

# Ralph

## by Dewan Demmer

Characters: Ralph Spade, private detective  
Gus Malone, a man.

Scene: *An office. With a desk and hatstand for his coat and hat and 2 chairs. Mirror on wall. Ralph wakes up behind the desk - had too much to drink last night. Fully clothed with jacket and hat on. Gets up, groans, takes off coat and hat. Hang them on stand. Then looks at self in mirror on wall. Looks and tongue.*

Ralph: *(exclamation of disgust) errhh (whilst looking a tongue and holding it out to see in mirror. He then inspects his eyes by pulling down the lower lids and shudders. Goes to drawer, rummages for drink, pulls out cough mixture. Ew, cough mixture (then puts it back into drawer. The he pulls out sauce of some kind. Throws it back in drawer.) No, bleear, too many tomatoes. (finds vodka in drawer, pours into glass he finds in drawer then tastes it, puts tomato sauce in, drinks it again, shudders more, ) Bleear. (puts glass down and drinks from bottle. Picks up post on desk and as he ruffles through them. Bills, bills, bills, bills.*

*(knock at door)*

Ralph: Enter.

*(a older man enters.)*

Ralph: Good morning, ma'am.

Man: Ma'am?

Ralph: I'm sorry I have a cold.

Man: Are you Ralph Spade, the detective?

Ralph: Does it say that on the door?

Man: Yes.

Ralph: Are you sure?

Man: Yes.

Ralph: Really?

Man: Yes. I've already said so.

Ralph: Well that's me, then.

Man: You seem a bit unsure.

Ralph: Well, can we really be sure about anything?

*(stares at him with her least blood shot eye)*

Ralph: How may I help you?

Man: I need your help.

Ralph: Are you going to pay?

Man: Yes.

Ralph: Well I'm not cheap you know.

Man: I have the money with me.

Ralph: Good. *(gestures for him to sit down)* Please have a seat. *(he sits)* How can I help you?

Man: I need you to find my girlfriend.

Ralph: Where did you lose her?

Man: Pardon?

Detective: Tell me your story.

Man: I have a story?

Detective: Everybody's got a story. There's always a story. A story of love and hate, of war, of conflict and human emotions, and small little midgets and dwarves, fighting, biting, gnawing on arms and legs. No regard for the rules of fairplay and a person's dignity when their pants are down. Tell me your story.

Man: Well, Well, it was late Friday morning, about half past ten. I had to get a suit. I went out, said goodbye to Sybilla, that's her name. My girlfriend, that is. I went down the elevator. I live in a great apartment block, twentieth, floor, terrific view, wonderful view of the city. I mean, the rent is high, but it's worth it. My Sybilla, she just loves going out onto that balcony in the mornings when she has her breakfast. Anything to make her happy. Anyway, just before I left I got into a conversation with Mr Morris.

Detective: Mr Morris?

Man: Mr Morris? Oh my downstairs neighbour. Been there for years. Interesting man if

you like bad breath and hearing about his heart problems. Then just as I finally left the building, I remember hearing what could only have been a cyclist screaming as he crashed into a pile of what I imagine to be bananas.

Detective: A pile of bananas, really? And how do you conclude that?

Man: Well it just sounded like that. A long scream, and then a terrific splat. And instantly bananas came to mind, fresh bananas, mind you, not those horrible soft squishy bananas that have been out in the sun and gotten over ripe. You know what I mean don't you?

Detective: Yes. I know the ones you are talking about. The ones you can have with cream, and some sprinkles, and maybe a cherry. I know the ones you mean. Continue.

Man: Well, then I went off to Antonio, a wonderful tailor. He's been finishing off the touches to my brand new suit. My brother recommended him. And he was right! Tremendous, wonderful, fantastic suit. It fits like a well oiled Vaseline glove. I got home late in the afternoon and she was gone. At first I thought nothing of it, but later that evening, she still hadn't come home.

Detective: What line of work was Sybilla in?

Man: Oh she didn't work! Stayed at home. I bring home the bacon.

Detective: Does she regularly go out on a Friday? Bridge club, girls lunches, that sort of thing?

Man: Well she does play Bridge, but that's on a Tuesday, and her girls meet up on a Thursday. Sybilla says she hates leaving the apartment on a Friday. Says the traffic is worse on a Friday. Takes her ages to get a cab and go across town. So on Fridays, she mostly stays home.

Detective: So you didn't expect her to go out?

Man: No.

Detective: So did you did contact the police?

Man: Yes. But they were no help. Said I must wait 48 hours before a person can be considered officially "missing." So I turned to you, to help me find her.

Ralph: When you got back to the apartment, was everything in place? Was there any sign of a struggle?

Man: Well, there were the corn flakes on the floor from that morning when I had had a small argument with the cereal box.

Ralph: No, no, were there any signs of someone kidnapping or taking Sybilla? Perhaps she fought off some assailant?

Man: No, no, no sign like that.

Ralph: Was anything missing? Perhaps her clothes were gone? Perhaps she'd left?

Man: No, everything was as it was when I left that morning. Her clothes were still in the cupboard. Her book, "Parrots are people too, by Avery Birdhouse" was still on the bedside table with her reading glasses. Why do you think she would leave? What do you know? How could you know?

Ralph: It is merely a question I must ask Mr? I do not believe you have told me your name?

Man: Gus, Gus Mallone. (They shake hands, Gus gives Ralph a suspicious glance)

Ralph: Gus Mallone, from Howy, Dunim and Mallone, the Divorce attorney's?

Man: Hah! That's my cousin Pete Mallone. Miserable fellow, lives with his mother.

Ralph: Ah. So tell me, when you got home, was there anything out of the ordinary? Anything different?

Man; No. Well maybe, there was one thing. But I'm sure it's unrelated.

Ralph: We must leave no stone unturned, no room unsearched, no mountain too high, no valley too low, no clue too small, no whiskey undrunk, no Bourbon untasted, no beer unsavoured, but as you were saying, so where were we, ahh yes ... so tell me, about this clue.

Man: Well the parrot was dead.

Ralph: You have a parrot?

Man: It wasn't really my parrot. It was Sybilla's parrot.

Ralph: So Sybilla's parrot was dead?

Man: Yes. I won't miss that parrot.

Ralph: It had been alive that morning?

Man: Yes. I know that for a fact because as usual as I went past it to the door, it would squawk at me and do its customary call of "Who's a fat boy!" to me. I ignored that bird, as I'd throw a cracker into its cage. I then left.

Ralph: So you didn't like the parrot?

Man: It wasn't that I disliked the parrot, but more than that the parrot was evil. Well I wouldn't say it was evil, but in the same way that Ted Bundy wasn't a serial killer.

Never trusted the thing. But Sybilla, Sybilla loved that parrot, doted on it, and you know how long they live, don't you? Decades! That thing could out live me! And chances were, it was going to.

Ralph: Anything else out of the ordinary?

Man: Oh yes, the sandwich!

Ralph: The sandwich!

Man: Yes!

Ralph: *(pauses)* What about the sandwich?

Man: Well, you see, it's my special pleasure.

Ralph: Sandwiches are your special pleasure?

Man: No, no no, not just any sandwich!! This is my special sandwich, sour dough bread, spread with mayonnaise, a dollop of mustard, with a filling of avocado, beetroot and asparagus. All this covered with a nice thick layer of greasy, crispy bacon.

Ralph: Let me guess. The special pleasure's the bacon.

Man: No. It's the avocado.

Ralph: Never did like avocado myself. So much green. So what makes avocado the special pleasure?

Man: Well you see, avocado always makes Sybilla horribly sick. But the sad part is, she's crazy about avocado. One mouthful of that, and that's it, ill for hours, spends the rest of the day hugging the toilet as if it was a lost friend. So I always have to be very careful not to let her see me eating it.

Ralph: So what's so special about the sandwich?

Man: Well I remember I made one that morning, but I only ate half of it. When I came home that evening it was all gone. And the plate, the plate was on the balcony floor, broken.

Ralph: Well perhaps Sybilla found it and ate it. You did say she could murder one of those.

Man: But that's just it. I don't think so. I looked in the dustbin to check if it had been thrown away. You don't throw a sandwich away like that. I checked the fridge. Nothing. And I checked the bathroom. It was spotless, just as I had left it from the night before.

Ralph: And how had you left the bathroom from the night before?

Man: Spotless