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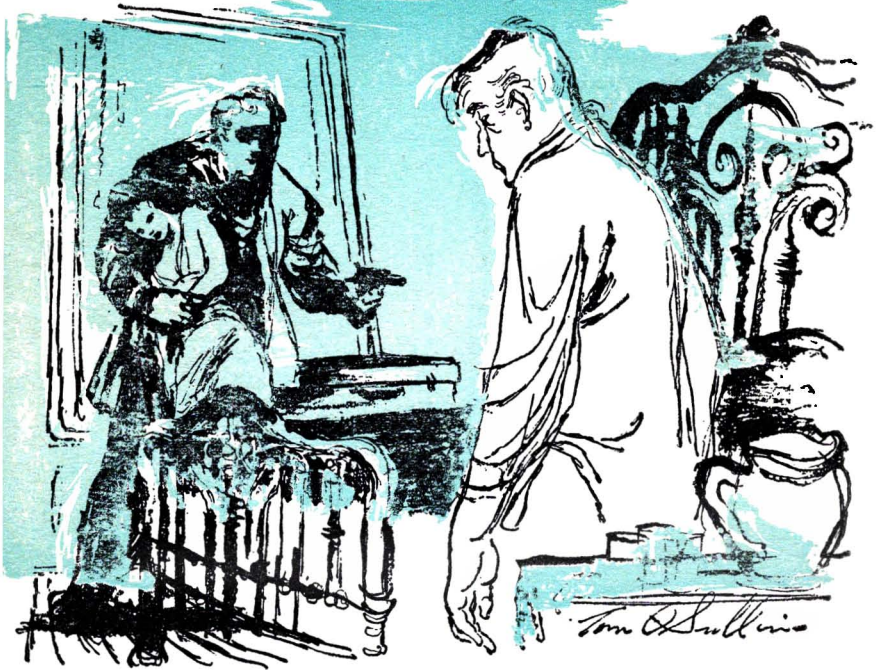
MICHAEL ST. JOHN, *Publisher*R. E. DECKER, *General Manager*WALTER R. SCHMIDT, *Editorial Director*WILLIAM MANNERS, *Managing Editor*CHARLES W. ADAMS, *Art Director*N. F. KING, *Associate Editor*GERALD ADAMS, *Assistant Art Director*JOE SHORE, *Advertising Rep.*

MANHUNT VOLUME 4, NUMBER 8, August, 1956. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, \$4.00 for one year in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere \$5.00 (in U. S. funds) for one year. Published monthly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. Telephone MU 7-6623. Entered as Second Class matter at the Post Office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Concord, N. H. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1956 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Title registered U. S. Pat. Office. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts and drawings if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. Manuscripts and art work should be sent to Manhunt, 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in U. S. A.

# Cop Killer

BY DAN SONTUP

*Hurt a cop and you die. That's how it was in Sgt. Baxter's book and no Academy Wonder was going to change it.*



HE WAS alone in the squad room when I came in, sitting at a table all by himself. He was a big man, big all over, even to the size of the brown fedora perched on the back of his head. The table was a large one, but he seemed to tower over it even from his sitting position. In his massive hands, he

held the service revolver, the gun looking puny next to the thick, heavy fingers. He kept turning the gun over and over in his hands, staring at it as he hefted it from one hand to the other.

I walked over and stood beside him, but he didn't look up.

"Sergeant Baxter?" I said.

He waited a moment and then glanced up at me, his gray eyes staring steadily into mine.

"Yeah," he said.

"I'm Detective Arnold," I told him. "Lou Arnold. I've been assigned to work with you." I held out my hand to him, but he ignored it and motioned across the table with his gun.

"I know. Sit down."

I sat down opposite him and watched him toy with the revolver. He kept turning it over and over in his hands, pressing the safety catch on and off several times. A good cop doesn't play with a gun like that, and it was making me nervous. The barrel never pointed at me, but I still didn't like it. He must have sensed this because he stopped for a moment and looked at me and said, "I know how to handle a gun, Arnold."

I didn't answer him because there was nothing I could say. He did hold the gun like a man who had grown up with one in his hands, but that didn't make me feel any better about it.

"So you're my new partner," he said finally.

"Yes."

"You know what case we're on now?"

"Yes."

"You been reading the reports?"

"I have."

"You heard all about it? You seen all the details in the papers?"

I nodded my head.

"You ever go after a cop killer before, Arnold?"

"The boy didn't kill a cop," I said.

Baxter looked up at me quickly, his heavy eyebrows rising in mock surprise. "Oh. He didn't? Then what did he do?"

"He pulled a knife on your partner and stabbed him—but he didn't kill him. He's going to live. The doctors say he'll be all right in a few weeks."

Baxter kept staring at me. "Look, Arnold," he said. "There's something you got to learn. When a punk pulls a knife or a gun on a cop and uses it, then, as far as anyone is concerned, he's out to kill—to kill a cop. It doesn't matter that he didn't get to do it. All that counts is that he tried. That makes him a cop killer in my book."

"We're splitting hairs," I said.

His lips tightened into a thin line, and he said, "Been on the force long, Arnold?"

"Three years, two of them walking a beat, the last year as a detective."

"Ever killed a punk?"

"No. I never had to use my gun once."

He smiled then, his lips curling back over even teeth, but the smile never even caused the corners of his eyes to crinkle. "Well, I have," he said. "I've been a cop for 22 years, and I worked 17 of them with my partner, Pete. I've killed

8 men in the line of duty, and Pete got 5. We were a good team."

"You'll still be one," I said. "As soon as he gets out of the hospital."

Baxter shook his head. "No. Not any more. Pete told me he's through. He's going to put in for his pension. He's had it."

"That's too bad," I said, "but he's got a right to his own choice."

Baxter grunted. "You're an Academy man, aren't you?"

"Yes, I graduated from the Police Academy."

He smiled again. "When Pete and I started on the force, they didn't have an Academy."

"That was a long time ago."

"We learned police work the hard way, the right way. They didn't turn out any soft cops in those days."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"It looks like I'm stuck with you, Arnold," he said, "so you might as well know I'm a real old-time cop. I look like one, I think like one, and I work like one."

"If you don't want me for a partner," I said, "you can always ask to have me transferred."

"Wouldn't help, Arnold. I'd only get another Academy boy."

I shrugged my shoulders again.

"You know the man you're replacing, Arnold? You ever met Pete?"

"I know him."

"Then you know what kind of a cop he was. We both worked together real well."

"I'm sorry you couldn't have kept on," I said.

He glanced at me sharply, but the sarcasm in my voice hadn't been strong enough to get through to him. He shook his head. "Maybe it's just as well, though."

"How's that?"

"Pete was slipping. He was getting careless, and now that he gets one little knife stuck in him he's ready to quit."

"The way I heard it, he wasn't careless. The kid just took him by surprise."

"Were you there, Arnold? Did you see what happened?"

"No."

"Well, I was. I was right there with him. We'd gone up to check this punk on a robbery down in the jewelry district. This Eddie Wilkins had already done time for a similar case, so he looked like a good bet."

He still had the gun in his hands, and he stopped and looked at it for a moment before going on. "Wilkins had his dame with him, a little squirt of a girl, and he tried to look big in front of her. He started to hand out some guff to us. Pete and I went to work on him, and that's when the kid pulled a kitchen knife out of the drawer and stuck it into Pete's stomach. I made a grab for him, but he kicked his way clear, and then he and the girl lammed out of there before I could get to my feet again."

He sighed and fondled the gun. "I started after them, but Pete groaned just then and I stopped to help him. He was all right, just wounded badly. But he hadn't handled it right at all. That kid never should have gotten close enough to him to use the knife. Pete should have blasted him right on the spot. He slipped up pretty badly on that one."

"I don't know about that," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"They got away from you, too, didn't they?"

Baxter glared at me. He snapped the safety again on the gun and then put it in its holster on his belt. "I don't think I'm gonna like you, Arnold," he said evenly.

I started to tell him the feeling was mutual, but I never got the words out. I heard the door open in back of me, and Baxter half rose in his chair, his eyes growing suddenly hard.

I turned around, and there was a uniformed officer in the doorway holding a girl by the arm.

"She wants to see you, Sergeant Baxter," the officer said.

Baxter sat down again and smiled that special smile of his. "Okay," he said. "Leave her here and wait outside."

The officer nodded and walked out and closed the door behind him, and Baxter and I sat there and looked at the girl.

She was small and tiny, but with

the figure of a mature woman. I'd guess her age at eighteen to twenty, but with that kind you never could tell. She wore her black hair long, hanging down below her shoulders, and that always makes a woman look younger. She had hardly any make-up on her face, and the little bit of lipstick she did have on seemed even redder against the paleness of her face.

She didn't move, and Baxter finally broke the silence. "Arnold," he said, and his voice was heavy with sarcasm, "I'd like to introduce Dolores Wilkins. She's Eddie Wilkins' dame."

"I'm his wife, Sergeant," she said softly. "You know that."

Baxter grunted.

"That officer—Pete—is he all right?" she said, her voice even softer now.

Baxter grunted again, but didn't answer her.

She turned to me. "Is he all right? Please tell me."

"He's okay," I said. "He'll live."

The girl sighed, and Baxter stood up and pushed back his chair and walked over to her. It was almost ludicrous the way he towered over her as she looked up at him.

"All right," he said. "You've got your answer. Now, you're going to tell me a few things."

The girl waited, and Baxter said, "Where's the punk hiding out?"

She straightened up just a bit and said, "Eddie's in a hotel room now."

"Where?"

"I'll take you to him."

Baxter grinned. "You turning him in, sister? You getting tired of the punk?"

"Eddie's giving himself up," she said calmly. "He sent me to tell you that."

"Well, now isn't that nice," Baxter said. "Isn't that real generous of him. Tell me, why is he being so noble?"

"Eddie's not a killer, Sergeant. He made a mistake once and got sent to prison for it. But he's not a criminal, and you know it."

"He's a lousy cop killer," Baxter growled. "Where's he hiding out?"

"In a hotel. He'll give himself up, Sergeant, but he told me to tell you he won't do it if you make the arrest. You can come along, but Eddie will only give himself up to someone else."

Baxter smiled. "I don't make deals with cop killers, sisters. Where's he staying?"

"He won't do it, Sergeant. Not if you try to take him."

Baxter looked at her for a moment, his eyes never leaving her face. "Okay," he said finally. "Arnold can make the arrest, but I'm coming along. That's as far as I'll go in making a deal. But you better make sure he doesn't try to pull anything fancy, or he'll never leave the place alive."

The girl looked at me, and I nodded. "All right," she said "I'll take you to him."

"Nothing doing," Baxter said. "You tell us where he is now."

She looked at me again, and I said, "You'll have to tell us. We're not going there alone, and we're not going to follow you blindly."

She sighed. "He's at the Central Hotel. Room 404. But he won't give himself up unless I'm there with him."

Baxter grabbed for the phone and barked orders into it. Within seconds he'd set up everything for a police cordon around the block where the hotel was situated and had given instructions to clear all the guests from the fourth floor. Then, before he hung up the phone, he looked at the girl and gave one more order: "Nobody's to do anything until we get there. Just clear the place out, but don't try to take him. I'll handle the whole thing."

He put the phone back in its cradle and looked at the girl and then at me and then back to the girl.

"Let's go," he said. "Let's go get our little cop killer."

The girl rode between us on the front seat of the squad car, and we made quick time getting to the hotel. The entire block had been roped off, and the policemen made a path for the car through the crowd that jammed the road.

Baxter got out of the car, pull-

ing the girl out after him. "He still up there?" he asked one of the policemen.

The officer nodded. "He's in the room, but he says he'll kill anyone that comes in to take him until he sees his wife. He'll give himself up only when she's there."

Baxter grunted and said "C'mon," and held on to the girl's arm and started across the street with her toward the hotel entrance. I followed behind them.

Once inside, another policeman directed us to the elevator and rode up to the fourth floor with us. "You can go in the adjoining room," the officer said. "It's got a door that connects with his room, but he's got it locked from the other side. We've got a set of pass keys in the room."

Baxter nodded and the elevator stopped, and we all hurried down the hall. At room 403, the policeman directed us inside, and there was another officer in the room, his gun drawn, facing a closed door on the far wall.

"Okay," Baxter said. "Leave me the pass keys and wait outside."

The officer handed him the keys, holstered his gun and walked out. When the door had closed behind him, Baxter put the keys down on the table, walked over to the wall next to the locked door, and waited there. I took the girl by the arm and led her over to a corner.

"Wilkins!" Baxter shouted. "Can you hear me?"

There was no answer.

"Unlock this door and come out with your hands up, Wilkins," Baxter yelled. "And do it now."

There was still no answer.

The girl broke away from my grasp and ran across the room and up to the door. She raised a tiny fist and pounded on the door and shouted, "Eddie! Eddie, it's me. It's all right."

Baxter and I stood where we were. Finally, there was a muffled voice from the other side of the door, "Dolores?"

"Yes, Eddie," she said. "It's all right. The policeman didn't die. Please come out now."

"Is that Sergeant Baxter there with you?" he asked.

"Yes, he is."

"Tell him to get out."

Baxter shook his head. "Nothing doing," he growled.

"He won't go, Eddie!" she shouted.

"Then I'm not coming out."

Baxter, from his position next to the door, suddenly reached out his arm and grabbed the girl around the waist and pulled her away from in front of the door. He held her tightly against his massive body, and when he spoke, his voice was hard. "Okay. That's enough. We're through fooling around now." He gave the girl a shove and sent her staggering across the room to me. I grabbed hold of her and held on while she struggled in my grip.

Baxter stayed pressed against the wall. "Wilkins, I'm giving you one more chance!" he shouted. "Come out now, or I'll come in and get you."

"Don't try it, Sergeant. I've got a gun now. You'll get it right in the gut the minute you walk through that door."

Baxter licked his lips and looked over at me. "Hold on to her, Arnold," he said. "Don't let her get near this door again."

The girl squirmed in my grip, but I held on to her. "You can't do it," she said. "You promised you wouldn't make the arrest."

"Well, I'm going to, sister. What are you going to do about that?"

"But you promised."

"You don't have to keep a promise to a cop killer—or to his wife."

"He's not that!" she shouted at him. "You know he isn't a killer!"

"Oh, no?" Baxter said. "Don't kid me, sister. I was there."

"Yes—and you and that other policeman provoked him into using the knife. You forced him to do it."

Baxter grinned. "We did? How?"

The girl bit her lip and was silent.

"C'mon, tell us," Baxter said. "I'm sure Arnold will be interested in hearing this."

"You know what you did," she said softly.

"What?" said Baxter. "What did we do?" His voice was almost

as low as the girl's, and there was a new and a more deadly quality in it that I'd not heard before.

"You held Eddie while your partner roughed me up. You know you did that."

"We did?"

"Yes. Your partner handled me. He—he put his hands on me." She shuddered. "It was horrible. You knew Eddie wouldn't stand for that. That's why he grabbed the knife."

Baxter shrugged. "That was a big mistake for him."

"Why did you do it?" she said. "Why? Did you enjoy doing something like that? Was it a lot of fun for both of you?"

Baxter smiled. "Maybe. Pete and I are bachelors." His smile spread, but still not to his eyes. "And maybe we wanted to get the punk mad enough to talk. Pete told me he was having a good time until your damn husband stuck the knife in him."

The girl had quit struggling in my arms now, but her breath was coming heavy. "Do you blame him for doing that? Wouldn't you have done the same to protect your own wife?"

"I told you I'm not married," Baxter said drily.

The girl twisted around in my grasp until she was facing me. "Are you going to let him break his promise? I thought you were the one who was going to arrest my husband? You promised."



I looked at her and then at Baxter. He was still smiling. "He's in charge," I said.

The girl laughed bitterly. "You cops are all alike."

"That's enough of that," I said.

It wasn't enough for her, though. "You've got me now, officer. Maybe you'd like to do what they did, too? Why don't you? You cops are all alike. Go ahead. What are you waiting for?"

"Be quiet," I told her.

There was a knock on the outside door. "You all right in there, Sergeant?" a voice asked.

"Yeah," Baxter shouted. "Stay out. I'll handle this."

He turned back to the girl. "Look, sister," he said, "I'm through fooling around. No one else is going to take him but me. I got a special way of handling punks who try to kill cops. So don't give me any more malarkey about promises."

He stepped away from the wall, being careful not to get in line with the locked door and walked over to the table and picked up the pass keys. Then he went back to his position by the wall, stretched out his hand and inserted a key in the lock. He turned it slowly, took the key out of the lock, and then threw the bunch of keys on the floor.

There was no sound from the other room.

"Wilkins!" Baxter shouted. "I'm gonna open the door!"

There was still no sound, and Baxter reached over and touched the knob. He turned it slowly, keeping his body pressed against the wall.

The knob turned silently, and all I could hear was the girl's loud breathing while I held her tightly.

Baxter gave a sudden yank, and the door flew open.

I could see into the other room—a bed, a chair and part of a chest of drawers against the wall. But no Wilkins.

Then his voice came through, probably from behind the chair the way it sounded. "Don't come in, copper. Don't set one foot inside this room."

"Throw out your gun," Baxter said, "and come on out of there. Right now."

There was no answer for a while, and then Wilkins' voice came out again, a note of real desperation in it now. "Don't come in. I won't give myself up to you. Not to you."

Baxter waited a moment and then made a sudden lunge past the open door and over to the corner where I was holding the girl.

There was no sound or movement from the other room.

"Let's send down for tear gas," I whispered in Baxter's ear, still holding on to the girl.

He looked at me, and his lip curled up over his teeth, and he smiled and took my hands off the girl.

"That's the hard way," he said. "I know an easier one—and it's a lot more fun."

He took a firm grip on the girl's arms and said, "I think I'll finish what Pete started."

The girl gave a little gasp, not loud enough to carry to the other room, but she let out a real scream when Baxter's big hand suddenly closed over the front of her dress. He pulled, and most of the top of the dress came away as though it were made of paper.

I saw Wilkins' head suddenly pop up over the top of the chair in the other room. "Dolores!" he yelled.

I drew my gun, but Baxter, still holding the girl, said, "Take it easy, Arnold. He won't shoot while we've got his chippie in the line of fire."

Wilkins' voice came from in back of the chair in an almost agonizing yell. "Keep your hands off her!"

Baxter laughed and reached around the girl with his free hand again. I couldn't see what he was doing, but she struggled and squirmed and her face grew red.

Baxter kept on laughing, and more of the girl's dress tore away, and then she screamed again. She almost got away from Baxter, but he pulled her back to him again. He was starting to breathe heavily now, and the girl began to sob.

"Please," she said. "Please—don't do that. Please stop."

Baxter didn't stop and the girl's sobs grew louder.

Wilkins, finally, stood up from in back of the chair and stepped out into the open. "All right," he said from the other room, "you win. Leave her alone. Let her go. I'll give myself up."

"Throw out your gun," Baxter said, still holding on to the girl.

"I haven't got any. I was only bluffing."

Wilkins started walking toward us, and I raised my gun. He moved with his arms hanging at his side and when he was through the doorway, and just a few feet away from us, Baxter gave the girl a sudden shove and she went stumbling across the floor to fall at the feet of her husband. What little there was left of her dress rode up above her knees, and she lay there like a bundle of torn rags on the floor.

Wilkins knelt down beside her and touched her gently and then helped her to her feet. She stood leaning against him for a moment and then swayed erect, but she wouldn't look at him or at Baxter or myself. She kept her eyes on the floor.

Wilkins looked at her and then at us. Baxter had flipped back his jacket and was reaching for his cuffs when the kid said, "You lousy cop. You had to maul her to get me. You had to do that to her, didn't you? Just like your partner did. I'm not sorry I knifed him."

I wish I could do the same to you." His voice was low, filled with defeat and bitterness, and he took a threatening step forward.

Baxter sprang into action. The hand that had been reaching for the cuffs suddenly switched to the holster. It was the fastest draw I've ever seen a cop make. It was the draw of a man who likes the feel of a gun in his hands. The revolver was out of the holster and pointed at Wilkins even before he had finished the first step.

There was a split second while he looked at the gun, and then Baxter's finger tightened on the trigger, and the gun roared and jumped in his hands.

Wilkins spun around with the force of the impact of the bullet and rolled on the floor and finally came to rest on his back.

The girl screamed terrifyingly loud in my ear. I saw Baxter calmly holstering his gun as he looked down at the red stain spreading on the upper part of Wilkins' shirt.

I still held on to my gun and went over to Wilkins and kneeled down beside him. He seemed to be breathing, but I couldn't be sure. I bent over and put my ear to his chest.

There was a sudden, slamming pain in my wrist. It was the hand in which I held my gun. The girl had brought her spiked heel down hard, stooped quickly and grabbed the gun from my limp fingers.

She stepped away and held it in front of her as I scrambled to my feet.

"Put it down," I said. "Don't be foolish."

A knocking started on the outside door. "Sergeant," came the policeman's voice from out in the hall, "is everything all right? Can we come in now?"

"Tell him to stay out," the girl said.

I hesitated, then said, "Not yet. Don't come in."

She stood there in her torn dress, holding the gun pointed at Baxter, while he stayed rooted to the spot. She let her eyes flick momentarily to Wilkins lying on the floor, and then her glance went right back to Baxter.

"Is my husband dead?" she asked.

Baxter didn't answer her, so I said, "We don't know. I didn't have a chance to check."

"Look at him," she said, never taking her eyes off Baxter. "Find out."

I went over to Wilkins and kneeled down again. Even before I put my ear to his chest this time, I knew what the answer would be. A cop soon learns to know what a dead body looks like. I checked, though, just to make sure. There was no heartbeat. I straightened up and got to my feet.

"Well?" she said, and there was a note of resignation in her voice as though she already knew.

"He's dead."

"Then so is Sergeant Baxter," she said.

Baxter started forward, stopped, his face starting to turn pale.

"Give me the gun," I said to her. "Don't do anything foolish."

She ignored me and raised the gun a little higher.

Baxter began to wilt. "I didn't mean to kill him," he said, his voice hoarse and cracking. "I thought he was—was going for a knife and—"

"He wasn't even reaching for anything," the girl said. "His hands weren't even moving. And you killed him."

"Hold on, now," Baxter said. "I didn't mean—"

He never finished the sentence. I saw her raise the gun until he was looking straight down the barrel, and, as the fear leaped into his eyes and his face turned even paler, her finger started to tighten on the trigger.

"That's when I made my move.

But before I could reach her, she fired. The roar of the gun seemed even louder this time, and the heavy revolver bucked itself right out of her hand and fell to the floor.

There was no need to go to Baxter. She'd got him right between the eyes.

For a moment, there was silence in the room, then I walked over and took her by the arm and led her to the door. I opened the door, and the uniformed policeman came in, his eyes taking in the whole scene at a glance.

"Both of them," the policeman said aghast.

I nodded.

"He got Pete and now Baxter."

It took me a second to realize how he was taking it. I was willing to let it go the way he saw it. "Yeah," I said.

The girl looked at me, her eyes widening, unsure. "Come along," I told her, and took her arm. "I'll see you get home all right."

