

Remember Me to Roscoe

By Dave Grinnell

With all the police forces of the state at work, it still took a five-year-old to put the cuffs on his own kidnaper.

THE kidnaping of young Eddie Barlash may have started as a routine job, but the windup had a decidedly different touch to it that causes much grim hilarity whenever the cops of this state recall it. Our first information on the case came when Eddie's governess—Eddie was only five years old—told Mrs. Barlash that she couldn't find the boy. He'd been playing in the garden on the spacious estate of his parents—his father is *the* Barlash of Barlash Copper—and at first the governess thought the boy had got lost in some flower bushes.

After searching for some time, though, the French baby-trainer began to get a bit worried and called for help. Then the servants scouted the estate from top to bottom—the flower gardens, the swimming pool, tennis courts, arbors, trellises, and even the entire mansion, and found nothing of the boy. But the under-butler found a place in the wall where a ladder had been placed—and the ladder was still standing outside the wall where someone had climbed down—and there were tire tracks in the mud alongside the highway where a car had parked.

So it looked like kidnaping for sure. Everyone got busy on the telephones and the city police and state police and the FBI and the reporters were called—and everything was in quite an uproar. Not, however, as much of an uproar as old Barlash himself made when he'd found out what the servants had done, telling the world. He raved about for a couple of

hours, cussing everyone out, reminding them that that kind of publicity was liable to scare the kidnapers away for good—and they, after all, hadn't even had time to send a ransom note.



As it was, he'd no cause for worry, for the next day the note came in the mail. It'd probably been posted just after they'd grabbed the kid and before the newspapers had dragged out their biggest type, dusted it off, and set it up in print. The note, crudely hand-lettered, said simply that they wouldn't harm the kid if their terms were met and the terms would be stated later.

The papers blew up pictures of the note—old Barlash, having decided the

damage had been done, had okayed the super-publicity angle and had offered a terrific reward for his son and heir. All the amateur detectives, would-be sleuths, and actual dicks took out their Sherlock Holmes caps, magnifying glasses, and fingerprint kits, and set out to solve the problem themselves.

Naturally this didn't make our state police any the happier. It was really their bailiwick and their problem—all that the others could do would be to ball everything up and probably guarantee the kid's death, sure as shooting.

THE kidnapers must have been scared stiff for a while by all the clamor, for nothing more was heard of them for several days. We'd followed the auto tracks a little way, then lost them for good on the main highway. The footsteps measured, plaster-cast, photographed, proved nothing except that one of the men—there seemed to have been two—wore a size eleven shoe, the other a size eight. The ladder showed nothing, and there were no fingerprints.

Of course everybody in the state was constantly spotting suspicious characters and seeing strange little boys being smuggled here and there. This turned out to the advantage of the state police though. Clever Captain Ordell, who had been assigned to the job, merely let the city and Federal dicks and the army of volunteers undertake the task of running down all the wildest reports, while he stuck to the main problem and clues themselves.

Thus Ordell was fortunately able to intercept the second note from the kidnapers and keep it secret from the public. This note had been mailed to the caretaker of the estate, rather than to Barlash himself—that way the caretaker got it to Ordell without the battalion of reporters camped on the lawn getting at it.

This note was the bite. They wanted fifty thousand dollars in small bills tied up in a bundle and hurled from a speeding car at the intersection of three main highways at exactly twelve midnight, two days hence. If they didn't get it, the boy would be killed.

Ordell talked it over privately with Barlash and they both came to the conclusion that the kidnapers would not dare release the boy in any case. With all the publicity, it was obvious that the boy would be able to tell something that would lead to nabbing his captors. So, with Barlash's permission, Ordell decided to try something new, something really postwar in catching the culprits and bringing them in.

AS IT developed, the boy, a very Amiable cherubic child, had been kept by the two kidnapers in a small cabin up in the woods in the northern part of the state—mainly rather wild, hunting preserves. There were only two of them; they were desperate characters, with long and very ugly records, but they weren't exactly sadists.

The boy was constantly under the surveillance of one or the other; they'd treated him fairly well, considering the circumstances, but they never had any intention of returning him. They only kept him alive as a sort of insurance—you never could tell what would happen—and as long as he was alive, if something went sour and they were nabbed, well, it wouldn't be so hard on them. Having broken jail once, both men figured they could do it again—but there wasn't any known way to break out of hell if the state gallows sent them there.

It was the intention of the two men, Cutter Ward and Mack Naseby, to get the dough, wait a little while to see if they had been traced, then kill the kid and beat it.

Along about seven on the evening of the payoff day, Cutter Ward took leave of Mack and the boy, and got the black sedan out from under the leaf-swathed tarpaulin beside the cabin. He'd loaded his shoulder-holstered .32 and filled the car's tank. When he drove off down the winding road toward the main highway, he left Mack and the Barlash child sitting at the single uncovered table in the small cabin.

Mack was nervous and fidgety for a while—he was the number eleven shoe, six-feet two, two hundred pounds of muscle with an itchy trigger finger, and a shock of wiry red hair that should have waved a warning flag. Mack watched the kid awhile; the boy was restless from several days of being held indoors, and this night was one of special tension. After a time, Mack was relieved when the boy took up a jar of mucilage and started to cut pictures of airplanes out of a stack of old magazines and laboriously paste them onto big childishly scrawled "landscapes" he'd drawn in crayon. The two kidnapers had had enough sense to have laid in a stock of toys and junk to keep the kid occupied.

Mack fidgeted as the hours slowly passed. He played a few hands of solitaire, finally cheated himself to a victory, took off his coat, unstrapped his holster, hung the harness on the arm of his chair, while he carefully cleaned and checked the deadly .38 that he was never without. The boy continued pasting out pictures and cut-outs, stopping only once to walk around and pick up a clipping that had slipped to the floor near Mack's chair.

It would take about an hour and a half steady driving to get to the rendezvous, so Mack didn't expect his partner back until one-thirty. Along about eleven, he shoved his gun back in his holster, buckled the harness on, shrugged into his coat and made the boy go to bed. When the boy fell asleep in the little bunk against the wall,

Mack settled back in his chair facing the door and waited.

ALMOST exactly on time, his ears caught the laboring of an engine on the hilly road. Without changing his position Mack slipped his hand inside his coat and rested his palm on the butt of his pistol. The car came closer, drew to a stop. It was Cutter's motor all right.

A few seconds later he heard the tramp of feet, and Cutter's hand gave the agreed-upon knock.

"It's me," came Cutter's voice. "I've got the jack!"

The door opened and the slender, dark-haired figure of Mack's partner-in-crime came in, a grin of elation on his face, a big paper-wrapped bundle under his arm.

"Great!" Mack exclaimed, leaning forward, then suddenly his eyes caught a motion behind Cutter. He started to his feet, yelling.

Out of the darkness, directly at Cutter's back, leaped the figure of Captain Ordell. Before the kidnaper had a chance to turn, the heavy police pistol of the state officer slammed down on his head. Cutter Ward dropped to the floor like a poleaxed steer.

Ordell charged on into the room, but missed his step and tripped over the package of money that Cutter had picked up at the midnight crossroads and driven back with. Ordell fell headlong into the room.

Mack Naseby, on his feet, grabbed for his pistol. Closing his fist over the weapon's butt, he tugged. There was a slow-motion withdrawal and a sensation of pulling taffy. Wild with the emergency, furious at the strange delay he was encountering in drawing his weapon while he had the policeman at his mercy, Mack pulled the trigger.

There was a terrific explosion. When

Ordell scrambled to his feet, his police .45 in his hand, Mack was rolling about on the floor screaming and holding his shattered bloody hand.

Ordell had no difficulty in tying up both men and waiting until the rest of the blue-clad pack could come up the mountain.

You see, he'd borrowed a helicopter and a pilot from the Coast Guard people, and hovered over the crossroads at midnight sharp with a borrowed "black light" projector and goggles borrowed from the Army, flooding the entire scene in infra-red light, invisible to the naked eye, but making the scene as bright as day to the man in the plane.

He'd kept his eye on the bundle that had been dutifully thrown from a speeding car, had found the car that had retrieved it, and followed Cutter from the sky all the way back. When Cutter started into the cabin, the helicopter had simply swooped.

Ordell had gone down a ladder and been deposited at the open door of the cabin, behind Cutter, just as neatly as the post office drops off mail these days.

Oh, yes, you want to know what was the matter with Mack, how come he didn't kill Ordell when he had the chance? That's the funny part. You see, when Mack Naseby had been cleaning his .38 several hours before and had hung his holster over the side of the chair, young Eddie Barlash had playfully emptied his jar of mucilage into the holster.

Naturally when Mack drew his sticky gun and pulled the trigger, the totally gummed-up barrel caused the thing to explode in his hand.

So it's always been a matter of question as to whether Ordell should have taken the entire reward—or whether he should have split it with young Eddie Barlash. But don't mention that to Ordell, he could be kind of touchy on the subject.