

# HICK'S TRICKS

*A City Sleuth and a Country Town Marshal Team  
Up in Order to Trim a Snatcher!*

By G. R. TAGGART

*Author of "Jinx," "Two Pair of Eyes," etc.*



*The panting figure plunged on*

**W**ELL, it's live and learn in this old mud puddle. But if you'd ever told me that I was going to take lessons in crime detecting from a hick town marshal and like it, I'd have concluded your head needed examining. But that's exactly what happened. What's more, I had a mob of city dicks and G-men for company.

Yeah, you guessed it, another snatch. I get around a little and have a fair rep for busting tough cases. So I guess that was why the snatched kid's dad, a top notcher in the oil game, name of Judson Green, rang me long distance at Tulsa and offered me big dough to help on the case. I'd read plenty on the kidnaping, of course, figured it as a big time mob's snatch and exclusively up the G-man's alley, but

Green's do-re-mi was the kind of music no private dick can ignore.

When I arrived at Green's large, Spanish-style country place in the hills, after a two hundred mile drive that hot June noon, I found it swarming with government men, city dicks, state troopers and news hounds. The case was three days old then and no word had as yet been received from the kidnapers.

Green, a wiry, nervous little man, kept pacing up and down on the Persian rug in his big living room, telling me I must "do something quick." He was bald-headed, with protruding black eyes, and reminded me strongly of one of those little *Chihuahua* pocket dogs.

I was glad to get away from him for brief quizzes of the servants—when I could get them away from the other dicks. But the servants were no help either, so I gave the scene of the snatch the once over. I became more than ever convinced that the thing was some smooth gang's affair.

Then, as I was driving out the Green driveway again, I first saw this Herman Schuch. He was standing by the exit gate on the narrow asphalt side road, called Scenic Loop Drive, which ran by the Green place. As I came by in the Buick, he hailed me and bummed a ride into town.

Schuch was a little guy, with a fat belly but a wrinkled, hatchet face that made him look like an oversize armadillo. He wore a crumpled brown suit, a wide black sombrero, fancy black boots, and an important air. You couldn't miss the big star, prominent on his coat front, nor the Colt bulging on his right hip. He kinda tickled my funny bone and was a welcome contrast to the bunch of snooty dicks in the house.

"You're new on the case, aincha?" he queried as he got in nimbly beside me, cocked his comical narrow head on the side, and squinted at me with a pair of small, sharp brown eyes.

"Yeah," I admitted, amused at the little bird's evident desire to impress me with his alertness. "Just got in about an hour ago. And you're the town marshal, I see."

"Yup," he assented importantly. "Herman Schuch is the name. Marshal and only deputy sheriff in Brazos. Powerful crowded in Green's, I rec'n. But you'll find it even worse in town."

I introduced myself and asked him if he could help me find accommodations in the town.

"Wal," he said quickly, "I might fix you up at my place fer a few days. No luxuries but powerful comfortable and good grub. And besides, we might work together better

on this kidnapin' then."

ALMOST busted out laughing at this, but I appreciated Schuch's offer, considering the crowded condition at Green's and in the town. I took him up on his proposition, figuring he saw a chance to sting me for some fancy board money and at the same time pick up some points on real detecting.

"Wal, how do *you* reconstruct the case?" he shot at me suddenly, without warning.

"It looks to me like an outside job," I replied, managing to keep a straight face. "Plenty smooth, timed right, and shows they had cased the place thoroughly. According to the nurse, they snatched the kid some time between midnight and two, cutting the screen in that side window and taking her out that way to their getaway car out front. Heluva watch dog they got in the old pit in the back. But I hear he's pretty deaf."

"The other detectives believe it's an outside job, too," Schuch surprised me by saying dubiously. "They think them big footprints from the side window to the driveway proves the little gal was carried to a waitin' car. But I'm still thinkin' it's a local job with inside help."

I stared at the guy. Either plain dumb, I thought, or trying to get himself some notice by disagreeing with the big shot dicks.

"Yessir," he went on. "Them strange footprints are just a foxy blind, put there a-purpose to throw us off."

"Mebbe," I said, not thinking his opinion worth an argument.

We'd come to the edge of the little town by now and Schuch pointed out his small, stone bungalow on the right. I parked the Buick in the gravel driveway beside the house.

"My old woman'll have some tasty grub on." Schuch remarked, and led the way around the house through the back yard. And then, suddenly, something whizzed by

my ear, popped me lightly on the back of the neck. I swore suddenly and clapped my hand to the spot. I'd felt a damn unpleasant sensation there and brought my hand away, holding a dead black wasp. I glared around and saw several of the same little black devils sailing in circles around a mud nest built under the eaves of a nearby shed.

"Sat down on you, eh?" Schuch inquired solicitously. "Hum, too bad, but we can fix it up inside okay. That musta been their scout. He ain't usta such tall fellas as you around here."

We went into the kitchen where Schuch's plump, pleasant-looking wife put something on the swelling caused by the sting that seemed to do it some good.

"Judas H. Priest!" I exclaimed. "Why do you keep assassins like that around?"

Schuch grinned a little sheepishly. "Won't do no good to burn 'em out. Come right back again. And they never bothered *us*. But you wanta be careful walkin' in the woods around here. Lots of hornets and ground wasps are settin' up housekeepin' now."

**B**Y THE end of that afternoon I was just about where I'd started on the case. There wasn't a thing to go on except the half dozen large footprints between the first floor side window of the room where the five-year-old girl had slept and the semicircular gravel driveway in front. The Green servants were all old, trusted employees. Just a butler, cook, nurse and chauffeur. All—except the middle-aged nurse, who'd been with them only four years—had spent a decade or more in the Green's employ.

Green, his wife and young daughter usually spent about six weeks at his place by the lake in the early summer. The snatchers evidently knew this. I tried to exchange a few ideas with some of the other dicks around the place, but none seemed

any too chummy. Green had offered a ten thousand dollar reward for the return of his daughter.

After Schuch's wife had cleared away the supper dishes that evening I glanced over at Schuch who, with his spectacles perched on the end of his beak nose, was avidly reading the weekly *Brazos Beacon*.

"Well, Marshal," I remarked a little facetiously, "still believe in that theory of yours?"

Schuch peered at me gravely over his specs. "Ain't changed it nary a jot, Mr. McCraw. Got a coupla likely suspects, too, but can't get to watch 'em close enough. 'Fraid they might get suspicious and kill the child so as to do away with the evidence."

I changed my laugh into a cough as Schuch drawled on. "Now, if the kidnapers was outsiders, you'll agree with me that they musta turned off Route Thirty-seven down the Scenic Loop Drive to Green's, and then drove back the same way with the kid when they left."

That seemed to be the first reasonable thing I'd heard from him yet.

"Sure," I agreed. "The snatchers wouldn't keep on the Scenic Loop Drive past Green's after they got the kid. They'd have to travel that dirt half mile stretch beginning just past his place that way. They'd be afraid of leaving tire tracks in the mud after the heavy rains last week. Might even get stuck in there."

Schuch took a couple of quick puffs on his pipe before continuing with evident satisfaction.

"Then you'll also agree with me that outsiders, not familiar with parts around here, wouldn't hardly try to carry the child through the thick brush back of the Green house and over the hill there. Only a man who knew the woods there would try that. It's a mile easy over the hill to the highway. And that would give the dog a better chance to hear 'em and *see* 'em, too."

I surprised myself by beginning to feel a little more respect for the old boy.

"Sure thing, Marshal. So, you see, it's just gotta be a professional job. They grabbed the kid and rolled out the Scenic Loop Drive to Route Thirty-seven and then high-balled it for their hideout."

Schuch went on puffing pensively for a minute or two after that.

"I been lookin' fer clues in them woods back of Green's fer three days now without findin' nawthin'," he finally observed ruefully. "But, just the same, it's bound to be someone who knew them woods well who kidnaped the child. And he had inside help very likely."

I gave up after that. Feeling pretty tired, I hit the hay early, but it seemed like I'd hardly dropped off when I felt something tugging at my elbow. It was Schuch. I looked at the illuminated dial of my wristwatch. Ten to one.

"What in hell—" I began irritably.

"Sorry to disturb you, Mr. McCraw," Schuch interrupted apologetically, "but it's important. Need your car to prove my point and I'd like fer you to come with me and do the drivin'."

I didn't feel much like it but I was kinda curious at that and thought I'd humor him. I jumped into my clothes and within the next five minutes we were cruising along the highway in the Buick. Following Schuch's directions I was headed out toward Green's. It was cooler now and the big full moon lit up the surrounding landscape almost like day. Mighty pretty, too, but I didn't feel poetical then.

"Powerful smooth machine you got here, Mr. McCraw," Schuch remarked when we'd reached the narrow, little used Scenic Loop Drive. "Can't hardly hear her a-tall. Now, when we turn here, will you turn off your lights and cruise along as quiet as you can? You see, I'm makin' out like this is the kidnapers' car."

"So what?" I growled, but followed directions just as Schuch had ordered.

I could see the winding road easy without lights and wanted to see this thing through. Well, we'd gone only a few hundred yards and were approaching a small frame bungalow on the right when Schuch asked me to turn off the ignition and coast by. I did, but when about a hundred feet away a sudden frantic yapping jerked me upright in my seat. The yapping was almost immediately drowned out by a blood-thirsty growl and a deep-throated barking.

"That's Mrs. Ewing's fox terrier and police dog," Schuch explained, as a light appeared in a rear window. "She's a retired nurse. Lives here alone with an adopted baby and is a very light sleeper. Okay. Switch her on again and let's hit up the next house."

About another half mile and we were approaching the "next house." It was a two-story stone affair, almost hid in a cluster of trees and only a quarter of a mile from the Green mansion. Schuch had me turn off the engine here, too, and glide by. But we didn't make it. This time a clattering noise like a keg of nails falling downstairs shattered the stillness. Then we got a lotta wing flapping. "Them's Joe Dutter's guinea hens," Schuch enlightened me. "Scariest fowl alive. Damned if I'd want 'em in my front yard! What say we head back now? Guess you see the point Mr. McCraw."

You're damned right, I did! That racket would have waked the dead. And a field mouse couldn't have sneaked by those two houses unannounced. Yeah, Schuch told me, he'd asked the people living in the houses if they'd been awakened between midnight and two on the night of the kidnaping. They hadn't.

**A**T NINE the next morning the Greens got the ransom letter. It was

postmarked from Dallas and dated the preceding day. The note was written on a bit of common yellow wrapping paper and was short and to the point:

Mr. Green: We mean business! Follow carefully the directions in this note or by God your kid will die and you'll never even find the body! Obey directions in the note and you'll get your girl back. Go alone Thursday night at eleven-forty-five to the mouth of Rattlesnake Cave on Old Baldy Ridge. Bring twenty-five thousand, old tens and twenties, in a shoe box. Put the money down at the mouth of the cave and walk back slow the same way. Keep the cops in your house! If you bring them and we are trapped your kid will be killed by our pals to destroy evidence! It's up to you!

Thursday night was tonight! Green had about fourteen hours to make up his mind. Of course I knew he'd pay to get his girl back, but I didn't like that note. That part about doing away with the tot to destroy evidence had me plenty worried. It was ten to one they'd already done away with the kid and gotten rid of the body!

I went to Schuch, told him about the note and asked him where "Old Baldy" was.

"Only four miles from here," he replied. "And they couldn't have picked a better spot—for them! A man on that ridge has a mighty clear view down both sides of the mountain. In the moonlight he could see if Mr. Green come up alone, all right. And if he knew the mountain, he'd have plenty of time and ways to get away unsuspected."

"Damn!" was all I could say.

"It's worse than that, because if the skunk had inside help, like I claim he did, he'd *hafta* kill the girl as soon as he gets his hooks on the money. He may not have killed her yet. So we can't let him get that money!"

I knew he was right there, and we began chewing over possible ways of trapping the kidnaper, without arriving at anything that sounded feasible. Green had notified his bank at Dallas, which in turn had notified

the local bank and made the twenty-five thousand available for him there, just about cleaning the smaller bank out.

It was nearly supper time again and only a few hours before the deadline for delivery of the ransom when Schuch told me he had a plan that ought to work. I listened to it and wondered, then finally agreed to take him out to Mr. Green to see what he thought of it.

Well, as soon as Green knew what it was, he was for it. He said he'd been raised in the country and he felt sure it would work. He was pretty well convinced by now, anyway, that the payment of the ransom would mean his little girl's death.

I started out early with Schuch to circle Old Baldy and we arrived at Schuch's prearranged hideout, at the foot of the big hill on the opposite side from Green's house, about eleven-thirty. Everything was lighted up silvery clear by the big moon's radiance although in the deep shade of the tall trees it was black as doom. The air was cool and fragrant and the gurgle of the green water pouring lazily over the old dam had a mighty soothing sound. Nature at her best, I thought.

**B**UT we didn't have long to enjoy that idyllic peace. I'd just glanced at my wrist-watch, which showed eleven forty-six, when we heard the crashing, running footsteps coming through the brush down the mountain side. A few more breathless seconds and we got a glimpse, in a small clearing, of a man's figure tearing pell mell down the slope and thrashing his arms wildly about his head and cursing violently.

"That's the skunk!" Schuch whispered harshly in my ear. "Hold this flashlight on him when he comes out of the water on this side!"

I grabbed the flashlight in my left hand and held my .38 automatic ready in my right as the man got closer and closer to the dam.

And finally a cursing, panting figure did reach the other side of the water and immediately plunged in. It seemed as if he never would come up again, but he did, at long last, about in the middle of the dam, gulped in air, and plunged under again. The next time he appeared he was only twenty feet away from us and he immediately began to strike out furiously for the bank where we stood.

As he came out of the water I nailed him with the flashlight's blinding beam. He was a big, heavy-set man with a massive, swarthy face. But his face looked kinda lopsided now. His eyes were half closed and he was groaning and grabbing at his mug, swaying dizzily there at the edge of the water. On the other side of the dam, about where he had dived in, the flashlight's powerful ray revealed a swarm of insects circling angrily just over the surface of the water.

Then I heard the click-cluck of the hammer of Schuch's rifle.

"Now, you low-down blank of a blankety-blank skunk!" he sang out with a surprising ferocity and hatred, "Say your prayers! You murdered that little gal and I'm gonna blast you to hell where you stand! No use the town payin' trial money fer your kind!"

The big man let out a queer whining sound that seemed scarcely human. He was the most hideous and yet the most piteous sight I can remember seeing.

"D-don't shoot, Herman!" he croaked. "She-she's alive! Back there in the cave. . . . God! Get me to a doctor!"

Yeah, you guessed it. That fool Schuch had managed somehow to get a *ground wasps'* nest in the shoe box! And he'd told Green to shake the box every now and then

while walking up the hill, being sure to keep the lid on while doing it, though. Naturally, by the time those kidnaped wasps arrived at the cave they were rarin' to go. And it was just too bad for Lundquist—that was the snatcher's name—that he got his mug in their way when he peeped in the box to see if the dough was there.

It turned out that a mildewed love affair existed between the kid's nurse and Lundquist, a widower and owner of a small farm near the Green estate. He kept pestering her until at last she agreed to help in the kidnaping scheme, and she'd simply handed the tot to Lundquist, who had carried her over the hill back of the Green place and hid her in the cave. Of course he'd driven to Dallas himself and mailed the ransom note. And he'd made the footprints under the window, afterwards burning the shoes. They would have had to kill the child and destroy the body to avoid discovery, they admitted.

I felt kinda cheap later when Schuch insisted I take half of the ten grand reward. He said I'd earned it by getting him the necessary interview with Green. And, oh boy did he enjoy the publicity he got!

"Well, seems like you really stung that guy Lundquist after he'd tried to put the bee on Green," I congratulated Schuch, laughingly, as I was getting into the Buick for the return trip to Tulsa.

His parchment face wrinkled up like a pebble-disturbed pool. "Yup. And that proves that self preservation is the fust law with man or wasp. It was just a hick trick I played, I rec'n, but it worked."

"Yeah, I gotta hand it to you," I said, meshing gears. "You can run rings around me in the country—I've got to admit it—but if you ever get down to the city. . . ."