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LIE DOWN, YOU'RE DEAD!



Blood streaking down his face, he leaped forward...

NO, of course I don't believe in ghosts. It really wasn't Joe Darrow's ghost that haunted Police Headquarters. But all the same, it almost did seem as if Joe refused to stay buried in Waynesville's cemetery.

I used to know Joe quite well. Back in the old days, he was the best man on the force—none excepted. Then we were together in the Detective Bureau when Joe became boss of that. That was before a bullet cut him down.

Then it began....

Joe was so used to coming in for his tour

By
DAVID X. MANNERS



McGrady found that filling his well-loved predecessor's brogans was no cinch—particularly when the guy wouldn't stay dead, but kept hopping up on McGrady's desk and telling him how to run the force!

of duty that the bullet wasn't enough to break the habit. After they buried him, he used to come in just the same, and sit right there on the edge of his successor's desk.

Captain McGrady was of the old school, to put it mildly—big mouth, a pair of powerful, hairy fists, and two hundred pounds tough. But that didn't help him much against the towering reputation of his predecessor.

The dicks who'd come in the Captain's office when the Captain wasn't there, would say, "Hello, Joe!" to the ghost. Sergeant Bo

Stanton was the worst offender. He'd come in there, and right in front of the Captain, he'd whisper, "What's your ouija board say for the fifth race, Joe?" Or, "Good Lord, Joe. How can you go around with only that thin nightie on?" McGrady about burst with apoplexy. He couldn't take their kidding.

The Captain, apparently, didn't like Joe. Joe was a cross between a tout and a cardsharp, to hear him tell it. But I knew the Captain really didn't feel that way. After all, he and Joe had been buddies. And wasn't it me and the Captain and Joe who'd been in there together on that last, fatal fight?

The truth was, the Captain liked Joe—and he was aware of Joe's ghost as strongly as anybody else!

The Bureau was in the old wing of the city jail building. Its old-style high windows were stone-trimmed and the brick had been painted over. A sign on its front said, "WORK-HOUSE, 1882." But it seemed older than that. The Captain's office was just off the squad room, with a door that was open most of the time, so that anybody in the squad room could usually see the Captain taking his ten o'clock liver pills, or sitting tilted back in his seat, hands locked around his hemispherical front, staring biliously off into space.

Bo Stanton always said he was looking at Joe.

I remember the day Sam Winn went into McGrady's office. "I'd like to get tomorrow off, Captain," Sam said, as he related afterwards. "My wife's folks are coming in from Columbus. I thought it would be nice to spend the day with them."

"Tomorrow's a working day," said McGrady unblinkingly.

"I know, but it's the only chance in a year they've had to get here, Captain, and if I don't spend it with them now—"

"Your wife's family?" McGrady nodded his great, shaggy head. "How nice. How very lovely. You're allowed so many days leave a year, Winn. You've used 'em up. Now you come to me, asking me to smash the rules." He let his clenched fist fall like a rock on his desk top. "What kind of a Bureau is this we're running here anyway?"

"Well, Joe—"

"I don't care what Joe used to do! Joe's not here. It's me that's running this Bureau now. Not him. Understand?"

SAM WINN came out of the office with his ears pricked up sharply and with a crossed look in his eyes like a cat that's been massaged the wrong way.

I folded some money I had in my hand. I said, "Ol' McGrady got his hackles up?"

Sam nodded.

"It's his liver," I said. "That's what it is."

"Oh, no," said Sam. "That's not it. McGrady's scared, that's what. Look at this Pete Wire outfit all the papers are hollerin' for him to crack. They're hiding out right here in town and McGrady can't nab 'em. He's stepped into bigger brogans than he knows how to fill. That's what's chewin' him. He looks tough, but it's all bluff. He knows he ain't got the beginnings of the guts it takes to fill the spot Joe held down."

I stared at Sam Winn, surprised to hear him come out that way, with me being so close to the Captain.

"McGrady's an all right guy," I said. "Don't go popping your cork. Things have been a mite tough for him, that's all. He's got to get his bearings."

"Joe was never like that." Sam shook his head. "It was a sad day we lost a fighter like him."

"Yeah." I nodded thoughtfully to myself, and in nodding, saw the money in my hand. "By the way, have you given yours yet?"

"No," he said. "Here, you better take it now." And he dug down into his pocket for his wallet.

McGrady came out of the office then. He looked around, as if he didn't know what he was looking for. Then he saw us. He stomped right over.

"Listen," he said. "I was just telling Sam here about discipline. For God's sake, what would the Commissioner say if he came in here and saw you collecting money for some damn pool!"

"I'm collecting for flowers for Joe," I said quietly.

McGrady sort of went back on his heels. "This ain't no anniversary already, is it?"

"No. Not yet. It's just two months, but—"

"Well. Here. Put me down for fifty cents. You wasn't going to miss me, was you?"

I looked at the Captain's face, and I felt sorry for him and the strain he was under. The strain of Joe. The Wire hoodlums.

"We're each giving a frogback," I said. "It's not exactly for flowers. We thought with nice weather here soon we'd have someone fix his grave up right, with shrubbery and stuff like that."

The Captain's eyes took on a hurt look. He sucked in his cheeks and I wondered if he was trying to keep from swallowing. He fished out a folded wad of grass and handed it to me.

When he was gone, I unfolded it. Ten dollars!

Sam Winn said, "A guilty conscience, that's what. McGrady's got no more business in that chair than a spotted eel—and he knows it."

"What do you mean?" I growled. But I knew what he meant.

"He tilts back in that chair of his and what does he see? Joe parked there on the corner

of his desk. Maybe Joe sayin', 'How about the Pete Wire crowd, McGrady? Why don't you scrub 'em out like I woulda done?"

"You better clam, Sam!"

"Me clam?" Sam snorted. "Who's got to be afraid of a guy who's on the greased chute right now? McGrady might be all right, but he came in at a bad time—right after Joe."

THE Commissioner arrived at two o'clock and went directly into the Captain's office. I was sitting at my own desk, looking over the twice-weekly report of wanted cars—wanted either because they were stolen or because of who might be driving them. Listed was license 6V 1592, operated by Pete Wire and company. Wire—wanted for murder, bank robbery, grand larceny.

The walls were thick, but the Commissioner's voice spiked through from McGrady's office. I could hear him berating the Captain.

"Joe didn't do this that way, McGrady. . . . And he didn't do the other. Now, why do you insist on . . . ?"

It made the fine hairs on my neck into little needles. Why was everyone pulling the wings off poor McGrady? Why couldn't they let him alone? It seemed to be reaching a climax with this Wire situation. McGrady would show himself a fighter, and as good as any of them. If they would only be patient and give him a chance!

But then I thought of Lucilla, and I knew I was whistling in the wind. Frankly, I didn't think McGrady had the stuff either. I was sure he'd lost all the vinegar he did have in that battle when he saw Joe get killed. But could I say that out loud about the father of the girl I was—well, you know how a guy can get about a girl. Out of town three days, Lucilla had me mooning for her like a sick butterfly.

The Commissioner stalked out of McGrady's office and the boys in the squad room eyed each other. Bo Stanton had a smirk that jerked up one side of his mouth. Walt Lamb winked and looked at Pop Harris. Pop drooped his eyelids balefully and wagged his head. The girl at the switchboard sat stiff in her swivel chair as if the cold breeze of the Commissioner's passing had frosted her.

I just glared at them all, and felt washed-out down inside me for McGrady.

Bo Stanton opened his lippy mouth, and I just knew he was going to say something about Joe perched on McGrady's desk. And just then—in barged McGrady.

EVEN from where I was, I saw the pin-sweat on McGrady's forehead. I didn't know if the sweat was hot or cold, but to me it looked cold. McGrady looked as if he'd just been bitten by a nightmare.

He stared, saying nothing for a minute. Then his fingers dipped into his vest pockets and brought out a cigar and a clipper. He sheared the tip off the cigar, which he then stuck in the center of his mouth. He looked around at all of us.

"Dave Jones," he said to me, and his tongue shoved the unlighted cigar over into the corner notch of his mouth. "I'm seeing your detail in my office right now." And then he turned away.

Stanton got up, Lamb and Baylinson and a couple others. They followed me. There were five of us standing before McGrady's fumed-oak desk when the last one clamped the door.

The Captain paced before us, looking down at his shoetips, his thick, meaty hands in his pockets, the cigar at a downward angle in his mouth.

Stanton's eyes traveled from the corner of the desk to me and then back again. I caught that veiled, fishhook grin of his, and gave him a stare that stabbed him right between his dark eyebrows.

McGrady said, "Prepare yourselves, men. If you don't already know them, here are the facts. We've located the hole-out of the Wire flock. We're going after them."

He waited till our murmurs settled. "They're in an old frame house on the hill just behind the Zachary foundry. They've been there several days now. One or more of them are the birds who got Joe Darrow. Now remember this—and for God's sake, don't forget it. No shooting unless it's absolutely necessary. We want, if it's at all possible, to take them still chirpin'."

His eyes surveyed us. "That's all. But just remember. We want to act quickly, effectively. It's a dangerous flock—and a deadly one. Stanton, see that the business office provides the tear gas bombs, machine guns and ammunition from the arsenal—and three men to take care of the stuff. We'll try to take these buzzards peacefully. If we can't, tear gas. But guns are to be held in abeyance. We want no one hurt. Is that clear?"

McGRADY drove ahead in a department sedan. With him were two men from the machine gun detail and a fellow named Reynolds from the fugitive squad. It was a snowy, sloppy day, with the sky dirty gray. In a half hour it would be dark, though it was only four o'clock.

I was in the car right behind McGrady. Stanton and Lamb and another of the tommy-gun handlers were with me. The regulars didn't handle the machine guns. It was a specialist's work. Another car with four more men followed behind us. Twelve men, in all, to handle the three-man Wire mob.

Stanton mimicked, "We don't want nobody

to get hurt. That's a laugh! I bet a nickle I know who McGrady's got in mind."

I didn't want to say anything. But it slipped out, "Anybody can bust a place apart like Joe used to do. You can have brains in your pants for that."

"Yeah." Stanton looked at McGrady's car ahead. "But when there *was* fireworks, Joe was in there. He wasn't sitting on his pants."

"You're damn right," Walt Lamb said. "He was in there pitching."

And suddenly I felt alone among wolves. I thought: McGrady will tear hell out of this flock and show these guys how cockeyed they are.

The hill behind the foundry was bare and white with winter, and we stopped short of its summit. The foundry, down below, stood out in severe outline against the drab yellow swirl of the half-frozen river. Leafless trees on the bank were blurred, with falling night smothering them.

The Captain's car stopped, rim-deep in slush. We pulled up, and the third car stopped behind us. We waited, and pretty soon somebody got out of that first car and came back toward us. I wound down the steamed window. It was snowing fairly hard.

Captain McGrady's face was a sallow, frost-breathing nose and a pair of eyes through the window's crack.

JJONES, you and me are traipsin' the rest of the way up the hill, to the house," he said. "The others will deploy and throw a fast cordon around the place. We'll scoop 'em out of there quick."

As I got out, I shot a hurried glance at Stanton, to get his reaction to McGrady now. Then I swore under my breath. Stanton's face was still cynically set. I had the feeling that no matter what McGrady did the boys would never grin for him. They had a golden image of Joe Darrow in their minds, and they'd built a stone wall around it.

A long walk led up to the house, its path almost indistinguishable under the snow. McGrady pointed to it. His face was gray—his eyes wild, the skin around his white lips a bilious green. When I was a deputy up at Sing Sing I once saw a man with a face like that. He was taking a walk to that little room with the only chair in the world with a matching cap.

"Mac—" I began.

"I'm all right," he said. And he tapped my arm.

He started up the slope to the house, following the line of the sidewalk's trough. It was dark, with the snow swirling down more strongly, almost smudging out the house.

I looked off to my right and left. The dark blots of men slogging through the snow were

barely visible. The Captain was ahead of me, and the house was a shapeless hulk ahead of him. He fell back suddenly, and turned to me. His lips quivered. I looked down at the gun he held in his hand.

"I can't. No. Good God, I'm licked!"

I stared at him. The gun was shaking like a winter leaf. "McGrady. What—?"

"I can't go up there, I'm telling you!"

A tremor shook his shoulders. His eyes were bulging like a fish's. The tip of his tongue brushed dry, scaly lips. I felt my heart turning inside out. I grabbed McGrady's arm. My fingers snagged into his coat.

"You can't act like this! Think of how they've been blowing off about you! About Joe!"

"But—but—"

I looked back and the others were closing in. "You can't give them this chance. You'll be through—finished!"

I thought: It was seeing the way Joe died that did this to him. But the boys in the Bureau, they didn't understand a damn thing of what this was all about. They'd put McGrady under their heel and he'd never show his face again.

"It's not only yourself you got to think of," I said. "You don't even know for sure Wire's bunch'll be up here. We been on false prods before. Think of Lucilla. That's who you got to think of. Think of—"

I locked an arm around his and pulled.

"No! No! Don't make me!" He turned on me in a delirium of frenzy. "I *am* thinking of her. I can't go up there. There'll be shooting—bullets—killing—"

His voice rose. I flashed a quick look to the others. "McGrady!" I shook him. But I couldn't shake him from his hysteria. "McGrady!"

"Get away then!" I said finally, desperately. "Get behind that tree. Hide! Where nobody can see you."

I shoved him, and he stumbled off. The snow swirled as the wind whipped it. I moved up the trough of the walk, the blood out of my bones.

LUCILLA—this would kill her. McGrady—this was his finish too. The porch steps were under my feet. I looked back. McGrady was stumbling through the snow—stumbling and falling and dragging himself up again. If he could get away from the place, I thought, maybe it could be fixed so no one would ever know exactly what happened.

Then McGrady fell, and out of the dark a shadow moved up to him as one of our men bent over McGrady.

The house must be ringed now—ringed tight. I stepped to the door. Drifting snow covered its threshold.

My knuckles rapped on the panel. I lifted my left fist and knocked again, holding my .38 low.

There was a pause, then the quick, dry click of shoes on a bare floor. I sensed the pressure of someone against the door—the grate of a latch being slid back.

A dishevelled blonde face looked at me over a safety chain. "Wha' d'yuuh want?"

Footsteps sounded behind me and the woman's eyes widened at what she saw over my shoulder. She tried to slam the door, but my shoulder was against it. Suddenly Stanton was beside me, swearing as he barged against the door.

"McGrady! That damn yellow slob. And you said he wasn't chicken!"

A bullet splintered through the door at us. A harsh voice inside shouted, "Get back, or the girl gets it!"

"To hell with you!" Stanton yelled. "Damn this door!"

I heard McGrady's voice then, shouting from somewhere. It seemed to be at the side of the house. "You touch that girl, and I'll tear you apart!"

"Dad!" a girl's voice inside cried. "Dad—" Her voice was suddenly muffled into incoherence.

"Good God!" I said. "Lucilla!"

"What!" Stanton's legs pumped as he charged the door. I lunged in front of him to stop him.

"Stanton—for God's sake—don't!"

And I suddenly knew why McGrady had insisted so urgently that we hold off shooting. He must have known all along that his daughter was being held by these men.

Glass crashed at the side of the house. A police gun coughed briefly. A burst answered from the house. Then I heard one of our men cry in horror, "Good Lord! They've shot the Captain's girl! They've killed Lucilla!"

I went momentarily berserk. I shouted crazy curses and my gun blasted. A bullet struck my side, and I pitched down. I sensed there were more than three gunmen in the house. As I got up, another window crashed—a gun rocketed violently.

Someone shouted. "Look—look at McGrady!"

I didn't see Stanton. The house was rocking with gunshots. I crashed against the door and I went through. Three gunmen were down, and I saw Lucilla on the floor too.

And then I saw McGrady.

Blood streaking down his face, he stood back-to-the-wall. A shattered window showed where he'd come in. Two gunmen rose from behind an overturned table at my entry, and McGrady's gun spit. He leaped forward over the table, and the two gunmen fled toward the stairs, toppling as McGrady's shots cut them down.

"There's more of 'em upstairs," McGrady gasped. "The damn—"

I grappled his arm. He was a fighting wild man. If he'd wait a minute our boys would be there. It was fanatical madness to rush up those stairs alone.

But McGrady tore loose from my grasp, lunging for the stairs. Stanton came inside. His face went blank as he realized McGrady's intention.

Then hell tore the stairs apart. McGrady was shooting. The Wire gang was retaliating. Suddenly the Captain slumped down against the wall at the bottom step and fired a last volley.

I jumped over McGrady's sprawled legs, and two bodies McGrady had just shot pitched down the stairs on top of me, knocking me on top of McGrady. The upper balustrade collapsed and a body that was draped over it came down too. That accounted for everybody!

I shoved to get out from under, sure McGrady must be dead.

Then I heard him breathing in a rasping gurgle. He too was struggling to get free of the bodies piled on him.

"Joe! Joe!" he was moaning deliriously. "You ain't letting me breathe. You ain't letting me breathe."

And in the next room, I heard somebody saying, "Where in hell's some water? Or some rags? Something—damn it! Somebody do something! We can't let McGrady's girl die!"

I DIDN'T know just what the boys in the Bureau would say about the Captain now. I was in the hospital only long enough to get a couple chunks of lead dug out of my side.

Lucilla McGrady, it had turned out, hadn't been shot at all at first. She had merely keeled over in a faint, and one of our boys at a window had yelled that the gunmen had killed her. But she had gotten nicked up some in the fracas that followed. Still, she wouldn't have had to stay in the hospital a whole week. But she did—just to be near her dad.

It seemed a sour thing to me that there should be any doubt as to the welcome awaiting Ed McGrady when he got out. Why, the bluff old Captain had practically lonehanded cleaned up that nest of eight Wire men! And yet all the boys in the Bureau were going around with glum looks. Disappointed looks. As if they were sorry McGrady was coming back at all.

I guessed the answer. They all knew about McGrady's acting chicken there just before the Wire battle. And they probably couldn't forget it. It apparently didn't mean anything to them that McGrady hadn't gone after the Wire flock right off only because he knew they had Lucilla, and that they'd threatened to kill her if he did come.

I felt the tenseness in the air the Monday morning the Captain came back to the Bureau. And I wanted to poke that guy Stanton. He was more grumpy about it than anyone.

McGrady crippled in the door. He still had a bandage around his head, and his right arm wore a sling. The second he got by the switchboard, I felt that he sensed it. He looked at the boys and then dropped his eyes.

"I—" he began. He didn't get beyond that. He looked to me. I glared at Stanton.

McGrady caught the way the wind blew.

"Well, Stanton," he said. "Don't stand there like a dripping faucet. Say something."

Stanton looked bewildered. "I hardly know how to begin, chief," he said finally.

"Begin? About what?"

"About how all this week you've been in the hospital, we've been kicking ourselves, not being able to look at our own faces in the mirror, just thinking what it would have have been like if something permanent had happened to you."

"What?" said McGrady.

"We want you to know we're sorry for the way we've kidded about Joe—about Joe sitting in there on your desk like a guilty conscience. Hell, Captain, Joe never did anything like your bringing down that Wire flock all by yourself."

"Look," Walt Lamb cut in. He pointed to the open door of the Captain's office. All heads turned. There was a note of surprise and delight in his voice. "Look! Joe's gone. He's not there any more."

I HELD my breath. A cloud came over McGrady's face. It was a joke—a gag. But this was carrying a raw point too far.

McGrady stalked away from them, as nearly as he could stalk without even a cane to help him. "You crazy?" he said. "You all blind?" He walked toward his desk. We didn't know what was coming next.

"Hello, Joe," McGrady said, waving at the imaginary spectre that had so long haunted his desk. "How you doing, Joe?"

And that was his tribute to Joe's reputation which he now no longer feared.

Later, when I was alone in there with McGrady, he closed the door and looked around, as if to make sure there was no one else in the room who could hear.

"They don't know anything?" he asked.

"No," I said. "They don't. They'll never know now."

"I was afraid," he said, and his tongue shoved the smoke into the corner of his mouth, "that I might have said something when I was delirious. I kinda had the feeling I did. Good Lord, that would have been terrible."

"No," I said. "You didn't say anything."

"A fellow does get scared sometimes when he's facing a lot of guns. I really appreciate how Joe must have felt." He let out a sigh, dropped his voice to a whisper. "And I tell you, I had a cold, clammy feeling when I stepped in here and saw their looks. I was sure they knew. I was sure that I'd spilled something about Joe getting that bullet in the back, running away."

He looked over at the corner of his desk, and his voice came back. "You're okay, Joe," he boomed. And there were crinkles at the corners of his eyes. "But, damn it, why don't you get down off that confounded desk and take a comfortable chair?"