

Ragtime Kid, The



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Brun Campbell, a 15-year-old piano fool, gets to play Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" one 1898 afternoon in Oklahoma City. It's destiny calling. Though he tries for ragtime lessons, he's told no--"Ragtime is colored music" So Brun runs away from the family home in El Reno, Oklahoma, to Sedalia, Missouri, to persuade Joplin to take him on as a pupil. What Brun doesn't expect is to trip over the body of a young woman--he thinks at first she's a log and thoughtlessly picks up a couple of items before he rushes away.

When Edward Fitzgerald, who befriended Brun his first night in town, is arrested for the woman's murder, Brun is certain he's innocent. But if the boy shows anyone the things he pocketed at the scene, things he now knows belonged to Scott Joplin, he'll point the finger at the composer--and himself.

Caught in this dilemma, Brun decides to get Fitzgerald and Joplin and himself off the hook by finding the real killer, but for that he will need some grown-up help which he gets from the story's other linchpins: Dr. Overstreet, the alcoholic town mayor, and John Stark, a man pushing sixty and feeling it, who's been employing Brun at his music store.

Sedalia is rife with suspects, some of them opportunists bent on stealing Joplin's music. And then there are the girls and women. Both are a mystery to Brun. A teenager seized with religious fever, a couple of mischievous prostitutes, and an attractive, ambitious young woman with a hint of scarlet in her past complicate the pursuit of the killer.

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