

# "MA" BINGHAM

by  
**FRANK  
MARKS**

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## MEETS A NAZI



"I want use your phone,"  
the man said in ugly tones

*What could this Nazi want in the hills? "Ma" Bingham thought she knew—and how not to get there!*

**M**A BINGHAM lifted herself heavily from the wicker armchair and crossed over to the ringing wall phone. Above the roar of the cloudburst that pounded like an angry cataract on the roof, she raised her voice:

"Binghams' Auto Court."

From another chair by the office window, Pa Bingham peered toward his wife. "Who is it, Ma?"

She gestured him silent and spoke again into the telephone. "The storm's so bad I can hardly make out what you're saying, Sheriff. Will you talk a little louder?"

Pa's faded eyes turned to the window and to the midnight expanse of countryside beyond, fast becoming a morass. The road past the auto court had been barricaded a few hours ago by the highway crew, for at the bottom of the grade a savage torrent sluiced in

foaming fury around the concrete supports of Mill River Bridge, threatening the structure.

This, Pa thought, was probably what the sheriff's office was phoning about. Most likely they wanted to make sure no traffic got past the barricade, maybe to plunge into the flood and drown somebody. Out of control, the river was; but not as bad as it could be if it weren't for the big new dam farther up the canyon. The dam mightn't stop all the flood, but it certainly kept the rising waters from turning into a disaster.

Pa turned again toward his wife, swiftly this time, when he heard her gasp: "A German spy—?"

Outside, the rain-lashed trees hissed like tortured giants as the old lady held the receiver tightly against her ear. Then her short words punctured the wail of the storm: "Land sakes! You don't tell me!"

The wrinkles in Pa's face deepened. German spies! Only day before yesterday he'd read about the nine Nazis who had landed on the coast from a U-boat. Eight of them had already been picked up, along with explosives, maps and plans for wrecking factories, power plants and railroad centers. By their own confession, though, a ninth saboteur was still running loose. Again Pa thought of the dam that harnessed the water to make electricity for the munition-making plants down in the cities.

The old man suddenly felt a twinge of uneasiness about his son, Ted, now an FBI agent. During these war times his work was more dangerous than ever. But Pa was mighty proud to know that his own boy—his and Ma's—with his unruly light hair and blue eyes, had grown up to be a Federal officer.

PA'S mind came back to the present when his wife again spoke into the phone: "Sounds—sounds just like the description of a man who came in here tonight. He was having car trouble; wet ignition or something. Pa's been working on it." She drew a short breath. "Yes,

yes, Sheriff—but hurry! I—I think I'm a little scared."

She hung up the receiver and spoke nervously to her husband: "That was Sheriff Dodson. He says the one Nazi from the U-boat—the one they didn't catch—headed toward here. Hermann Reinhardt, is his name. I just know it's that man in Cabin 13."

"Now, Ma, don't be jumpin' at shadows."

"But I'm sure about it. He's got a scar near his left eye just like the sheriff says."

"Say, I did notice that. What's Dodson want us to do?"

"To hold him somehow until he gets here from Cardiff."

"Huh, that'll take him about three hours." The butt of an old army pistol showed above Pa's hip pocket when he reached back under his coat. "I'm going out and scout around."

"No, Pa. Don't you dare! He—he might kill you!"

"I'll just peek in the cabin window." Pa started from the office, but before he reached the door it swung open and a heavy-set man was at the threshold. The intruder's drenched hat didn't hide the livid scar above his eye. His glance swept the interior, then settled on the elderly couple. "The entire telephone conversation I heard. I am leaving." There was a German accent to his arrogant tone.

Pa thought of the sheriff's instructions. "But your distributor's still wet." He motioned to the part drying by the pot-bellied stove. "I will manage without it."

"How can you?"

The alien didn't answer the question. He went to the case on the counter and helped himself to cigarettes. As smoke sifted from his nostrils he crossed to the wall where a glass-covered forestry map hung.

Ma stood motionless, close to her husband. Her flesh seemed to be shaking like

the aspens when the cold wind blows across the meadow. She glanced toward Pa’s back pocket, and felt her blood chill. If he tried to use his pistol the Nazi would kill him in a second. Maybe they shouldn’t try to hold him for the sheriff. She spoke in an undertone: “Can’t you hurry and fix his car?”

Pa didn’t answer, but admonished her with his eyes; to make her understand that he was aiming to hinder the Nazi from leaving.

REINHARDT was tracing over the wall map with a pencil, his back toward the old folks. For a moment Pa’s eyes rested steadily on the saboteur; then his weathered features tightened as his hand moved slowly toward his rear pocket. This was his chance. He’d hold the Nazi at gun point; threaten to shoot if he moved; maybe Ma could tie him up.

As Ma saw her husband draw the weapon, his finger on the trigger as he started to raise it, her parted lips twitched in fear. Her staring eyes followed the rise of the pistol in Pa’s hand.

But old Bingham hadn’t realized that the glass cover of the map afforded sufficient reflection for Reinhardt to see the action behind him, and before the camp proprietor could level his gun the fugitive whirled, a Luger automatic in his grasp. A shot cracked above the storm.

Pa groaned when the bullet tore through his fingers. His pistol clattered to the floor. Blood trickled down over his wrist when he held it up with his other hand. He sagged as if going to his knees, then regained himself and tried to reach his fallen weapon.

The German plunged forward, picked up the pistol and pushed it into his pocket. His thick fingers dug into the old man’s neck as he raised the butt of his automatic.

Ma screamed:

“D-don’t!”

With a sickening thud the alien’s gun came down on Pa’s head. Bingham’s eyes

closed and he crumpled limply. The old lady stared as if she thought such a thing couldn’t happen; then, sobbing, she hurried to her husband and wrapped her apron around his wounded hand. Reinhardt pulled her backward. She looked up helplessly. “Please—please don’t kill him.”

The Nazi picked up Bingham, carried him to the adjoining room and dropped him on the bed. He bound his wrists and ankles. Then he poked his Luger in Ma’s back and said: “You and I will now be leaving.”

“You—you mean you’re going to make me go with you?”

“Precisely.”

“No, no, please don’t take me from my husband.”

“From that little bump he will soon recover!”

“But—but your car—the distributor—”

“I am using yours.”

“Our old Buick?”

Reinhardt nodded. “And you are going to drive it. I shall need you to answer questions in case we are stopped.”

“I—I can’t do that. Please, you go. I’ll tell the sheriff anything you want me to if you won’t make me leave Pa.”

“This arguing!” Reinhardt exploded. “Cease it!”

HE PULLED out the phone wires and smashed the transmitter. Forcing her to the door, out into the stormy night and on to the garage, he ordered her into the driver’s seat of her battered sedan. From his own disabled car he took two heavy cases and put them in the Buick. Then taking his place in the rear, he thrust his gun between the backs of the front seat. “Now go!”

Ma started the car, bounced through the puddles to the highway and turned north away from the river. Her captor reached over and gave the wheel a yank. “Do you think I

am fool enough to go toward Cardiff, and the police?"

"But we can't go the other way; the bridge—!"

"Turn toward the river!"

Ma swung the car around, veered past the road barricade and started down the grade. The wagging windshield wiper struggled with the sheets of water that slapped against the glass. Near the bottom of the hill the headlights barely picked out the bridge outlines; the abutments cutting the milky water like the prows of ships.

Ma Bingham's shaking foot pressed down the brake pedal. "You—you can't even see the road over the bridge."

"Never mind the bridge. A side road skirting the river shows on your office map. Are you familiar with it?"

"Y-yes, but that road goes up to the dam."

"Exactly."

"And—you want me—!"

"Slow down; this must be the road right ahead."

Ma brought the car to a standstill, and looked far off into the darkness toward the mountains; the watershed that filled the big lake behind the new dam. Now she knew why the Nazi was going up there with the two heavy cases. He was going to blow up the great dam so there would be no more electric power for the factories making war materials. Such were the plans of the saboteurs from the U-boat.

"Drive up this road!"

Ma felt lifeless, unable to move as the savage storm droned on the car top. Up the canyon the blackness resembled an enveloping shroud that threatened to suffocate all who entered. Like a trapped animal, she reluctantly turned onto the dirt road.

IT SEEMED that her heart beats were trying to keep up with the motor as the car labored

up the muddy grade. If only she knew of some way to save the dam and hand this spy over to the police. She wished she didn't feel so scared, then maybe she could think of something to do that would aid her country; she'd be remembered then, the same as her ancestors who had fought and died in the Revolution.

Her mind turned to her son. She wondered where he was, and if he'd had anything to do with catching the other eight Nazis from the U-boat. She never knew where Ted was, or what he was doing. His work was all so secret.

Reinhardt broke in: "How much farther to the dam?"

"I—I think about five miles."

She tried to imagine what would happen after she got to the dam with the German. He could set his explosives and then go on foot over the mountain to some place where they wouldn't find him. Her own fate wasn't so sure, though; or maybe it was. She'd seen pictures of what the Nazis had done. They were ruthless. This might be her last ride.

Her arms ached from holding the old sedan to the winding road. It was hard to see ahead very far, too. The streaks of rain in the headlight's rays were like whip lashes hissing angrily. The weighted foliage slapped against the windshield as if it were a warning hand of disaster.

And then a sudden idea made Ma Bingham straighten. About two miles before she would get to the dam there was a back road which connected with the one she was on. This detour curved back through the woods to the main highway north of the auto court, and on the way to Cardiff where the sheriff had phoned from. If she could turn on to this cross road without her unwelcome passenger getting suspicious, she might reach the main highway ahead of the sheriff, before he passed the point where she would come out

of the woods. Then she could deliver the fugitive to the officers.

It was an awful chance for her to take, for the Nazi most likely would shoot her if he found she had tricked him. Ma’s mouth set in a hard line of determination as she went on toward the cross road, not far ahead now. She must take the risk and not go on up the canyon.

As her headlights pointed upward from a road dip, the light shafts fell on a rock formation—a landmark she knew well — “Indian Head.” It was where the detour joined the road to the dam. She glanced back at her passenger. He seemed unconcerned, probably feeling safe enough in the isolated area . . .

MA SWUNG suddenly into the cross road.

Reinhardt leaned forward. “Are you sure that this is the right way?”

“Of—of course; I was brought up in this country.”

The saboteur scanned the woods and then settled back with a grunt. Ma felt relieved, for the time at least. She was putting more territory between the dam and the man who meant to wreck it. But she was still worried, for the distance to the main highway was more than to the dam and there was yet a chance that he might suspect something. She tried to make more speed.

She figured up the time spent since they had left the auto court; how much more it would take before she would come to the state highway. She thought of the distance to Cardiff, and about where the sheriff should be when she got out of the woodland. If only she would reach the main road before the posse passed to the south.

Reinhardt stirred uneasily. “Should not the dam be in sight?”

“I—I’m going as fast as I can.”

She gave thanks for the country being dense with undergrowth, and for the winding road. You couldn’t see anything of the

highway until you got right on it. The last half mile seemed to have no end, and she was shaking worse than ever now, for any minute a bullet might end everything.

The sedan went under a canopy of foliage that seemed to part suddenly to show the state road. Ma drove the Buick onto the concrete and started toward Cardiff.

“This is not the road to the dam!”

She said nothing and kept on going. Reinhardt clamped his hands on her shoulders. “Stop!”

The car shuddered to a standstill, but still Ma made no reply. She felt the menacing Luger at her back.

“This is your last second . . .!”

SHE closed her eyes and waited for the bullet. In that moment it seemed that she lived her whole life over; every event from her childhood raced by like a moving picture where scenes change quickly to show passing years.

Ma lifted her lashes when the hum of distant tires reached her ears. She looked up the road. An approaching car was rounding the curve, its headlights turning to shine directly on the old Buick. The Nazi exploded something in German, then ordered: “Back into the woods!” The machine was coming at high speed and the fugitive seemed to realize that it was too late. “Drive toward that car!” he changed his command.

He crouched on the floor, his automatic punching into her. “If questions they ask about me say that your husband has me bound at the auto court.”

“Yes—yes, I will.”

“Another thing; they may want to know where you are going. What will you say?”

“I—I’ll tell them I just got word from the hospital; that my son was hurt at the factory.”

“That will do, and no more tricks;

understand?"

"I understand."

The car was close now, its brakes grinding. It came to a stop directly in the path of the Buick. It was the big black and white state patrol; the automobile Ma had hoped to intercept. Two men got out and came toward her. One was elderly, dark-haired. The other was younger, wore no hat, and the wind ruffled his light hair. Ma said, "Howdy, Sheriff Dodson," and looked steadily into the blue eyes of the young man.

He stared oddly for a moment. "Hello, Mrs. Bingham." It was a few seconds before he asked, "What became of the Nazi spy at your auto court?"

"He—he's tied up; Pa got the best of him."

"Good work; but where are you going?"

"I—I got a call from the hospital. Ted was hurt at the factory; that's my son," she added by way of explanation.

"Oh; I see. I'm sorry to hear it."

MA PRESSED the starter and the sedan started to creep forward, past the two men from the patrol car. Then with unexpected suddenness the rear door of her Buick was jerked open. There was a snarl in German, the Luger barked and a bullet tore through the roof behind her.

Bringing her car to a quick stop, Ma jumped to the highway. She saw the young man trying to crush the Nazi to the floor. The spy was striving to twist his gun hand free from his attacker's clamping fingers. With desperate strength the German was slowly raising his Luger, bringing the officer's arm up with it. Ma gasped when she saw the pistol

almost on a level with the hatless man's head.

At that critical instant the door on the other side of the Bingham sedan was pulled open by the older man. He struck the Nazi's arm. The bullet from the Luger ploughed into the floor. The newcomer lifted his revolver and brought the stock down on the fugitive's head, a glancing blow. He raised it again. The alien dropped his weapon and put up his hands. "I surrender!"

It was only a matter of seconds before steel clicked around the saboteur's wrists. He was hauled to the roadway. The tight lines of his face showed the hatred he nursed for the Americans who had brought about his downfall. He brought his heels together in military style and extended his arm perfunctorily. "Heil Hitler!" he shouted. After a moment's attention he lowered his hand and said, "I am curious to know how you suspected that I was in the car."

The elder man answered, "Ma gave us the tip."

"How?"

"When she spoke to this young man she called him, Sheriff Dodson. I'm Sheriff Dodson, and Ma has known me for years. Then when she said that Ted was in the hospital we guessed what was up. For this man is Ted—Ted Bingham of the F.B.I.—and Ma's own son."

TT WAS later at the auto court when Pa Bingham had been cared for that Ted put his arm around his mother's shoulders. "Ma, you should have a medal for bravery."

She shook her head. "I wasn't brave, Ted. Why, I was just plain scared."

"That's what makes a hero, Ma; *being just plain scared.*"