

THE HIGH-TENSION MAGAZINE

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The blind alley, the locked room, the tied hands, the menacing weapon—these are the stocks in trade of your dealers in crime fiction. Is there nothing new under the sun to confront characters in murder stories? Perhaps not. But this author tells a tale with a device which, if not more novel, is at least more realistic. By the standards of Murder, Inc., and certain Kefauver Committee witnesses, that is.

JOHN BASYE PRICE

IN A small California town, late one evening, the two partners in the firm of Morton & Vickers sat face to face in the back of a small panel truck parked in a closed garage. Morton, well satisfied with himself, lounged at his ease and smiled at Vickers. Vickers was not at ease. His hands were tied behind him and his bare feet were immersed in a tub filled with cement.

Vickers, still groggy from the unexpected blow on the head some hours before, stirred weakly. Morton held his flashlight on Vickers, saw that the eyes of the bound man were clearing.

"For God's sake, Morton! What happened? What's come over you?"

"So you are awake again, my dear Vickers," said Morton. "The fact is that I am closing out our partnership." He drew a long envelope from

FATAL mistake

**Perfectly planned—this
killing could not fail.
But could the killer?**

his pocket. "Here you see the profit I shall make from this transaction. No doubt you recognize the fifty thousand entrusted to us by our clients, which you so obligingly drew out of the bank for me."

Vickers licked dry lips. "You're crazy. You can't get away with that kind of money!"

Morton laughed. "No? My dear Vickers, even yet you don't understand the situation. Look at that tub of cement! It is you who will disappear and be blamed for taking the money—while your old heartbroken partner, Jack Morton, remains behind, shocked at the crime. The money, of course, will be in a safe place. And so will you—at the bottom of San Francisco Bay."

"Why bother with the cement?" Vickers gasped. "Why not just kill me and throw me into the bay?"

"Ah, dear Vickers, that would never do. Consider—here we are, two partners, entrusted with a sum of money for investment. One partner disappears and so does the money. Obviously the missing partner is an absconder." Morton paused to light a cigarette. "But suppose the missing partner is found murdered, as you might be if I simply threw you into the water. Even the stupidest cop or most incompetent jurymen could fail to catch the implication! So I use the cement. You will sink to the bottom—and never be found—"

"You can't be sure of that," hoarsely urged Vickers. "The stuff may crack. The water may wash it away!"

"Nonsense. That won't happen."

"But I tell you it will!"

"My dear Vickers, I know all about cement. You don't suppose this to be the first time I've used it! This business coup is my own invention. I've been successful with it three times in the last ten years in Chicago, where Lake Michigan is so close at hand. But I thought it best to change my base. So I moved to Indianapolis to find a partner who, though honest, would be less brilliant than I—"

"God, you do hate yourself!" broke in Vickers.

"I simply face facts. I am very clever, but I admit I make mistakes. Indianapolis, for instance, has one drawback. It is not near any large body of water. So I suggested a vacation for both of us—and was delighted when you invited me to visit your brother in California. I had

never been west before we arrived. . . . Nice climate, isn't it? I think I shall stay on for a week or so after this—this unpleasantness is over." He smiled. "By the way, how fortunate that your brother should have to be away this week-end. And this truck of his, how nice of him to lend it to us to tour around in . . ."

Morton reached over, tested the cement with a finger. "Not quite hard enough yet."

Vickers desperately tried to move, but the ropes held him helpless.

"In Chicago I always used a boat," said Vickers. But this truck is really more convenient. I can't lift you and the tub of cement together, but all I have to do is lower the tail-board and slide you over into the water."

"Where?" Hope flickered in Vickers' eyes.

"Where no one will see you. It will be too lonely and dark. I have a map here showing a long bridge crossing the lower end of San Francisco Bay. That ought to be a good place."

"For God's sake," said Vickers, "stop yapping! Kill me, then. But get it over with!"

"My dear Vickers. You don't understand what a rare luxury a frank conversation is to a man of my attainments. Only to a person about to die can I reveal them. You know, I always think of everything. That's why I'm not being merciful and killing you now, before heaving you over. You see, there is one chance in ten thousand that the truck might break down or for some reason be stopped by the police. If that should happen, you would still be alive, and

I would say that all this was a practical joke—I had no intention of killing you. The police would not believe me, but a good lawyer could get me off.” He poked with his finger again. “I see the cement is getting pretty stiff. By the time we get there it will be solid enough. Time to get started . . .”

Morton turned off the garage lights, opened the doors and climbed into the driver’s seat. The truck moved off at a moderate pace as Morton had no wish to be stopped for speeding. After an hour or so of driving, in the moonlight appeared the broad expanse of San Francisco Bay, with the long, low bridge stretching across it. It was very late. Not a car was in sight. Morton turned off the lights, drove out over the water, and stopped the truck with its rear against the rail. First with a weight and a long string he took a sounding to make sure the water was deep enough. Then he lowered the tailboard and started to slide Vickers out.

Vickers had been too dazed to speak, but suddenly he began to laugh. He was still laughing when he went over the rail. Morton heard

a loud splash, gazed down at the lapping water and saw no trace of his erstwhile partner. He drove to the other end of the bridge, turned the truck and put on the headlights, drove back to the garage. Nice job, thought Morton. . .

Next morning he rented a car and started out for a drive to enjoy the California sunshine. On a whim, he decided to drive across the bridge for a last look at Vickers’ resting-place. The car rounded a hill and the bay stretched before him. He slammed on the brakes. His whole spine sagged. Now he knew why Vickers had laughed!

There were certain differences, it seemed, between Lake Michigan and San Francisco Bay. Last night the bay had been full from brim to brim. But now before Morton stretched mile after mile of dreary mud flat. Morton had dropped Vickers into deep water—at high tide!

With horror Morton saw a police car on the bridge. Several men were lifting the dead Vickers into a van. His brother, Morton knew, alarmed by the victim’s absence, would soon enough go to the police and identify the body.

