

farmer taking a short cut home. Crowther was unconvinced.

Later Lela fed the chickens while her brother milked the cows. Afterward they sat together, reading and listening to the radio. Lela kept thinking she heard strange sounds upstairs, but decided she was imagining things. About eight o'clock, Crowther went to bed.

She continued reading—and hearing the odd noise. Unable to concentrate on her book, she went to bed at nine, but she still had a feeling of apprehension. The unidentified sounds were coming from the kitchen now.

In her nightgown and bare feet, Lela went to the kitchen. She could see nothing, but she sensed that another person was in the room. She screamed.

Suddenly she was struck on the head. Blow after blow fell, and she reeled backward. Crowther came running down the stairs, calling to her. The prowler lunged at him. Crowther seized a chair and swung it at the intruder, now visible as a huge figure silhouetted in the moonlight.

Lela slipped past the two struggling men and turned on the light. Then she saw that the prowler had a gun. She cried a warning to her brother who was running for a shotgun that hung over the kitchen door.

He didn't make it. A shot from the prowler's pistol sent him sprawling backward and he collapsed on the dining-room floor.

Heedless of the danger, Lela ran to help her brother. The big man turned to ward her off, striking out with the pistol. He pursued her as she wrenched free and ran back to the kitchen.

She managed to reach the shotgun and fire, but the shot merely grazed the attacker's thumb. With a bellow like an enraged animal, he charged toward her. She aimed again, but the hammer clicked on an empty barrel.

The intruder grabbed the gun, yanked her hair, and struck her with his ham-like fists. Somehow, she managed to get away from him.

Her breath was coming in gasps now, her lips bleeding and her body covered with bruises. Her brother lay dying on the floor.

For a moment, the frail woman thought the end had come. She stood wavering, her head bowed. Then she jerked erect and faced the brute again. The tide of battle suddenly turned when he leaped at her and tripped over a broken chair.

Lela snatched up the shotgun and brought the butt down on his head with what seemed supernatural strength. He

groaned, dropped to his knees, then collapsed on the floor.

Throwing on a coat and a pair of shoes, Lela staggered to the home of a neighbor a quarter of a mile away.

When Sheriff W. O. Pillow and Dr. Thomas Watkins, the coroner, arrived later, both Crowther Hudson and the intruder were dead. From papers in his pockets, the man was identified as Walter Green, age 33, weight 200 pounds, an ex-convict.

The aged men and women who had been victims of the previous assaults later identified him as their assailant.

Lela Hudson was rushed to a hospital where she was treated for shock and multiple cuts and bruises. Many weeks elapsed before she recovered.

Meanwhile, she was acclaimed throughout Virginia; messages poured in from all over the country, praising her courage. But Lela declined to accept the credit. "It wasn't my own strength during those last few moments," she declared. "I never could have done it alone."

Where did she get the sudden strength to overcome her attacker?

"It's no mystery," she explained. "When I thought the end had come, when it seemed the next breath would be my last, I prayed. God did the rest."

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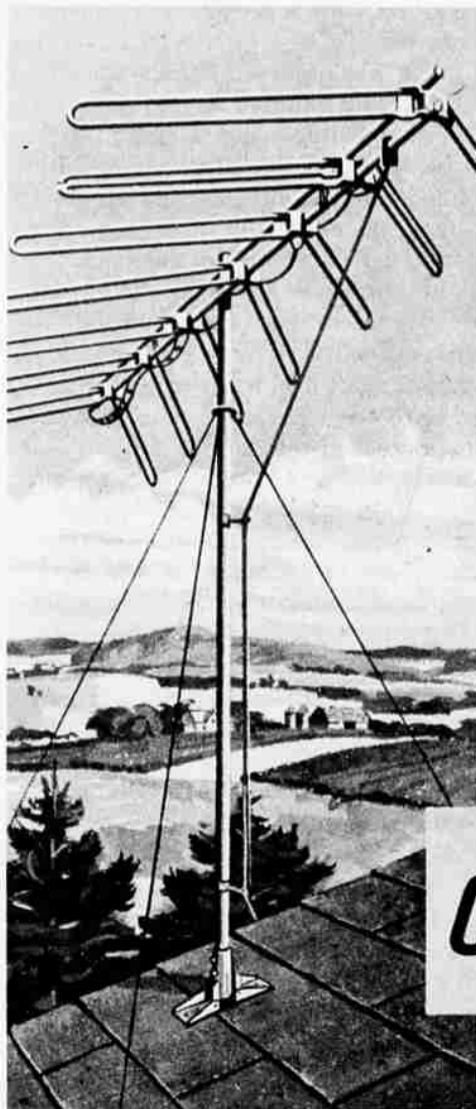
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