

# Ice from a Corpse

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*The killers had the doc in a tight spot, but the old medico still had a few tricks up his sleeve.*

## **Chapter 1**

### **I'm No Surgeon.**

Old Doc Welch thought it was thunder the first time he heard it. He sat up in bed, stiff, tense, listening for it again. And then, suddenly, a cold chill swept over him as he heard again, this time unmistakable, the three knocks at the front door.

His wife, Myra, grabbed his arm.

„Don't answer it, Jim. Maybe, they'll go away.“

The room became suddenly blue-white as lightning fired the darkness. For an instant, he saw his wife's face, pale and frightened and old.

„Got to answer it, Myra. Might be someone pretty sick. Can't tell.“

Again, the thunder rumbled and again—three knocks.

Wearily, Old Doc Welch stepped into a pair of slippers, threw a robe over his shoulders. His back ached and he wondered why he hadn't become a lawyer or a plumber, instead of a country doctor. He stumbled past the waiting room to the front door, listened once more to the three knocks.

„All right, all right. I'm coming. Hold your dang-blasted horses!“

He switched on a small wall-lamp, opened the door.

Shivering, cold rain lashing his face and body, Doc Welch stared at the two men in the doorway.

„Doc Welch?“ It was the tall, shifty-eyed one who spoke.

„That's right.“ He opened the door a little wider.

„We got a little job for you, Doc. Little surgery.“

„Sorry, I'm no surgeon. Broken bones, belly aches and babies. You fellows ought to see Doc Benjamin in town. He's a surgeon.“ He ran his hands through greying hair, started to close the door.

„You're a surgeon now, Doc.“

Doc Welch saw the gun, then. A .38 was clutched in the man's hand, it's shiny, blue barrel only a few inches from Doc Welch's stomach. They forced the door open.

„Behave like a good, little doctor and nothing'll happen to you. Get smart and we'll blast you. Okay, Felix, go get the patient.“ Felix, the short one, disappeared to a car outside.

Doc Welch backed up in the dim light of the hallway, studied the tall man, his eyes never for a second leaving the leveled .38.

Sure, why hadn't he become a plumber? Plumbers were never wakened up at three in the morning to have a gun poked in their belly. All they had to worry about was pipes.

Doc Welch turned then to see Felix and the „patient“ in the doorway. Felix paused long enough to catch his breath, then he locked both arms around the „patient's“ chest.

Grunting, his face red, he struggled and dragged the apparently unconscious patient into the hallway. Behind them, on the flowered carpet, lay a trail of rain and blood. The tall one slammed the door, never lowering the .38.

„Okay, Doc, take us to surgery. And no funny business.“

„You fellows won't get away with this.“

„No sermons, Doc. Move!“

He hesitated, then seeing no choice, moved toward the white-paneled door. He opened the door and they were swiftly blanketed in darkness and the heavy scent of ether. That was when he got the idea.

„C'mon, Doc, put on a light.“

„Wait'll I find the switch, will you.“

## **Chapter 2**

### **A Fear-Crazed Look.**

He started toward the cabinets at the far end of the room. There was a jug of concentrated ammonia in one cabinet and if he could get his hands on it before the lights went on, throw it in their faces, it would blind them and choke them for a few seconds and a few seconds was all he wanted.

He would soon find something else to throw, a chair, more jugs and bottles, and somehow he'd get a hold of that gun. He'd show them that being old and fat with kind, blue eyes didn't make you necessarily harmless.

Slowly, almost on tip-toes, he reached the cabinet. He reached down in the darkness, gripped the jug, started to unscrew the cap.

Suddenly, the stillness was broken by a muffled scream. He whirled, saw Myra silhouetted in the doorway.

„Okay, lady, stand where you are. C'mon, Doc, get that light on.“

There was no use to play it brave now. He didn't want Myra stopping any bullets. Do what they said. At least he'd live—maybe. He cursed, angry that Myra had stumbled onto the scene, then switched on the light.

„All right, lady, get over there with the Doc.“

She saw the gun, flashed a fear-crazed look at her husband.

„C'mon, move!“

„Better do what he says, Myra.“

She moved toward him in short, quick steps. He put his arm around her. Felix and the other man dragged their still unconscious friend to a table in the center of the room, lifted him onto it.

„All right, Doc, operate.“

## **Chapter 3**

### **A Little Stomach Trouble.**

He shot a glance at his wife, saw the tears, the tremor of her lips, patted her gently, then moved reluctantly toward the table. He made a visual examination of the man on the table and in just a few seconds, he knew.

„Looks like you’re a little late, boys. Your pal is dead.“

„Now ain’t that something,“ the tall one said. His dark eyes blazed. „Operate, Doc.“

„Operate? For what? I told you this man is dead.“

„Do like I tell you, Doc. Open him up.“

The Doc looked up, puzzled, saw the strange, twisted grin on the tall man’s face. Were these men crazy?

„Maybe, you better explain to the Doc, Felix. Let him know what he has to do.“

The short man moved closer, waved his own gun at the dead man.

„Seems our friend had a little stomach trouble, Doc. He swallowed some diamonds he shouldn’t have.“

Doc Welch still didn’t get it.

„He was going to take a little trip below the border — and with all them gems in his belly, too. Only we got a slug in his back and talked him out of it. Now open him up, Doc. They’re coated with plastic. You can’t miss them.“

Suddenly, everything became clear to Doc Welch. He’d been in town that afternoon, stopped in the Waffle Shop for a cup of coffee, and there had run into the sheriff having a dish of his favorites. It had passed over his head at the time, but now he remembered.

The sheriff had spoken of a big jewelry store stick-up. He’d said three men—\$30,000 worth of diamonds. Then these were the same men the whole state was looking for.

He turned now, stared at the dead man. And this guy on the table had apparently tried to outwit the other two. He had coated the diamonds with some kind of plastic material, swallowed them one by one, hoping to escape by himself to Mexico.

Unfortunately for him, his pals had got wise and killed him.

„Okay, Doc, we ain’t got all night. Snap it up!“

„Suppose I refuse?“

„Suppose you don’t.“ The tall one’s teeth were bared in a murderous smile, as he waved the gun in the direction of the Doc’s wife.

From a rack, he removed a white laboratory coat. At the table, he cut away the man’s shirt and undershirt, lowered his trousers, then covered him with a sheet. The two men backed over against the wall. The Doc could see they wouldn’t like this. He forced a pair of rubber gloves onto his hands, then went to the cabinet near the sink and removed what instruments he would need.

Paused over the corpse, the shiny, stainless-steel scalpel in hand, he took a last look at the two men standing in the shadows against the wall.

„Cut, Doc.“

Doc Welch began.

## **Chapter 4**

### **A Load of Hot Gallstones.**

A clock hung next to the linen cabinet. It ticked away five, ten, fifteen minutes... and then, Doc Welch looked up. He couldn't help feeling a sort of grim, professional satisfaction at a job well done. The incision had been made and he had found what he was looking for.

„Doc, I got itchy fingers. Start picking them pellets out... and hurry!”

With forceps and tweezers, the Doc began to remove the wet pellets. He laid them carefully in a large patch of gauze.

Ten minutes later he removed the last pellet, stared at between fifteen and twenty pellets lying in the gauze.

„That's all of 'em.“

„All right, Doc, now you can take that plastic coating off the diamonds.”

For a long minute the Doc stood silent.

„You'll need some kind of a corrosive agent to take that plastic stuff off. Lye'll do.“

Then he stopped.

„Only I don't have any.”

Their eyes shifted.

„Heck, you can buy it in any grocery store.”

„Then what?”

„Well, put the diamonds in a pan of lye and boil 'em for about five minutes. That should take it off and it won't hurt the diamonds.“

The two men avoided the corpse on the table. The tall one grinned victoriously and scooped the gauze into a bundle, stuffed the bundle into his coat pocket. Then he turned to the old doctor.

„You did good, Doc, and just to show you how much we appreciate it—”

The butt of the gun came sudden like a whip, smashed against the Doc's mouth, sent him sprawling to the floor. Myra screamed and ran to him.

„See you, Doc.” The tall one laughed, slapped at the gauze bundle in his pocket. „Wonderful surgeon, that Doc.” They were both laughing throatily as they left.

Doc Welch didn't speak until he heard their car grinding up the country lane. Then he turned his head, looked up at Myra. A slow, trickle of blood oozed from his pain-throbbled lips. Yet he smiled, and the smile became a laugh.

„You know, Myra, I'd give a hundred dollars to see the look on them gunmen's faces when they try to peddle a load of hot gallstones. Go call up the sheriff.“

„What do you mean?” She was blinking fast.

„Why that fella there on the table had enough gallstones in his bladder to anchor a river boat. I just substituted the gallstones for the real pellets. Well, quit staring at me that way. Call the sheriff. Tell him we got every last one of them diamonds, and then put on some waffles. The sheriff is crazy about waffles.“

