

The Hooded Raider By Leslie McFarlane



CHAPTER II The Second Victim

The room was in an uproar. Norris, white-faced, sprang following to his feet. Korman whipped a revolver from his pocket. Jensen stared incredulously. Grant leaped toward the prone figure.

He knelt over the body, pressed his hand beneath Lawson's coat.

"Dead." "But how?" shouted Jensen. They crowded around the corpse. Keyed up as they were, expecting anything, they were totally unprepared for the result of Grant's rapid investigation.

"Heart failure." There was not a mark on the body. Everyone knew that no person had been within three feet of Lawson when he crumpled lifeless in his chair; there had been neither the sound of a shot nor the flash of a knife; yet such was the fear of the Raiders' threat that each felt a grim conviction that the unknown criminal had caused the attorney's death.

"Heart failure," snarled Norris. "You can't make me believe that. He was murdered. And the Raider did it. Search the grounds. He's somewhere about." The man was almost incoherent with terror; his flabby face was wet with sweat. "Look for a blow-gun—an air-rifle—something—"

Grant tore the dead man's shirt open.

"You can see for yourself," he rapped out curtly. "Lawson dropped dead. The strain was too much for him."

"The Raider said one of us would die at midnight. And Lawson is gone. Search the grounds. You're a policeman, aren't you? We're entitled to protection. If the Raider has struck once he'll strike again."

Grant motioned Jensen toward the door.

"Look around, constable. If there's anyone in the neighborhood, pick him up."

Jensen blundered out of the cabin with drawn revolver. With the help of the others, Grant lifted Lawson's body to a couch. He telephoned to Balsam Ridge for a doctor.

In his own mind he felt certain that Lawson had dropped dead in sheer fright. The strain of waiting for the hour of midnight, the tension under which they had all been placed, was too much for him. And yet there remained the inescapable fact that the Raider had sworn to kill one of the men responsible for his comrade's death at the moment of the execution.

Was it possible that the masked avenger had devised some diabolic scheme whereby he had meted out swift and invisible death to Lawson?

The sardonic Pettengill had picked up Lawson's half-filled glass and was sniffing at it cautiously.

"What's in that glass?" demanded Grant, sharply.

"Whiskey. I just wondered—" "You wondered what?"

"There is always the possibility of poison," remarked Pettengill.

"We'll leave that for the doctor."

"Poison!" yelled Korman. "My God—maybe we've ALL been poisoned."

With a convulsive movement he seized his own glass and flung it against the wall.

"Don't do that!" shouted Grant. "Leave it for analysis."

using it now." Norris gestured to the remaining glasses, his own and that of Pettengill. "Personally, I think that poison idea is the bunk. We'd all be dead now. That liquor came from Lawson's own private stock—"

They heard a shout outside, a protesting voice, a thudding of feet on the steps. The door swung open and Jensen stumbled into the room, grasping a dishevelled, clamorous man by the collar.

"Look what I found, snooping around under the trees," grunted the constable as he gave his captive a push that sent him reeling against the wall.

Grant recognized the fellow as Dopey Magee, the village half-wit, an unkempt, ragged wretch who had wandered into Balsam Ridge some three months previous and who managed a precarious livelihood by grinding knives and scissors from house to house.

Dopey crouched against the wall, his vacant eyes staring in terror, his straw-colored hair sticking out at all angles from beneath his tattered cap.

"I ain't done nothin'," he snivelled. "Lemme go."

"Found him hiding in the bushes back of the cabin," declared Jensen. "He ran when I saw him, but I collared him. What were you doing there, fellow?"

"Nothin'," whimpered Dopey. His eyes roved the room. He saw the body of Lawson on the couch and he pointed a trembling finger. "Is he dead?"

"Never mind," snapped Grant. "What brought you up here to-night?"

"I—I wanted to see what was goin' to happen," the man whined. "They said you was all scared somebody was goin' to get killed when Dave Demave was hung."

His fascinated gaze did not leave the body. "Is he dead, huh?"

"Who told you somebody was going to get killed?" Grant demanded.

"They all said it. Down in the village. I wasn't doing nothin'. I knew you was all here."

"Anyone with you?"

"No. Nobody but me."

"Did you see anyone when you were hanging around back of the cabin?"

"Didn't see nobody," snivelled Dopey.

Grant flung open the door. "Get out!" he snapped. "Clear out of here and keep your mouth shut."

The half-wit pointed to the body again.

"How—how did he get killed?"

"Clear out."

Dopey scuttled across the threshold. Beyond the doorway he turned. "Lawson's dead, eh? he said, with a cackling laugh. 'I knew it was going to happen. The Raider did it. He'll get the rest of you, too. I bet if was him killed the man down on the south road to-night. He's smart, the Raider."

"What's that?" shouted Grant. "Who was killed on the south road?"

"You go and see," screeched Dopey, backing down the steps. "Over on the Goldcrest. With a bullet in him. I bet the Raider did that. And you'll all get the same."

Before Grant could move he plunged down the steps into the darkness. They heard him running across the clearing and then he went stumbling and crashing into the undergrowth.

Somewhat shamefaced at deserting Grant, but still under the spell of fear, they indicated their anxiety to leave the cabin at once.

"If you don't mind," said Norris, hesitatingly, "I think we'd feel safer if you sent Jensen along with us. If you need him back here, he can have my car when he drives home with us."

"No need of that. I'll bring the body back to Balsam Ridge with the doctor. Jensen, escort these gentlemen home and wait at the office for me."

They filed out of the cabin and made their way to the car parked in the road below the clearing. Norris cleared his throat.

"If anybody had told me three months ago that the Raider would scare me so badly that I'd ask the police escort to my own home, I'd have knocked him down."

"Me too," grunted Korman, as he climbed into the car. "But I don't mind admitting that I don't feel easy about this business. Lawson might have died of heart failure, but—"

"His heart picked a queer time to stop naturally," observed Pettengill.

"And if, as Dopey Magee claims, someone else was murdered over on the Goldcrest property, it looks as if the Raider is at work."

Jensen patted his revolver holster grimly.

"Without looking for trouble, I hope he shows up."

"God forbid!" muttered Korman, piously.

The car sped down the rough mountain road. Within a quarter of a mile they dropped Korman at his home. Jensen escorted him to the door, saw him safely inside and returned to the car. Both Norris and Pettengill lived on the Eldorado property just outside Balsam Ridge. They left the main road and sped up the driveway to Pettengill's home. He bade them a hasty good-night and sped across the few yards of gravel between the driveway and the front door as if he fully expected that the Raider would be lurking in the shadows, and ducked into the house.

"I don't think there is anything to worry about," said Jensen, trying to allay the mine manager's fears. "If the Raider killed Lawson tonight, although how he did it is beyond me—he could have killed you all."

"All very well for you to be brave about it," growled Norris, as he backed the car around and drove back toward the main road again.

"Your name isn't on the list."

"For which," murmured Jensen "I am very thankful."

They reached the main road again and sped past the twinkling lights of the Eldorado mill, past the little office where the watchman had met his death at the time of the Raider's visit, and then the car slowly began its ascent of the steep declivity leading to the manager's residence. It was built at the summit of the hill, overlooking the mine property and the village below.

"Poor old Lawson," muttered Norris. "I suppose it wasn't right of us to clear out in such a hurry, but damn it all—under the circumstances—"

Jensen shrugged. "You couldn't help him by remaining."

"I don't envy Grant, staying alone there with Lawson. Why the Raider could step in and shoot him down in a second."

"If it comes to shooting, Grant will have an even break, I think. He's pretty quick on the draw."

Suddenly, Norris stiffened. His hands gripped the wheel as though frozen. He was staring into the little mirror, an expression of ghastly fear on his pallid face.

"Jensen!" he croaked. "Behind—look—"

His words were drowned by the crash of a revolver. Jensen whirled about. His hand flew to the butt of his own weapon.

The big touring car was running with the top down. In the semi-darkness Jensen caught a glimpse of the head and shoulders of a hooded figure rising above the back of the automobile. An arm was extended. A roaring revolver spat flame.

Jensen rose halfway to his feet, his revolver half out of the holster. He did not see Norris slump dead over the wheel. He only knew that the car suddenly swerved, that the hooded figure vanished abruptly.

The constable was swung violently to one side even as he wrenched the revolver free and fired. The shot went harmlessly

into the air. The car, out of control, had bumped and rocketed across the road, plunged into the ditch with a tremendous crash. Jensen felt himself hurled into space. There was a tinkling of shattered glass, then a second crash as the car turned over. Jensen was hurled into a clump of bushes where he lay, scratched and bleeding, with the breath knocked out of him. He saw a burst of flame, heard an explosion as the gas tank blew up. The car became a roaring mass of wreckage.

He stumbled to his feet, still groggy, blundered out of the bushes toward the road. He caught a glimpse of a fleeing figure in the gloom and fired. There was an answering shot and he flung himself flat in the roadway emptying his revolver after the fugitive.

But the hooded man sprang across the opposite ditch and vanished into the darkness of the trees.

Jensen scrambled to his feet, stumbled in pursuit. But when he crossed the road and entered the bush he realized that search would be futile: He remembered Norris then ran back to the car.

The lurid flames rose high from the wrecked car, casting a ruddy illumination upon the wall of trees beyond the ditch. He could see a huddled body sprawled beneath the mass. Flames seared him as he shielded his eyes with his arm and dashed in. The heat was terrific. He was forced back.

In the light of the fire he saw that Norris was beyond help. The roaring radiance revealed the body of the mine manager, trapped beneath the wreckage.

But he had died before the crash. Jensen could distinctly see two bullet wounds in his head and neck.

To Be Continued. (By special permission of Clues Magazine.)

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Treasurer's Sale of Lands For Taxes Town of Haileybury

TO WIT: By virtue of a Warrant issued under the hand of the Mayor of the Town of Haileybury and the Seal of the Corporation of the said Town, bearing date the 10th day of August, 1932, and to me directed commanding me to levy upon the several parcels of land hereinafter described for the arrears of taxes respectively due thereon, together with all costs thereof, I hereby give notice that pursuant to the provisions of the Assessment Act, R.S.O. 1927, Chapter 238, and any amendments thereto, I shall on Monday, the 14th day of November, 1932, at the hour of 10 o'clock in the forenoon at the Municipal Offices, Ferguson Avenue, proceed to sell the said lands or so much thereof as may be necessary to discharge such arrears of taxes and all costs thereof unless such arrears and costs have been sooner paid.

H. CLIFFORD, Treasurer.

Table with columns: Lot No., Plan No., Street, Arrears of Taxes, Expenses, Fees, Total, Owner. Lists various land parcels for sale.