

Taking No Chances

by **Emile C. Tepperman, 1899-1951**

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THE sirens of the state prison suddenly began to scream a shrill, raucous warning to the night; probing searchlight beams lanced through the darkness. One of these beams, swinging toward the river, picked up and outlined with implacable brightness the figures of four men running wildly, frantically, down the steep slope toward the shore.

A machine gun began to rip-rap vindictively from the southwest tower; a moment later the one on the northwest tower joined its frenzied chatter. Two lines of bullets converged on the little group of fleeing men, and seemed to meet in the body of the rearmost fugitive.

He threw up his hands and stumbled forward headlong, tripped and fell over a boulder. His three companions took shelter behind the same rock. They clustered over the prostrate man. He was dead. His chest was ripped away where the slugs had come out.

They stood up. One of them said, „Nagle’s through. Let’s go.“

The other two followed him as he ducked away, dodging the searchlights which had lost them momentarily behind the boulder. They reached the shore. A motor boat was tied up to a tree. They got into it, and the one who had

spoken before, apparently the leader, kicked over the motor. Another cast off the line. The boat woke into life, shot away into the river.

One of the men took the wheel, guided it unskillfully. He called forward to the leader, „We better get back to the land an' ditch the boat, Jake. They know we headed for the river.“

Jake was big, gaunt of face, with cold killer's eyes, and the pallor of the habitual prisoner. He snarled back, „Shut up and steer, Louie. I'll tell you where to go!“

The third man said, „What a break, Nagle gettin' bopped. He's the only one that knew where the dough was cached!“

Louie held the course straight for the middle of the river. „Him an' his wife, Nick. Nagle's wife knows, too. But how we gonna get in touch with her? Didn't Nagle say she'd been pulled in herself a couple of weeks ago an' was due to take a rap for receiving stolen goods?“

Nick grumbled, „It's a hell of a note, a guy trustin' his wife with a thing like that, an' not tellin' us. Dames shouldn't be mixed up in rackets like this!“

Louie let out something like a laugh. „Not this dame, Nick. She's got brains, an' I'm told she's quite some looker. If it wasn't for her, Nagle would never of been able to plan the job in the first place.“

Nick grinned and licked his lips. „I'd like to get my glims on her if she's such a looker. I ain't got such a bad face myself. Maybe now that Nagle is dead—“

Jake suddenly growled, „Stow it, you guys!“

Nick subsided under Jake's baleful glare. But Louie whined, „Aw, Jake, don't get sore. We was only figurin' how we'd get in touch with the Nagle dame now.“

„Don't worry,“ Jake said grimly. „We'll get in touch with her, even if we have to break her out of the can to do it.“ Then he added ominously, „Now you two guys clam down an' attend to business. This is no pink tea. They'll be scouring the country for us, an' we got to look sharp.“

„Okay,“ said Louie, „you're the boss now, Jake.“

There had come to their ears the powerful stuttering of a launch behind them.

Suddenly Jake called out, „All right, head her into the shore.“

Louie obeyed, and soon they were close in. Nick got out and held the boat, while the other two joined him. Then Jake turned the boat around, opened the throttle, and gave her a shove. The boat put-putted out into the stream.

He laughed harshly. „That'll take 'em out on a wild goose chase. They'll follow that boat till she goes aground!“

HE turned and led the way up a short slope and came out at a crossroad. The headlights of a car were approaching along one of the converging roads.

Jake said, „Get out there and lay down, Nick. We gotta stop that car.“

Nick hesitated, glanced at Jake's savage face, and went out into the road. He lay down at full length on the concrete, head in his hands.

The car came close, and stopped with a squealing of brakes. There was a man and a woman in it.

Jake leaped to the door, wrenched it open. The man, who was driving, turned a startled face, and reached for his pocket. But Jake placed an enormous hand on his throat, and yanked him out. At the same time, Louie opened the other door and dragged the woman out. Nick got up and helped Jake to subdue the man.

Jake called out, „Tie up that dame, and gag her, Louie.“

In a moment both the occupants of the car were tied helpless on the ground. Jake had found it necessary to hit the man twice before he submitted. The woman had put up ineffectual resistance to Louie's brutal treatment. The man was tied with the sleeves of his own coat, the woman with strips torn from her dress.

Nick said, „What's the idea, Jake? Why not knock 'em out?“

The leader scowled. „A lot of good you'd be without me to think for you. They'd have you back in stir inside of an hour!“ He ordered Louie, „Heave the dame in the car!“

Louie had taken two rings from the woman's finger—a diamond solitaire and a wedding band. He held them up, grinning sheepishly. „Don't hurt, does it, Jake? We might need a stake!“

Jake's eyes gleamed with cunning when he saw them. While Louie was putting the woman in the back of the car, he bent over the helpless man. „Look, mug, we're lamming from the jail. We're takin' the car an' your wife. We're leavin' you here.“ He bent, closer. „Now listen careful, if you ever wanna see your wife alive again. When we go, we're followin' the left road. In about a minute the posse from the jail will get here. You'll tell 'em we took the right hand road. Because if they come up to us, I'll break your wife's neck before we're caught!“

The man struggled against the thick knot that held his arms behind him. He glared up at Jake, trying to work free of the gag.

Jake laughed, and got into the car behind the wheel. Nick and Louie got in too, and Jake turned the car around. Before he gave it gas, he called out to the struggling man in the road, „Killin' your wife won't make no difference to us—we were gonna burn for murder anyway!“

Louie sat in the back with the woman as the car sped away along the left fork of the road. „I gotta give you credit, Jake! That's a swell idea. That guy will send the posse the wrong way to save his wife, an' it'll give us time to fade away!“

The gagged woman started to struggle, squirming around on the floor at his feet. He bent down and slapped her heavily in the face. „Quit it,“ he growled. „We ain't in the mood for fooling around!“

Ten minutes of savage driving brought them close to the lights of a village. Jake said over his shoulder, „We can't turn off the road. I'm goin' through this town.“

Nick, beside him, said, „Go ahead. That guy we tied up must of sent them the wrong way anyway.“

Into the main street they sped, and then with a curse, Jake pushed down hard on the brakes. Four cars were lined up across the street, blocking it. A dozen uniformed men with riot guns lined the sidewalks.

Jake swore luridly. „That palooka didn't give a damn for his wife! Give her the works, Louie. We'll keep our word about that!“

Louie said in a thick, mad voice, „Yeah!“ He bent down and wrapped his gnarled fingers about the woman's throat. The gag slipped, and she screamed once, then was silent.

Jake threw the shift into reverse, raced the car backwards in a desperate endeavor to turn it around.

One of the armed men from the sidewalk called, „Stop! Come out with your hands in the air!“

Jake got the car half way around. Nick yelled, „Go to hell!“

The man on the sidewalk shouted, „Give it to them, boys!“

The riot guns thundered. The car heaved with the impact of the heavy slugs. Glass shattered. Nick's body was jerked violently against Jake, then slumped. Louie, from the rear, started to cry, „Holy Mo—“ but his voice was cut off by a death rattle. Jake was wounded, but he had been on the far side, protected partially from the rain of lead by the body of Nick. He called out weakly, „Stop, I give up!“

The killer look in his eyes had given way to one of whining dread. With shaking fingers he opened the door and came out with his hands in the air, tottered, and fell.

He was immediately surrounded by uniformed men. One of these looked into the car, and swore. „Hell! They strangled the woman!“

Jake looked up through a haze. He managed a grin of bravado. „I told that guy I'd kill his wife if we was caught!“

The officer who had looked into the car exclaimed, „Wife, hell! She's Nagle's wife. That guy you tied up is Detective Clancy. She was convicted in General Sessions last week for receiving stolen goods. Clancy was taking her up to do a five year stretch!“

Jake gagged as blood spurted from his mouth. „Nagle's—wife!“ he managed to gasp. „We—had—her in the car—all the time! We could've got her—to tell us where—“

He choked, fell into a spasm of coughing, then let his head drop back weakly. His eyes were terrible to see.

„—where Nagle had cached the swag, eh?“ The officer grinned down at him. „Too bad, Jake. Clancy tried to tell you who they were, but you wouldn't give him a chance. You were just a little too smart!“

