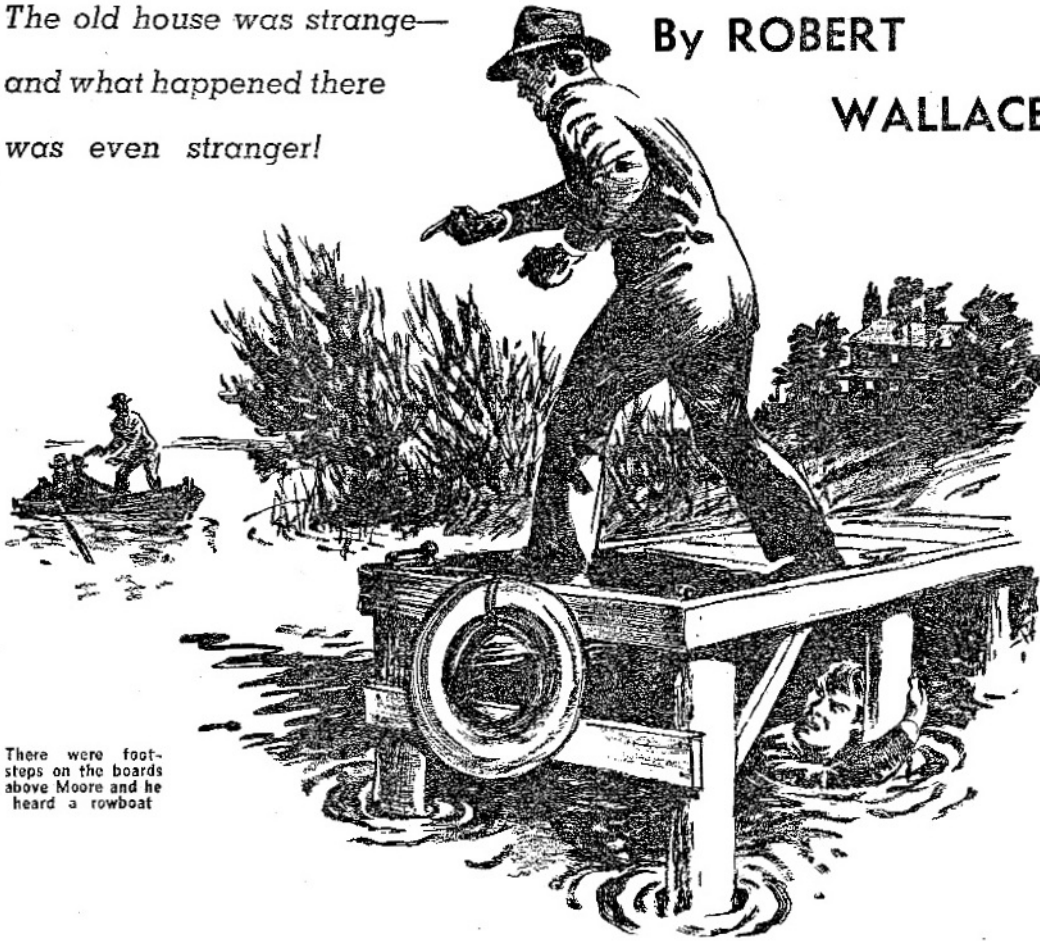


*The old house was strange—
and what happened there
was even stranger!*

By **ROBERT
WALLACE**



There were foot-
steps on the boards
above Moore and he
heard a rowboat

FOR RENT FURNISHED —WITH CRIME

CARSE MOORE sat on the porch of the rambling old house that stood on an isolated section of the New Jersey coast and contentedly smoked his pipe. He enjoyed his work as an examiner in the laboratory of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but it was good to have two weeks of complete change from his usual daily routine. Besides he was combining his vacation with some important official business.

“No using the petrographic microscope or the helizometer for two weeks,” Moore

muttered. “No dropping benzidine solution on a stain to detect the presence of human blood.”

“You sure talk funny,” said a gruff voice. “What are those things you are mumbling about?”

Moore smiled at the lean man in overalls and flannel shirt who sat on the steps of the porch peeling potatoes. For a moment Moore had forgotten George Tillman, the caretaker of the house that the government man had rented for two weeks. It was a letter that Tillman had

written to the bureau that had brought Moore to this place.

Tillman had thick gray hair, a lined, tanned face and the perpetual expression of a man who had just eaten a bunch of sour apples. He was doing the cooking, taking care of the place and acting as guide for Carse Moore on fishing trips. Both men were also doing a lot of watchful waiting.

Moore had arrived at the house only that morning. Now it was late afternoon, and in the few hours that had passed he had become convinced that he had known many far jollier companions than George Tillman.

"I was just thinking of the instruments we used back at the laboratory," Moore said. "A petrographic microscope is usually used for soil and dirt examination. Sometimes we can examine the dirt on a dead man's shoes or clothing and make a pretty good guess as to what part of the country he spent most of his time in."

"What's that other thing that sounded like you were swearing in some sort of a foreign language?" Tillman asked, the sharp knife in his hand moving swiftly as he peeled the skin off a potato.

"A helizometer?" Moore asked.

"That's right." Tillman nodded. "What do you do with that?"

"Use it to examine the interior of a weapon that is thought to have some vital bearing on a crime," Moore said. "We also have spectographic and spectophotometric apparatus—"

"That's enough," Tillman interrupted impatiently. "All those fancy words make my head dizzy." He looked at the husky dark-haired man sitting in the porch chair as he got to his feet. "Nearly time for me to get dinner ready anyway." He scowled. "It's the nighttime we have to worry about around here. That's when those men I wrote to the Federal Bureau of

Investigation about have been sneaking around this place."

"That's why I'm here, George," Moore said. "To try and find out what those men you wrote us about are trying to find in this house."

"I figure it is hidden loot of some sort," Tillman said. "Anyway I feel a lot better since I got me that rifle." The old caretaker got to his feet, holding the pan of potatoes in front of him. "Ten years now I have been taking care of this place for the Marshall family, and never ran into any trouble until the last couple of months." The old man walked into the house through the open front door and disappeared.

Moore glanced at the small wharf down at the edge of the stretch of inland water. A rowboat, tied to the pier, rocked gently. In the late afternoon sunlight everything looked peaceful, and yet Carse Moore felt an uneasy feeling creeping over him.

THE old house was located in a cove at the lower end of a stretch of mainland. A battered coupe turned off the road and swung into the winding gravel driveway that circled around in front of the house. The car stopped and a man got out.

He was neatly dressed and wore a snap-brimmed hat. His face was heavy and expressionless and he might have been any age from thirty to forty.

"Mr. Moore?" he asked coming up the steps of the porch. "I'm Sloan Paxton and I want to see you on important business. You are Carse Moore?"

"That's right." Moore got to his feet. He had no desire to shake hands with the new arrival. "What can I do for you, Mr. Paxton?"

"I was very disappointed when the real estate agent told me you had rented this place," Paxton said. "You see I had

planned on occupying it for the next two months with my family as we always do during the summer months.”

“I’ll only be here for two weeks,” Moore said. “After that the place is yours.”

“But my vacation starts tomorrow,” Paxton said. “The first of July. My family always occupies this place from that date on. I’ll admit that I was careless and put off renting the place until the last moment this year, but I thought Byron Nester, the real estate agent, would hold the house until he heard from me.”

“He didn’t say anything about anyone else wanting the place,” Moore said. “I understood it was closed and boarded up all winter and spring.”

There was something suspicious about Sloan Paxton’s sudden desire to take immediate possession of the big old house. That he couldn’t wait even two weeks more before taking over the place was hard to believe, in Moore’s estimation.

“I’d gladly pay you the two weeks’ rent and a little extra if you will turn the place over to me now, Mr. Moore,” Paxton said.

“Don’t do it, Moore,” said George Tillman suddenly appearing in the front doorway of the house. “If you leave, they’ll kill me.”

“Who are you?” Paxton glared at the old caretaker. “Who will kill you? What are you talking about?”

“How long have you been taking care of this place, George?” Moore asked. “For the past ten years, didn’t you say?”

“That’s right.” Tillman nodded.

“Your family has been occupying this place every summer, and you don’t even know George Tillman by sight,” said Moore, looking hard at Paxton. “Isn’t that a bit strange?”

“I tried to be nice about this,” Paxton said. “But I guess we’ll have to do it the hard way.”

Paxton drew an automatic from the right hand side pocket of his coat and covered Moore. Paxton glanced toward the doorway of the house and scowled as he discovered that Tillman had disappeared.

Moore glanced at the gun in Paxton’s hand, then yawned and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. It obviously wasn’t the reaction Paxton expected and it worried him. Moore’s tobacco pouch was lying on the arm of the chair in which he had been sitting when the stranger arrived. He picked it up and began calmly filling the pipe.

“Saying ‘boo’ has also been known to scare some people,” Moore said, dropping into the chair. “Nice gun you have there. Colt forty-five automatic pistol, Government Model. Length of barrel, five inches; over all length, eight and a half inches, Magazine capacity, seven cartridges. Weight, thirty-nine ounces.”

“Never mind all that stuff,” snapped Paxton. “I know it is a good gun and I’m likely to use it on you if you are not careful.”

“I wouldn’t like that at all” Moore struck a match and lighted his pipe. “From now on Caution is my middle name. That’s it Carse Caution Moore. By the way, we have some interesting guns where I work. A twelve gauge automatic that will shoot through three walls. A Thompson submachine gun which shoots six hundred forty-five caliber bullets a minute, ten a second.”

“Byron Nester, the real estate man told me that you were a business man on a vacation,” Paxton said. “Where do you work?”

“Federal Bureau of Investigation,” Moore said.

Paxton blinked and for a moment he actually looked frightened, but he recovered quickly. His expression hardened as he glared at Moore.

"A G-Man!" he said. "You were foolish to tell me that. Now we just can't let you go."

"We? Either you suddenly feel like royalty or you are working with some companions in crime," Moore said thoughtfully. He glanced at the door leading into the house. "Before you do something foolish with that automatic I had better warn you, Paxton."

"Warn me of what?" Paxton snarled.

"That George Tillman is a crack shot with a high-powered rifle," Moore said. "Why he can stand back there in the hall out of sight and shoot down a man out here just as easy" Moore raised his voice. "Isn't that right, George?"

"Right!" came Tillman's voice from somewhere in the house.

"This is too much for me," Paxton said, dropping his automatic back into his pocket "I'm in deep water, way over my head, and I thought I was making a smart play. But five hundred thousand bucks would tempt anyone."

"I seldom carry that much money around with me in cash," Moore said.

"I didn't think you had the dough." Paxton dropped into a chair. "But I was tipped off that it was hidden in this old house. You remember that armored car robbery in Philadelphia last winter?"

"Of course," said Moore. "That gang got away with five hundred thousand dollars and none of them has been caught yet. You mean that money is supposed to be hidden in this old house?"

"That's right," Paxton said. "I wasn't one of the gang, but I got a good tip that the money was here. That's why I was so anxious to rent this place. I wanted a chance to look for that money without it seeming suspicious, but I found you beat me to it."

"I'm so sensitive to my surroundings," Moore said. "I still have a feeling that you

would rather not have me around, Paxton. While Tillman still has you covered with the rifle, suppose you just take that automatic out of your pocket and place it on the floor of the porch. We decided before that I wouldn't like to be shot."

PAXTON hesitated and then drew the automatic out of his pocket and placed it on the floor of the porch. The sun was setting in the west as the long summer afternoon drew to a close. Moore glanced out at the water. A speed boat with three men in it swerved close to the little wharf and then sheered off as it sped by.

"Beautiful sunset, isn't it?" Paxton said.

To Moore this wild observation was completely out of character. With considerable interest he watched Paxton walk to the porch rail. As the man stood there, apparently staring out over the water, he took off his hat and held it in his left hand.

"'One if by land, and two if by sea,' " Moore muttered and moved fast.

When Paxton turned to look at him Moore was sitting in the same position in his chair, calmly smoking, but the automatic was no longer lying on the porch floor.

"What did you just say?" Paxton demanded.

"I was thinking of Paul Revere," Moore said. "Only he had a horse."

Paxton snorted. "Are all government men as crazy as you are?" he asked.

"Only when the right opportunity presents itself," Moore replied.

Tillman, completely unarmed, appeared in the doorway. "Dinner is ready," the caretaker said. "I set a place for you, Paxton."

"Then I'm a prisoner here," Paxton said resignedly.

"Let's say a guest for the time being."

Moore rose to his feet and knocked the ashes out of his pipe on the porch rail. "Until the other visitors I'm expecting arrive."

Paxton glanced at him, and frowned but said nothing. The three men went into the house. Tillman had the evening meal ready for them on a table in the big kitchen. Paxton kept watching the caretaker as he ate.

"Where's the rifle?" Paxton finally asked.

"I seldom use it when I'm cooking," Tillman said. "Kind of gets in the way."

When the meal was finished Moore rose from the table. He looked at the other two men. "I'm going to take a walk," he said. "See you later."

He walked through the hall and out onto the porch, and then down the hill to the small wharf. It was night now. He saw that the rowboat was gone. From somewhere in the darkness behind him a gun roared.

The bullet just nicked his right ear, but he reeled as though badly wounded and tumbled off the pier into the water with a loud splash. He came to the surface and a quick swim brought him beneath the wharf. He remained there clinging to one of the pilings.

There were rapid footsteps on the boards above him, and he heard the creaking of the oarlocks of a rowboat.

"All right, men!" Paxton shouted as he stood on the pier. "We've got him, but let's be sure that he is dead. Put another bullet in him if he comes to the surface."

Moore saw that the rowboat was heading toward the pier and that there were three men in it. One of them stood in the bow with a gun in his hand, another man was rowing, while the third sat in the stern of the boat. From the first he had thought Paxton was lying about not being a member of this gang.

"See him?" called Paxton.

"Not yet," shouted one of the men as they came closer.

Moore edged back to the shore end of the pier and crawled up on land. Some bushes not far from the pier sheltered him while he waited.

The man in the bow of the rowboat tossed the painter to Paxton who grabbed the rope and tied the boat fast. The three men climbed onto the pier, and then to Moore's ears came a sound he was delighted to hear. It was the whiplike crack of a high powered rifle.

"Tillman!" the G-Man muttered. "I was afraid Paxton had killed him or knocked him out."

He saw one of the men go down from a bullet in his leg. Another clutched at his chest and then dropped to the boards. Paxton uttered a wild yell and dashed off the pier, running directly toward the bushes where Moore waited. Moore brought him down with a flying tackle. Paxton's head struck a small rock and he was knocked unconscious.

As Moore got to his feet he heard the rifle roar again and saw the fourth man drop. "All right, George!" Moore shouted. "We got them all!"

Tillman hurried down the hill, the rifle in his hands. Moore went to meet him. "The F.B.I. was smart in figuring those men I heard sneaking around the house at nights might be looking for the loot taken from the armored car robbery," the caretaker said. "Paxton caught me when I wasn't looking and locked me in a broom closet in the kitchen, but I managed to break the door down and get out."

IT DIDN'T take Moore and Tillman long to unarm and tie up the three wounded men and Paxton. When Paxton regained consciousness, he found that he and the other men had been carried into

the house one by one by Moore and Tillman.

“Finding the money would have been easy if our boss hadn’t died last winter,” Paxton said. “Five hundred thousand dollars in thousand dollar bills. We knew he hid it in this house, but he didn’t tell us where.”

“I found it,” Tillman said. “It was packed away in the dust bag of an old vacuum cleaner in the kitchen broom closet.”

“That’s right,” Moore said. “We’ve got the money now.” He smiled at Tillman. “And since there is a five thousand dollar reward for the capture of this gang, I’ll see that you get it, George.”

“Gosh,” said the old caretaker, “that’s finding money twice in one night. I phoned the local police and the doctor. They should be here soon. While we’re waiting, tell me more about those gadgets you use at the laboratory, Carse.” Tillman was actually smiling. “They sound right interesting!”