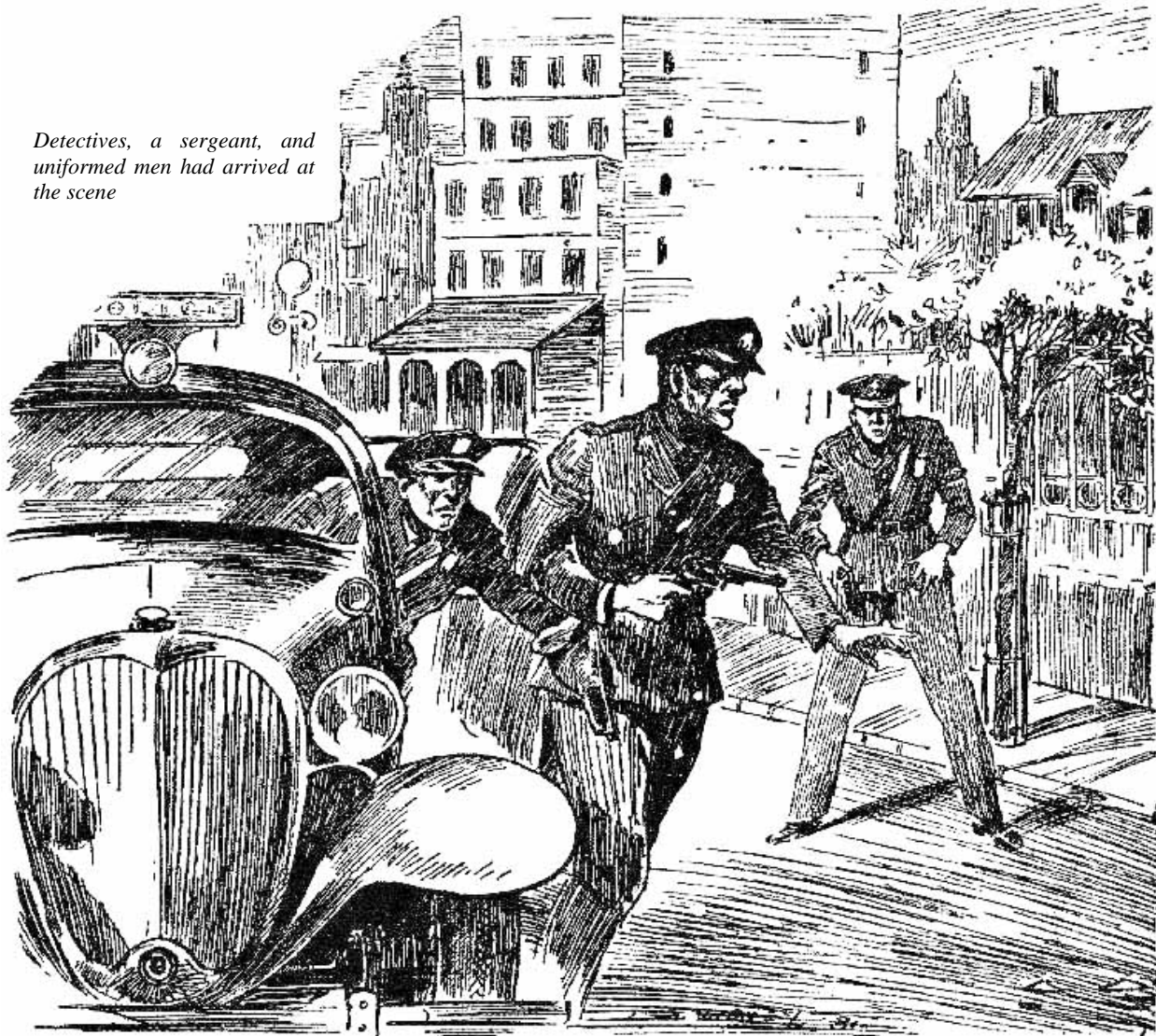


No Cause for Alarm

Detectives, a sergeant, and uniformed men had arrived at the scene



*Patrolman Tim Brady Is Torn Between Fire and Loot—
and Finds the Answer to a Riddle!*

By JOHN L. BENTON

Author of "The Well of Murder," "Vain Escape," etc.

PATROLMAN TIM BRADY fastened his black rubber raincoat closer about his husky broad-shouldered form.

It had been raining ever since he had come on duty for the midnight to eight A.M. patrol and now he was wet and cold.

He reached the door of Harrison's Jewelry Shop and tried the knob. His eyes narrowed as the door swung open to his touch. There was a single electric light bulb burning in the rear of the store.

No one in sight.

There were two things which worried the big patrolman. The first was the unlocked door, and the second, the electric burglar alarm that was connected to the door and which was not ringing. It might be that John Harrison or his two clerks had neglected to switch on the alarm when they had left the store, but it seemed unlikely. All three of them were methodical men, as Brady knew.

"I don't like it," exclaimed the patrolman,

opening his raincoat and drawing out his service revolver. "There's something wrong here. I—"

HE glanced over his shoulder, caught a red glow out of the corner of his eye. Halfway down the block a fire had suddenly started in a tin trash receiver. Brady uttered a startled curse as the red glow revealed what appeared to be the legs and the lower part of the body of a man whose head and shoulders had been wedged into the trash can.

Brady hesitated for an instant. Down the block a man was apparently burning to death and in front of him was a jewelry shop which might be robbed. Human life was the first consideration—so he dropped his gun back into the pocket holster and raced to the burning trash can.

He reached it and grabbed at the legs sticking out over the side of the container. A sickening wave of horror swept over him as he found himself holding the lower part of a body. What had been the head and torso were merely charred embers. The fire in the can was dying down, and now there was only a few flickering flames that hissed and then disappeared as the rain struck them.

Brady stood there cursing as he held the trousers in his hands. Beneath the cloth the legs felt hard and there was a wax-like odor mingling with that of the smoke from the trash can.

"A dummy!" snapped Brady. "That's what this thing is. One of them clothing-store dummies that somebody put in the trash can!"

He dropped the dummy on the sidewalk and started back toward the jewelry shop on a run. He came to a sliding halt at the door and grasped the knob. The door did not open—it was locked!

Brady peered in through the glass and saw that the nightlight was no longer burning inside the shop. He whirled as he heard a slight sound in the shadows to his left, but he was too late. A dark form lunged toward him, then a heavy object crashed down on his head and he dropped to the sidewalk unconscious.

He recovered his senses to find that he was still sprawled out on the sidewalk. A green coupe with the familiar lettering of a prowl car had drawn up to the curb, and behind this a squad car containing four detectives and a sergeant stopped. Two uniformed figures ran up to Brady and picked him up. Two patrolmen from the burglar alarm association had also appeared on the scene.

"Phone Harrison and have him come here at

once," ordered Detective-sergeant Doyle, and a detective moved away to obey instructions. Doyle turned to the patrolman. "All right, Brady. Now tell us what happened."

Brady told his story slowly and carefully, explaining how he had discovered the door of the jewelry shop unlocked, and then had seen the man apparently burning to death in the trash can.

Doyle listened silently until Brady had finished, and then led the way down the street to the trash can. The patrolman frowned as he followed. There was no longer any sign of the half-burned clothing-store dummy.

"You say there was a fire in this can?" Doyle turned on his electric torch as he spoke. Both men looked inside the can. It was empty and the tin had not been blackened in the slightest degree. "It doesn't look like it now."

"Mebbe I'm crazy!" Brady reached into his pocket and drew out his handkerchief to mop his moist face. As he did so an object wadded in paper dropped to the ground. "You'll be thinking I dreamed the whole thing."

Doyle was not paying any attention as he reached down and picked up the paper wad. He opened it and revealed a small roll of bank notes. The detective-sergeant read what had been scrawled on the paper by the light of the electric torch.

"Here it is," read the scrawled lines. "Thanks for being a wise guy."

That was all. Doyle gave Brady the flashlight to hold as he slowly counted the crumpled bills.

"FIVE hundred dollars," he said finally. "Guess you have your own ideas, Brady, but when I was a patrolman my job was worth more than that to me."

"But, Sergeant, I didn't have anything to do with robbing the jewelry store. I—" Brady realized there was no use saying anything more. He had been framed, the money and note planted on him by the man who had knocked him out. "There was a burning trash can with what looked like a body in it," he said half to himself. He glanced across the street where there was the foundation of a building. "They switched the cans—that's it."

Under protest he finally got Doyle to follow him across the street. In the excavation they finally succeeded in finding the scorched trash can and part of the burned dummy.

“I’ll believe part of your story, Brady,” said Doyle finally. “But this doesn’t clear you of the bribe angle. We’ll go back to the jewelry shop now.”

When they reached the shop John Harrison and his two clerks, Sam Grey and William Stanley had arrived. Harrison was a thin, grey-haired man of fifty. Sam Grey was a short fat man with a face that made him look like a codfish. Stanley was young and dapper.

Harrison unlocked the door. As he did so the burglar alarm started to ring. It continued to do so until the store owner went inside and switched it off. One of the burglar alarm patrolmen followed him, and phoned the home office to report there was no cause for alarm—though the bell had just rung.

Lights gleamed in the shop as the police and the two clerks followed Harrison and the protective association watchmen inside. The jeweler went to the big safe in the rear of the shop. The doors were half open. Harrison went quickly through the small drawers in the safe. He was shaking as he turned to Detective-sergeant Doyle.

“At least fifty thousand dollars in unset jewels are gone!” he exclaimed. “Business has been bad lately. This about ruins me, Sergeant!”

“What about your insurance?” demanded Doyle. “Aren’t you covered?”

“Well, that might do some good,” said Harrison doubtfully. “At least, I hope so.” The elderly man dropped weakly into a chair. “I’ve had so much trouble lately. First my brother’s dry goods business failed and I’ve had to help him—and now this!”

Brady had been wandering about, seeking some means of clearing himself. There was a door in the rear of the shop. He opened it and glanced in. It was a small storeroom. He stepped inside, switched on the electric light and then deliberately closed the door behind him. In one corner of the room he found a neatly piled stack of flat boards. Some of them were about eight feet long, others four feet. On one of the longer boards was stamped “Model Manufacturers.”

The big patrolman studied it for a moment and then he caught a glimpse of something gleaming in a dark corner of the room. He discovered it was a five-gallon kerosene tin. He lifted it and found it was nearly empty.

“That might be it,” murmured Brady. “But I’ve

got to prove it to Doyle.”

He returned to the front of the shop. Doyle and his men were still there, so were the two watchmen from the Burglar Alarm Protective Association. The detective-sergeant glanced at the patrolman as Brady appeared.

“Find anything?” asked Doyle.

“Enough to make me certain this was an inside job!” stated Brady.

“Trying to save himself,” said Sam Grey with a sneer. “We know that he is suspected of having been bribed by the crooks. The sergeant told us.”

“Thanks, Doyle,” Brady glared.

“Never mind that,” said Doyle. “Let’s hear what you have to say, Brady.”

“ALL right,” said the big patrolman. “In the first place this whole thing was timed so that I could be used as a goat. The person who planned the robbery knew what time I usually passed this shop on my rounds. He left the door unlocked so that I would find it that way and know there was something wrong. When he saw me at the door he set fire to the dummy in the trash can.”

“Dummy in the trash can?” demanded Harrison. “What’s he mean by that? It sounds fantastic.”

“Which was just the way it was planned,” went on Brady. “Doyle didn’t believe that either until we found the can and dummy—and they both had been half burned. The fire in that can burned very quickly because someone had poured kerosene into the can and on the wax dummy. You’ll find the kerosene can back in that storeroom.”

“What of it?” demanded Stanley; the dapper young clerk suddenly seemed nervous. “Anyone might have a can of kerosene around the place.”

“Sure,” said Brady. “Someone around here is very methodical and saving. So much so that they went to the trouble of taking a big packing case apart in order to save the boards. A packing case from the Model Manufacturers that originally contained the clothing-store dummy. He got it from his brother’s store.”

“But who did all this?” demanded Doyle, as the big patrolman paused.

“Harrison robbed his own shop,” said Brady. “For the insurance, I guess. What he probably did was have the unset jewels insured for fifty thousand, then cut them up and mounted them and sold them wholesale without telling the insurance company. This robbery is merely an attempt to

collect on jewels that are no longer in his possession. Such things have happened.”

“He’s lying!” exclaimed Harrison excitedly. “Trying to clear himself after receiving a five-hundred dollar bribe to let outsiders rob my store.”

“That’s all I wanted to know,” said Doyle. “You admitted everything right then, Harrison. I told about Brady being bribed hoping someone would make a slip. You did it when you said he received five hundred. Only Brady, myself and the man who planted it on him knew the sum.”

“Trouble with him is that he’s too methodical,” said Brady, as one of the detectives placed the handcuffs on Harrison. “Who ever heard of a robber switching on a burglar alarm after it had been turned off like Harrison did here tonight, and then locking the door of the shop? That was just

force of habit, and it was the first thing that gave him away to me.”

“Yeah, we’ve been waiting to learn more about that angle,” said one of the protective association watchmen. “We got the usual owner’s signal that all was well when Harrison first unlocked the door tonight. Then a little later he phones in and tells us to send some men around; he’d been robbed.”

“He phoned the police, too,” said Doyle. “But he tried to disguise his voice and refused to give his name.” The detective-sergeant glanced at the big patrolman. “I’m beginning to think that I could use you, Brady. I’ll see what can be done about it.”

Brady glanced out at the rain.

“I’d better get back on my beat,” he said. “I still have two hours to go.” He grinned. “Nice night for a murder or something!”