

Terry swung the pick with all his might



K IS FOR KILLER

By CARL G. HODGES

Terry Michaels, ex-detective out of a job, starts anew in a small town—with a big crime case on his hands!

MYSTERY had just parked itself outside the Lakeside Glass Shop, but Terry Michaels didn't know it. Terry stood by the cutting table, where old Joe Collins was fitting five by eight panes into a French door. His reddened eyes looked glumly around the dim interior.

"Joe," Terry grumbled, "how can you stand it in this medieval dump? Ten miles from Silver City and civilization. My

brother Tom pulled a fast one getting me to spend two weeks here while he's having himself a good time in Chicago. Here I am, surrounded by lazy tourists and fishermen, when I ought to be out looking for a new job. The police commissioners in Silver City—Aubrey Jehoshaphat Jones in particular—won't ever change their minds about my politics. I'm a Republican and they're Democrats, so I'm out on my ear."

Collins' gnarled hands slapped putty

with the skill of a lifetime as a glazier.

“Lakeside’s a fine town, Mr. Michaels. Fresh air, sunshine, and good food. You look better already and you still got nine days to go.”

“Nine days from now I’ll be in the bughouse if something doesn’t happen. The detective detail in Silver City was bad enough but at least we had a good bloody murder once in a while. Here all we got is fresh air, fishermen, and glass!”

“Glass is interesting stuff. Your brother has made quite a study of glass. You ought to read some of the books he has on the subject.”

“I’ve read every book he’s got about window glass, stained glass, art glass, optical glass and windshield glass, and I’m sick of it. I’d trade one full beer glass at the Press Club in Silver City for every book he’s got and this two-bit glass business thrown in.”

The little bell over the front door tinkled and Terry moved forward to meet a squat, beefy customer in a pair of shapeless coveralls. The man’s eyes were almost hidden by puffy bags of flesh and he smelled of some kind of acid.

“Gimme a pane of single-thickness window glass twelve by fourteen,” he demanded.

Terry’s eyes sharpened with interest.

“Twelve by fourteen? You must live out at the lake, too, chum.”

“I run Blake’s Battery Shop, if it’s any of your business. I live out there, too. My name is Jed Blake, I’m forty years old, fresh out of the pen and I don’t like guys with long noses. Now kin I have the glass?”

Terry grinned. “Okay, chum. But there seems to be an epidemic of broken windows out your way. You’re the third person today that’s ordered a twelve by fourteen pane. The other two paid for the glass with silver dollars they found on the

floor of their cottages after they discovered the broken windows.”

Blake dashed his cigarette to the floor and ground it viciously under his heel. Fear veiled his blue eyes. Terror was on his fat face. Then he turned and ran out of the shop, his squat body waddling like a duck.

“Wait for the glass!” Terry yelled.

But the fat man didn’t stop. He slammed the door, leaped into a dirty, paneled truck parked at the curb, and drove away in a swirl of dust.

Terry walked back to Joe Collins.

“There’s something screwy going on around here. Why should Roly-poly get all hot and bothered when I told him about those silver dollars?”

“I don’t know.” Joe went on slapping putty.

Terry had excitement in his eyes for the first time in five days. He started for the back of the shop where his bachelor brother had living quarters. “Lakeside has a newspaper, and I’ll bet I can find out what’s going on here. And I think I will—just for the heck of it!”

TERRY walked into the Lakeside Library. And when he saw the blonde behind the desk, he was glad he had slicked up.

“Baby,” he said, “without looking any farther I can tell that you’re the cutest volume in this library. I like your binding and I can see that the contents are properly indexed.”

Her blue eyes twinkled.

“The children’s book department is on the next floor,” she said. “Their books would better fit your mentality.”

“Touché!” Terry grinned. “No kidding, baby, you’re the first thing I’ve seen in Lakeside that isn’t put together with glue and belling wire. I’ll take you home.”

“You’re leading with your chin, mister. I live nine miles down the lake shore.”

“Ouch!” Then he grinned that boyish grin of his again, “I’ll still take you home.”

Banter was over for her. Her face grew stern.

“Do you want a book?”

Terry took out his wallet and showed her the shield pinned inside.

“I used to be Detective-lieutenant Terry Michaels until I got fired for being on the wrong side of the political fence,” he told her. “I was with the detective detail in Silver City. And before you tell me to stay in my own back yard, I’ll tell you that I’m also a deputy sheriff. They forgot to take that commission away from me. I want to ask you a sixty-four dollar question.”

The sternness seemed to go out of her, but she became instantly alert.

“Detectives I’ve known couldn’t ask a sixty-four cent question!”

Terry rubbed his fingers over his cheeks quizzically.

“Why should anybody in Lakeside go around throwing silver dollars through people’s windows?”

The girl sucked in her breath sharply.

“Silver dollars?”

“Yeah. Washington threw one across the Potomac, but some bunny out at the lake’s been busting people’s windows with them. What’s the matter, baby?” He stared at her wide and frightened eyes. “First Jed Blake gets the blind staggers when I talk about silver dollars and now you. Why?”

He could sense that she was trying to control herself. Her voice trembled when she spoke.

“A seventeen year old boy, Bruce Cameron, was mixed up in a payroll robbery about five years ago. He didn’t have anything to do with it but he was framed by others. He spent five years in the pen and was released about two weeks ago.”

Terry’s face showed interest.

“What’s that got to do with silver dollars?”

“Bruce has a crippled leg,” she explained, after a little hesitation. “He ran a garage out on Route Sixty-six. One day he got a call to tow in a damaged car, which he did. Then the cops came and arrested him. It seemed the car had been used by the men who held up a payroll truck intended for the Lakeside Shoe Company. It was the company’s silver jubilee and they were looking for publicity by paying all their employees with silver dollars—fifty thousand silver dollars.”

“How could they frame the crippled boy on that?”

“The two thieves, Karl French and Tom Slater, claimed that the robbery had been planned by a mysterious man they had never met. They said they had abandoned the robbery car at a pre-arranged spot; and that another man was to pick it up and hide the loot. They accused Bruce, and they, and Bruce, got five years in the pen.”

“Did the cops ever find the loot?”

“Not to this day.”

“How about Jed Blake? Could he have been the mysterious master mind? He could have taken the money between the time French and Slater abandoned the car and Bruce Cameron picked it up.”

“Blake got out of jail about two weeks ago after serving a five-year term for manslaughter,” the girl went on. “He killed a man with his car. It happened the same day as the payroll robbery, in fact, and only a couple blocks away. The man’s name was Fritz Marrow.”

“Who was Marrow? Some big shot?”

“No. He was sort of a shady character. I guess that’s one of the reasons Blake only got five years for killing him; in spite of the fact that it was a hit-and-run case.”

“Maybe Marrow was the master mind, mind, and when he got himself killed—”

“No. Marrow died in his brother’s arms in the hospital in Silver City within an hour. It couldn’t have been he,” the young librarian said emphatically.

“Where are the newspaper files?” Terry asked. “I’d like to read up on the case myself. Then I’d like to drive you home and talk about this Bruce fellow. Maybe we can straighten things out.”

The girl’s eyes were somber.

“Bruce isn’t a bit well,” she said. “He’s pale and he worries a lot. Running his own garage is too hard for him now. He could work for somebody else—he’s a swell mechanic—but nobody will hire him because of—”

“Yeah, I know. Small towns are like that.” Terry turned away toward the newspaper reference room. “See you at nine. By the way, how long you been crazy about this Bruce guy?”

The girl smiled at his tone and her laugh bubbled out in spite of her.

“Ever since he was born. He’s my brother.”

“Boy, I hit the jackpot! What’s your name, so I can put it down right at the marriage license bureau?”

She had to laugh at his impudence.

“Lila Cameron,” she said.

“That’ll sound swell,” Terry mused. “Lila Michaels.”

LILA sat alongside Terry as he drove over the lake road.

“Turn off here,” she directed. “We’re half way home now.”

Terry twisted the wheel and sped off the dirt road and onto the concrete. His headlights glared over a tall, rangy figure in hip-high rubber boots and a denim jacket, standing wide-legged in the road, his hands waving for them to stop.

Lila sat forward tensely.

“Don’t stop! He looks like a tough.”

Terry felt reassuringly for the automatic

under his left armpit. He stepped on the brake and the coupe squealed to a stop. The man’s rubber boots clunked on the concrete and he poked his unshaven ugly face in the driver’s window.

“When you git to a telephone, call the law,” he said. “I just killed a man.”

“Who are you?” Terry’s skin was creeping on the back of his neck.

“Garse Withers. I’m a fisherman. I come in from running my trotlines and somebody had busted in a window of my shack and was giving the place the search. I guess I shot too straight. Right through the heart. He’s deader than a last week’s perch.”

“Who is it?”

“I don’t know. I never seen the man before.”

“Hop on the running board and we’ll take a look.”

“Call the law,” Withers growled. “I don’t want to git myself framed on no murder charge.”

“I’m a deputy sheriff. Come on.”

He followed Withers’ directions, drove off the road and down a rutted lane to a dilapidated, rambling shack that at one time had been a neat vacation cottage. Fishing paraphernalia cluttered up the place, and the smell of fish filled the air.

A dim light glowed in a room at the side. Withers led the way in.

“He’s in there,” he told them.

. They went into the room, and Lila gasped and turned away. Terry took one look at the corpse and felt his hair standing on end.

The dead man was fat and wore nondescript coveralls and his blue eyes stared coldly at the ceiling.

“That’s Jed Blake!” Terry exclaimed. “I was talking to him only a few hours ago!”

He walked across to the window and looked out. It was about four feet to the ground outside and Terry could see faint

footprints in the soft earth. The sill was covered with dust.

His feet scattered glass on the floor. Withers was beside him.

"He must have busted the window so he could reach inside and unfasten the hook off the sill," he said. "The glass is all on the inside."

"You didn't find a silver dollar on the floor, did you?" Terry asked.

Withers' face flushed red and surprise shuttered his eyes.

"What you talking about, mister?"

"Never mind." Terry knelt on the floor and began to gather the glass into a small pile.

Withers swung the window open and rapped the jagged glass remnants with his gnarled knuckles.

"You might as well take it all, mister."

"Get me a sack or a bag so I can carry it in to Silver City," Terry requested. "Help me pick it up, will you?"

Withers produced a dirty canvas bag and together they picked up the pieces until the floor was clean.

"What do you think you can do with a bag full of glass?" the fisherman asked scornfully.

Terry grinned. He remembered all the books his brother was so proud of.

"You'd be surprised what a man can learn from bits of glass." He got to his feet. "Don't move anything, and don't walk around outside any more. I'll call the sheriff and the coroner. . . ."

"Funny," Terry said, as the coupe sped over Route 66. "You say Blake ran a battery shop less than a quarter of a mile away from Withers' shack and yet Withers says he didn't even know him. That's screwy."

"Maybe not," Lila answered. "Blake worked during the day and slept at night. Withers runs his trotlines at night and

sleeps during the day." She smiled at his discomfiture. "Turn off here, we're home."

TERRY turned into a gravelled drive that led to a neat little cottage. Nearby was a small garage whose light gleamed through a grease-stained window. A figure came out of the door, walking with a limp.

Terry got out of the car.

"Hi, Bruce," he said, "I'm Terry Michaels. I brought your sister home. Better than her waiting for the bus."

Bruce Cameron had a tense look on his white, pinched face. He glanced questioningly at his sister.

Lila was conciliatory.

"He used to be a detective, Bruce," she told him. "And he's still a deputy sheriff."

Bruce turned to walk toward the house, but Terry grasped his arm.

"Mind turning your pockets inside out, Bruce, to satisfy a whim of mine?"

"No," the boy said. "Go ahead." He dug oil-marked hands into his pockets and came up with a handful of house keys, cotter pins, small change and five shining silver dollars.

Terry glanced sharply at Bruce, then at Lila.

"How come the silver dollars, kid?"

"I save 'em."

"Somebody's been tossing silver dollars through a lot of windows around here. Are you the one?"

Bruce's face froze and he tried to hide the excitement in his voice.

"Why should I want to do that?"

"Maybe because you know there's fifty thousand cartwheels hidden around here. You might toss silver dollars through windows to scare the right guy into revealing the cache."

"You're crazy!" the boy declared. "Besides, I was framed in that payroll robbery five years ago."

"You could be trying to locate the loot so you could unframe yourself," Terry pointed out. "And a little something happened tonight that might blow the lid off the whole thing. Jed Blake got himself killed."

Bruce's mouth dropped open.

"Murdered?" he asked in a shocked voice.

"What made you think of that?" Terry's eyes were cold. "I didn't say he was murdered. I said he was killed. Garse Withers says he shot Blake when he surprised him in his shack, but I'm not too sure that Withers is telling the truth." He turned to the girl. "I'm going to use your phone, Lila. See that Bruce stays around. We might want to ask him some questions."

"You fool!" Lila stormed. "Anybody can see that Bruce isn't mixed up in this. Jed Blake broke into Withers' shack and Withers shot him. He admits it. That's all there is to it!"

"There's a little matter of fifty grand unaccounted for, baby," answered Terry. "I've gone off the deep end for you, but fifty grand has a lot of possibilities, least of which is the five grand reward which has never been rescinded. And if I dig out the truth when nobody else takes a tumble, I've got an even chance to get my job back on the Silver City force, in spite of hell and high water and Aubrey J. Jones."

Early the next morning, a rustic character with a star on his chest came into the Lakeside Glass Shop and introduced himself.

"I'm Sheriff Wade," he said to Terry. "I gotta have you as a witness in the Blake killin'. Withers admits he killed him. The coroner says the bullet in Blake's body was fired from Withers' gun. Open and shut case of accidental shooting. Will you show up this afternoon?"

Terry chuckled at the homespun naiveté

of the local officer.

"Did you look for footprints leading to Withers' window?" he asked the sheriff. "It was too dark for me to look last night."

Wade grinned wisely. "You city fellers ain't the on'y ones what knows their business. I found tracks. And I took off Blake's shoes and tried 'em in the prints. They fit perfect."

"How about fingerprints on the window sill?"

"What fer?"

"How could a fat man like Blake climb into a window four feet off the ground without leaving fingerprints? He didn't have any gloves on when he was killed and there weren't any in his coveralls."

Wade was disgruntled.

"That's a mite too particl'ar, if you ask me," he said. "Withers admits killing Blake. Ain't that enough?"

"Never mind. Did you give Blake's Battery Shop the once-over? It isn't far away from Withers' place."

"Yeah, I did that. Ain't nothin' there but a lot of pre-war batteries that's been stored in the basement since Blake went to jail fer runnin' over Fritz Marrow five years ago."

"Care if I take a look around? Got a key?"

"Yeah." The sheriff gave Terry a key and then turned to leave. "Maybe I better take a look at that there window sill," he said, shaking his head. "It ain't natural that a fat jasper like Blake could climb in a window without leavin' no fingerprints."

Terry drove over to Silver City and spent an hour at the "Clarion" office, browsing through the "morgue." Then he walked over to the old familiar crime lab of the Silver City Police Department, where he had worked for the past three years. He found "Specs" Queen, lab specialist, and gave him the canvas sack of shattered glass that he and Withers had gathered up off the

floor of the fishing shack.

"Specs, find out which side the blow came from that broke this pane, will you?" he asked the old man, heaving the sack onto a table.

SPECS shook his grizzled head as he peered through thick eyeglasses.

"That's a new one, kid. I don't know whether I can."

"The police library ought to have a copy of a Canadian book called 'Glass Fractures,' " Terry said, remembering the book he'd read in his brother's shop.

"Yeah, I know how to tell from what side force has been applied, by the scallops, and the radial and concentric rings," said Queen. "But how do you know what's inside and what's outside?"

"The book'll tell you, Specs. The outside will show dirt, leaf mold and insect marks; the inside will probably show an oil film."

"Shucks, I never thought of that. Can do, with a microscope."

"You'll find fingerprints, too," Terry added. "Ought to be a perfect set. I got the fellow to help me pick up the glass. Fellow named Garse Withers. A fisherman. Check with the FBI and our own files, will you?"

Specs had a queer look.

"Withers admits killing Blake," he said. "What you messing around with the case for? You ain't even on the payroll no more."

"There's a five grand reward still outstanding."

"You're batting your head against a wall, Terry. I remember that payroll holdup and Jed Blake wasn't in on it. He killed Fritz Marrow with his car; that's why he went to stir for five years."

"Maybe I'm nuts," Terry persisted, "but I've got an idea that Jed Blake was behind that holdup and that he knew where the loot was hidden."

"But Blake was blocks away when the holdup happened!"

"I know. But I figure that maybe his running over Marrow was part of the plan—to draw any law officers away from the scene of the holdup."

"Fritz Marrow wasn't the kind to get himself killed so somebody else could get away with fifty grand," Specs Queen said scornfully.

"Maybe Marrow was one of those guys who specialize in fake accidents to defraud insurance companies," Terry went on. "He never worked and yet he always had dough."

"And he got himself killed! That don't make sense."

"Sure. Maybe something went wrong. Or maybe Blake figured if Marrow really got killed there'd be one less to share the loot."

"I still think you're nuts," Specs said, "but I'll do what I can with the glass and with any fingerprints I find."

Next, Terry went to the teletype room and sent messages to the state penitentiary. In a short time he had the answers to his questions:

Karl French died here August 6, 1945. Tom Slater released fourteen days ago. Present whereabouts unknown. No record available of Garse Withers.

He then telephoned a dozen different fish markets in Silver City and Lakeside. None was familiar with the name of Garse Withers and all were positive that they had never purchased a catch from a fisherman of that name.

Terry was considering his next move, when he became aware of the presence of his former boss—Aubrey J. Jones, himself. The man had a furious scowl on his blue-shaven face.

"The use of the teletype room and our telephones is reserved for department

employees, Michaels,” the police commissioner said tersely. “Use pay telephones after this. That is, if you’ve got a nickel.”

Terry grinned. “One of these days you’ll be saying something different,” he said mysteriously and scooted out of the room.

* * * * *

THE inquest was held that afternoon in the tiny chapel of the only mortician in Lakeside. When the coroner had completed his testimony, Terry asked for permission to question Withers, and it was granted.

“Withers,” he said, “isn’t it unusual that you lived practically next door to Blake and yet you didn’t even know him by sight?”

Garse Withers was frank enough.

“I fish at night,” he said, “when there ain’t no outboard motors and sailboats cluttering up the lake. I sleep days, and I guess Blake done just the opposite.”

Terry was balked by the logical answer. He played his trump card.

“You say you fish for a living. Yet there’s not a fish market in Lakeside or Silver City that’s bought a catch from you.”

Withers showed his yellow teeth in a grin.

“I been here only a few weeks,” he explained. “If I sell in Silver City. Nobody asks my name; they weigh my catch and pay me cash, that’s all.”

The inquest broke up with the verdict of accidental death, and they all filed out of the little chapel. The early evening air was fresh and sweet.

Terry took Lila’s arm and led her over to the coupe.

“I’ll take you home,” he offered.

“All right,” she said. “If you promise not to mix Bruce up in this.”

The ride to the cottage was silent, for the most part. When they got there, Terry kept his motor running while Lila got out of the car.

“Are you going to be home for the next hour or so?” he asked.

“Yes. Why?”

“I want you to do me a favor. If I don’t phone you before eight o’clock, I want you to notify the sheriff, the fire department, the Silver City police, the national guard, and Superman. Send them to Blake’s Battery Shop. The sheriff gave me a key and I’m going there to look around. But I’ve got a ten-cent idea that some other folks interested in fifty thousand cartwheels might do the same thing.”

Lila’s eyes mocked him as she agreed. Then she said something that made him tingle all over.

“You’re silly, and you’re stubborn—but please be careful, Terry.”

It was the first time she had ever shown any softness toward him. And it was also the first time she had ever called him by his first name. He leaned across and kissed her—and that was nice too.

Driving his car down the short lane off the lake road, Terry parked in a grove of trees just short of the spot where Blake’s Battery Shop loomed dark, silent and forbidding. He took his flashlight, slipped out, and was moving down the shoulder of the road, when he heard footsteps running on the dry earth. Peering into the dark, he saw a shadowy figure making for the trees on the other side of the shop. The figure ran with a decided limp.

“Bruce!” Terry yelled.

But the limping figure kept going and vanished among the trees. Almost immediately Terry heard an engine roar into life and a car flashed out of those trees onto the lake road, going for all it was worth.

“Now what is that dumb kid nosing around here for?” Terry muttered to himself.

He turned his attention back to the shop holding his flash in his left hand, he inserted the key that Sheriff Wade had given him and pushed the door open cautiously.

He flashed his light across the dirty floor, over the walls. Then, moving to a door that opened into what was evidently a service room where Blake had done his work, he found a short hall leading to a pair of doors. One of them opened to the outside. The other led downstairs to a cellar. He closed it as the smell of acid-laden dampness struck his nostrils.

Turning back he saw another door in the side wall. He opened this, flashed his light around the room, and then centered it on the window. The lower sash had been broken and glass littered the floor. Terry whistled softly. He threw the beam of the light over the bed and then got down on his knees and looked under. Sure enough! There was a shiny metal object which upon closer scrutiny, turned out to be a new silver dollar.

“Blake must have missed it,” he said to himself. “No wonder he got the fear of the devil in him when I told him about the other windows being broken with silver dollars!”

A QUEER sense of apprehension filled him. His skin prickled, and cold perspiration began to come on his forehead. He had a feeling of being watched by unseen eyes. Suddenly he sensed movement in the room and froze.

A beam of light struck his face, and for a moment he was blinded by the glare.

“Get up off your knees, Withers, and no monkey business!”

“You’re wrong,” Terry managed to say. “I’m not With—”

“Shut up!”

Terry saw the man now. He had an ugly gun in his hand as he moved forward with his flashlight. He was tall and skinny, and his face looked sickly white in the reflected glow of his torch.

“Who the heck are you?” Terry tried to grin. “I thought young Cameron was the one who threw the cartwheels through the windows around here.”

The man’s grin made him look like a hissing viper.

“That lame kid’s got a lame brain. He tossed them dollars into windows trying to get Blake to run for his cache, the dirty doublecrosser!”

“Karl French is dead. You must be Tom Slater.”

“Yeah, the one that Blake doublecrossed. That dumb Cameron never even seen the fifty grand. Blake hid it before he had the kid pick up the holdup car. I came back here as soon as I got out of stir and I camped on Blake’s tail. I searched this dump from top to bottom when he was gone. I even ripped open all them batteries he’s got in the cellar. No soap.”

Terry was silent, and Slater went on.

“I seen him go into your shack last night, Withers, and then I heard a shot. I beat it, quick.”

“You—”

“You knew where Blake cached the loot or you wouldn’t have gunned him last night,” the man said with an evil grin.

“I didn’t. . . . Why should I? . . .” Terry was at a loss. This man obviously thought he was Garse Withers, and he couldn’t tell him the truth. He couldn’t say that he was Terry Michaels, ex-detective and deputy sheriff.

Slater’s mouth was ugly.

“Don’t stall, Withers! I know you plugged Blake to get even with him for killing Fritz, but you wasn’t dumb enough

to kill him till you found out where the fifty grand was cached. Come clean, or I'll blow you to pieces! I'll kill you quicker'n Blake killed your brother!"

Suddenly Terry had the answer to most of the puzzle. There were only a few more pieces to fit into place and then he'd have it all. But it might be too late! He might be a corpse at any second, unless he could escape from the menace of Tom Slater's gun.

A plan popped into his head. He moved his left hand, and Slater's cold eyes followed it as his gun dipped. At that instant Terry blasted into action. He swung a terrific right at Slater's flashlight, sending the heavy missile against the man's nose with a jarring impact.

Slater screamed in pain. His gun flamed and the roar bounced off the walls. A slug ricocheted from the bedpost and splintered plaster in the wall.

By that one tiny second Terry escaped death. He ripped the door open, slammed it viciously behind him, then dashed for the cellar steps and slammed that door too. Not daring to breathe, he waited while Slater's pounding feet went past him and through the outside door. Then there was a shot as Slater raced away across the dirt and fired at a shadow.

Terry smiled inwardly. "He's out of my hair for a while. He won't risk coming back here very soon, after all that shooting."

Moving softly in the darkness he started to feel his way down the stairs. A string brushed his face, and pulling it, he flooded the cellar with light.

Over on one side, piled to the ceiling, was a stack of storage batteries, some with their rubber cases covered with dust, and others with gaping sides where they had been battered open with a sharp instrument. On the other side there was a mass of crating lumber. In one corner Terry saw a hammer and a pickax that was covered

with rust. He knew this was the weapon Slater had used to demolish the storage batteries in the hope that he would find the cached loot.

He moved over to the batteries, lifted one off the top and put it on the floor. As he was fanning off the dust with his hat, something made him slant his eyes sideways, and he braced as he saw the toe of a rubber boot sticking out from the end of the pile. He whirled crazily across the few feet of space, his right hand reaching frantically for his gun.

He was too late. Garse Withers stepped out into the open, a mean-looking weapon in his fist and a leer on his lips.

"Freeze, blast you, or I'll shoot! And you ought to know I hit what I aim at."

TERRY was filled with a raw humor. "You and Slater ought to get together," he said. "You're looking for the same thing."

"I heard Slater blabbering, copper. That makes it bad for you. You know who I am, now, and you ain't gonna live to squeal. Me killin' Jed Blake is one thing. Fritz Marrow's brother killin' him is another. Nobody around here knows me as Garse Withers Marrow 'cept you. Them hospital docs'd forget me in five years since Fritz died in my arms."

"You haven't found the cartwheels yet," Terry said evenly, "or you'd be far away. If you kill me, you'll never know where they are."

Withers' eyes glinted greedily.

"Start talkin', copper! Where's the cache?"

"I'm not talking."

Withers advanced menacingly, his eyes green slits of fury.

"Curse you, talk!"

As Terry retreated, his hands groped behind him, touched the pick handle.

The stairway door above their heads

opened softly on its hinges. Withers whirled, his chin outthrust like a trapped animal. His gun veered in his hand.

Terry gripped the pick with both hands. He sure was in a spot. He was faced with the prospect of being caught between two killers, Tom Slater and Garse Withers. And then his heart flopped over when he heard a soft voice call from the dark above them.

"Mister Michaels! Mr. Michaels!" It was Bruce Cameron's voice.

"Keep out of this, kid!" Terry screamed.

He leaped aside as Withers' gun slug bored into the wall behind him. The rusty pick zoomed in a vicious arc as he swung with all his might. Withers dodged, threw up his arm to ward off the blow. Another slug went wild over Terry's head. And then the murderous pick slashed through again, just grazed Withers' coat and buried itself in the side of a storage battery.

Terry tugged at the handle with desperate strength, but the point of the ax held firm. Suddenly the battery came out of the pile, and a dozen others, off balance, tumbled one after the other onto the floor. Terry's eyes popped as he saw the row of hidden batteries in a recess dug out of the earthen walls.

Withers laughed hysterically.

"Blake was cagey" he rasped. "That's where he made his cache, in that second row of batteries!" He backed away from Terry, keeping one eye on the stairway. "Copper, you're a dead duck."

Terry saw the man's finger tighten on the trigger. He dove headlong for Withers' legs just as the roar of the gun boomed in his ears and acid smoke stung his nostrils. At the same instant, a tear gas bomb, hurled from above, blossomed its white vapor in every direction.

Both men were on the floor now, Terry grappling for the slashing gun butt. He drove a hard right fist upward into Withers'

jaw and slammed the man back onto the floor. Withers lay still.

Terry squirmed to his feet, grabbed Withers' inert body and dragged it across the earth like a sack. Bruce Cameron limped down the stairway to lend a hand.

"I trailed Withers here," he said, "but somebody scared me away and I went home. Lila called the police at eight o'clock, like you said. They've got the place surrounded. They picked up Tom Slater, too."

"Good boy," commended Terry.

They lugged Withers up the stairs and laid him in front of the assembled lawmen. Specs Queen was there, with a submachine-gun in his arms, and Sheriff Wade, and Del Courtney of the Silver City Clarion. Aubrey J. Jones was there, too. The room was as light as day from the headlights of autos parked outside the building.

In the middle of the room Tom Slater sulked in a pair of shiny bracelets.

"What's the idea of having your girl friend call out the entire police force to catch a common hoodlum?" Aubrey Jones wanted to know.

Terry grinned. "A common hoodlum? Slater doesn't count. He was looking for fifty grand that he couldn't find. So was Withers, but he didn't find it either. It's downstairs, cached in storage batteries."

"I searched the joint for two weeks, every time Blake left it," said Bruce Cameron with amazement, "I even weighed some of the batteries, to see if they checked with regular ones. But I didn't have brains enough to look behind the first row."

Jones mopped his brow.

"You mean you've recovered the fifty thousand dollars stolen from the Lakeside Shoe Company five years ago?" he asked weakly.

"That's the idea," said Terry. "Blake was the master mind. He doublecrossed

Karl French and Tom Slater and figured to hold the loot for himself.”

“Where does Withers come in?” Jones asked.

“Withers isn’t his last name. His full name is Garse Withers Marrow, and he’s Fritz Marrow’s brother.”

Del Courtney chuckled with delight.

“Jones, how you gonna explain how a dick you fired solved a five-year-old crime and won a five-grand reward, when your own department couldn’t do it?”

Jones was a quick-thinking politician.

“Fired? There’s been a misunderstanding. Michaels was only enjoying a vacation. This case will serve to underline the brilliance of the department under my supervision.”

Garse Withers moaned, rolled over on the floor and got weakly to his feet. Specs Queen snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

“You ain’t got nothin’ on me,” growled the erstwhile fisherman. “I was only trying to find the loot for the reward, same as Michaels.”

Queen grinned. He whispered to Terry for a few moments. Then Terry faced Withers. “We’re arresting you for the murder of Jed Blake!”

“Murder? You’re crazy. I killed him, sure, but it wasn’t murder. He busted into my shack and I killed him.”

“I’ll tell you what really happened, Withers. Bruce Cameron has been tossing silver dollars through windows around here, trying to scare Blake into going to his cache so Bruce could clear himself. Instead, when Blake took a tumble to what was going on, he hunted you up.

“Slater saw him enter your shack last night and he heard the shot when you killed

him. To make it look like an accident, you smashed your own window. But you made the mistake of smashing it from the inside. Then you picked up the pieces that fell outside and brought them back into the room to make it look as though the window had been broken from the outside. You made tracks to your window by taking off Blake’s shoes and putting them on your own feet. But Specs Queen studied that glass and he can prove that it was broken from the inside. Jed Blake couldn’t have been the one to break it from the inside so it had to be you.”

“That ain’t no evidence.”

“Here’s some more. How could Blake climb through your window without leaving any kind of fingerprints or handprints on a dusty window sill?”

Jones sidled close. “Think you got enough evidence, Michaels?”

“Sure. He had motive enough. He wanted revenge on Blake for killing his brother, Fritz Marrow, and he wanted that fifty grand.”

Lila came into the room then, and Bruce told her all that had happened. She smiled sadly at Terry.

“Now that you’re a hero and have five thousand dollars and your job back, you’ll be leaving Lakeside and going back to Silver City.”

“Not for a while,” Terry said, putting his arms around her. “I’m taking two weeks vacation with pay.” He grinned at Aubrey J. Jones. “Right, Jones?”

Jones smiled gingerly. “Of course.”

Terry winked at Lila.

“That long enough for a honeymoon?”

He kissed her. And this time, it was even nicer than the first.