



"Just sit right where you are!" said the masked intruder

# ONE SHOT TRICK

By BENTON BRADEN

*When a masked stranger threatens to torture his wife,  
farmer Tim Turner rapidly puts his wits to work!*

SHERIFF Jim Gaynor was walking down the main street of Amesville with his distant cousin, Ed Gregg, when he spotted Tim Turner. Tim Turner was a farmer. He was about fifty, slight in figure but lean and hardy. Most people in Amesville thought Tim was somewhat of an eccentric.

"There's Tim Turner, Gregg," the sheriff said in an undertone. "Been wanting to have a little talk with him. Guess I'll tie into him now."

The sheriff increased his pace and caught up with Turner before he had taken more than twenty steps from the hardware store from which he had emerged. Ed Gregg sauntered along behind, stopped about ten feet short of the pair.

"Hello, Tim," the sheriff greeted. The little farmer turned and grinned. "Haven't seen you for quite a spell. Don't come to town very often any more, do you?"

"I come about the same as usual but I don't stay any longer than I have to," Turner

answered. "Can't get any help on the farm and it keeps me goin' about sixteen hours a day."

"Guess you're doing pretty well now, Tim."

"Can't complain," Tim Turner said cheerfully. "Prices are good and I'm layin' by a little for a rainy day."

"I heard as much," the sheriff said. Then a note of severity crept into his voice. "I've heard you've done pretty well in the past three or four years. Heard you've saved several thousand dollars. That's why I'm gettin' just a little worried about you, Tim. A lot of people know you've got that money. They know too that you don't put your money in the bank."

"A lot of people would be better off if they attended to their own business and left mine alone," Turner returned. He chuckled as though he were amused.

"You're right about that, Tim. But the answer to the problem is, that a lot of people make it a point to take a hand in other people's business. A lot of people know that you've made a little money lately. They know that you don't do business with a bank. They know that you have your money in cash right out there on that farm of yours. Now I'm beginnin' to get a little worried, Tim."

"Shucks, Sheriff," Tim Turner grinned. "There's nothin' to worry about at all."

"You're just like a lot of folks, Tim," the sheriff said soberly. "There's never anything to worry about—until something happens. Then it's too late to do anything about it. Even around a little town like Amesville there are a few crooks who would take a chance for a few thousand dollars. I'll speak plain, Tim. Somebody is going to come out to that farm of yours sooner or later and take that money away from you."

"They'd never find it, Sheriff," Turner said confidently.

"They wouldn't even try to find it, Tim.

They wouldn't waste a minute lookin' for it. They'd just work on you. They'd beat you up, torture you, make you tell where you've got that money hidden."

"They wouldn't get anywhere at that."

"They might if they worked on your wife, Tim. You couldn't stand to see her tortured, could you?"

Tim Turner winced at that idea as the grin faded from his face.

"You're actin' mighty foolish, Tim." The sheriff followed up quickly. "Takin' unnecessary chances. Why don't you put that money of yours in the bank, Tim? Why are you so set against banks?"

"Got a good reason, Sheriff," Turner said, of his blue eyes hard. "When Martha and I were first married we worked like slaves for several years. We just had sixty acres and we had borrowed quite a bit. We finally got eight hundred dollars in the bank. Then the bank in went broke. It just ruined us. Took us four years to get our heads above water again. If you'd gone through what we went through you wouldn't have much love for a bank, either."

"I can understand how you feel about it, Tim," the sheriff nodded. "But things are a lot different now. That must have happened twenty years ago. Banks are run differently now. They're all closely supervised by the government. Bank deposits are insured up to five thousand dollars. You put that money of yours in the bank, Tim. Do it before something happens."

"I'll think it over, Sheriff." Tim Turner's eyes twinkled again. "But I don't think I've got much to worry about. I think I can take care of any situation that comes up."

"There's the danger of losing your money in other ways, too," the sheriff reminded him. "Your house or barn might catch on fire and—"

"Haven't got my money in the house or barn," Tim interrupted. "Haven't got it buried either. Anybody that tried to find my

money would have a hard time locating it. I figure it's safe enough where I got it."

"It ain't safe if a couple of tough guys walk in on you and work on you," Sheriff Gaynor said sharply. "I guess if somebody started torturing Martha you'd produce that money for them quick enough. Well, it's your funeral, Tim. But I thought it was my duty to warn you what might happen."

WITH a non-committal shrug, the sheriff turned away rather abruptly. He rejoined Ed Gregg and they walked back up the street together. "Never saw such a hardheaded man as Tim Turner," the sheriff muttered. "You'd think a man would have more common sense than that, wouldn't you?"

"I wasn't close enough to hear what you was talkin' about," Ed Gregg replied. "But that old farmer you was talkin' to was kinda crazy, wasn't he? He was a funny lookin' old coot."

"He's smart enough. Just a little off on one subject," Gaynor said shortly.

That was the truth of it. Many people thought Tim Turner was thoroughly queer because he was hipped on the subject of banks. Some of them said he was a miser. But Turner wasn't a miser. He was a generous man in his own little country community. He was always good-natured and cheerful and everybody liked him. His hardworking wife too was a model for the wives of other farmers.

Tim Turner didn't seem to be greatly disturbed by the sheriff's words as he climbed into the seat of his light truck that was parked near the end of Main Street. He was in a hurry to get back to his farm and get back to work again. The sheriff was out of his mind before he cleared the edge of the town.

But Sheriff Jim Gaynor had been right.

Tim Turner knew it the minute the man with the black mask walked into his house. It

was in the evening, just about a week later. Turner and Martha had finished with their chores at dusk, eaten a late supper, then sat down in the living room for a few minutes relaxation before they went to bed. It was a small living room. The furniture in it, however, was almost new. In these last few years of prosperity Turner and Martha had spent some of their hard-earned money for a few home comforts.

They never locked any of the doors until just before they went to bed. It was a simple matter for the intruder to open the front door quietly and step into the room. The faces of Tim and Martha showed surprise at the intrusion. But there was no question in their eyes.

The man wore a coat over blue denim overalls. His black felt hat was pulled well down. The mask that almost wholly covered his face was evidence enough of the purpose of the visit. The mask was a large piece of cloth in which thin slits had been cut for the eyes.

Turner and Martha didn't move from their chairs. They just sat and waited. They didn't have to wait more than five seconds. The big revolver in the right hand of the intruder swung menacingly from one to the other.

"Just sit right where you are! I'm going to ask some questions and I want straight answers. I won't hurt you if you give me straight talk. But I'll work on you if you try to stall or lie. Understand that?"

The man spoke in a voice that was guttural, keyed very low in an obvious intent to conceal his true tone. Still Turner and his wife didn't say a word. They sat still and waited for him to speak again.

"It's the dough I want!" the man snapped. "The cash! Don't try to tell me you haven't got any money. I know better."

"I'm not denyin' it," Tim Turner said mildly. "I guess I've got seven or eight dollars in my wallet. I'll get it out of my

pocket if you—”

“I’m not after any seven or eight dollars! It’s seven or eight thousand that I want. I want the dough you’ve been stowing away for years. Where is it?”

“I’ve got just that little in my wallet,” Turner said evenly. “You could search the house from cellar to attic and you wouldn’t find—”

“I won’t waste any time looking for that dough, Turner!” the grinding voice cut in. “I been workin’ on this job a long time. Everybody knows you don’t do any business with banks, that you hide the money out here somewhere. I already sneaked in here and searched the house when you were out. I combed it from the roof down.

“I know the money isn’t in here. I searched your barn too and the other outbuildings. I looked all around your yard and lot and I’m pretty sure you haven’t got it buried somewhere. So don’t waste my time with any stalls. I know you’ve got a good hiding place for that dough. You’ve kept your cash hidden all these years. Where?”

“There wouldn’t be much use of havin’ a good hidin’ place if I told folks where it was, would there?” Turner asked with a hint of a sly note in his tone.

The intruder gripped his gun tightly. He took a step toward Tim Turner, then squared himself. “You’d just as well find out the score right now, Turner!” he lashed out. “I’m not going to stand here and argue with you about that cash. Or where it’s hidden. You’re going to tell me where it’s hidden. You’ll either tell me right now or I’ll tie you both up.

“I’ve got a big box of matches in my pocket. I’ll use those matches, Turner. Use them on your wife. You want to see her burned? Burned inch by inch? I’ll gag her so she can’t yell or scream when her flesh burns. How long will you stand that, Turner?”

Turner’s face twitched a little. “I guess I couldn’t stand that at all,” he admitted.

“Of course, you couldn’t. You love your wife too much to see her hurt. So come through and save yourself the grief. Where’s the hiding place?”

“In a stump,” Tim Turner sighed. “I cut my own wood that we burn—in the timber east of the house. Lot of stumps there. So I just cut a big piece of bark off the stump. Then I cut out a place large enough for the waterproof steel box I got.

“I put the box in the place I cut out. Then I put the piece of bark back in place and the stump looks just as it did before. You could look that stump over close and not spot it. Of course, stumps rot out. So I have to use a new stump every two or three years.”

Even beneath the mask the elation of the intruder was apparent. His voice showed that elation when he spoke. “You’re smart to take the easy way out, Turner. Now we’re going out there to that stump and get the cash. I’ll have to tie your wife up while we’re gone. I can’t take the risk of letting her run down the road to a neighbor’s while we’re gone. You get over and stand against the wall with your hands up, Turner, while I tie her to her chair. I brought some cord along for that very purpose.”

**T**IM TURNER held up a halting hand. “Just wait a minute, stranger,” he said quickly. “You asked me where my hiding place was and I told you. That’s where I kept my cash all these years. In a steel box in one of those stumps. But it ain’t there now.”

“Don’t try to lie to me, Turner! And don’t try to stall! I’ll either leave this farm with your cash tonight—or I’ll kill you both. If you haven’t got the cash in that stump—where is it?”

“It’s in the bank,” Turner said evenly.

“You lie! Everybody in this part of the country knows that you hate banks, that

you've never put a cent in the bank. You keep that cash right here on your place!"

"That's partially right, stranger." Turner's voice was calm. "I don't like banks because one of 'em went broke a long time ago and put me in an awful hole. So I always kept my cash on the place. But about a week ago Sheriff Gaynor stopped me on the street on Amesville and gave me a talkin'-to.

"The Sheriff told me what a chance I was takin' in keepin' cash out here. Reminded me that the banks have government insurance now for depositors. He got me to thinkin' and I got scared about it. Two days later I took my cash in and put it in the bank. Eight thousand, seven hundred and fifty dollars. That's the amount I had and that's the amount I put in the bank."

"You're lying!" The heavy figure was shaking with sudden rage. "You're stalling! You never put your dough in the bank. You hate banks. Everybody knows it. You haven't been near a bank."

"If you'd talk to Henry Weatherford, the president of the Amesville National Bank, he'd tell you different," Tim Turner said. "When I went into the bank I went to him. I told him the sheriff had thrown a scare into me and that I wanted to put my money in the bank. He took my money and gave me a receipt for it. A duplicate deposit slip I think is what he called it. I got that slip right in my wallet. I'll show it to you if you think I'm lyin'."

Tim didn't wait for a demand. He slowly moved his right hand toward his hip pocket and took out his wallet. He opened it and took out a slip of paper with his thumb and forefinger. He held it out for inspection.

The masked man took a step forward and snatched it from Tim's hand. His shoulders slumped with disappointment as he looked at that deposit slip of the Amesville National Bank. In the blank space was written "cash." In the column for figures was inserted "\$8750.00." The bottom of the slip was

initialed, "H.F.W."

"If I had a phone you could call up Mr. Weatherford and he'd tell you all about it," Turner continued. "But we've never had a phone here. I wouldn't have put our money in the bank if the sheriff hadn't jumped me about it. But after he talked to me and I thought it over I decided that, with the United States Government backin' up the banks now, it was kinda foolish for me to keep that cash here on the—"

Tim Turner didn't seem to notice that the man in front of him was shaking with rage as he spoke. The man suddenly cut Turner's words off, cut them off with a blow. His big left fist swung without warning and caught Turner cleanly on the right side of his jaw. The wallop lifted Tim off his feet for a fraction of a second. Then he dropped to the floor without a sound.

When Turner came to his wife was kneeling beside him, bathing his head and face with cold water.

"Are you hurt bad, Tim?" she asked anxiously as his eyes opened. "The robber turned and ran out right after he knocked you down. Are you all right? You want me to run down the road to Halford's and call a doctor?"

Tim Turner shook his head and sat up. "Now you ought to know me better than that, Ma," he said with a wry grin. "I never had to have a doctor when that mule kicked me in the head, did I? And I reckon a mule packs a heap more of a wallop than any man's fist. Give me a couple of minutes to get the cobwebs out of my head and I'll be as good as ever."

Turner got up, took a couple of unsteady steps, sat down in a chair. "You think we'd better call the sheriff right away?" Martha asked.

Tim shook his head. "No hurry. It'd take him a while to get out here and that feller would be miles away by the time he got here. Guess I'll wait and go into Amesville

in the morning. That feller said he searched this house before he came to rob us, Martha. You think he really did?"

"He did not!" she declared positively. "No one could have ever pawed through my things without my knowing it."

"That's just what I thought," Tim chuckled.

Sheriff Jim Gaynor was sitting at his desk in his office the next morning when Tim Turner walked in. Ed Gregg, the sheriff's cousin, had his chair tilted against the wall. They listened attentively as Turner told his story.

"You should have come right into town and reported it last night," the sheriff said critically. "What little chance we had to catch up with this man is almost gone. That man had had you spotted a long time if he had previously searched your place, trying to find your cash."

Turner smiled a little. "I was just getting around to that, Sheriff," he said. "That man lied about that. He never searched my place at all. Martha is a mighty neat housekeeper. Stacks her stuff up just so. Nobody could have even looked over a closet shelf in her house without her noticing that stuff had been moved. And I looked up in the attic. Dust on the trap door where we get into the attic from the upper hall hadn't been disturbed. Nobody's been up in that attic."

The sheriff looked a little puzzled. "But why would he lie about that?"

"Because he knew that I didn't have the cash hidden in a building. He knew I didn't have it buried. He cut me off the minute I mentioned searching the house. He wasn't going to let me stall a bit about having the money hidden in a building or buried."

"Just what are you driving at, Tim?"

"When you talked to me on the street a week ago, Sheriff, I told you that I didn't have the cash hidden in the house or barn or buried. And you are the only person I ever confided in to that extent in all these years.

Nobody else knew that. So it occurred to me that the man who tried to rob me last night must have overheard the conversation I had with you on the street."

"But there wasn't anybody else around when I talked to you, Tim," the sheriff objected.

ABSENTLY, Tim Turner rubbed his stubbled chin. "You're wrong, Sheriff," he said firmly. "I distinctly recall that there was a man standing about ten feet away from us at the edge of the sidewalk. He had his back to us. He was a heavy-set man and he—"

"That was me!" Ed Gregg blurted out the words as the front legs of his chair thumped to the floor. "I was with the sheriff. I stepped aside when he talked to you. I didn't hear a word."

Tim turned and stared at Gregg, stared at him until many seconds had ticked by. Gregg squirmed a little. "Rats!" he exploded finally. "You ain't got the crust to hint that I might have tried to rob you, have you?"

"I was just looking you over," Turner said steadily. "You're about the same build as the man who tried to rob me. And your voice has a familiar tone. At the last when the man got excited he forgot to drop to the guttural tone he used as a disguise."

"Why, you little runt! I ought to smash in your face for popping off this way," Gregg rasped.

"And the man lost his head and socked me on the jaw at the last," Tim went on imperturbably. "He hit me plenty hard. Cooled me. But I've got a tough jaw. Wouldn't be surprised that the knuckles on his left hand would show scratches or bruises."

Gregg involuntarily lifted his left hand and looked at it. Then he put his left hand down on his thigh and glared at Tim.

"But I'm not accusing anybody," Turner said. "If Mr. Gregg is innocent we can prove

it absolutely in five minutes. The robber threw down the duplicate deposit slip on the floor as he hit me. It just happened that there was a little wax on the back of that deposit slip. I'm sure you can get some good prints off it, sheriff. Here's the slip in this envelope. Now why don't you just take Gregg's fingerprints. Maybe you have them already. You can compare them and prove one way or the other."

"You little hick!" Gregg leaped to his feet and fumbled for the gun in his holster. "I'll fix you right now if it's the last thing I ever do."

The gun showed in his hand and came up. But Sheriff Gaynor had moved as Gregg had moved. The sheriff's left hand struck Gregg's arm. The gun thundered but the bullet thudded into the ceiling. The sheriff followed up with his right with a haymaker. The gun dropped from Gregg's hand as he reeled back, lost his balance, and fell to the floor. Sheriff Gaynor picked up the gun and looked down at his cousin.

"Not much doubt about what those prints will show, Gregg," he said. "You've got a bad temper. You wanted to kill him because he had the right angle on you. The only reason I let you hang around here and let you run errands for me is because you married my cousin, one of the Holbrook girls down in the south part of the county. The whole Holbrook clan demanded it. You're only my cousin by marriage.

"Not even they could tell me much about you back of the last two or three years. You never held a steady job. That's what a man gets when he lets family politics influence him too much. You always had your ears open. When you overheard me talking to Tim the other day the criminal in you came to the top. It looked like an easy job for you to grab Tim's money. It's lucky for you, Tim, that you took my advice and put your

cash in the bank. I don't doubt that Gregg would have even been brutal enough to torture Martha until you told where the money was."

That easy grin returned to Tim Turner's face. "I'm taking your advice now, Sheriff," he said. "Martha is over at the bank right now, putting all our cash in the bank. I had a pretty good trick. It worked once but now that the story will get around it will never work twice."

"You mean," the sheriff gasped, "that you tricked Gregg? That you had all that cash on your place when he was there?"

"Sure, I did. When I first started keeping cash at home I didn't worry about it. But one day Martha and I counted up and found we had saved exactly one thousand dollars. I knew someone might try to take the money away from us because it became pretty well known that I didn't do business with any bank.

"So I decided then that if anybody ever did walk in on us and demand that money I'd have a deposit slip ready to show that I had lately put the money in the bank. I've made out a new slip every month for years now. Made a new one out a couple of days after I talked to you on the street. I've always rubbed a little wax on the back of 'em ever since I read an article on fingerprints in a magazine. Figured it might come in handy some time."

"You had the money hidden in a box out in one of those stumps all the time?" the sheriff blinked.

"Sure. I figured it was safe enough there when I could produce a deposit slip to show that it was in the bank. I lost eight hundred dollars in a bank failure once, Sheriff. Guess the bank can't object to me pinching a few deposit slips from the counter once in a while when I went in to endorse or cash other folks' checks."