



The killer drew an automatic and fired at close range

NEW YEAR'S DUTY

By JOHNSTON McCULLLEY

Deputy Sheriff Retland is ready to retire—but not before walking into the gunfire of two killers in the line of duty!

MORE cars whizzed past on the highway which had been free of snow for several days. The night sky was clear and star-studded. The temperature had moderated. Taken altogether, it was as pleasant a New Year's Eve as Deputy Sheriff Lew Retland ever had experienced, and he had lived through sixty of them.

Now he stood in the doorway of the

sheriff's substation on Riverdale Road and watched the traffic. It was about nine. Most of the cars, he knew, were headed for the somewhat notorious Britelite Tavern, less than a mile away in a grove of trees on the bank of the frozen river.

It took money to celebrate New Year's Eve at the Britelite Tavern. Wine would flow, and prices would be high. The floor show would not be conducted with even its usual

modicum of decorum. By midnight, it would be a wild party.

Three raids by a sheriff's squad had convinced John Miller, the tavern's operator, that it would be cheaper to close his gambling layouts, so he had done it. But he would make up a part of the difference, everybody knew, by padding checks, short-changing customers, and slapping extra tariff on everything that could bear the weight.

Retland knew all about the clientele of the Britelite. He dropped in often in the line of duty. Big business men, socialites who thought they were slumming, sportsmen, beautiful women with warm smiles and cold hearts out for what they could get—they all passed through the doors of the Britelite Tavern at some time.

Stepping back into the substation, Deputy Sheriff Lew Retland closed the door and went to his desk. He was alone tonight. Because he was a widower with no children, and only a middle-aged niece to keep house for him, he was generally selected for holiday assignments. New Year's Eve was only another evening to him—usually.

But it was a bit different tonight. This was the last New Year's Eve he would be on duty. He was coming up for retirement in February, after forty years of service.

As he filled and lit his pipe and made himself comfortable at his desk, with his feet upon a corner of it, his mind flashed back over those forty years. There had been tense moments in the early years of service—wild chases and a few gun battles that did not amount to much except to make life a bit interesting.

THEN he had been given desk work at the sheriff's office in the big city. In time, he had charge of the telephone work to the substations scattered around the big county outside corporate limits, most of them along highways leading in and out of the population center. Those sub-stations formed a net when

the sheriff's office wanted to stop somebody making a getaway.

The years passed with Retland giving satisfactory service but never doing anything spectacular to get his name into the newspaper headlines. Sam White, who had been sheriff for many years thanks to a strong political machine and good work, gave medals for especially meritorious conduct and bravery. Retland never had gone to the Head Office to have a medal pinned on him while newspaper photogs flashed their bulbs at him.

Yet he was content. He owned a little home free from debt. He would have a retirement pension. And he could raise chickens and rabbits, and drop in at the substation evenings to smoke his pipe and gossip. However, he wished he had done something during the forty years that would have impressed the people of the city with the fact that at least he was alive.

His middle-aged niece, a spinster who had soured on life in her teens when a love affair had gone wrong, went around humming hymns and thought a meeting of the Ladies' Aid Society was the high spot of the month. She ruled Lew Retland with a hand of iron, and had a sharp tongue. But she was a good housekeeper and an excellent cook, so Retland tolerated her. He merely closed his ears to her complaints and grunted in reply to her queries.

However, she had said something a few days before that had startled him.

"You'll be retiring in February, Uncle Lew," she had said. "Forty years on one job! A steady, dependable man. I'd think Sheriff Sam White would do something handsome for you."

"The retirement fund will do that," Retland had answered.

"I mean something special. Like a medal for faithful service—"

"Them things are for heroes only," he broke in. "I'm no hero. Been an inside office man most of the time. Anyhow, I'm alive and ain't got any bullet holes in me, and some

heroes can't say that. I ain't complainin'."

Now, as he sat in the little office on New Year's Eve, he realized that his passing from active service would cause no sensation in the daily public life. He wasn't even important enough to rate an item in the big city papers. Just a good public servant quitting the job because of age. There was a keen satisfaction in that, however. His record had been an honorable one, and he would quit with it that way.

More cars roared past on the highway outside.

"Big night for the Britelite Tavern," he muttered to himself. "John Miller will gouge 'em plenty. 'Bout time for Joe Adams to be comin' along."

Joe Adams was the highway motorcycle cop on the night shift in the Riverdale district. He stopped at the sheriff's sub-station every night a couple of times to check the teletype for orders and chat with Retland.

Retland hated the teletype. Telephones had been good enough, he thought. He had handled everything by telephone when he had been at the Head Office in charge of communications with sub-stations, before Head Office decided he was growing old and slowing up.

But now a pretty girl sat at a teletype machine and punched keys and sent the message to all sub-stations at once. Instead of remaining comfortable at his desk, reaching out to take the phone when its bell sounded and attending to official business without getting out of his chair, now he had to get up and go to the teletype receiving machine in the corner of the office and read what the thing had written!

The spitting of a motorcycle coming along the highway at top speed interrupted Lew Retland's reverie. Joe Adams was coming. The highway cop would perhaps have a bad night—drunken drivers, auto mishaps, fights and all that. For an instant, Retland was glad he would have nothing worse than a teletype

to contend with.

JOE ADAMS parked his motor in front and barged through the door, his manner breezy. Retland liked Joe Adams. He was only twenty-eight, good-looking, tall and strong, and knew how to handle belligerent men speedily and to advantage.

Adams had been married two years and had a son about one year old. He was paying for a little bungalow-type house. He was a splendid officer, looking as an officer should look in his uniform. Retland long ago had decided that Joe Adams would climb high in the service.

"Evenin', Lew!" the motorcycle cop greeted now. "Lucky you, to have your job tonight. I'll probably have to handle a dozen fights at the Britelite, make reports on a score of auto accidents, and pinch a bunch of drunk drivers weaving their cars all over the highway. What's on the teletype?"

"The cussed thing hasn't clattered for an hour," Retland replied. "Hope it keeps quiet."

But it began chattering at that instant. Joe Adams went over to it, and Retland got up from the desk and followed him. The message came in swiftly:

TO: ADAMS, MOTOR 631.

FROM HEAD OFFICE:

SEND AMBULANCE CALLS IF ANY TO WEST SUBSTATION. REPORT ACCIDENTAL DEATHS TO SAME. URGE KEEP EYE ON BRITELITE TAVERN. REPORT IS THAT NORT SANDERS HAS RESERVATION THERE FOR LARGE PARTY. IF HE IS THERE OBSERVE WITH WHOM HE COMMUNICATES AND REPORT SAME. IF GAMBLING ROOM OPENS TONIGHT CALL AT ONCE.—BRYAN, COMMUNICATIONS.

"Nort Sanders, huh?" Retland said, as the machine became silent. "What's he up to now?"

"I wouldn't know," Joe Adams replied. "Head Office seems worried about his

associates. I've heard rumors."

"Open up," Retland begged.

"You know Nort Sanders' girl, that cute model, Clarissa Dayle?"

"Not personally," Retland replied, grinning. "I can't buy the things she likes."

"Nort Sanders has been buying 'em for a year. His gambling house in town and his rackets have dressed that cold-blooded baby in mink and decked her with jewels, as the saying is."

"That's ordinary for such people," Retland suggested. "No law against a man makin' a fool of himself over a woman. If there was, half the men would be in the jailhouse. Good for the merchants, too."

"And bad for the homicide squad if things go wrong," Joe Adams added. "Nort Sanders is generally in the chips and a couple of mink coats wouldn't wreck him. But you take Duke Parney, now. He could make it three ermine coats and a matched pearl necklace, and still have breakfast money left."

"You mean Duke Parney is tryin' to steal Nort Sanders' girl friend?"

"I'd say he's stolen her already, Lew. It's the principal topic of conversation in our cafe society, as a man might say. She's been giving Nort Sanders the brush off. And what else would you expect of a girl like her? Sanders is a free-spending guy dancing around on the fringe of crime. Bootlegger when he was a kid, mixing in all the rackets, owns a gambling house in town that the city cops can't seem to be able to find. It's out of the sheriff's jurisdiction, or we'd find it."

"Yeah, I know all that."

"And Duke Parney—distinguished gent with gray hair at his temples. Comes from an old family. Has an inherited fortune which he makes grow despite his huge spending. Likes to dabble around with the horse-poker-baseball-cafe crowd. You think a girl like Clarissa Dayle would hesitate if she had a chance to drop Sanders and cling to Duke Parney?"

"Reckon not," Retland said. "A model, eh?"

ADAMS uttered a scornful laugh. "She's a model, my eye! Was once. Heard an artist say she was the greatest model ever for hands. Bet she hasn't worked at it six days the last year. She's a model gold-digger. But she's a beauty, and she has brains—I'll say that much for her. Heard her on the witness stand a year ago in a manslaughter case—innocent bystander who just happened to see and hear, to listen to her tell it. And she outsmarted the D. A. and all his hired help."

"And you think there may be trouble about it?"

"It's only a question of where, when and what. Somebody once said, 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.' I can match that. Hell hath no fury like a cheap tinhorn gambler and minor racketeer who sees his moll sneering at him as she walks away on the arm of a rich, aristocratic playboy. Somebody'll be picking up the pieces before the New Year is very old! That reminds me! Happy New Year, Lew, and many more of them!"

"Thanks, Joe. Same to you. I won't be on the job much longer. Going up for retirement in February."

"I'll miss our nightly chats, Lew," Adams said, sincerely. "Better get a hustle on me now. I'll look in on you later, Lew."

Joe Adams hurried from the office, and a moment later Retland heard his motorcycle roar into life as he dashed along the highway toward the Britelite Tavern.

The teletype began chattering again. Retland hurried to it and read the message as it came in:

RETLAND, RIVERDALE ROAD SUB-
STATION:
TELEPHONE HEAD OFFICE IMMEDIATELY.
BRYAN, COMMUNICATIONS.

Retland hurried across the office to the telephone. He had a moment of glee. The

teletype could make sounds and print a message, but it was a one-way affair. When they really wanted something, they had to call him to the phone. Then, human voices did the work.

He telephoned the Head Office and gave his name and code word.

"Adams been there?" Head Office asked.

"Left not two minutes ago."

"Which way did he travel?"

"North, toward Britelite Tavern."

"Trouble there, Retland. Adams may have gone on past. Leave message for him and hit for the Tavern in your car. It's a homicide. The homicide squad is busy in the city now. It'll be some time before our men can get there. Help Adams if he gets there. Take charge until he does get there if he is late. We'll try to catch him at the next station."

Retland felt a thrill go through him as he replied:

"Orders understood!"

"Make it quick, Retland! We had a phone tip that, Duke Parney has been shot and killed."

Retland's heart was pounding as he scribbled a note for Adams and left it on the teletype. Sometimes, Adams circled on another highway and came back. But Retland supposed he had stopped at the Tavern.

He locked the office door and rushed to his old car, and a moment later was driving down the highway with what speed the old rattletrap could make.

Duke Parney! They had just been talking about him and Nort Sanders and Sanders' girl. Duke Parney, the millionaire playboy who wasted money and at the same time supported a children's hospital and built playgrounds for the kids! His death from natural causes would have been a front page story, but if he had been murdered, over a gold-digger, it would be a sensation greater than any other during the year now dying.

As he neared the lane that ran out to the highway from the Tavern, he saw cars turning

out and speeding away in both directions. Some passed him on the way to the city. Retland guessed that shocked and fearful guests were escaping from the place of tragedy, reluctant to be interrogated and held as witnesses.

HE TURNED into the lane and sent his car slowly to the front of the sprawling building, parking off to one side and getting out to hurry to the wide verandah in front. He took his service pistol out of its holster and checked to see that it was loaded and ready. Regulations made him wear that pistol. He had not used it for years except at the police pistol range, where he revealed himself an excellent marksman.

Inside the Tavern, women were screeching and men were shouting at one another hoarsely. Retland straightened his bent shoulders, thrust some people aside, and got into the place. His arm was grasped, and he turned his head to see John Miller, the proprietor, beside him.

"Into the office, Retland—quick!" Miller said.

The office was only a step away. Miller closed the door when they were inside.

"Listen, Retland!" John Miller begged. "This will ruin me unless it's handled just right. How could I help it? A decent man reserves a table and starts a celebration with his friends. And another man comes in, walks up to the table, and shoots him. For some trouble outside the Tavern. No quarrel in here. Remember that, Retland."

"Facts—quick!" Retland said.

"Duke Parney had the party. Nort Sanders had a reservation, too, but phoned and canceled it two hours ago. I thought I knew why when I saw that Clarissa Dayle was one of Duke Parney's guests."

"I know all that dope—get down to the killin'!" Retland ordered.

"Sanders walks in with his pal, Walt Henson, behind him, and goes right to the

table. Duke started to get out of his chair, and Henson slapped him back into it. ‘Steal my girl, will you?’ Sanders hollered at Duke. ‘It’s the last girl you’ll steal!’ I was less than twenty feet away and heard every word. Half the people in the place heard, cause Sanders was yelling, and it was quiet between orchestra numbers.”

“Hurry it up!” Retland ordered.

“Sanders drew an automatic and fired five shots into Duke Parney at close range. Bet the front of his dress shirt has powder burns on it. Walt Henson threatened the crowd with a gun, and he and Sanders backed toward the front door, watching everybody. Women screamed and fainted and men bumped into one another as they began rushing around crazy like.”

“How about Duke’s guests?”

“Two big city men and their gals, and Clarissa Dayle. They about went crazy.

I’ve got ‘em in a private room. The three women are screeching their heads off. Plenty of other witnesses, too. Some paid their checks and hurried away, and some forgot their checks. No mystery here for a homicide squad to solve. All the cops have to do is catch Nort Sanders and his pal, Walt Henson.”

“I’ll talk to Duke’s guests,” Retland answered. “I’m just holdin’ the fort until the squad can get out from town. They’re busy there on another case. Joe Adams will be here soon as he gets word, to take over.”

“A second, Retland, before you go talk to those people. I want this thing smoothed as much as possible, see? Want it made plain in all reports that the trouble didn’t start here. This thing has ruined my New Year’s Eve take. It’ll blast business for a long time for me, except a few curious folks will drop in maybe tomorrow or next day. A thing like this—”

“What can I do?” Retland asked. “Tell it to the newspaper boys. You can bet they’ll come stormin’ out here when they hear of Duke Parney’s murder. They’re probably on their way now.”

“You talk to the newspaper boys like I

said. Make it official.”

“And why should I do a favor for you—a man who’s runnin’ gamblin’ tables on the sly half the time, who’s caused the Head Office a lot of trouble?”

“Listen, Retland! I’ve heard you’re to be retired next month on a measly little pension. Kicked out after forty years’ work. You could use an extra few thousand—”

THE deputy sheriff shook his head. “So you’d hand me a fistful of century notes, maybe?” Retland asked. “Just for sayin’ in my reports, and tellin’ the news-hounds, that the quarrel didn’t start in here?”

“Protect me all along the line.”

“What line, Miller?” Retland asked. “Seems to me I’ve heard that Nort Sanders and some of his boys were your pardners in your gamblin’ room here.”

“Old stuff, Retland. I’ve closed my gambling rooms, and you sheriff’s men know it. You can come smelling around any time you like.”

“Offerin’ me heavy sugar for nothin’?” Retland asked. “Not like you, Miller. The thing is putrid.”

“Have it your own way. Facts are facts. The trouble didn’t start here.”

“But Nort Sanders and his boys have been your friends and business associates,” Retland reminded him. “How do I know but what you knew what was comin’ off? Maybe you made it easy for Sanders and Walt Henson, like passin’ word where Parney and his party had their table and all that. Let’s get to those witnesses.”

Miller shrugged his shoulders and opened the door. Retland followed him out, through the lobby and into the scene of confusion. Guests were wild. They stormed the check rooms for wraps and hurried out to get their cars.

The head waiter hurried up to Miller. “More than half are dodging their checks, sir.”

“Let ‘em go!” Miller told him. “Get

everybody out except those in the private room. Make a speech and tell them to leave quietly, that we deplore what happened but it wasn't our fault; that the men didn't quarrel in here."

Miller led Retland on toward the private room, dodging those who were charging toward the door in delayed panic. Somebody had shouted that the authorities would hold them all without bail as material witnesses.

The orchestra platform was deserted. The stage was filled with costumed chorus girls who had been preparing to put on the floor show, who were screeching inquiries at one another. Miller shouted to them to shut up, dress and go home, and they scurried from the stage.

At the door of the private room, Miller stopped and turned to Retland.

"Make it as easy as possible for the two men," he whispered. "Both prominent and married and all that. I confess that's one of the things I was, and still am, willing to pay you for. Plenty of witnesses without them."

"You're crazy!" Retland told him. "Scores of persons must have seen them at Duke Parney's table. By the way—the body?"

"Where he fell beside the table. I had waiters cover the body with tablecloths. It hasn't been touched."

"You've got a little sense anyhow," Retland acknowledged, grudgingly. "I didn't notice anything as we came through the big room."

"You're not used to this sort of work, Retland. You're an office cop, and an old one. Why not wait until Joe Adams gets here?"

"Say! Why have you been delayin' me?" Retland snapped. "There's somethin' behind this. Open that door and let me talk to these people, get their names and all."

He glanced back at the big room with its lavish furnishings. Almost everyone was gone. Tables and chairs had been overturned. Waiters stood around white-faced. On the

floor was something covered with white tablecloths.

Miller was pretending to give his head waiter further orders by shouting. Retland brushed him aside suddenly and jerked open the door of the private room.

"Get him!" he heard Miller shout to somebody as he stepped into the room. "Better stop his mouth!"

Retland was behind an ornamental screen that shrouded the door inside. He heard voices. He whirled as Miller rushed at him, grasped the small tavern owner and clapped a hand over his mouth and threw an arm around his throat and squeezed. Miller could do no more than gurgle.

RETLAND heard voices: "So, Beautiful, you thought I'd plug Duke and let you continue to run around, did you? Little Nort doesn't play that way. He settles the score all the way around. I hate to ruin the mink coat I bought you—"

"Don't shoot me, Nort! Don't kill me!" a hysterical woman begged. "I was only working him for a fool. I'd have fixed things so you could have taken him for thousands."

"In that case, Beautiful, why didn't you let me in on the game? You lyin' wren! You've done your last chirpin'."

"Please, Nort! I'm crazy about you! Get away, Nort, and send for me—"

"Get ready to die, Beautiful."

"They'll get you, Nort!"

Retland heard the man laugh. "My getaway's all planned. Miller hid me and Henson upstairs and got rid of the others so I could walk in on you."

"He—he promised to get me away and hide me so I wouldn't have to go to court."

"I'll let you live a couple of minutes longer, Beautiful, because it amuses me to hear your wild talk. We can't get away for a little longer anyhow. The sheriff's squad can't get here for some time yet."

Retland realized the situation completely. He whirled Miller back through the door and into the big room. He smashed his service pistol against Miller's head. The tavern owner dropped, unconscious.

"Tend to you later," Retland said.

He turned toward the door of the private room again, his face white, expecting this move would mean his death, but determined to try to save the life of Clarissa Dayle and take Nort Sanders dead or alive.

"Lew!" somebody shouted.

Retland glanced back to see Joe Adams rushing toward him, gun held ready.

"Come on!" Retland shouted. "The killer's in here!"

A man rushed from one of the other rooms. The gun he held blazed and cracked. Retland saw Joe Adams stop abruptly, drop his gun, lurch forward and sprawl. Over his body sprang Walt Henson, Sanders' pal. He tossed a shot at Retland and almost got him. Retland darted behind a huge potted palm and opened fire. He missed, and Henson dashed through the lobby and outdoors.

Retland's first flashing thought was to go to Joe Adams' side, but he sensed that Joe Adams was dead, and there was a girl's life to be saved, regardless of her worth.

A glance at Miller revealed that he was still unconscious from the quick but thorough pistol-whipping Retland had given him. Retland darted into the private room, and this time went around the screen.

"Can't wait any more, Beautiful," he heard Sanders saying. "That shootin' outside—"

"Hands up, Sanders!" Retland shouted. "Drop that gun! You're under arrest."

An astounded man whirled and began firing. Retland felt a bullet burn across his left arm and a second strike him in the left shoulder and send him reeling back against the wall. He opened fire. But Nort Sanders dashed through another door and into another room, slammed the door behind him, was gone. To get away was Sanders' first idea; he thought

the squad had arrived.

Retland got into the other room to find it empty. A door was open, and an empty hall was beyond. Sanders had darted away. Retland rushed back in time to see Miller trying to get up off the floor, two waiters helping him.

"Against the wall, you two!" Retland ordered. "Take your napkins and tie his wrists behind his back, and make it a good job!" To himself, he was muttering, "Wish the squad would get here. Can't do everything myself."

HE RAN to Joe Adams. Joe was dead. Fine, splendid Joe, with a young wife and a baby a year old. Retland almost sobbed. He'd get Sanders and Henson, or have a share in getting them, he swore to himself.

Voices, rushing feet jerked him around. The squad had come. A captain gripped his arm and demanded quick facts. Retland gave them. The captain began shouting orders and squad men began rushing about. Handcuffs snapped on the wrists of Miller and some of his waiters. A sobbing Clarissa Dayle was promptly seized.

"He'd have killed me—killed me—if that deputy hadn't driven him off!" she was saying repeatedly.

To Retland, everything seemed a daze. The doctor with the squad was examining his wounded left arm.

"Bad bullet burn . . . only a flesh wound . . . force of shock kicked you off balance probably."

"Joe. . . Joe?" Retland questioned.

"Killed instantly," the medical man said.

The captain came rushing up. "Get to your sub-station, Retland, and wait there till your relief comes," he ordered. "Able to drive your car?"

"I can make it."

"We'll handle everything now."

"Henson killed Adams. Miller was in it—helped plan and hid them."

"We'll get it all, Retland. Get to the sub-

station. Got to have a man there.”

In the old car, Retland made the best speed he could. He skidded to a stop at the sub-station and felt in his pocket for his keys. His arm burned from the wound and the medicine the doctor had used to dress it. His head was spinning.

“Had enough action for a whole career,” he muttered to himself as he started to unlock the door. “Poor Joe! I’d like to blast the man who killed him!”

It occurred to him that something was wrong, but he couldn’t quite make it out. He shook his head, but his brain refused to clear. He did not realize that the shade had been pulled down at the front window of the little sub-station.

He opened the door and walked into the well-lighted office. And one man seized his wounded arm and jabbed a gun into his ribs, and another closed the door quickly and shot the bolt. Nort Sanders and Walt Henson were there beside him.

“You—you—” Retland muttered.

“Yeah!” Nort Sanders snarled. “We walked right into your little sub-station with its cell in the little rear room. Only you won’t put us into the cell. You kept me from killin’ that double-crossin’ beautiful doll by blastin’ in the way you did. Ruined our getaway plans, too. And now you’ll help us get goin’ again.”

“My arm hurts!” Retland sank into the desk chair. He looked at the desperate men before him. They were sneering at him. An old man, an old office cop, out of his element in a scene of violence. They despised him for a weakling. Sanders was mad at him for shooting in the tavern and making him think the squad was there.

Sanders was small and dapper and mean. Walt Henson—tall and sneaking-looking and mean. He had killed Joe Adams, shot him down to keep him from going after Sanders—

“We’ve got to work quick!” Sanders was saying.

“What—what?” Retland mouthed. “Must

look—at teletype!”

“How do you communicate with the Head Office?” Sanders demanded, shaking him and hurting his sore arm again.

“Phone.”

“Get to it, then. Listen! You tell the Head Office, in plain language and no tricks, that just as you got back here we drove past in a green coupe. You shot at the car and missed. We turned into the cross highway and went east. You tell ‘em that and nothin’ more, understand? If you don’t, I’ll blast you!”

“I’m—all in,” Retland complained. “Let me—get drink of water. If my voice—doesn’t sound natural.”

“Hurry it up! Water cooler in the corner.”

FOR Retland, it was an act. His mind was racing. He had guessed that they would shoot him down before they made their escape. They did not intend to drive east, of course. Probably west to some temporary hideout. Men like they were, they’d have more than one getaway planned.

They did not fear him. They hadn’t even taken his gun. Unfired shells were still in it. What chance would he have against the pair of them? Sanders held a gun ready. Henson had returned his to its shoulder holster, but could draw it quickly enough.

They had killed Joe!

Red rage flamed in front of Retland’s eyes as he lurched toward the water cooler. He made his hands shake as he filled a paper cup with water, spilling some of it, acting as though he were weak and about to collapse from the excitement and his arm wound. He held the water cup in his left hand and turned the tap with his right.

“Hurry it up!” Sanders told him. “When you give Head Office a phone report, do you use any signature or code word?”

“Sure!” Retland replied. “We say ‘finis’. That means ‘the end’ in some foreign language. If we don’t say that—”

“You be sure to say it, then.”

If he hadn't been thinking of Joe Adams, Retland might have smiled. They had swallowed it. To give the word "finis" at the end of a message merely meant that the message was being sent under duress, and Head Office would know something was wrong and send men to investigate. So, if they killed him, others would soon be on their trail.

He lifted the spilling paper cup and carried it to his lips with his left hand. He took a little gulp.

"Hurry it up!" Sanders hissed at him.

And suddenly Retland made his move. He straightened, and hurled the cup of water into Sanders' face. His right hand dived to his holster as he lurched to one side and heard Sanders' bullet scream past his ear.

Then his gun was blasting, first at Sanders, and then at Walt Henson, who was trying frantically to get out his own weapon. Again it blasted at Sanders, and again at Henson. Both men dropped their weapons and started to totter.

And Lew Retland was upon them like a maniac.

"You killed Joe—killed Joe!" he was yelling at them, as tears streamed down his old cheeks. He slashed and smashed with the gun, pistol-whipping men already unconscious.

Reeling against the wall, he shook his head and gathered his wits. He ran to the door and opened it and left it open. He got handcuffs and put them on the wrists of the unconscious men behind their backs. Then he lurched to the telephone and got Head Office.

"Retland—Riverdale," he said, when his call was acknowledged. "I've got Sanders and Henson—the two killers—here. Shot—and handcuffed 'em. Better send—help—"

The phone receiver dropped from his hand and he collapsed in the desk chair. He looked at the two victims on the floor. A mist was before his eyes.

A moment later, he heard the teletype chattering. "Must read message," he muttered. He got up and lurched across the office,

brushed a hand over his eyes and blinked and read:

EMERGENCY! ALL SUBSTATIONS, CAR PATROLS AND MOTORCYCLE OFFICERS! PASS WORD! GET TO RIVERDALE SUBSTATION QUICK. TROUBLE! CAUTION!

BRYAN, COMMUNICATIONS

Retland lurched back to the chair. "Fool teletype!" he grumbled. He opened a drawer and got out a pint of whisky somebody had given him for a New Year's present, and drew the cork. He surely needed a drink for a bracer, he told himself. He took a deep one, then his head dropped forward and his arms spread on the desk.

Screeching sirens, squealing brakes, men's excited voices made him alert again. Sheriff's men stormed into the room. They volleyed questions at him, and Lew Retland answered them like a man half asleep.

"They killed Joe!" he said.

A MEDICAL examiner went over him quickly and decided the worst of his condition was due to shock and exhaustion. Retland heard one of the men giving Head Office a full report over the telephone. He understood dimly that an order had come in reply for a man to take over the substation until relieved, and that Retland was to be taken to his home in a squad car.

"Both these hounds will live to go to the chair or gas chamber," he heard the medical examiner reporting. "How did you ever do it, Retland?"

"They—killed Joe." He seemed to think that was explanation enough.

They stood him up and started to lead him toward the door, to put him into a squad car and take him home. The teletype was chattering again.

"Fool teletype," he mumbled.

"Hey, wait! Here's a personal message for you, Retland!" one of the men called.

He went to the teletype and blinked and read:

TO: RETLAND, RIVERDALE.
FROM: HEAD OFFICE.
CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR
COURAGEOUS ACTION. YOUNGER
MEMBERS OF THE FORCE WILL BE
INSPIRED BY YOUR EXAMPLE. AT THE
TIME OF YOUR RETIREMENT NEXT
MONTH, I SHALL HAVE THE HONOR AND
PLEASURE OF AWARDING YOU
PERSONALLY MEDAL FOR VALOR. UNTIL

THAT TIME YOU HAVE LEAVE OF
ABSENCE WITH FULL PAY. HAPPY NEW
YEAR!

SAM WHITE, SHERIFF.

Retland's eyes were misty again as they led him away. "Teletype—not so bad," he muttered. And as he got into the squad car he was thinking that this might sweeten to at least a small extent the sour disposition of his spinster niece.