



Shakedown for Murder

Ed Lacy

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This is a novel, entirely a work of fiction. All characters, names, incidents, and places—including the village of 'End Harbor'—are completely imaginary and not intended to represent any persons, living or dead. “.... of course I got here as soon as possible, but I was too late—he must have died within seconds after phoning me. I found him over the hall table. You and I, we're more than merely old friends, so believe me when I tell you that in a case like this, there isn't anything a doctor can do. At his age, the heart grows very tired.” Doctor Edward Barnes placed a hand on the other's damp, trembling shoulder; a hand both firm and gentle. “Yes...I...I understand, Edward.” The voice was dazed, sullen with mounting hysteria. “What?” the doctor asked, cupping an ear, brushing the rain from his face with his other hand. “What did you say?” “I said... I'm okay. It's just... I'll miss him so. You know how close we were.” The doctor pulled his old felt hat down as he said, “Come now, no weeping. There isn't much one can say about death, especially the death of an old friend. Yet I always find myself groping for the meaningless phrases. Our only consolation is to remember he lived a long and useful life. And he died without pain. Remember the old Indian saying you once told me.... Death is but the opening of a new trail. Do you recall telling me that?” “Yes. I suppose I knew this would happen—some day. But... oh God! Ed, it's all so sudden!” “Let yourself go, weep.” Barnes reached into the car for his bag. “Naturally you're in shock. I'll give you something to calm your nerves, make you forget.” “I don't need any drugs.” “Listen to me. It's late, there isn't anything either of us can do till morning. Standing out here in the rain will only give you a chill. If you like, I'll spend the night here.” “No.” “Come now, at a time like this... I can stay the night with you.” “No, Ed, I'm... fine.” “Then take this pill and you'll sleep for...” The doctor's wet and wrinkled face expanded with astonishment for a very brief part of a second as he was viciously kneed in the groin. Gasping, Barnes bent over—arms out like a racing swimmer ready to dive—then he stumbled back against his car, hands now pressed hard to his middle. The killer clamped a hand over the doctor's open mouth, another over the sharp nose. The old man's watery eyes bulged—pain still mixed with surprise. He started to claw the air, then slumped to the wet ground. Opening the door of the doctor's heavy Buick, the murderer dragged the old man across the front seat, yanked a woolen muffler from around Barnes' thin neck, then savagely jammed it over the doctor's pink face. For a moment the doctor's legs jerked and thrashed as the muffler cut off all air. Certain Barnes was dead, with great effort the body was picked up and slowly lowered to the floor of the rear of the car. Placing the medical bag on the front seat, the killer slid behind the wheel—moving gracefully—and drove off, driving along the dark roads of the village. Reaching Bay Street the murderer stepped out and listened long and carefully, sweating face almost touching the wet pavement. Certain no cars were coming, the doctor's corpse was quickly pulled to the middle of the road. Then backing the Buick up, the killer shifted gears and pressed the gas pedal to the floor. The big car jumped as it ran over the dead body.

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