

CLUE OF COURAGE

by
NORVELL PAGE

Just a dumb rookie cop, they said. A mugg with brains in his feet and not enough savvy to buck the choppers.

PATROLMAN MALLORY paced his beat with spring-heeled jubilation. He wanted to whistle, but that was one of the things a cop on duty isn't supposed to do. On duty! The thought sent a tingle of pride through Patrolman Mallory. Off the recruit list at last, no longer a rookie. He was a regular cop on duty—a cop, as his father had been before him. That was what put the spring in young Patrolman Mallory's heels.

The slap of his shoe leather was cheerful along dusk-filled Tenth Street, a lanky, loose-jointed man, with big-wristed hands swinging like hams against the neat dark uniform. His young eyes were alert beneath the black visor of his uniform cap. They raked both sides of the street, took in the high dim ceiling of a studio through a big window, saw lavish furnishings, saw a gentleman in a silk hat come out of an apartment house across the street and stand in pale yellow light beneath the canopy.

The *chasseur*, in light blue uniform, raised a white ivory whistle to his lips and piped twice. Near the corner behind Mallory a taxi clashed gears and moaned to a crescendo of mounting speed. It passed Mallory with a sibilant rush, swerved toward the curb. Its yellow bulk cut in between Mallory and the waiting gentleman in the silk hat. Staccato explosions ripped out.

The high buildings on either side of the street caught up the blasts and gave them a whip-like after echo. It filled the thoroughfare with crashing sound. Mallory stopped dead, lanky body crouched, brows frowning above alert young eyes. *Could that be gunfire?* Mallory's big fist squeezed through the slit in his coat pocket to his holster; his gun came out in his hand.

The taxi had not stopped. As if the explosions had been rocket blasts propelling it, it spurted ahead with increased speed. As the yellow screen



of the cab was removed the man in the silk hat came into view again. He was clinging to a steel support of the canopy. His head was sagging and, while Mallory watched, he slid slowly, grotesquely down the pole. His knees hit the pavement and he pitched sideways. The *chasseur* stood rigid, shoulder-hunched, against the apartment wall, a picture of paralyzed fear.

Mallory was in the middle of the street in a single, long-legged bound, his pistol leveled. He blew his police whistle in shrill squirts of sound and his gun jerked in his big hand, spitting lead after the fleeing taxi. Mallory saw glass crash out of the car's back window as it swirled through the white pool of a streetlight, then it lurched, squealing rubber around the corner into Fifth Avenue.

Mallory pounded, gun still in hand, across the street to where the man had sunk to the pavement.

"Hey, you!" he yelled to the *chasseur*, "Where's a phone?" He had a big voice.

The doorman moved a jerky, trembling hand toward the entrance. Mallory bolted past him. His ham-like fist struck the door like a brick and slammed it open. A man sitting at a switchboard jerked about with eyes wide in a white face.

"Get headquarters quick!" Mallory bellowed.

His deep voice filled the gleaming, modernistic lobby. The white-faced man's hands fumbled in a plug. He swung the mouthpiece around toward Mallory, and the young patrolman folded his long body to bark into it.

"Patrolman Mallory, Number 19785," he said rapidly. "Man shot in front of West 10th Street apartment. Killers got away in a yellow taxi with the glass smashed out of the back window by a bullet. They headed up Fifth Avenue. No, I didn't get the number," he said, and then, "Okay."

He spun on his heel and slammed out into the street. The doorman still stood unmoving, teeth chattering in a loose-lipped mouth. Mallory flicked a sharp glance at him, bent over the recumbent gentleman.

THE SILK HAT was in the gutter, red stained the stiff white bosom of his shirt. He was dead. Mallory dug hurriedly into his pockets, found a card with the name, *Eugene Delancey*, and an East 65th Street address.

Windows were crowded with down-peering faces. Men and women pounded and tapped swift

feet over from Sixth Avenue, popped out of doorways. An excited babble of voices arose. Mallory unfolded his lanky length, from the side of the body, glared at the doorman. "What's your name?"

The man quavered, "Frank Leopold," and added his address.

"Know this guy?"

The man's head wobbled.

"See who shot him?"

The man stammered out a mumbled "No."

Mallory stood glaring at him, thought belatedly of his notebook, fumbled it out, and began scrawling in it with a pencil stub lost in huge fist.

The first police siren whined into hearing, a roadster slewed around the corner of Fifth Avenue, and roared with flashing headlights the wrong way up the street, swerved over to the curb. Two cops piled out.

"Get the crowd back," one with a red face snapped at Mallory, spun to the doorman and ordered, "Get a sheet."

Mallory, arching his back and shoving into the curious throng, felt the hot blood rising in his cheeks. These cops had the professional tone. They showed him up as an amateur. It was his case. He had reported it. And now he was being ordered around by the first copper that came along. The crowd was stubborn, resisted his thrusts and asked questions. A man queried in a confidential tone, "Say, what happened here?"

"None of your damned business," growled Mallory.

He turned his broad blue back on the crowd and glowered at the two cops. He crossed over to them and said, "The guy's name seems to be Eugene Delancey. I got a card out of his pocket."

The cop with the red face grunted, "Why didn't you say so?" and the doorman came back with a sheet.

The cop took it away from him and flapped it once and let it settle over the body. More police cars squealed up, and the big green car from headquarters. A square-jawed, stocky detective with a derby on his eyebrows, dropped out and slouched over beside the sheeted figure. He grunted, "This here the corpus delecti?" and bent over and jerked the sheet off the man's face. He gasped then, "Good Lord, Delancey!" and straightened with a snap.

"Who reported this?" he barked out.

MALLORY stepped forward, his mouth smiling. This was a detective from headquarters, from the homicide squad, one of the big shots of the force. This was what Mallory hoped some day to be. He told his story in an eager deferential gush of words. The detective glowered at him, square jaws knotted.

He said, "Hell, the kill of the year, and a rookie cop has to be on the job."

Mallory flushed, "I marked the cab, sir," he protested. "I broke its back window with a bullet."

The detective growled, "Yeah, yeah, sure. Why in hell didn't you grab a taxi and chase 'em?"

Mallory started to talk, and the detective cut in again, patting the air with a mock-soothing hand. "Sure, sure, I know. There wasn't a taxi waiting there with the door open, was there?"

Mallory's big hands were fists at his sides. His eyes narrowed and his mouth was a straight white line of anger. Another detective lolled over, a thin man with a sharp face. "Aw, lay off the kid, Callahan," he said. "It's Pat Mallory's boy, you know, and he done right well for a rookie."

The detective called Callahan, glowered at Mallory. "Pat Mallory's kid, huh? Why, the old man would turn over in his grave if he knew you'd done a stunt like this tonight."

Mallory bellowed, his voice filling the street, "Look, I don't know you, but—" The thin detective slouched over beside him and patted him on the shoulder. "Back up, kid, back up," he said. Mallory jerked his shoulder away and moved toward Callahan. The thin man's hand grabbed him again and tightened.

"Listen, kid," he said, "one of the first things you gotta learn is to take it. I said you did right well for a rookie."

Callahan grunted, "Oh, sure, for a rookie," and hunched his shoulders and stumped over to the doorman, put him over the hurdles without learning any more than Mallory had, and finally grouched off to the headquarters car. It roared away. An ambulance clanged up and the medical examiner did his job, and presently all that was left was a red stain on the sidewalk and Patrolman Mallory, pacing up and down the opposite side of the street.

The spring was gone from his heels now. He put his feet down heavily, doggedly, one after another, and his broad shoulders were hunched and his eyes narrowed. His ham-like fist was knotted about his stick. Anger gnawed within him. He had one

thought in his mind, and one only: to get even with Callahan. But at the back of his brain something told him that the headquarters detective was right.

Why hadn't he commandeered a taxi and chased the killers? There wasn't but one reason. He hadn't thought of it, and that was dumb. That admission only made him more angry with Callahan. And the detective had had the nerve to mention Mallory's father! Old Pat Mallory had started out this way too, pounding a beat. But he'd been smart, young Mallory jeered at himself. He'd never have pulled a dumb stunt like letting those killers get away.

Pat Mallory had risen to the chief inspectorship of the force, a tradition among the uniformed men. But that wouldn't make it easier for young Mallory. It only gave him something bigger to live up to, and the older police would be harder on him because of that, just to show him that the fact that he was Pat Mallory's son didn't mean a damned thing to them. Mallory gritted his teeth and clenched his jaw. He would show them!

HE GLOWERED across the street at where the *chasseur* still stood in the yellow light beneath the canopy. A girl and a man came out, and the doorman piped one shrill note on his whistle, and a taxi thundered down the street. Mallory felt his muscles tighten as the car drew near to the spot where it stopped. Hell, he'd have a case of nerves every time a guy whistled up a taxi now. The cab took aboard the fares without disturbance and muttered off up the street. A man with a bucket and a mop came out of the apartment and sloshed water on the sidewalk where Delancey had died.

For two hours Mallory paced the beat, and heard the doorman piping taxis, and finally he came to a stand across from the apartment. The doorman walked back and forth beneath the canopy. He kept jerking his head around and looking at Mallory's lanky young figure across the street. A woman came out alone, and the shrill single piping of his whistle skirled.

Mallory's eyes grew narrow and hard, and when the taxi pulled away he walked with slow, loose-kneed strides across Tenth Street. The doorman saw him coming and backed against the wall, waiting, a nervous figure in his light blue uniform. When Mallory stepped up on the curb the man said cheerfully, "Hello."

Mallory said nothing, but stalked up to him,

heavy-footed, and stood staring at him. "How long have you known Delancey?" he asked.

The man drew a hand heavily across his mouth. He had loose lips. "I didn't know him," he said.

"Oh, yeah?"

"Well, not very well."

Mallory tried to twirl his club in his big hand, but the twirl didn't work so well, seemed to cry "rookie" at him. He flushed and said, "But you did know him when you saw him."

"Yes."

Mallory thrust forward his head. "Naturally. How much did they pay you?"

The *chasseur's* loose lips trembled. "I don't know what you mean," he protested.

"Sure, sure," said Mallory, "I know you don't know what I mean."

"Well, I don't."

"Come clean," Mallory rasped, "or it's going hard with you. How much did they pay you?"

The trembling of the man's lips communicated itself to the rest of his body. His hands shook, so did his knees. "Honest to God, officer."

Mallory held the club in his clenched fist now. He said softly, "Let's you and me go inside."

THE DOORMAN put his palms flat against the brick wall, his mouth opened twice without any words coming out, and finally he got out, "What for?"

Mallory took his club in big-wristed fists and looked down at it with hard eyes. "I want to show you a little trick I know with a club," he said softly.

The *chasseur* stammered, "Honest to God, officer, you got me wrong!"

Mallory said, "Sure, sure, I know. Now listen, you get inside the building and get into your duds. Then you and me are going down to the police station and have a little talk."

The doorman said, "Honest—honest, officer, you got me all wrong!"

Mallory moved even closer to him and bit out between tight lips, "And if you get in touch with those gangsters or try to tip them off it's going to be twice as tough for you. This is a murder rap," he said. "You'll get the hot seat. Now get in there and get into some other clothes before I . . ."

The man sidled away, loose lips trembling, jerked open the door and darted inside, frightened face peering back over his shoulder. Mallory paced before the apartment, loose knees springily alert,

eyes watchful. Bells in Jefferson Market courthouse on the corner chimed the quarter hour and then the half hour, and Mallory glared inside the doors with an ugly amused light deep in his eyes.

He worked his big fist into his coat pocket, through the slit in it, and took hold of his gun. He loosened it in its holster. Up near the corner a taxi was backing into a file of cabs. He heard the apartment door opening and toed around to find the doorman coming out slowly, his face white beneath the broken brim of a shabby cap.

He muttered, "There's a guy in there wants me to get a cab for him before we go."

Mallory said, "Okay," and the man put the white whistle to his loose lips and blew it sharply twice. The taxi up near the corner droned into life. Mallory put the weight of his left hand on the man's shoulder. "Don't try any funny business," he warned.

The taxi's engine muttered nearer and the machine tooled in toward the curb. Mallory suddenly thrust the doorman forward, crouched behind him and jerked out his gun. From the back of the taxi two revolvers spoke. They spurted flame and lead, and Mallory heard it plunk into his human shield, felt the man jerk and stiffen, and heard his breath gasp out of him.

He held the *chasseur* erect with a hand on his collar, and his own pistol answered the gunmen. The taxi jumped into gear, lurched forward. Still holding the man as a shield, Mallory turned with the car, fired again, and heard a cursing scream within the car.

As the machine glided forward, he saw that its rear window was smashed. The same car he had fired on earlier in the evening! He leveled his gun at the driver. It snapped emptily. Another rookie trick! *He'd forgotten to reload.* All his carefully laid plans were going awry because of a dumb rookie trick. His long jaw clenched. He wasn't beaten yet.

MALLORY'S huge hand thrust aside his human shield, his long legs bent, and he made a flying leap for the rear bumper of the taxi as it got underway. His feet slid off, but one hand grasped the nickel-plated brace of the top. He ran heavily a few paces, pounding the pavement, then he leaped again and this time landed firmly on the bumper.

A gun thrust its ugly muzzle out of the broken rear window. His huge left fist closed swiftly on it, jerked it aside as flame belched out past his face. He wrenched savagely, tore the gun loose, and fired into the dark interior of the cab. A man's voice gasped, "Christ!" hoarsely. Mallory sent another shot crashing forward through the windshield. He bellowed out in his huge voice,

"Drive over to the curb or I'll drill you!"

The machine checked so sharply that Mallory's body surged forward against its back and he was almost thrown to the pavement. Then it leaped forward again. Mallory shouted:

"Try that again and I shoot! Pullover!"

Brakes squealed, and the machine slewed over to the side, in the white pool beneath a streetlight, and Mallory eased cautiously down. He crouched in the shelter of the cab's body, captured weapon ready in his hand.

"All right," he growled, "All of you come out of there."

The driver climbed stiffly out of the front with his hands lifted shoulder high, his thin face screwed into a frightened knot.

"Open the back door," Mallory snapped, "but keep that left hand up."

The driver obeyed, small eyes, gleaming in the black shadows of his cap brim, fixed on the young patrolman's grim face. He moved slowly and twisted the handle. The door flew open as if sprung from within, and the driver retreated two swift half paces, breath caught in his throat. A man's body slithered out on the ground, and rolled over on his back with arms flung wide. A bullet hole was in his throat.

Mallory's young eyes were hard. "That's one they won't have to electrocute," he groaned out. "Now haul out the other one."

The taxi driver almost whimpered, "I ain't got nothing to do with it," he said. He moved behind the taxi door, leaned inside, then suddenly jerked his hand above the door and fired almost point blank at Mallory!

MALLORY'S duck was a split second faster, but the powder flare burned his face, and the bullet smacked through his ear. Mallory went down on one knee, cursing his rookie dumbness in letting the man get a weapon. His own pistol leaped twice in his hand. The driver's eyes, peering over the yellow door of the

cab, opened wide, and a startled expression rose into his face. There were two black dented holes in the paint where Mallory's bullets had pierced.

The driver had both hands on top of the door now, one grasping the gun. His fists were white with strain. He tried to bring the pistol to bear upon the young patrolman, and Mallory, still cursing under his breath, eyes hard and bitter, squeezed the trigger again. The driver jerked, his eyes closed slowly, and his face sank behind the door, his body crumpled in a limp huddle in the street.

Police sirens were moaning all around now, and headlights flashed into the street. Mallory got slowly to his feet and pulled out a handkerchief which he held to his cheek. The blood from his bullet-torn ear was warm and sticky on his face.

Windows slammed up along the street and crowds pounded up. The first police car skidded to a stop beside the taxi and two men in uniform piled out. The first was the red-faced cop. He put both hands on his hips and stared down at the shambles on the pavement and said, "Well, I'm damned!" He turned slowly to Mallory, shook his head and walked over and clapped a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"Youngster," he said, "that's damned good work."

Sirens let out their banshee yells down the street and the big green headquarters car rolled up. The stocky man with a derby down on his eyebrows slouched over toward the bullet-scarred taxi.

"Well, well," he jeered, "the boy hero himself."

Mallory's head jerked up. "Listen, Callahan," he ground out, "I'm damned sick of hearing that."

The detective came around back of the taxi then and saw the three bodies laid out in the street. His jaw knotted and he shoved his derby up off his brows, grinning.

"How'd you catch 'em, son," he mocked, "did they all commit suicide?"

Mallory's eyes were ugly. "You might call it that," he said. "They got my Irish up."

Callahan grunted, "Huh," and his tall thin partner lolled up, laughing. "I told you he was Pat Mallory's son," he said.

Callahan growled, "Just a lousy dumb rookie cop that was born for luck."

"Sure, that's right," Mallory agreed, "but the lousy rookie cop was the one that caught the murderer of Delancey, and not you, Callahan."

"Aw, they fell into your hands," said Callahan.

“Any lousy rookie cop or anybody else can shoot.”

“Listen,” said Mallory, taking a step forward angrily, “it wasn’t luck. I had an idea that the doorman of that apartment house was in on the murder and I scared him up good, told him he’d go to the chair for the murder. Then I gave him a chance to call up these bozos. And when they came to shoot me, I shot them instead.”

The thin detective clapped Callahan on the shoulder. “And you call that luck, eh?”

Callahan growled out, “What made you think the doorman was mixed up with this.”

Mallory’s eyes grew mocking and slightly amused. “Well,” he said, “I did it by being a real good cop.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah. The regulations say that a cop should be alert at all times, watch out for any suspicious happenings on his beat. Well, this guy acted suspiciously.”

“Did he wear a black mask or something?” Callahan jeered.

Mallory shook his head slowly, the smile still in his eyes, but turning hard. “No. What he did was to blow his whistle twice when he called the taxi for Delancey, and I noticed that every other time he called a taxi tonight he blew only once on his whistle.”

The smile extended to his mouth, stretching its thin corners. “Not so bad, eh, Callahan, for a rookie?”

The big detective growled, “You’re too damned cocky, Mallory, but”—he shoved out his hand—“that was good work, for a rookie or anybody else.”

Mallory’s anger faded. He shuffled his big feet and shoved out his ham-like hand to Callahan, red-faced with embarrassment.

“Shucks, Callahan, I’m just a dumb rookie, like you said. I did a dozen things that a regular like you would never do. I even forgot to load my gun again.”

Callahan shook his head mournfully. “Don’t tell me no more, son,” he sighed. “My reputation can’t stand the competition.”