



"Drop that gun, you rat!" Crosby was over the side and upon the youth.

## *Just Like Old Times*

By ROBERT R. MILL

*Tiny David and a pal of the State Police undertake a bit of extra duty.*

**Q**UITE some years ago—I was a cub reporter then—a Los Angeles policeman literally "blackmailed" a prominent surgeon into performing an operation that made it possible for a crippled boy from the slums to walk.

In New York I knew a tough cop who ruled his East Side beat like a czar, handing out justice, advice and mercy. He is a detective captain now; but I happen to know that his heart aches for the days when the people of the crowded tenements regarded him as a god.

There was a warrant officer in the United States Coast Guard, who risked his ship in heavy seas to take off a rumrunner, his sworn enemy, who would die without medical attention.

Again, I saw a New York State game

protector pounce upon two youthful violators and instead of arresting them, give them a man-to-man talk on sportsmanship and conservation.

Another time I saw two men wearing the uniform of the New York State Police start off on a long cold ride into the mountains. They didn't have to go. But it had been their duty to arrest a boy, and they were afraid his aged mother would be without food and fuel.

I think of these men, and others like them, as the "Extra Duty Legion." The accomplishments of the members of this Legion seldom appear in the annual reports of their organizations. Instead they are written in the hearts of people living in the territories they serve.

LIEUTENANT EDWARD DAVID was slated to make an inspection trip in the northern part of the territory patrolled by the Black Horse Troop, New York State Police. Duty decreed that Lieutenant James Crosby perform a like mission in the southern end of the territory. The fact that Captain Charles Field, commanding officer, was attending a conference in Albany caused them to sally forth from the barracks in the same troop car, first giving all interested persons the not-too-convincing explanation that they were "combining duty with pleasure."

To themselves they made gruff apologies:

MR. DAVID: "We can double up and get through this just about as quick."

MR. CROSBY: "Yeah. Lot better having somebody to talk to."

But they knew, and all the barracks knew, the reason for their braving official displeasure:

They had ridden these roads together for many years, finding them highways of adventure. They had ridden them in varying capacities, the chevrons of a sergeant appearing on the arm of first one and then the other, depending entirely on their state of grace. That had worried them little, if at all, for the lonely roads beckoned.

It had been a wild country then. They had been told to "go by the book," the official regulations; but the country grew faster than the book, and so occasionally they wrote a few pages. They had been wild, headstrong—but just and fearless. If Old Man Misfortune dogged their elbows, Lady Luck perched on their shoulders.

"They emerged from it all, thanks to an understanding commanding officer, and sympathetic executives in Albany, a little older, presumably a little wiser, and with the silver bars of lieutenants.

They bore their new honors easily, and

down in their hearts, a little sadly. A commission had its points. They were the boys who could enjoy them. But more than once amused onlookers saw them gazing wistfully after departing patrols of the troopers.

THEIR departure on their present expedition in search of lost romance was watched sympathetically by a little group of old-timers, all of whom listened politely to the protesting explanations, and all of whom were fully aware of the real motive behind the trip.

"David and Crosby," said Sergeant Max Payton, the top-kick, as the car pulled away, "the clean-up kids!" His gruffness masked his emotion. "Seems like old times to see them starting out together." He scowled at a group of rookies. "We sent out some real patrols in those days."

"Yes," agreed Sergeant Henry Linton, who had shared many of those patrols, "they were the boys to get quick action. Half an hour after they went to work; the Skipper always detailed one man to the telephone to answer complaints about them."

But Messrs. David and Crosby presented an outward picture of decorum as they rode along a road that wound its way through the mountains. Mr. Crosby, who was at the wheel, occupied the quarter of the front seat not filled by the bulky form of his companion, whose size was responsible for his nickname, Tiny. They were silent, both trying to recapture something which, in their hearts, they knew was gone, perhaps forever. It was Mr. David who made the first and only attempt to bring this into the open.

"This," he declared, "brings it all back."

"Yes," admitted Mr. Crosby, "uncomfortable as it always was, with you hogging most of the seat."

Mr. David sighed with resignation. Romance, if it was recaptured at all, must be taken on the fly, and with no outward comments or indications. He devoted his talents to keeping Mr. Crosby in order.

"And your driving hasn't improved any. If you would keep the car on four wheels, a guy could relax in the far corner of the seat and, we wouldn't be crowded."

Mr. Crosby measured the seat-space with his eyes.

"They could nail you against the far corner of the seat, and there still wouldn't be room for anybody but a midget."

**D**URING the next mile Mr. Crosby developed this theme. A sudden gust of wind brought Mr. David revenge. When Mr. Crosby's hat left his head, he used both hands to save it, and the car swerved to the right. Mr. David seized the wheel and kept the car in the road.

"Thanks," murmured Mr. Crosby.

"Don't mention it," said Mr. David. "I'll even tell you how to keep your hat on your head. Use a thumbtack."

"I seem to have heard that before," retorted Mr. Crosby.

"If you did," declared Mr. David, "you didn't profit by it. As the Skipper once said, in order to get anything into your head, you have to blast." He cast an accusing glance at his companion. "You might have killed me."

"In that case," said Mr. Crosby, "the loss would be trifling." They had reached a state of armed truce, and were deep in a discussion of European affairs, as they approached the outskirts of Tranquil Lake. Both men glanced at a neat house a short distance from the road.

"Might as well stop," said Mr. David.

"I was going to stop," retorted Mr. Crosby with acerbity.

**T**HEY drove to the rear of the house, parked their car, entered a back door without knocking, and found themselves in a spotless kitchen. A white-haired woman, bending over the stove, looked up with alarm, then gave a cry of pleasure:

"Tiny! Jim! Well, I do declare!"

They bore down upon her, arms extended, faces wreathed in smiles.

"Hello, Ma Gilsdon!"

She pushed them from her, and gazed at them with mock severity. .

"It's about time you dropped in! How long ago was it that you were stationed here?"

"More years than I care to think about," said Mr. Crosby, seating himself astride a kitchen chair.

Mr. David, with the air of a man following a familiar trail, found his way to a cookie jar. "Substation was built four years ago." A cookie vanished in two bites. "We lived with you about a year before that." Another cookie disappeared. "That makes it five years."

"There will be steak for dinner," said Mrs. Gilsdon, "so let those cookies alone. And how many times have you been to see me in those five years?"

"Every chance we had," declared Mr. Crosby, deserting the chair for a tin box, which, when opened, disclosed the best portion of a chocolate cake. "That cake looks fairly good, Ma."

"It will look better after your dinner," ruled Mrs. Gilsdon. She turned to Tiny David. "Do you remember the Hopper boy?"

"Hopper?"

She stamped her foot with impatience.

"You should remember him. The lad the constable caught breaking into the general store, and wanted to send away for life. You saved him from the reform school, and—"

“Oh, yes,” said Mr. David hastily. “What about him?”

“The first of the year,” declared Mrs. Gilsdon, “he was made cashier of the bank.”

“That,” said Tiny David, “is swell.”

“That,” repeated Mrs. Gilsdon, “is one of the many things this town remembers about two roughnecks that were well hated when they were first wished on us, and missed—well, just a little—when they left us.”

She wheeled on Crosby. “Wipe that smile off your face, Jim Crosby. You had your share in it. I could tell—”

“In that case,” said Mr. Crosby, “I guess it’s safe for me to cut this cake.” He helped himself to a generous slice. “Sort of saints, weren’t we, eh Ma?”

But Ma Gilsdon sniffed.

“Saints!” she repeated. “Devils would be more apt. But kindly devils.”

She busied herself at the stove.

“Set that table while I am finishing up. Many’s the time you have done it. You have silver bars on your collars now, but it won’t hurt you a bit.”

They grinned as they went about the task.

“SHALL I set a place for Bea, Ma?” asked Crosby presently.

They saw a shadow cross her face.

“Bea won’t be home.”

“School?” asked Tiny David.

“School?” She turned to face them. “Don’t you realize five years have gone by since you were here? Beatrice isn’t a schoolgirl.” Bitterness crept into her voice. “She’s a young lady.”

“She was a sweet kid,” said Tiny David, preparing to attack a piece of steak.

“Pretty as a picture,” added Crosby.

Mrs. Gilsdon sighed. “Too pretty,” was her grim comment.

Tiny David pushed his knife and fork

aside and asked:

“What’s the trouble, Ma?”

Crosby took part in the conversation:

“Too much Tom Wilson? He always was on hand to carry her books.”

The woman hesitated, then answered the last question first:

“It isn’t Tom. He’s a good hardworking boy. I only wish Bea would go out with him more.”

Tiny David spoke quietly: “Who is it, Ma? And what’s the trouble? It’s all in the family, you know.”

“The trouble,” said Mrs. Gilsdon, “is Glover Menton.”

“Glover,” declared Tiny David, “must be a recent improvement. I don’t remember him.”

“He’s no improvement,” retorted the woman. “Oh, he’s handsome, in a weak way. He has too much money for his own good, and all the time in the world to spend it. Bea”—she hesitated—“Bea is just at the foolish age, where all this has swept her off her feet.”

“Where does he get all this money?” asked Tiny David.

“He says it comes from his father.”

“Where does his father live?”

“Syrchester.”

“What keeps him here?”

“He came here for a vacation. Said he liked the place, and stayed on; but I guess Bea is the answer.”

Tiny David eyed what food remained, placed both hands on a bulging waistline, and sighed regretfully.

“Well, Ma, have to be moving along in a little while. Help you with the dishes first.” His upraised hand stilled her protests. “Do us both good. Got an apron for Jim?”

They dried dishes with a skill that belied their large hands. They kept up a flow of bantering conversation. It was Crosby who made the only reference to the

problem they all were considering silently.

“Think it would do any good if I talked with Bea? She used to be right fond of her Uncle Jim.”

Mrs. Gilsdon removed the last dish from the pan.

“This has gone too far for that. Beatrice always was a good girl, but now she won’t listen even to her mother. Besides, I don’t know when you’d have a chance to talk to her. This is a full-time proposition. They have gone to the races at Haone this afternoon. Bea will be home just long enough to change her dress. Then they are going to a dance at Mack’s.”

Tiny David carefully piled the dishes in the cupboard.

“Got to be moving, Ma. This sure was swell.” He struggled into his coat. “By the way, where did you say this Menton lives?”

“The Central House.”

“Tom Wilson still working in the print-shop?” asked Tiny David.

“Yes.”

They took their leave, amid promises to call soon again. Tiny David slipped behind the wheel of the troop car.

“If I have to die,” he explained, “I would prefer it to be suicide, rather than murder.”

“Why quibble about technicalities?” demanded Mr. Crosby. “The public benefits in either case.”

**T**HE car headed toward the business section of Tranquil Lake.

“The Skipper,” declared Mr. Crosby, as if in answer to an unspoken statement, “will be back day after tomorrow. God help us if we aren’t through with these inspection trips. And we will need divine help anyway, if he learns we went together.”

The car continued its way along the main street.

“Not that I mind spending the night at the Central House,” added Mr. Crosby.

“Who said anything about the Central House?” demanded Mr. David.

“Nobody. Just wanted to let you know I was willing to play along.”

They registered, exchanging wisecracks with the clerk, who greeted them by their first names. When they were in their room, Tiny David spoke:

“Going for a walk. Be back in a little while.”

“While you are gone,” said Mr. Crosby, “I’ll find out what time the dance starts, and what time it is likely to break up.”

Mr. David remained silent.

**M**R. CROSBY was the first to return. Soon Mr. David appeared, carrying a large bundle.

“Shopping?” asked Mr. Crosby.

“Borrowing,” Mr. David corrected.

Mr. Crosby sighed deeply. “Most of your schemes have a slight backfire. Something tells me this will be a major explosion.”

“This,” said Mr. David with heavy dignity, “is a worthy cause.”

“Uh-huh,” said Mr. Crosby without enthusiasm. “By the way, Menton drives a yellow Speedway roadster.”

“Supper,” said Mr. David, “will be served in half an hour. Don’t know why, but I am not as hungry as usual.”

“Two pounds of steak may have had something to do with it,” was the opinion of Mr. Crosby.

They made their way to the dining-room, where Mr. David, despite his gloomy foreboding, made an impressive showing. Later they adjourned to the lobby, where they took an active part in a discussion that ranged from politics to religion, and then to hunting and fishing. It was not quite ten o’clock when Mr. David led the way to their room.

Crosby sat on the bed, while Tiny David stood before the mirror above the bureau.

“Jim,” said the man before the mirror, “I am senior to you.”

Crosby scowled. “All right, Tiny. Going official on me?”

Tiny David ignored the thrust: “I think I have this thing doped out swell. It will be better for you, and better for me, if you don’t know anything about it. I want you to grab a chair on the front porch, and hold it down until I get back. That’s an order, Jim.”

Mr. Crosby shrugged his shoulders.

“This,” he declared with heavy sarcasm, “is just like old times.” He paused to light a cigarette. “Very well, Lieutenant.”

Alone in the room, Tiny David went to work. He removed his uniform. He opened the bundle he had brought to the hotel, took out dark, rough clothes, and proceeded to don them. He produced a large handkerchief, which he stuffed into the pocket of his coat. A cap completed his costume.

For a moment he stood gazing at the revolver and cartridge-belt he had removed when he doffed his uniform.

“Better not,” he decided. “Better without it, if this thing should backfire.”

Then he made his way down the back stairs, left the hotel by the rear door, and walked to the troop car, which he had parked in a back street near the hotel. . . .

The dance was in full swing at Mack’s, a roadhouse near Tranquil Lake. An orchestra, imported from a neighboring city, was demonstrating its ability at swing music. Couples had deserted the tables and thronged the floor.

Beatrice Gilsdon danced easily, a worried frown upon her attractive face. Her partner, a rather flashily dressed youth, pulled her up short.

“What’s eating you?” he demanded.

“Nothing.”

“Then get that look off your face.”

They danced on. Back at the table, the girl faced the youth.

“GLO, where did you go tonight, when you made me wait in the car?”

He made a gesture of impatience. “I told you before, Bea. Want me to make a recording of it for you? I had to see a guy on business. Business for my dad.”

“What kind of business, Glo?”

He pushed a glass aside. “You’d not know if I told you. Skip it.”

She sighed.

“What’s eating you?” he demanded again.

She hesitated. “N-nothing.”

“Still crazy about me, aren’t you?”

“Y-yes. But tonight things don’t seem the same. You don’t seem like, yourself. You—”

He laughed bitterly.

“That’s a dame for you. When they play ball, they want to bat all the time. A guy can keep putting out and putting out, and that’s swell. But once he asks one little favor, that’s a different mess of fish.”

Her hand crept across the table and rested on his coat-sleeve.

“It isn’t that, Glo. I would do—do almost anything for you. But I want to know that it was on the level. Was it on the level, Glo?”

A snarl escaped him.

“All right. Just for the sake of argument, suppose it wasn’t? What does that make you?”

He saw a look of terror leap to her eyes.

“What does that make you?” he repeated relentlessly. “The cops have a word for it. You ought to know. You grew up with them, and you still call them your uncles.” He laughed sarcastically. “That’s a

hot one. Uncle Tiny and Uncle Jim! I've heard about those two guys until I see red."

There was a calculating look in his eyes.

"Not that they are after me; but just suppose they should be. You were with me. If they take me, they take Little Sunshine. And I got a picture of them doing that!"

His manner changed. "But all this is a fool argument, Bea. I am telling you it is on the up-and-up. And you are crazy about me, aren't you?"

She made no reply as she struggled to her feet.

"I am going home," she told him.

He started to protest, then shrugged in resignation.

"Fair enough." He paid his check to the waiter who stepped forward. He lowered his voice. "Sorry that you did one little favor for me, Bea?"

"Not that I did a favor for you," she said.

He pretended to miss the inference as he walked across the floor with her.

"That's my girl!" he said.



Illustrated by  
Monte Crews



They stood outside, drinking in the clear air of early morning.

"Now I know you are crazy about me." He laughed lightly. "Might even call on you again sometime."

She was silent.

They started along a path that led through woods to a parking-lot. His hand rested on her arm possessively as the lights from the roadhouse were swallowed up in the foliage.

"How about a little kiss, Bea?"

Before she could answer, a bulky figure loomed before them. It was a man clad in rough clothes. A cap was pulled low over his eyes. A handkerchief concealed his face. His right hand was in his coat pocket, apparently grasping some solid object.

"Stand where you are, and don't make any noise!" The order was delivered in a gruff, disguised voice.

They obeyed him. The girl drew in her breath in terror. Menton's knees buckled. He attempted to speak, but no sound came from his lips.

The left hand of the masked man was extended as it pointed at the youth.

“Beat it, you! I don’t want you. I am after the dame.”

The moonlight that seeped through the trees played on a ring on the hand of the masked man.

Menton hesitated.

“Beat it!” came the order again. “Keep going. Right across that parking-lot, and into the woods on the other side. One word out of you, and I’ll drill you.”

Menton hesitated not at all; he started along the path at a trot. The trot became a run as his courage increased with the distance between his precious self and the masked man.

Tiny David, watching him over his shoulder, stifled a chuckle. This was what he had wanted. Now the glamour was gone. The girl had a picture of the youth as a coward who deserted her and fled, seeking safety for himself. It was a drastic cure, but effective.

The thought that the girl must be suffering from fear, and the desire to reassure her, caused him to turn about. There was no fear on her face, only wonder. Her lips moved; the words were barely more than a whisper.

“Uncle Tiny?”

**H**HE drew back in surprise. “What? How did you know, Bea?”

She took a step toward him. “The light flashed on your troop ring, Uncle Tiny. Remember how you used to spell out the motto for me? I guess I’ll never forget that ring.”

They stood facing each other. He was ill at ease; his voice was even gruffer:

“It was a bum joke, Bea. But I meant it to—”

She spoke slowly: “I—I think I understand.”

“Has it worked?” he demanded.

“Yes, Uncle Tiny.”

A crooked grin transformed his almost

ugly face, making it strangely attractive in the moonlight.

“Good girl,” he muttered. “Well, that’s that.”

**S**HE was looking behind him, gazing along the trail.

“Uncle Tiny!” There was terror in her voice. “He has a gun! He has it pointed at you!”

With speed strangely at variance with his size, Tiny David went into action. One arm seized the girl, and tossed her into a clump of bushes. The trooper slipped behind a tree.

His voice rang out in the woods:

“All right, Menton. The kidding is over. This is Lieutenant David, of the State Police. Put down that gun!”

The youth with the gun gave a gasp of surprise.

“Damn her!” he cried. “She told you! All right—she’s in this up to her neck. And you won’t live to get me!”

A bullet crashed into the tree behind which Tiny David was crouching.

The youth backed along the trail. Tiny David crawled forward to the next tree. A bullet struck the ground near his feet.

Menton was crazed with fear, trigger-crazy. He was close to the car. Tiny David cursed the impulse that had caused him to leave his gun behind. The cry of the youth was ringing in his ears:

“She’s in this up to her neck.”

The trooper was gripped by a feeling of despair. This was a fine mess. Not a leg to stand on. He had no business in this town. He was in civilian clothes, and had been playing a bum practical joke. He had stumbled on something sinister; and Beatrice, apparently, was involved in it. Fine present for Ma Gilsdon!

Dull anger surged over him, crowding out fear and caution. He leaped to his feet, and raced forward. Menton, standing

beside the car, paused to take careful aim. Tiny David gritted his teeth, and went on.

Then there was the whine of an approaching car. Menton hesitated, turned to face it. Headlights illuminated the scene. The youth ducked back. The voice of Crosby sounded:

“Drop that gun, you rat!”

The car was at Menton’s side before he recovered from his surprise. Crosby, sitting beside the driver, was over the side and upon the youth before he could make up his mind to fire. There wasn’t much of a struggle.

“Now, then,” demanded Crosby, “what’s this all about?”

Menton’s whining voice sounded:

“She’s in this too, I tell you. She isn’t going to—”

“Shut him up, Jim,” ordered Tiny David.

There was the sound of a slap.

“He’s shut,” announced Mr. Crosby.

“Be with you in a minute, Jim.”

“Right.”

Tiny David retraced his steps along the trail. Beatrice Gilsdon had struggled to her feet. She stood waiting for him.

“What did he mean, Bea?”

She faced him frankly.

“I don’t know, Uncle Tiny. We were at the dance. After about an hour he begged me to—to go out and sit in the car. But when we got there he drove off and parked the car in the woods near the Four Corners. He left the engine running, and told me to sit at the wheel. He was gone for about half an hour. When he came back, he seemed excited. But we went back to the dance.”

She hesitated.

“He got angry when I asked him what it was all about. He said he had to meet a man on business for his father. We—we had a quarrel. I guess it was all over before—before you showed me what he was, Uncle Tiny.”

He felt a wave of relief.

“All right, Bea. Come along with me, but keep back until we get this straightened out.”

**B**ACK at the parking-lot, where a crowd of the curious had gathered, Mr. Crosby, Troopers Haines and Wolf stood about Menton. The youth obviously bubbled with the desire to talk. But each time he began, a slight motion of Mr. Crosby’s arm insured silence.

Tiny David beckoned Crosby to one side.

“What brought you here?”

“It was this way,” began Mr. Crosby: “I was sitting on the front porch, as per orders, when Haines and Wolf drove by. I yelled at them. They were going to investigate a complaint that the feed-store at the Four Corners had been robbed. Neighbors heard a noise and called them. I went along for the ride. Somebody got about two hundred bucks from the store, and we got this—”

He produced a glove, which he handed to Tiny David.

“Look inside.”

The name “*Hopper*” was inked on the leather.

“That,” said Mr. Crosby, “was what brought me here. Despite your veil of secrecy, I figured you were operating in this neck of the woods. I figured that you would want to know that apparently your shining star that had made good at the bank was going sour. It just happened that I stumbled on this laddie with a gun. I don’t like boys with guns.”

**M**R. CROSBY paused to light a cigarette.

“In addition to the gun, he had about two hundred bucks. For some reason, he doesn’t like to have me raise my elbow. When I raised it, he admitted that he stole

the glove from Hopper, and dropped it in the store to throw suspicion on him. He had heard about the mistake Hopper made when he was a kid."

"Nice going, Jim," said Tiny David.

"The second time I raised my elbow," continued Mr. Crosby, "he admitted six or eight other little jobs, here and there around this neck of the woods. Busy chap." He lowered his voice. "How did you make out?"

"Good."

"But what's this dope he is trying to spout?"

Tiny David stepped forward and faced Menton. He spoke in a low tone:

"I am giving you a chance to do one decent thing, and to make it easier for yourself. I never did this before, but this is a special case. Forget about Miss Gilsdon, and we forget the gun charge and everything except the feed-store robbery. How about it?"

Menton nodded.

Tiny David turned to Troopers Haines and Wolf.

"Book him on that. I'll sign the complaint."

He watched them drive off with their prisoner.

"Bea!" he called.

She stepped forward.

"Hello, Uncle Jim."

"Hello, Bea."

"You drive, Jim," said Tiny David.

The girl and the big trooper sat in the back seat.

"Uncle Tiny—"

"Yes, Bea."

"I've been a fool."

"Guess we all have, one time or another."

"I've learned my lesson—thanks to you and Uncle Jim."

"Forget it, Bea."

There was silence for a minute or two.

"What shall I tell Mother, Uncle Tiny?"

"Just what you told me: that you have learned your lesson. Tell her as soon as you get home. She'll be awake, and she'll understand."

He paused for a moment.

"And don't tell her any bunk about Jim and me. Let her think you learned it yourself. You and your uncles owe her that."

The car came to a halt before the Gilsdon home.

Beatrice stepped out and stood by the running-board while Tiny David climbed in beside Crosby.

"Lean over, both of you," she commanded. "I want to whisper something to you."

They thrust their heads over the side of the car. She bent down, and quickly kissed them both. Then she jumped back. She was laughing, but tears welled from her eyes.

"You'll—you'll never know—"

Her voice choked. She ran toward the house.

THE troop car made its way along the deserted street. They were almost at the hotel when Mr. Crosby went into action:

"Far be it from me to interfere with your welfare work—moral talks to young girls, and all that; but being a practical guy, I feel moved to point out that this is morning and another day. Therefore, the Old Man gets home tomorrow. Therefore, we get—"

"We," said Tiny David, "get hell."

"With trimmings," added Mr. Crosby.

Mr. David sighed contentedly. "Just like old times."

Mr. Crosby thrust his elbow into well-padded ribs.

"Exactly," he admitted. "You still hog most of the seat."