

LADY—HERE'S YOUR WREATH

As Vessi is heading toward the gas chamber, a mysterious phone voice offers newspaperman Nick Mason \$10,000 to find the real killer. Vessi's dying words are "Lu Spencer pulled it," but Spencer's organization is not a group you want to tangle with—shareholders include most of the men who run the city. When Mason decides to check it out anyway, he meets Mardi, Spencer's secretary, a sweet dish with the largest brown eyes. But Mason's also got a gunman on his tail. And the cold-hearted Blondie, who has a knack for turning up when she's least expected. Not to mention the mysterious person who keeps insisting he investigate Spencer. One of them is bound to be wearing a wreath before this game is over...

MISS CALLAGHAN COMES TO GRIEF

St. Louis is ripe for a change. Gang boss Mendetta is getting old and careless, so it's a cinch for Raven to step in and take over. The first thing he changes is the prostitution racket. Raven feels that too much of the profit is going to the girls. So he rounds them up, takes them off the street, puts them in new houses and rakes off all the profit for himself. And when fresh girls are needed, he simply has them kidnapped. Newspaperman Jay Ellinger senses something is amiss when he hears about a husband whose wife has gone missing. But Sadie is missing for a different reason—she saw Raven leave Mendetta's apartment, and can put the finger on him. Sadie is now a valuable pawn, able to bring the whole racket down. If only Jay can find her...

“The king of all
thriller writers.”

Cape Times

**Lady—Here's
Your Wreath**



**Miss Callaghan
Comes to Grief**

by James Hadley Chase

Introduction by Gregory Shepard



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LADY—HERE'S YOUR WREATH /
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James Hadley Chase Bibliography

The Great Americanized British Thriller

I discovered James Hadley Chase back in the early 1970s when Ace Books reprinted *Dead Ringer* in paperback. They had originally published the book in 1955 as an Ace Double paired with *Maid for Murder* by Milton K. Ozaki. I was too young in 1955 to appreciate the effort. The 1969 edition had a bright blue bikinied woman lying lengthwise across the cover in a pose that was both cool and alluring. It caught my eye. I've been hooked on Chase ever since.

I don't remember the plot, or any of the details, but if I know one thing about James Hadley Chase, it had a lot of surprises. Because Chase is a master at the art of deception, the sudden turn, the I-didn't-see-that-coming plot twist. But back in the late 1930s and early 1940s, he was just getting started.

The surprises were a little more obvious. Like killing off a major character, or pinning the crimes on someone you wouldn't suspect. Chase started by writing gangster novels. Inspired by the works of the two Cains—James M. and Paul—plus Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler (who he famously ripped off in one of his early novels), Horace McCoy, Jonathan Latimer and even William Faulkner (who he also did a little borrowing from), Chase created the perfect amalgam of the American hardboiled novel.

What did it matter that he did it all from England with U.S. city maps and a dictionary of slang. Should we fault him for occasionally letting a “shan't” drop from the lips of a New York hoodlum? Nobody's perfect. He captured the *feel* of the American gangster, the total ruthlessness, the greed, the got-nothing-to-lose attitude. Chase had done his homework well, and his first novel, *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*, was a British bestseller, read by the working man on the streets and in the trenches of World War II.

His publisher, Jarrolds, wasn't generally known as a crime fiction publisher, but they knew how to promote a winner. Chase's first few British

editions are filled with promos for upcoming titles. *No Orchids* had been extremely violent, the more so because of the casualness of the deeds. Chase and Jarrolds kept pushing it, but sooner or later, Chase had to take it too far. By the time of his seventh book, *Miss Callaghan Comes to Grief*, they finally pushed the sensibilities of the British government too far with a tale of white slavery. In St. Louis, no less.

Jarrolds had promoted the book with this delicate bit of understatement:

“This is the story of Miss Callaghan. Not of any particular Miss Callaghan but of the hundreds of Miss Callaghans who disappear from their homes suddenly and mysteriously and are seen no more by those who knew and loved them. This is also the story of Raven, who played with clockwork trains, the leader of the White Slave Ring in East St. Louis, who was responsible for keeping to full strength the army of women for the service of men. James Hadley Chase needs no introduction now. He has established a reputation for unmitigated toughness and plain writing. Under his blunt treatment the traffic of women in America is shown to be what it is—a loathsome corrupt stain on the pages of American history.”

The British authorities were not amused, and they hauled Jarrolds and Chase into court with a cease and desist. As it is written in Wikipedia, “the author and publishers Jarrolds were found guilty of causing the publication of an obscene book. Each was fined £100.” The book was banned in 1942, and hasn’t been in print in England since.

And make no mistake, it came by its reputation honestly. From the moment when the newspaper reporter sneaks a couple guys into the morgue one excruciatingly hot day and they start to check out the naked corpses, to the climactic knife scenes when the prostitutes turn the tide on their keepers, this one pulls no punches. It’s as if Chase and Jarrolds really want to see what they can get away with here.

Lady—Here’s Your Wreath (the first book written under the Raymond Marshall pseudonym which Chase used during the 40s and 50s) for all its hardboiled narrator, seems almost poignant compared to *Miss Callaghan*. The hero is a newspaperman—as many of Chase’s heroes were at the time—who cracks wise and uses his tough exterior to cover a sentimental heart. There’s a woman in peril, and another who is as tough a cookie as you’re likely to find in hardboiled fiction. Between the two of them—the good girl and the bad girl—Chase plays with the reader’s expectations in a way that shows a creeping subtlety to his method.

The book starts with the dying words of Vessi, a condemned gangster: “Lu Spencer pulled it. You gotta get him...” Someone—a voice on a telephone—has offered Nick Mason \$10,000 if he can expose Vessi’s frame-up. Trouble is, everyone’s in on the take and pretty soon Mason’s life is being threatened by some pretty tough hoods. Life is cheap in a James Hadley Chase novel.

Both *Lady—Here’s Your Wreath* and *Miss Callaghan Comes to Grief* were published within the same period—1940 and 1941—but *Lady* is the first “Chase” book that doesn’t try to blast its way to the ending. In fact, it’s more of a mystery, in the vein of *Twelve Chinamen and a Woman*, than a straight-up gat-blasting gangster novel. This is James Hadley Chase—or Raymond Marshall or James L. Docherty or Ambrose Grant, whatever he called himself—finding himself, trying on various outfits to see what fits best. In the end, he perfected an Americanized (British) thriller and did a damn good job at it.

James Hadley Chase—born René (“Rennie”) Lodge Brabazon Raymond—created his own persona on the printed page, that of the brusque writer of hardboiled mayhem. And 90 or so books later, he was still delighting readers across the British Commonwealth. Oh, they tried to pitch him to the American market. His early books were all published here by outfits like Avon, Eton, Harlequin (yes, the Canadian romance publisher!), and then later by publishers like Ace, Signet and Pocket Books. For some reason, the Chase thrillers seem to remain more or less a particularly British pleasure, never quite in direct competition with Chase’s American literary heroes. You never hear “Hammett, Chandler and Chase” mentioned in the same breath. But you should. Not because he out-hardboiled Hammett, or out-cynic-ed Chandler, but because when it came to plotting criminal thrillers, he was one of the best.

To quote the elusive but incisive Mr. Joseph Taggart: “James Hadley Chase is a thriller writer of masterly ingenuity. Several times you think you know what will happen. Well, you don’t.”

—Greg Shepard, publisher
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