

The Fateful Remodel

Marston Tidwell, the Bergen Bugle's chief investigative reporter, stood back and viewed his handiwork. His new office was nearly complete, furnishings were in place and the decorators were close to finishing the big street level window that opened out onto the intersection of East Hell Way and Quaintsville Boulevard.

It had been a tough project from the start. The square-jawed Marston had a plan and a vision that he had insisted be implemented. He had designed and presented drawings of his new window on the world, and by force of will, had cajoled Editor-in-Chief Lutz Lambert to go along. The personally designed full length blackout drapes included stars and stripes, gold tie-backs, and the most amazing banner that ran the entire width of the window above the drapes. He had contracted with a local artist to adorn the banner with a patriotic theme topped by the word *Liberty* surrounded by images of fallen soldiers, Civil War era Presidents, twenty dollar bills, and assorted antique bric-a-brac.

The banner was visually stunning. Once installed, though, Marston had to turn his attention to the investigation at hand, the Poulet Morts Winery case. Terrorists had blown up the winery the year previous, creating the world wide purple snow phenomenon and Marston had been following up on leads ever since. His big break came when he stumbled into Lanny Thistlewaite, a local con man who drunkenly admitted that he knew people who knew people who had committed the crime.

Marston worked the break, befriending Lanny and milking him of every bit of info he could. He was hot on the trail, knew the gangsters hung out at the Cucaracha Club. Someone decided that this nosy reporter was getting too close and decided to push back.

The threats began with a note on the windshield of his car.

It read *Watch ur step, newspiper guy. or else.*

Now, Marston was a big guy who didn't scare easily, but the deeper he dug, the faster the threats came. The phone would ring. *No name* was always the caller ID, then a voice would ask him if his life insurance premiums were paid up, or if he was ready to take a little swim-in

February. The most inventive threat, however, was from a voice who identified himself as the pizza guy.

I'm gonna rip off your gonads, use them as a pizza topping and serve them to your friends at the Bugle.

Marston had reason to be concerned after that. He was edgy, uneasy, but was determined to push on with his exposé. The world needed to know who had caused the months-long outbreak of purple snow. He returned to his desk and began to outline the story.

One Tuesday morning, a black Luxo E400 screeched to a halt in the intersection outside his window, two masked figures with AK47s jumped out and opened fire into Marston's window. He dove behind the water cooler and waited helplessly while bullets shredded his drapes and destroyed his beautiful banner. Sirens wailed in the distance, rapidly closing in. The gangsters made their getaway, burning rubber down the block.

Marston was miraculously unscratched. He stuck out that stubborn square jaw of his, and amid the rubble, typed out the oversized bold masthead for the next day's edition.

It read, **Who Shot the Liberty Valance?**