

MURDER IS FORGETFUL

CHAPTER V
SYNOPSIS: — John Saxo, private investigator, and his partner Moe were hired by the "Hardware" Smiths to guard Irene Smith, whose husband was murdered. Irene was suffering from amnesia. Kay, daughter of Irene, explained the conditions to Johnny. Kay took Johnny across the bay to see her uncle, J. T. Smith, who explained to Johnny that he wanted the murder solved and Irene protected and told about a book that Irene was writing. J. T. believed that if Johnny could get Irene interested in writing her memory would be returned.

The mechanic glanced at the bill, shoved it into his pocket. The freckles seemed to grow larger as his face beamed. "You bet!" Then he added, "I'll pick you up right outside the main gate to the Smith place. Ralph tells me you're staying over there."
 Reference to Kay's young friend reminded Johnny that he was still awaiting her return.
 "By the way," he said, "Where'd they go?"
 "Probably down to the corner for a coke. Want me to find them?"
 "All right."
 He stood there, looking at the wrecked car as man hurried out of the garage. As his footsteps died away silence was heavy in

the place.
 Johnny had seen a mechanic's long gray jacket hanging on the wall nearby. He quickly slipped it over his clothes, buttoned it, then located one of the flat, roller-skate scooters used for working under cars.
 A moment later he was on his back beneath the car, using his heels to move the scooter from one place to another. His quick, sharp eyes studied the chassis and underframe.
 And when he came out from beneath the car, and replaced the jacket, his eyes were thoughtful. He had found mud underneath the car—and yet there had been no rain for a month!
 "He heard footsteps approaching the garage, recognized Kay's quick steps, and went out to meet her."
 "I'm sorry I missed Uncle Thomas," said the girl.
 "What happened?" asked Johnny Saxo.
 She indicated the small package in her hand. "I had to get some things at the drug store."
 "I mean, what happened to Ralph?"
 "Oh, him," she said.
 "Then he's not coming over tonight?"
 Her head turned toward him for an instant. "I didn't say—"
 He grinned. "Puppy love's fun, isn't it?"
 "That's what he is!" Kay said with emphasis. "A big overgrown puppy. He hasn't any sense at

all!" Then she added heatedly, "I wish he'd grow up!"
 "He will, eventually, you know."
 They walked back toward the Northport dock. Little puffs of dust kicked up from their heels as they cut across a parking lot adjoining the wharf, where various types of pleasure craft were tied up. The sun had gone now; the dusk of early evening was settling down. Johnny noted two spots of color in Kay's cheeks. Her eyes were turquoise in the changing light.
 The ladder was built alongside the high dock, and Kay went down first. Her lithe, slim body was nimble as a boy's. She jumped into the speedboat and held up a steady hand as Johnny followed. The boat rocked when he dropped down into the cockpit.
 "It's really a good thing you can swim," he told her.
 Kay laughed. The seriousness was gone from her amazing green eyes again. She slid behind the wheel and started the engine while Johnny cast off the line. They eased out from the high dock.
 Above them, two men sitting with their feet dangling over the dock edge, waved. One held a fishing pole. Kay waved back.
 The harbor was quite as a mill pond. Though darkness would soon settle down, the afterglow of daylight still made the distant shoreline picture-clear. It was a pleasant scene. Johnny settled back in the cushions and passed the girl a cigarette.
 "Thanks," she murmured.
 They were moving at reduced speed, quietly, and the soft throb of the motor was soothing. Johnny thought riding like this in a high-priced speedboat, at dusk, was a nice way to earn a living.
 Instead of cutting directly across the harbor, the girl had steered the boat along the sweep of shore line. "Hannah will have a fit because we're late for dinner," she said. "But I always go back this way—especially at this time of day. It's so peaceful."
 The cigarette was flicked from Johnny's fingers and went skimming out across the water. A gentle breeze ruffled his thick dark hair. His eyes were closed and his head rested back against the cushions.
 "You can drop the anchor if you care to," he murmured drowsily.
 It was fast becoming dark. Her soft laughter was nice too. "You wouldn't like it at night. The mosquitoes eat you up."
 He heard the slight, swift-passing singing sound, barely audible.
 "Was that one of them? They must be big."
 "What did you say?"
 He opened his eyes. The shoreline was perhaps fifty yards away. There was no beach along this part of the harbor only heavy foliage that grew up close and high at the water's edge.
 "I said—"
 Johnny frowned, staring out across the glass-smooth surface. There was the only craft moving. They were limned against the sky-line as sharply as a silhouette. He straightened further in the seat, still watching the shore.
 "Something wrong?" The girl looked at him with curious eyes.
 "I don't know—"
 This time it was closer. You could hear wood splinter some-

where forward in the boat, near the waterline.
 "What was that?" Kay asked startled.
 Johnny was tense now. As he reached for the wheel, to guide the craft harborward, he said, "Someone's using a silenced rifle!"
 The ping of the silenced rifle, ripping through the hull of the boat and spattering wood splinters, was not a nice sound.
 Johnny wrenched the steering wheel from Kay and swerved the craft in a sharp curve toward the middle of the bay.
 Fear leaped into the girl's eyes. She swiftly fed the boat gas, realizing his intention to get as far from the shore as possible.
 And, even as the boat started to leap ahead, wood split atop the rail, not two feet behind them.
 Johnny yelled above the motor's roar, "Kill the engine. We're a perfect target here in the boat. Swim!"
 He thought Kay Smith had a splendid, alert brain. She had cut the switch, bent low, and was loosening her shoes even as Johnny called the warning. He too, had his shoes off in an instant. He jammed them beneath his belt. The light coat slid from his shoulders as he followed the girl overboard.
 Momentarily, the boat shielded them from the shore. As the girl's head popped to the surface almost beside Johnny's, she cried, "Can you swim?"
 "I hope so," he said, and dived under again.
 He remembered opening his eyes just below the surface. He saw a swift, distorted glimpse of Kay, almost beside him, doubled up as she wiggled out of her skirt and kicked loose her sandals. At first he thought she was having cramps. Then her legs whipped out in a smooth drive and she swam under water.
 Johnny did likewise, still holding his breath. Finally he was forced to come to the surface again. The girl was beside him treading water. Both twisted their heads and looked quickly behind them.
 The boat, drifting, was some distance away. It no longer offered a screen between themselves and the hidden marksman somewhere along the shore.
 Without a word, Johnny and the slimly-built girl dived again, striking out under water. This time they zigzagged to the left. Finally forced to come up for air again, Johnny looked around swiftly. He thought it was a useless thing to do.
 There was no telling from what direction the shots had come. It was like a marauder using a knife in the dark—silent and deadly.
 Kay was swimming beside, her face white and strained. "What'll we do?"
 In the few moments since they had left the boat, the dusk was already deeper. This, Johnny thought, was to their advantage. It should make the marksman's target deceptive.
 Ahead of them, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, was the curving white strip of beach that belonged to the Smith estate. Kay saw his gaze dart that way.
 "Can you make it?" she asked.
 "I'll try. Anyway, I'd rather drown than die of lead poisoning," he told her, grimly serious.
 They moved toward the beach in stages of swimming under water and popping to the surface for breaths of air. Soon it was dark, and he knew the riflemen could not possibly see them now. Yet the beach looked a terrific distance away, Johnny thought. Through his trousers were light summer tropicals, he considered loosening his belt and kicking

them off. They pulled at his legs. But he remembered he was carrying close to three hundred dollars in his pockets and decided against it. Also, he didn't want to lose his shoes.
 It seemed that moments dragged into hours. Neither he nor the girl spoke, both conserving all the breath they could. Johnny was aware of her labored breathing and knew that, even though she was a good swimmer, the pulse beat of danger had robbed her of energy.
 They kept swimming.
 Darkness was black over the shore when his feet finally touched sand beneath him. He stood up in shoulder-deep water, and his legs felt like something encased in cement. The girl swayed against him and clutched for his hand. He tried to steady her.
 Together they struggled toward shallow water, both panting with exertion. Finally they were on the hard-packed, wet beach. Kay stumbled forward until her feet touched loose, dry sand. Then she sank slowly to her hands and knees. Unnerved now, she started sobbing.
 Johnny sat down beside her, putting on his shoes. Muscles in his legs and arms trembling "It's all right," he reassured the girl. "The guy can't see us now."
 "I know," Kay said. "I just... can't help it."
 He put his hand on her wet shoulder and took it away again. His fingers were trembling. He decided he was in rotten condition to be a detective. Perhaps he ought to stop smoking.
 Johnny remembered his shirt. He flung his sodden necktie away. "Here," he offered, "put this shirt around you."
 For a moment she did not move. She was still crying a little. Then she straightened up, reaching for

the wet shirt that Johnny held out to her. "Which way is—"
 "I can't see the boathouse," he said. He stared into the gloom. "Which way is—"
 (To be continued)

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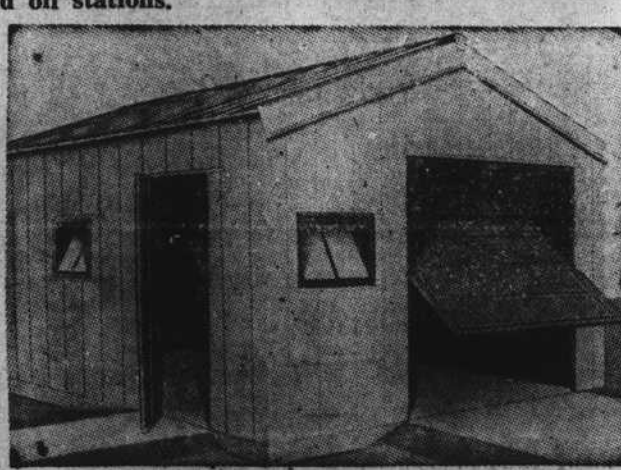
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