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Death on Deposit

By FRANK JOHNSON

"Hap" Farrell, of the F. B. I., earns his nickname by believing in hunches, but there is nothing haphazard in his pursuit of the killers who held up the Clarkston Bank!

THE entrance doors of the Clarkston Savings Bank were closed and locked from the inside. The lobby was so quiet that the sobbing of the girl there seemed unusually loud. And the dead man looked so pitifully young, lying there on the cold marble floor with a bullet in his heart.

"There were four of them," repeated

the bank guard for the third time. "Four guys with guns." He was thin and gray-haired, and pain from the bullet wound in his arm had deepened the lines in his face. "I tried to fight them! I did try!"

"We know that, Blake." As John Warren, chief of the Clarkston Police Department, he looked at the guard, he sounded like just what he was, a tired fat

man. "You did all you could."

In the heart of "Hap" Farrell, one of the listening group, was deep admiration for Chief Warren's control and restraint. For the dead bank teller had been the chief's son. Bitter grief was gnawing at the stout man's soul, yet he was struggling hard to just be a police official investigating a bank hold-up.

A uniformed patrolman unlocked one of the entrance doors and permitted the coroner to enter. But there was little that Dr. Lawson could do save declare young Tom Warren officially dead.

The girl stopped sobbing as the chief went to her and placed his hand gently on one slender shoulder.

"Remember you are a police chief's daughter, Betty," he admonished softly. "Tom would want us to be brave about this."

"I—I know, Dad."

Betty Warren wiped her eyes with a small, sodden handkerchief, then raised her head proudly. The late afternoon sunlight that poured in through the windows gleamed on the dark hair that touched her shapely shoulders.

"But I saw it happen!" She shuddered.

Her gaze was puzzled as she glanced at Hap Farrell. She did not understand what this strong-faced, dark-haired young man was doing here with the men from the Clarkston Police Department. Farrell sensed that in her glance. He smiled and walked over to the chair in which she was sitting.

"I'm Hap Farrell of the F. B. I., Miss Warren," he said quietly.

AS HE stood there in front of her he prevented her from seeing the policemen who picked up the limp form of her brother and carried the body out of the bank lobby. Chief Warren also moved around in front of his daughter, his stout

form helping to blot out what was going on.

"Farrell has been sent to investigate the bank hold-ups that have been occurring in this section of the country, Betty," Chief Warren said. "This is the fourth one, you know, that has happened within a radius of two hundred miles during the past month."

"Yes, I know." Betty nodded somberly. "I read about those other bank robberies, but this time—" Her lip trembled, and she could not finish.

Farrell knew what she meant. This time a bank robbery had not been something which she had merely read about in the papers. This time her only brother had been ruthlessly shot and killed. This hold-up at the Clarkston Savings Bank was a cruelly personal thing.

"I know it's a lot to ask, Miss Warren," Farrell said gently, "but if you could tell us just what happened again we might find some angle we have overlooked."

He moved a little to one side. Relief swept over the girl's face as she saw that her brother was no longer lying so bleak and still on the cold marble floor. Now that the body was gone it was far easier for her to talk.

"I work here in the bank as secretary to Mr. Duncan Medford, the president," she said. "This is Friday, May twenty-ninth, and since tomorrow is Memorial Day the bank will be closed. A number of the employees had finished their work and received permission to leave early today in order to go away for the week-end."

"We know that, Betty," put in Chief Warren. "I've already checked on that angle. Tom was the only teller still working when the four men drifted into the bank just a few minutes before closing time."

Betty nodded. "And I was working a

back in my office. I heard a shot and rushed to the wire grille door leading into the tellers' cages corridor. The door was open and so were the doors of the cages. The big vault where we keep all of the bank money was open and two of the men were scooping it out. One of them fired at me—and I must have fainted.”

“You did, dear,” the chief of police said quietly. “We found you lying on the floor of the corridor, unconscious. Tom set off the alarm. He must have dashed out into the lobby after the bank robbers and then—” For the first time Warren’s voice broke. “Then they killed him.”

“Were any of the men that you saw masked, Miss Warren?” asked Farrell, deliberately keeping his tone cold and impersonal.

“No.” Betty Warren shook her head. “I got a good look at only two of them—but I’m almost certain I would recognize their faces if I ever saw them again.”

The wounded bank guard had drifted closer to the two men and the girl and had been silently listening. Farrell frowned as he glanced at the gray-haired man. Blake looked as if he were in quite a bit of pain. It was high time he went to a hospital and had his wounded arm treated.

“There were four of them,” Blake said again. “They wore no hats and looked like college guys. But they all had guns.”

DUNCAN MEDFORD, the president of the bank arrived, bringing with him some of the other bank officials: A policeman took Blake to the hospital in a police car. Chief Warren sent his daughter home, accompanied by one of the detectives. Grief remained heavy in the heart of the stout police official.

“Four bank robberies within a month,” Farrell said grimly. “One of them a national bank, and in another robbery the

hold-up men escaped across the state line. So this is F. B. I. business.”

Farrell and Chief Warren were in the bank president’s private office talking to Duncan Medford, a tall, distinguished-looking white-haired man.

“Of course, I understand all that, Mr. Farrell,” he said, as he sat at his desk. “But how did you happen to be in town before the bank robbery occurred?”

“The result of a wild hunch upon my part,” Farrell said with a dry grin. “I believe in hunches. That’s why the boys in the Bureau have nicknamed me ‘Hap’—short for haphazard. I guess it is also because I work rather recklessly and leave a lot of things to chance. But I usually get results.”

“I’ll never rest until I get the men who killed my son,” Chief Warren said grimly. “I have no intention of leaving that to chance!”

“Naturally you feel that way about it, Chief,” said Farrell. “And I hope you do get them, if I don’t do it first. There is one vital fact to be remembered. That is, that the four men did not use a get-away car after they dashed out of the bank.”

“That’s true,” agreed the chief of police. “And they were clever about it, too. Two of them ran along the street excitedly shouting that the bank had been robbed, and that they were looking for the police.

“Meanwhile,” added Hap Farrell, “the other two, both carrying suitcases into which they had loaded the money stolen from the bank calmly walked across the street and vanished around a corner. They may still be in town.”

“My men are combing the town for them,” growled Warren. “But the trouble is that no one who saw them is exactly sure of what they look like. Since this town is so near to one of the defense plants

there are always a lot of strangers in Clarkston.”

“Would it be possible for you to hire a new teller without it being known outside of the bank, Mr. Medford?” asked Farrell, glancing at the bank president.

“Why, yes, I suppose so.” Medford looked puzzled. “But why do you ask?”

“No one knows me in Clarkston,” said Farrell. “Or has the faintest suspicion that I’m a government man. That is with the exception of those to whom I have talked here this afternoon, so—”

He broke off as there came a knock on the closed door of the banker’s private office.

At a word from Medford the door opened. A police sergeant stood there.

“There’s a reporter from the Clarkston *Banner* out here,” said the sergeant. “He wants to talk to you, Chief. Says he wants a story on the bank robbery.”

“Not now,” said the chief. “Tell him I’ll talk to him later, Sergeant.”

“Have him stick around,” Farrell said softly to the chief. “I’ve got an idea.”

“Tell the reporter I’ll see him in ten minutes,” Chief Warren told the sergeant.

“Yes, sir.” The sergeant saluted and departed, closing the door after him.

HAP FARRELL talked swiftly, and convincingly, as Medford and the chief listened intently. Finally Warren nodded.

“All right, Farrell,” he said. “We’ll try it. But this man Jackson who has been covering police for the *Banner* during the past couple of months is smart. He got his newspaper training on some of the big papers in New York, and he won’t be easily fooled.”

“We can try, anyway,” said Farrell. “Have him come in and give him the story, Chief.”

Chief Warren opened the door and

beckoned to a broad-shouldered brown-haired man in a double-breasted brown suit.

“All right, Jackson,” called the chief. “Come in. We’ll give you the story of the hold-up.”

“Swell, Chief.” The reporter stepped into the office and closed the door behind him. He drew out a fancy leather-bound notebook and a pencil. “Let’s have all the dope. I want a real beat.”

“Who you want to beat?” Warren asked dryly. “Far as I know the *Banner* is the only paper in Clarkston.”

Jackson grinned. “I keep forgetting I’m not still on one of the big sheets on the Main Stem.” He looked at Farrell. “Say I don’t remember seeing you around before.”

“You haven’t looked in the right places,” said Farrell. “I’ve been working here at the bank for the past week.”

The bank president nodded pleasantly. “Yes, Mr. Farrell is one of our tellers, but what is more important at present he got a good look at every one of the four bank robbers who killed Tom Warren. He’s positive he would recognize every man if he saw them again.”

“That’s interesting.” The reporter looked at Farrell. “Butch Jackson is the name. Just call me Butch. I’ll probably be seeing you around town.” He jotted down some notes in his little leather-bound book, then glanced at Medford. “I suppose the robbers made a pretty good haul?”

“Not as big as it might have been if they had staged the hold-up next Monday,” said the bank president truthfully. “That’s the first of the month, when the defense workers get paid. We usually have from fifty to a hundred thousand dollars in the bank in cash then. The hold-up men only got away with eight or nine thousand at the most today.”

“Want me to publish that?” demanded

Jackson, in surprise.

Hap Farrell had worked as a newspaperman while finishing his law course, before joining the F. B. I. As a reporter, "Butch" Jackson amused him. He acted like a cub newspaperman in a Grade B motion picture. Still Clarkston was a town with a population of not more than eighty thousand, and perhaps Jackson's New York newspaper background was just so much build-up for the local job.

"You can publish it if you like," said Medford. "It might teach those killers they weren't as smart as they thought."

Jackson nodded as he put away his notebook and moved toward the door.

"Guess I've got about enough for my article now."

Article! Hap Farrell grinned. This guy wasn't a newspaperman. He was a journalist with a capital J. The chance was too good to miss.

"Just a minute, Mr. Jackson," he said. "I've been reading the *Banner* since I have been in town, and I think the front page make-up is great. I see you run your streamer heads in eight-point Roman, don't you?"

"Yeah," said Jackson. "All the headlines are in eight-point Roman, of course."

"And I like the way the *Banner* has the society news in the body of the masthead," went on Farrell. "A bit different, but gives the paper a nice appearance."

"Just what I think." Butch Jackson stepped to the door and opened it, looking back over his shoulder. "Be seeing you."

HE REACHED hastily inside his coat as he nearly bumped into the police sergeant who had been just about to knock on the door. Hap Farrell's eyes narrowed thoughtfully as he watched the reporter depart.

A short while later Farrell left the bank

and went to the hotel where he had taken a room when he had arrived in town that morning. For a Federal man working on a case he appeared to feel that he had a lot of time on his hands.

That evening he made a phone call and then had his dinner in the hotel dining room. He lingered over the meal, reading the *Banner* which was an evening paper. Jackson had spread himself on the story of the bank holdup, and the mistake the robbers had made in robbing the bank today instead of on the following Monday.

"Sucker bait," murmured Farrell, as he read the part about him being able to identify the hold-up men. "And am I sticking my neck out!"

After he had finished his dinner he hung around the hotel lobby for an hour or so. One or two men loafing about appeared to be watching him, but he paid them no particular attention. He was giving a good imitation of a young man with a new job in a strange town, a man who did not know exactly what to do with his spare time.

He finally went upstairs to his room. As he unlocked the door he spied a small sheet of paper lying on the floor. Evidently it had been thrust under the locked door. He picked it up and looked at the printing on it. It had been done with a heavy black pencil and it read:

GET OUT OF TOWN BY NOON
TOMORROW OR YOU DIE. THIS IS
OUR LAST WARNING SO OBEY
ORDERS.

Hap Farrell smiled grimly as he stepped into the room and locked the door from the inside. Just to play safe he also thrust a straight-backed chair under the knob of the door, balancing the chair on two legs. He had little faith in hotel room locks. Too many people could get hold of

pass keys, but if the door was opened the chair would drop with plenty of noise.

"The boys appear to be worried," he was thinking as he undressed and went to bed.

Before he crawled in, though, he drew his automatic out of the shoulder holster he always wore and which he had hung over the back of a chair. He placed the gun under his pillow where he could reach it easily.

"Just so I won't be a dead G-man," he muttered, and quickly drifted off to sleep.

To Farrell, Sunday in Clarkston was one of the longest days he had ever spent. For the simple reason that nothing happened. For a man whose life had been threatened if he did not leave town by noon he felt he was leading a much too placid existence.

He had been tempted to pay a visit to Chief Warren at the police station, but had decided against it. That would hardly be in keeping with his role of bank clerk. Besides, Warren and his daughter probably were remaining at home due to the death in their family.

It was with a decided sense of relief that Hap Farrell arrived at the Clarkston Savings Bank early Monday morning. He had a hunch that something would happen during the next few hours, and he was ready for it.

After a talk with the president of the bank, Farrell was assigned to the cage where Tom Warren had worked. This was in the savings department, and handled the accounts under the names that began with the letters from R to Z. Fortunately Hap Farrell had once spent a summer vacation working in a bank so he knew the routine.

HALF an hour after the bank opened Butch Jackson appeared at Farrell's window. He drew out a twenty-dollar bill and placed it on the counter.

"Morning, Farrell," he said pleasantly. "Will you change that double sawbuck for me, please?"

"Of course. Glad to do it."

Farrell glanced over Jackson's shoulder. Betty Warren was just leaving another teller's window and walked away. She was keeping up a brave front, for she was not in mourning. Instead, she wore a red dress and a red turban to match. Farrell's gaze swept by the girl and rested on a hard-faced man who had swung around from one of the counter desks.

"Here's your change," Farrell said.

Handing Jackson a ten, a five and five one-dollar bills, he suddenly drew them back.

"This is a stick-up!" shouted the hard-faced man, a gun appearing in his hand. "Just keep still, all of you, and you won't get hurt."

Butch Jackson swung around, grabbing for a gun inside his coat. He got it out and was helping the four men who were now covering those in the bank when Farrell suddenly reached one arm out through the window of the cage. The arm caught Jackson around the neck in a strangling grip, even though Farrell unconsciously was still holding the money in his left hand. Jackson's gun dropped to the floor.

Farrell's automatic was in his right hand, roaring. Betty Warren stood nearby, gazing in horror at the blood streaming down the face of one of the bank robbers as Farrell's bullet got him.

"Look out, Betty!" shouted Farrell. "Get out of the way!"

She realized then that she was in the line of fire of the other three men who were shooting at Farrell. With quick presence of mind she dropped to the marble floor. A bullet that had been meant for the G-man tore into Butch Jackson as Farrell held the newspaperman pinned to the window.

The three remaining members of the gang were so busy trying to get Farrell that they did not see the bulky form of Chief Warren as he appeared in the entrance door.

As he saw his daughter lying motionless on the marble floor the police chief went berserk. His gun roared steadily as he fired six shots. When it finally clicked on an empty shell all three of the remaining bank robbers were dead.

"We got them!" he muttered dazedly.

The relief on his face was almost beyond belief as his daughter got to her feet and he saw that she was unharmed. In a few minutes the frightened depositors had been quietly ushered out of the bank and once more the police had taken charge.

Butch Jackson was badly wounded, but still able to talk. And he did, after Farrell had his say.

"Jackson was the tip-off man for the gang," explained Farrell. "I began to suspect there was something phony about him when I found he was such a washout as a newspaperman, especially a guy who was supposed to have worked on New York papers."

"What tipped you off?" asked the chief.

"When I told him the *Banner* headlines were run in eight-point Roman he agreed with me," said Farrell. "That's very small type, and any newspaper that used it for heads would sure look silly." He grinned. "And I'd like to see the society column in the body of the masthead of a paper."

"What is the masthead?" asked Chief Warren.

Farrell's eyes twinkled, as his grin broadened.

"It's usually the spot where the name of the paper and the names of the men heading the company are listed," Farrell told him. "And there isn't room for a society column or any other column there."

"Smart guy," Jackson growled weakly. "But I don't see how my bein' a rotten reporter tipped you off to my tie-up with the gang."

"As soon as that story about my being able to identify the four holdup men appeared in the paper I got a warning to leave town or I would be killed," said Farrell. "Those other men didn't know what I looked like, Jackson, but you did, and you must have left that note on the floor of my room at the hotel."

"So what?" Jackson sneered. "It was a good racket while it lasted." He glared at Farrell. "Who are you, anyway? You ain't a real bank clerk."

"No," said Farrell. "I'm from the F. B. I."

"A G-man." Jackson shivered. "And we were fools enough to try to pull off another bank robbery. Looks like—like you had death waiting on deposit for us." He shivered again and grew still.

"My boy will rest easier now," Chief Warren murmured tightly. "We got his killers."