

## **SCOTT'S TULSA**

*A Wyatt Scott Novel*

by

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### **CHAPTER 1 – THE MAY ROOMS**

The windows of Tulsa's infamous May Rooms lay dark, save one frame of the top floor. On the alley side against that casing's lighted and drawn blind, a female silhouette stood peering deep into the room. A male profile rushed into the tableau; his malevolent intent, even in two dimensions, became clear. The two shapes roamed and twisted in and out of the window's panorama. The male departed, shade right, while the woman recoiled, drawing closer to the window. His image reoccupied the scene charging like a rogue rhino, while brandishing the outline of a club. Her arms' shadows crossed her facade in fear and defense as her primal instinct sought protection from the onslaught. He drove forward with the bludgeon looming larger in aspect than in hand. He struck. The weapon smashed into her head. She wavered. A second blow, crueler than the first, crumpled her body out of view. As the cudgel's specter repeatedly came and left the screen, without slowing and without pity, he struck and struck again. His worst done; the marauder retreated beyond the beamed light.

The illuminated scene waited in blank anticipation for the assailant to complete his unspeakable purpose. Without the shade being raised, he lifted the pane, which framed the violent tableau. The blind fluttered out of the opening, ruining the projection, and ending the shadow performance. It rippled above the alleyway, a cautionary banner waving unheeded to the empty sidewalks and city streets. Before it could calm, a naked woman, beaten and bloodied, sailed out. She tumbled, silent and lifeless. Four floors of gravity's influence caused her body to rupture with a splat on the old brick surface. Blood seeped from her head, collecting on the mortar. It flowed north and south before encountering new paths to flow east and west. Despite the warm night air and the June heat caught in the pavers, the flowing blood congealed and altered the tiny rivers of crimson into extensions of the brick-red facade. The summer breeze swept down the alley. The neighbors slumbered and didn't see. The pigeons saw and didn't care.

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The May Rooms supposedly rented rooms, but true vacancies came about as often as snow in Key West. The police, the city officials, the business community, and those in need of sexual relief knew the true business of the May Rooms. The local girls, who plied their trade on the premises, generally had their own rooms to entertain and, more often than not, to live in. The proprietor and madam enjoyed an office and a comfortable apartment off the main parlor. The various rooms took the second through fourth floors, while the basement held a spot for Carl Jefferson, the maintenance man, bouncer, and factotum of the madam, Queena Capps.

In a third-floor room with an oscillating fan gently humming, big-band music streamed from a radio on a wooden nightstand. Except for a few feminine frills, the room presented an unadorned and basic appearance. The dresser supported an old-fashioned hand basin fired with a

deep blue pattern on a white glaze. A pinkish washrag kept it company. An open wardrobe displayed exotic outfits and an unusual array of hosiery – sheer, colored, and fishnet. A bed, a closet, and seemingly out-of-place male clothes draped over a chair, completed the bed chamber.

Paulette, a pretty, brunette whore in her early twenties, lay bare, partially, but not strategically, covered by a white sheet. Her few years in the profession had yet to impose decay on her looks or figure. She possessed a pretty, if naive, smile and a complexion that glistened a little owing to her modest application of makeup. The clothes on the chair tattled that she entertained a man in her room, and her expression disclosed the companion could not be mistaken for an ordinary john.

“Are you mad at me, Wyatt?” blurted out Paulette.

“No. Why?” replied her guest, Wyatt Scott.

Standing near the bureau, his frame showed toned muscle, no scars, and little strain. Tall, athletic, and thirty-three, Scott carried the lacerations and misfortunes of his life inside. A whirlwind tour of big-league baseball brought him overseas barnstorming in nineteen thirty-four and huge disappointment a few months later. Afterward, he studied languages and history during his west coast, postgraduate days only to be caught up in the draft where the army exploited his talents in the OSS. His parents’ deaths in a car accident brought him home to Tulsa. An association with his old high school baseball batterymate brought him to his occupation – private detective.

“It’s...you were...so urgent tonight.” Paulette dropped her eyes from Scott avoiding emphasis on her metaphor.

The radio music stopped. The announcer broke in; “You are listening to KTOO Tulsa. The time is ten o’clock.”

The brief delay, from switches being switched, gave way to the familiar three-note motif of the radio network. A coast-to-coast announcer from New York confirmed it. “The National Broadcasting Company welcomes you to music live from the Starlight Room.” On cue after his prologue, soft tones of muted trumpets and quiet strings flowed from the radio.

Scott moved slightly closer to the bed. “It’s not you, Polly. I keep thinking about a *solved* crime. Somebody got away with murder in Alaska. I’m not sure who and I have no idea why.”

Paulette reached for Scott, but he strayed to the side of the bed. She stretched out her arms like a child seeking reassurance. He resituated himself within her reach. She caressed his head and hair with her yearning undeniably exposed. He didn’t recoil, yet he didn’t reciprocate her attention or even glance in her direction. The wall took his stare, while his consideration focused much farther away and three years distant in time.

“Things were not right in Alaska,” swore Scott. “Sticks in my craw.”

A knock on the door interrupted them. Paulette withdrew her hands, freeing Scott. He stood up, scrutinizing the offending wooden barrier. He edged toward the chair supporting his clothes. Paulette kept her gaze on the door. A second knock triggered her to sit up.

“Mr. Scott. When you get your pants on, come to my office. I need to see you.” The footsteps of Queena Capps trailed off as she departed down the hall.

Paulette giggled. “Queenena don’t know it, but she’d like seeing you with your pants off.”

“Just for you, Polly.” Scott grabbed his shirt from the chair and slipped into it with an aggressive flourish. “Do you know what she wants?”

Playfulness and joy fled Paulette’s face. She lost her smile and glanced away. She pursed her lips, dropped her chin, and inspected the wrinkled sheet. She even feigned a cursory check of her fingernails.

Scott noted the fidgeting. “Is it about Darlene Barnes?” He moved on to his trousers.

She peeked at Scott before averting her eyes. Polly pulled the sheet over her nakedness and tight around her neck. She swallowed, then peered at Scott. "Wyatt, something's going on here." She drew her legs to her body still clasping the sheet to her neck. "Queena's troubled, and it's not just about Darlene's killing." Paulette's fear softened her tone and added breath to her words. "Cora's been gone nearly two weeks. Mary, the new girl, the real young one, hasn't been around in days. And then Darlene...can't help but think they're all connected."

Shirt tucked, and trousers zipped; Scott sat in the chair to work on his socks. "Connected like someone is systematically killing Queena's girls?"

"It's worrisome, is all," sighed Paulette. "Are you going to work for Queena; check on the missing girls?"

Scott slid a foot into one of his wingtips, then followed with the other. He looked at Paulette before tying either. "Is that what she wants?"

"You know her," sighed Paulette. "She only tells us to work the johns faster."

The left shoe tied; Scott wound the bow on the right one. "Could be she wants to hire me about the girls...could be about the time I spend with one of them." He flickered a sly grin as he made his conjecture. Scott stood and retrieved a ten-dollar bill from his wallet.

Watching his action, Paulette rose up. The abandoned sheet fell away. Her breasts jiggled. "You don't have to pay." Her wide-eyed, girlish gaze did not belong to her circumstances, her occupation, or her commonplace demeanor toward everyday clients. Wyatt Scott brought affection and hope to her eyes that others did not. Her hope languished in her storybook world where a sullen shamus and a veteran whore could be the sweet couple next door. It did not reside in Tulsa, in Scott, or in reality.

Scott dropped the bill on the nightstand. He petted Paulette's bare shoulder. "I know." He ambled toward the door picking up his pace as he neared it. He grabbed the knob, flung the door open, and left, closing it silently and summarily.

Wyatt Scott made his way down the stairs. The parlor's décor expressed comfort rather than the stale cheapness of most houses of the night. The lighting glowed low and soothing from a glass chandelier and several floor lamps. Easy chairs, wooden chairs with cushions, soft couches, hard couches, plush chairs, and wicker ones, which were out for the summer and generally replaced leather ones due to the heat, provided ample seating for the customers and the working girls of the house.

The parlor hummed with carnal tension and whispered euphemisms. Suits and ties mostly waited for their ladies of choice, while a few patrons delighted in the girls' competition for their business. A pair of men wore no coat or tie, but if they were laborers, they knew enough to be clean and well-mannered. Three robe-swathed girls competed for business in hushed tones with prospective clients. One flirted with a laugh, while the others advertised with a smooth leg peeking from her robe's slit or a pert breast daring to escape its halter. A console phonograph spun a Benny Goodman tune to set a cordial mood and ease the wait. Scott reached the door to which he had been summoned and entered the realm of Queena Capps, the madam and owner of the May Rooms.

Leaving the door ajar, Scott found Queena pacing near her fainting bed. Closer to fifty than forty and trying to look provocative in her night robe, she smoked like a stack. The lighting seemed brilliant after coming from the subdued hues of the parlor. An overhead, dome light, a couple of floor lamps and the lamp on her desk reflected off the jazz-plaster walls. Other than her tan lounge, the room, like Queena, was all business.

"Can't say I appreciated the visit, Miss Capps." Scott stopped just inside the doorway.

“I apologize, Scott. I’m not my right self lately.” She puffed on her cigarette; in and out so fast she hadn’t time to savor the smoke. The cigarette miasma billowed from her pacing figure like a forming storm flowing across the room.

Not one to deal in niceties or circle a problem, Scott drove to the point. “Do the police know about the missing girls?”

Queena jerked her head to see Scott. Her eyes narrowed. The right corner of her mouth twitched a smirk before it drooped to a frown. “Paulette should keep her mouth shut unless she’s working a prick.” She took a deep drag, held it, then blew the smoke toward the ceiling. “No, the cops most certainly know nothing beyond Darlene being tossed out the window. I pay them a lot of money not to care or get curious. But after her murder, they’re bound to stumble into a few things.”

Miss Capps sat down on her lounge but did not recline. She wore too much makeup, but not garishly promiscuous like the working girls. Her powder and paint spoke of a failing battle against time. Even as her upper body suffered from gravity and aging, her legs defied them and still held the firmness of her youth. She stretched them out resting her feet on the edges of her high heel pumps; footwear which spoke to Queena’s vanity and disregard for comfort.

Scott pulled the single, plain, wooden chair from near her desk, spun it toward the couch, and straddled the seat with the back forward and his arms on top. “What will they stumble into?”

“Nothing...something. I don’t know what – and that worries me.” Queena inhaled again. She leaned toward Scott but swiveled her head to exhale the blast of smoke away from him.

“Think you can help?”

“Tell me about the girls.”

“Shut the door.” Queena waved her smoking hand in the door’s direction.

Scott left his chair, grabbed the handle, and peeked both directions beyond the frame. Satisfied no one loitered nearby, he eased the door shut and reclaimed his chair. “It’s clear; no wandering souls or rabbit ears.” He took a small notebook and a sharp pencil out of his inner coat pocket. He nodded to Queena to begin.

Another exhale and Queena started. “Cora went AWOL about twelve days ago. That’s the last we’ve seen of her. She worked steady but day-by-day. Worked at Vandever’s part time too. The gal had fantasies of a rich guy taking her away and making her the missus. Good with men, but she’s not really a working girl at heart. Maybe she did find a guy and run off with him before he could get wind of her past.” Queena dabbed her cigarette ash in the ashtray next to her chaise lounge. “Mary is new, from Kansas. She came by way of a friend of mine, who works Lawrence and college boys. Been here less than a month. Pretty thing, real pretty – could do well in the business. Naive and likes daddy figures, but that’s a policy to bring in top dollar.”

“Don’t know either one of them, I guess.” Scott printed the names on his pad.

“You haven’t been Queena’s customer long enough to know the girls.” She raised her head high and rolled her eyes down at Scott. “Just since your girl left for California.”

Scott stopped scribbling his notes. His narrowed eyes, and a piercing stare formed his reply. Unaffected by his visual rebuke, Queena sucked her Lucky and blew smoke rings, which drifted until they fell apart.

“When did Mary go missing?” Scott’s gaze reverted to his pad.

“Four, five days ago.” Queena snatched a new smoke from a gold case next to the ashtray. She lit it with the remnant of her old one. She crumpled the stub in the center of the ashtray; its bent vestige standing rigid with her lipstick ringed its tip.

“After Cora, a missing Mary didn’t worry you enough to call me if not the cops?” grilled Scott.

“Whores don’t give notice like secretaries. The young ones wander off, fall for some guy, up and leave. And I told you; Cora was never a real worker.”

“But after Darlene, you figure there’s a connection?”

“Something’s off. Darlene was well worn and coarse as burlap, but she was smart. Cora had a date with a new john. He claimed she never showed. He took a date with Darlene as consolation.” A puff and re-puff busied Queena without a true inhale.

“You hear from that john again?” Scott stood. He put a foot on the chair and used his thigh to support the jotter while he logged Queena’s testimony.

“No, not my point though. Rumor had it Darlene wanted to start her own house, so maybe she saw him again.” Queena sought refuge in another deep draw.

Scott finished his note and left the chair. He strolled and contemplated. “And Mary?” He sauntered toward Queena to receive his answer.

Queena forced the smoke out before she spoke. “Other than being new, she worked as a usual in-house girl. Left for dinner one night, and we haven’t seen her since. She did spend time with Darlene.” She flicked an ash in the tray. Miss Capps stared at the assemblage of crumbled butts as she seemed to formulate her next comment. “At first, I thought maybe Darlene wanted to give Mary advice, take her under her wing and all, but maybe she tried to work her off-the-books.”

“I see.” Scott scribbled, paced a little, then paused. “They all live here?” Scott’s pencil awaited the reply.

“Not Cora. Had a place west of the river, Red Fork, maybe farther out. I don’t collect addresses.”

Scott worked his way around to Queena. “Okay. Tell me I’m hired, and I’ll see what I can find.”

“Wyatt, I’ll double your usual fee if you can locate my missing girls.” Her grim features tightened further. “Find Darlene’s killer before the cops do, and I’ll triple it. But you bring him here to me.” Queena took another drag. She sneered as she exhaled. “I’ll dispense a little whorehouse justice, personally. If I slip up and get caught, no amount of jail time could wipe the smile off my face.”

Queena gave a sample of the smile she would wear. She sucked in another puff and glared a provocation at Scott. Scott put away his notepad and returned the stare in kind.