



Zero at the Bone: The Playboy, the Prostitute, and the Murder of Bobby Greenlease

John Heidenry

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In 1953, six-year-old Bobby Greenlease, the son of a wealthy Kansas City automobile dealer and his wife, was kidnapped from his Roman Catholic elementary school by a woman named Bonnie Heady, a well-scrubbed prostitute who was posing as one of his distant aunts. Her accomplice, Carl Austin Hall, a former playboy who had run through his inheritance and was just out of the Missouri State Penitentiary, was waiting in the getaway car with a gun, a length of rope and a plastic tarp. The two grifters thought they had a plan that would put them on the road to Easy Street; but, actually, they were on a fast-track to the gas chamber. Shortly after they snatched the little boy, the two demanded a ransom of \$600,000.00 from the Greenlease family and it was paid; but, Bobby was already dead, shot in the head by Hall and buried in a flower garden behind the couple's house, exactly where his body was found by police shortly thereafter. The Greenlease ransom was the highest ransom ever paid in the US to that date and the case held the US transfixed in the same way the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby had done decades earlier. In a bone-chilling account of kidnapping, murder and the dogged pursuit of a child's killers, John Heidenry crafts a haunting narrative that involves mob boss Joe Costello, a cast of unsavory grifters, hardboiled detectives and a room at the legendary, but now razed, Coral Court Motel on Route 66. Heady and Hall were apprehended quickly, convicted and executed in a rare double execution in the State of Missouri's gas chamber on a cold December night not long before Christmas. By that time, little Bobby Greenlease was stone cold in his grave and a fickle America had turned back to its Post-War boom. However, one question has never been solved: as Hall was being pursued around Kansas City and St. Louis, half of the ransom was lost and never recovered. Did it end up with the mob via Joe Costello? To this day, no one knows and dead mob bosses tell no tales. In a book that brings to mind films like "Chinatown" and "Double Indemnity", John Heidenry has written a compelling work that blends true crime and American history to take a close look at one of the United States' most notorious murders.

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