

When the men who killed his friend returned for the loot, old Nap Orr prepared a . . .

Welcome for Killers

By John P. Rees



OLD NAP ORR believed that a man should stand on his own two feet. That's why, when torrential spring rains collapsed his storm cellar, he did not wish the neighbors to come, but set to work immediately to repair it. And when he saw that the police weren't going to catch the Burgham bank robbers and murderers of the cashier, George Ames, he decided to do something about it himself. He had been mighty fond of George Ames.

Tonight he sat alone in his farm kitchen reading the weekly. His mongrel dog, Spot, tied to a table leg, growled, warning him that some one was outside. Just as old Nap got up from his chair, two men, one dark and pudgy, the other sallow and slender, stalked in the open door. Each had an automatic pistol in his right hand. The pudgy one covered Nap.

"Case the joint, Icy," he said.

"Oke, Rollo," Icy said from the side of his mouth a moment later, returning the flashlight to his topcoat pocket.

Rollo shoved the cold muzzle of his pistol against Nap's temple. "All right, grandpa," he sneered, "where's that suitcase we left in your haystack down along the road? It ain't been turned in and the hay's gone, so we know you got it. Come clean—damned quick—or else!"

The hand that held the gun was cool, steady. But Nap knew he was safe until they had that suitcase containing the loot,

guns, masks and suits used in the Burgham job. Afterward—well, he had to risk that.

He grinned up at them. "Sure I got it. Found it when I sold the hay, and moved it because the buyer was goin' to move the hay. Soon as I saw what was in it I knew its owner would come for it sometime, an' I'd better have it for him. You fellers don't think—"

"We ain't thinkin' nothin', grandpa," Icy broke in. "We want that suitcase an' everything that was in it when we left it, see."

"Sure I'll get it, fellers. Just want to be sure I'm givin' it to the right owners, that's all."

Rollo lighted a cigarette. "Gonna be tough about it, huh? Well, maybe this will change your mind."



Nap winced as the burning end of the cigarette touched his cheek.

"Next time I'll stick it in your eye, grandpa. Now where's that suitcase? No more stallin' or you get the works."

One more murder wouldn't mean a thing to these killers. They'd killed George, and you couldn't do anything more to them for two murders than for one. Professionals—the way they'd done things. Entering the bank exactly at closing time, masking as soon as inside so

that no one but George, who had come up to lock the front door, had seen their faces; wearing conspicuous blue and white pencil-stripe suits and light gray hats.

Then, enroute away from the robbery, they'd changed clothes and hats, hid the suitcase with the loot, guns, masks, pencil-stripe suits and light gray hats in Nap's alfalfa stock along the road, figuring when the chase had died down to return some night and get it. Everything was well-planned and expert.

Being city fellows, they wouldn't know farmers get rid of their old hay before grass comes. Pretty slick, too, their story when the Highway Patrol caught them—readily admitting the car was the '37 Ford used by the robbers, but swearing that the robbers, having a flat tire, had forced them to give up their car, a '36 Ford, and when picked up were on their way to the nearest town to notify the law.

THE flat tire and the fact that neither was wearing a blue and white pencil-stripe suit seemed to substantiate their story. Their alibi—that they were returning from California to their homes in Indiana, and that one of them did own a '36 Ford which was not at home, checked. And while both had police records, neither was listed as wanted; so the sheriff could do nothing but release them after forty-eight hours.

"It ain't in the house," Nap said, rising. "I buried it in the peach orchard. I'll get my lantern an' spade."

"No lantern," the pudgy Rollo snapped. "Icy's got a flashlight. Go with him, Icy. I'll watch the rear."

Nap's old heart skipped a few beats. His plan was doomed unless both accompanied him. But to argue would be fatal. So he said, as casually as possible: "You're right, mister—one of you'd better watch the rear."

Rollo's lips twisted into a contemptuous snarl. "Don't want us both with you, huh? Well, just for that I'll go, too."

With one on each side of him, and Icy's flashlight picking out the path, they started for the peach orchard.

Nap's first thought when he found the suitcase had been to turn it over to the sheriff. But the men, he realized, would deny ownership, and smart as they were there would be no fingerprints on anything because both had worn gloves during the robbery. Even if the sheriff planted a watch over the suitcase, the men would come for it some night, and in the darkness might get away, might even kill some one else, and then George Ames' murderers would never be caught.

No, it had to be evidence that would stand up in court, something strong enough to offset the smart lawyers professional criminals got to defend them, something indisputably linking these men with that suitcase—like them coming back for it, then being trapped with the suitcase in their possession.

"Kinda used your head takin' care of this stuff for us, grandpa," Icy said. "We won't forget you, either, will we, Rollo?"

"I'll say we won't," the other shot back.

NAP could vision their twisted mouths giving the lie to these soft words. They planned to kill him, once they had that suitcase; then no one ever would know anything.

"That'll be mighty fine of you fellers," Nap replied. "Anytime you want to hide somethin' just bring it out here. I'll ask no questions, an' what I know don't go no farther."

"You've got sense—oodles of sense, grandpa. Ain't he, Rollo?"

"You tell 'em, Icy."

"How much farther?" Rollo asked grimly.

"Just about there. Down that third row of trees."

"Flash your light over there, Icy, an' see if ever'thing's oke."

"Whose car's that?" Icy demanded, and Nap felt Rollo's gun against his back.

Nap forced a thin laugh. "My old model T. Been sittin' there ever since I got through haulin' straw."

"Look it over, Icy."

"Oke," Icy declared a moment later, rejoining them.

"What's that stuff under these trees?" Rollo growled.

"Pshaw, don't you fellers know straw. That's 'round all my peach trees. Keeps 'em from bloomin' too early. I'll leave it there for a month yet."

"For Pete's sake, how much farther?" Rollo snarled from a mouth corner.

"Right over there," Nap said, stopping abruptly. "I'll shed this jacket, fellers. Quite a little diggin' to do. Buried it good an' deep."

Nap set his spade down, removed his denim jacket, and leaning over to accomplish this natural act, he rose up slowly, but with every muscle in his old body taut as steel. His large hands, hard as horns from years of farm work, spread spatulate now as each described a quick backward arc; then drove forward like two powerful pistons, each hand catching a man in the small of his back with such impact as to hurl him forward upon the point where the layer of straw reached up in a small cone.

The split-lath support holding the straw gave away. Both men plunged headlong into the old well whose bottom was filled with discarded parts of farm implements calculated to bruise, stun or break any human body hurtling down that thirty-foot drop.

"It come to me while I was diggin' my storm cellar," Nap told reporters, "that if I'd widen the top of that old well so the two of them could start down at the same time, it would be just the thing. They wanted that suitcase so bad, an' I just put 'em down there where it was."