and oysters. And I'm off in two minutes.

WOMAN: Oh, Mr. Piston... I think we can get you off before that...

(She kisses him. A shot rings out! She falls dead.)

PISTON: Well, I didn't see that coming.

(The Bellhop rises shakily to his feet, a smoking gun in his hand.)

BELLHOP: Neither did I.

PISTON: You're alive? But that's impossible.

BELLHOP: Actually, no, you're a terrible shot, Piston.

PISTON: Yeah... Sorry about that.

BELLHOP: Don't be. You were right about us, Piston. Until recently, this lady and I were having a torrid affair, behind her husband's back. And over his dead body.

PISTON: Ew.

BELLHOP: At least I thought we were. I thought we were in love. But now I see she was just using me to get what she wanted.

PISTON: A dead husband, and an airtight alibi. But what makes you think she was using you?

BELLHOP: What woman in her right mind would leave her husband for another man, only to throw herself into the arms of a third man – a third rate hotel detective – over the lifeless corpse of her dead lover, the second man? Unless, of course, she never truly loved him to begin with, and was only using him to get rid of her wealthy husband, who she also didn't love. And she probably didn't care much for the detective either.

PISTON: But if you'd waited a couple minutes, she might have cared a little bit.

BELLHOP: Forget it, Piston! She used us. We're all victims here.

PISTON: Well, actually, not me.

BELLHOP: No? I suppose not. (turning his gun on Piston, menacingly) But if you got a minute, I think I can correct that oversight.

PISTON: Wow, look at the time.

(Piston tries to run, but the Bellhop blocks his exit.)

BELLHOP: It looks like yours is up...Dick Piston...hotel detective....

PISTON: But why would you want to kill me? I haven't done anything to you! Besides shooting you a minute ago.

BELLHOP: I think you're forgetting the possibility that I, too, might not be in my right mind.

PISTON: No, I took that into account when you murdered two people at your place of work.

(The Bellhop closes in on Piston, jumping around like a chimpanzee with a gun.)

BELLHOP: Oo! Oo! Oo oo oo!

(A bell goes off: DING!)

BELLHOP: (distracted) What was that?

PISTON: Your luck running out.

BELLHOP: No, it sounded more like an egg timer.

(Piston grabs the egg timer and punches the Bellhop in the head with it: DING!!)

PISTON: Case dismissed.

(The Bellhop falls to the ground, unconscious.)

PISTON: It was a Saturday morning in the big city. And on a Saturday morning... my proverbial work here is done. Literally.

(He puts away the egg timer and punches out for the night.)

THE END