



"Must you make so much noise?" the stout man demanded

Death Signals

by John L Benton

The F. B. I. and Naval Intelligence combine to smash a diabolical plan, directed at our supply ships!

THE long stretch of beach on the coast of Maine was bleak and lonely as the shadows lengthened that late wintry afternoon. The wind blowing in from the sea was damply cold and whitecaps dotting the ocean as far as the eye could see, foretold of a storm before morning.

Larry Lowell's lean young face was set and grim as he plodded along. He wore no hat and the wind ruffled his thick brown

hair. His eyes were constantly alert and wary, for he knew that danger—perhaps even death—lurked somewhere nearby.

As he walked on he was a thin, tall figure in the gathering dusk. His topcoat was drawn tight about him to ward off the evening chill. Sand churned up against the trousers of his tweed suit and trickled down inside his heavy tan oxfords. His right hand, was thrust deep inside a side pocket of his coat, clutching the cold steel of an

automatic.

Yet there was no fear in Lowell's heart—only the cool caution of a man who had been trained to use his head when he had a dangerous job to do. The F.B.I. did not like their men to make mistakes by being too impetuous.

He glanced ahead at the big old stone house looming in the distance. The old Malden place was the sort of house that seemed to belong on this desolate stretch of coast. As gray and solid and grim as were the jagged rocks of a breakwater before it.

"Going somewhere special?" demanded a voice behind him.

Larry froze. He had been so intent on what lay ahead of him that it had been some time since he looked back along the beach. He turned slowly now and the automatic in his coat pocket was even more comforting than it had been before.

A STOUT man with his hands in the pockets of his overcoat stood watching him. The face beneath the brim of his dark soft hat looked like a piece of flabby dough. His small eyes were colorless and vacant, and the fuzzy little mustache looked as though it would blow away at any moment.

"I asked you a question." The stout man's voice was harsh, the tones of one who delighted in browbeating. "Answer!"

"Why?" demanded Lowell quietly. "I can't see that where I am going is any of your business."

"But I am John Clinton Dedham," said the stout man. "And I demand an answer."

"Pipe down! I'm Larry Lowell, of the beach-roaming Lowells," snapped the G-man.

Dedham gasped. It was obvious he wasn't accustomed to being answered in this manner. His right arm moved as he

tugged at something in his pocket.

"I wouldn't do it," said Lowell, his automatic abruptly covering Dedham. "That's how people get killed. Don't draw your gun or try to use it!"

"Gun?" Dedham said blankly as he pulled out a big white handkerchief. "But I have no gun."

Lowell felt rather foolish as he looked at the handkerchief. Apparently Dedham was not as dangerous as he had seemed at first. Yet there was something about the stout man that he did not like.

"Remember, I do have a gun," he said as he dropped the automatic back into his pocket. "And since you seem so anxious about it, I'm headed for the old Malden place down the beach."

"They will not welcome visitors," Dedham warned, shaking his head. "There has been a death in the family. Young Thomas Malden, I believe. He was found drowned just yesterday—and such a strong swimmer, too! I understand the funeral arrangements have all been made."

Lowell heard no sound behind him, for the roaring of the surf was loud in his ears. Suddenly the noose of a rope flipped over his head. He struggled to get it off, as it tightened—tightened—

Again Dedham's hand came out of his pocket, this time clutching an automatic. He leaped forward and brought the gun barrel down in a brutal blow.

An all-engulfing wave of blackness swept over the F.B.I. man as he dropped to the sand, unconscious. . . .

It seemed as though he had been swimming for hours in the waters of a dark sea. There were times when the white face of his younger brother Jim appeared above the crest of a wave—and always Jim shouted something that Larry Lowell could not quite understand.

The nightmare went on and on.

Now he was on the freighter with Jim and the rest of the crew. The ship was sailing down the New England coast just before the torpedo struck without warning.

Swimming again—trying to keep afloat as the giant waves tossed him about. There was Jim, shouting—shouting what? That he was reported missing at sea? Larry tried to answer him, tried to tell him to wait—

Now his eyes were open and he heard himself moaning. He remembered the nightmare vividly now that he had completely regained consciousness. Sorrow-swept over him. There was one part of it that had been true. His younger brother had been lost at sea just two weeks ago, when his freighter had been torpedoed by a Nazi submarine. That had not been a dream. . . .

Larry tried to move and found that his hands and feet were bound. His overcoat had been removed and he was beginning to feel cold. Although it was dark and he couldn't see anything, he was pretty sure he was inside a house, and since it was unlikely that the kidnapers would have carried him any great distance, he decided that it must be the Malden house, which was the only place for two miles in either direction along the beach.

HE HAD not the slightest intention of remaining where he was, silently waiting for something to happen. He wriggled his back and managed to get into a sitting position with his back against a wall. Then he began to yell.

"Help! Help, somebody—they've got me!"

He waited to see what would happen. Then he heard footsteps as someone came down a flight of stairs. It was Dedham. The stout man was still wearing his coat and hat and he had a

flashlight in his right hand and a gun in his left.

"Must you make so much noise?" he demanded as he stood glaring down at Lowell. "Perhaps it would have been better if we had killed you at once." He frowned. "Yet I thought it best to find out how much you know first."

"Know about what?" asked Larry.

"Do you think I'm a fool?" Dedham said arrogantly. "There were identification papers in your pockets. I know that you're from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, sent here to learn if someone in this house has been signaling U-boats along the coast."

"That's right," said Lowell calmly. "Are you in charge of operations?"

"Naturally," the stout man nodded. "For a job, such as this that requires brains and courage, I would be selected—that is to be expected."

"Still you have had a little help, Mr. Dedham," said a voice from the stairs. "So sorry—but I must say that I have been of assistance."

Lowell glanced up. A Japanese stood on the stairs. He was dressed in a blue suit and looked as though he might be a servant in the house.

"Oh, of course, Sato," said Dedham quickly. "You've been a great help. There is no doubt of that—you have proved quite capable of carrying out my orders. Where is Miss Malden?"

"In her room in the other wing of the house," said Sato. "She suspects nothing. The grief of her brother's death has made her blind to what goes on about her."

As he listened, Larry decided that Sato spoke rather good English, and that he wasn't overfond of Mr. John Clinton Dedham. In fact the G-man decided that Sato's voice and the way he pronounced

his words were very interesting. . . .

"We'll have to act fast," said Dedham. "With the G-men suspecting this place, tonight is the last time we will dare risk signaling from here. You have everything ready, Sato?"

"Everything is ready." Sato nodded toward the prisoner. "What will you do with him, Dedham?"

"Mr. Dedham to you," growled the stout man, glaring at the Japanese. "Don't forget that, Sato."

"You Axis boys certainly are good pals," said Larry with a mocking smile. "Just one happy family."

"Keep quiet!" snapped Dedham, as he looked down at the prisoner. "You talk too much, Lowell."

"You'd be surprised at how much I have been talking," said Lowell. "I had a little chat with the commanding officer at the Coast Guard station this afternoon before I decided to visit the old Malden place. He is going to have some of his men look for me here if I don't report back to the station by midnight tonight."

"Midnight!" muttered Dedham. "But the sub will not be expecting the signal tonight before twelve-thirty."

"So sorry, Mr. Dedham," said Sato dryly. "If the Coast Guard men come to the house it will be impossible to give the signal." He glanced at his watch. "The prisoner has been unconscious a long time. It is after eleven now."

"Then we've got to get Lowell away from here before the Coast Guard men search the house," Dedham said anxiously.

"There is a coffin in the attic," suggested Sato. "The late Mr. Carson Malden was the head of a casket manufactory and this was the first one he ever made. I'm sure no one would think of looking for him there."

"Excellent idea," said Dedham. "Couldn't be better if I had thought of it myself." He drew a roll of adhesive tape out of his pocket and quickly covered Lowell's mouth. "Come on, Sato," he said then. "Help me carry him up to the attic."

A pretty brown-haired girl had been standing on the second-floor landing all this time, silently listening to the voices of the men below. Now she moved swiftly along the hall as she heard them coming up the stairs with Lowell.

NANCY MALDEN was grief-stricken over her brother's death. There had been just the two of them in the family since their father had died two years ago. Nancy had kept the old home going since then, with the aid of two servants. Tom Malden, an Army officer, had been home on leave for the past week.

As was his custom, before he went into the Army, Tom had gone for an early morning swim just two days ago. He had been found washed up on the shore—drowned—with his head smashed in. Evidently the tide had dashed him against the jagged rocks of the breakwater not far from the house. Now his body was at an undertaker's establishment and the funeral was to be tomorrow.

Just three weeks ago the two servants who had been with the Malden family for ten years, a cook and a butler, had given up their jobs and left hastily. Nancy had found their explanations vague and unconvincing. A few days later, Sato, the Japanese servant, had arrived. When she learned that Sato had been recommended by one of her good friends in New York, she had been willing to hire him.

Then Mr. Dedham came. He claimed he was an old friend of her father's, and Nancy accepted him as a

house-guest. But when her brother came home he decided there was something very suspicious about Dedham, and he asked the stout man to leave. Dedham had agreed to do so. The next day her brother drowned.

She was in Tom's room now.

"I'll carry on for you, Tom," Nancy whispered. "I promised that if anything ever happened to you I wouldn't wear mourning. That's why I put on this red dress—you liked this dress."

She felt lonely as she looked around the room. And she was afraid of Dedham and Sato. She pulled open a drawer of the bureau. In the back she found what she was seeking—a fully-loaded automatic that had belonged to her brother.

She stood thinking, the gun held in one slender hand. That prisoner Dedham and Sato had taken upstairs. Who was he? She had heard the men say something about signaling a submarine shortly after midnight. What was it all about?

The house was very still. Dimly she could hear the sea pounding against the rocks. Suddenly the sound of the shot coming from the attic was like a terrific cannonade in her ears. . . . Had they killed their prisoner before placing him in the coffin? Nancy felt she had to know that.

She tiptoed out into the hall and to the stairs leading to the third floor, the automatic ready in her hand. She heard nothing and saw no one as she climbed the stairs. Stealthily she mounted the rough steps to the attic.

In the dim light she could see the black casket with its closed lid. She peered into the shadows where old trunks and furniture made gloomy patterns in the eerie loft.

Slowly she tiptoed over to the coffin. She hesitated for a moment before she dared raise the lid. Then she bent down and slowly lifted the cover.

The prisoner was there, all right, his mouth still cruelly taped—but his eyes were very much alive, glaring up at her.

"So, you have found him!"

Nancy had to grip the coffin to keep herself from falling. It was Dedham who had uttered the words as he staggered out of the shadows, blood dripping from a wound in his chest. Nancy fired at the stout man but her shot went wild. He tried to come closer—and then he fell, to sprawl lifelessly on the floor. One sleeve was pushed up, revealing the Nazi emblem tattooed on his wrist.

Nancy was stunned. She just stayed there, her smoking gun still pointing to where Dedham had stood. She did not see the leering face of the Japanese Sato as he pushed open a trap-door in the floor.

Abruptly Lowell sat up, wiggled out through the opening in the coffin and snatched the gun out of Nancy's hand.

He aimed the automatic at Sato, at the same time pulling the adhesive from his mouth with his other hand.

"So you shot Dedham!" Lowell said, glaring at the servant. "I heard you arguing. You got Dedham mad enough to pull his gun on you and then you killed him, Sato."

"Quite true," said Sato calmly. "I merely meant to wound him, though. He would be much more useful to us alive."

"You're not Japanese," said Lowell, glaring at the other man. "You don't even talk like one. You have no trouble with the letter R—they pronounce it like L. You didn't!"

"THAT'S right." Sato grinned. "I'm Lieutenant Thornley, U. S. Naval Intelligence. We were tipped off by the Coast Guard that mysterious signals were coming from this estate. Afraid we suspected the Malden family for a time—

that's why we arranged for the old servants to leave without telling why they were doing so, and I got the job here as a Japanese servant.

"Of course, Dedham must have been working for some time sending his signals outside the house—and then when he found I would apparently work with him he moved in here as a guest."

"And the F.B.I. decided they wanted a bit of investigating done, too," said Lowell. "That's why I'm here." He looked at Nancy. "You see we got curious about your brother's death, Miss Malden. We had a post-mortem performed secretly and found that Captain Malden had been killed by a blow on the head. There wasn't enough water in his lungs for him to have been drowned. It was John Deadham who must have killed him.

"But you were tied up when they carried you upstairs and placed you in the coffin, weren't you?" demanded Nancy after the shock of the news about her brother had passed. "How did you get

free?"

"Guess your servants used part of the old casket to store things away," said Larry Lowell with a smile. "I found some old silverware in the bottom of the coffin, and those knives are still pretty sharp."

"Two more jobs I've got to do," said Lieutenant Thornley. "The first is signal that U-boat at twelve-thirty and send her to a location where a couple of destroyers and Navy planes will be waiting. The second is get this Japanese make-up off."

"My brother was in the Army, Lieutenant," said Nancy. "I'm sure that we have a lot in common."

"My brother was in the Merchant Marine," said Lowell. There was a faraway look in the G-man's eyes. "He'll be glad if they get that sub."

"We'll get it," said Thornley. "Don't worry about that."

Lowell nodded. He did not doubt that the lieutenant was right.