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★ **BLACK MASK** ★

SEPT. 1933
20¢

**"A WOMAN
CAN KILL"**
By **RAGUL WHITFIELD**

"WHISPERING JUSTICE"
An **ED JENKINS** story
By **ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

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BLACK MASK

A MAGAZINE OF DETECTIVE, WESTERN STORIES OF ACTION
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JOSEPH T. SHAW, Editor

VOL. XVI No. 7

SEPT., 1933

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BLACK MASK

NOT GUILTY

RECENTLY *Vanity Fair*, one of the white paper magazines, which caters to a very "select," "highbrow" audience of our "best people" published a long article about "woodpulp." By woodpulp it meant, of course, magazines printed on gray paper, as is **BLACK MASK**. It told all about how the woodpulp cater to people who don't know or care anything about real literature, and stated among other things that woodpulp are descendants of the old dime novel which youngsters used to read out behind the barn, that woodpulp have little to do with reality, but are pure romance of the thrilling, hair-raising kind, and that the authors who turn out this stuff do their work hurriedly, send in manuscripts that are extraordinarily bad, and generally know little or nothing of the people, places, and action about which they write.

The fact is that there are about seventy-five woodpulp differing as much in quality as in character of stories they publish. A further fact is that for many years past, the best fiction of its kind published in any magazine, slick or woodpulp, has appeared in **BLACK MASK**.

The article in *Vanity Fair* treats, without differentiation, of all woodpulp condescendingly, with amusement, as one would write about the antics and weird ideas of a lot of children, and since *Vanity Fair* has offhandedly included, by inference if not by name, **BLACK MASK**, in this wholesale group, we venture to assert that *Vanity Fair* itself would not find too favorable comparison between its regular fiction and article writers and those of **BLACK MASK**, such, for example, as Dashiell Hammett, Raoul Whitfield, Frederick Nebel, Erle Stanley Gardner, Carroll John Daly—to mention a few.

The absurdity of *Vanity Fair's* article, so far as **BLACK MASK** is concerned, is further borne out by the fact that since the works of the above-mentioned writers appeared in **BLACK MASK**, they have been sought by the highest rated of the fiction magazines, such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, by the best book publishers and by the movies.

Again, in comparison with *Vanity Fair*, we very much doubt if *Vanity Fair* pays on the average its fiction and article writers as much as **BLACK MASK** pays regularly for its stories.

Furthermore, without referring to the society matron who considers it smart to have on her table the so-called class magazine with its illustrations regardless of its text, but on the basis of real human enjoyment we doubt if *Vanity Fair* can show such reader appreciation of its quality and character as is given by letters in our files from men of the highest mental and moral caliber—lawyers, physicians, clergymen, bankers, writers and the like, telling us that they read **BLACK MASK** regularly and enjoy it immensely.

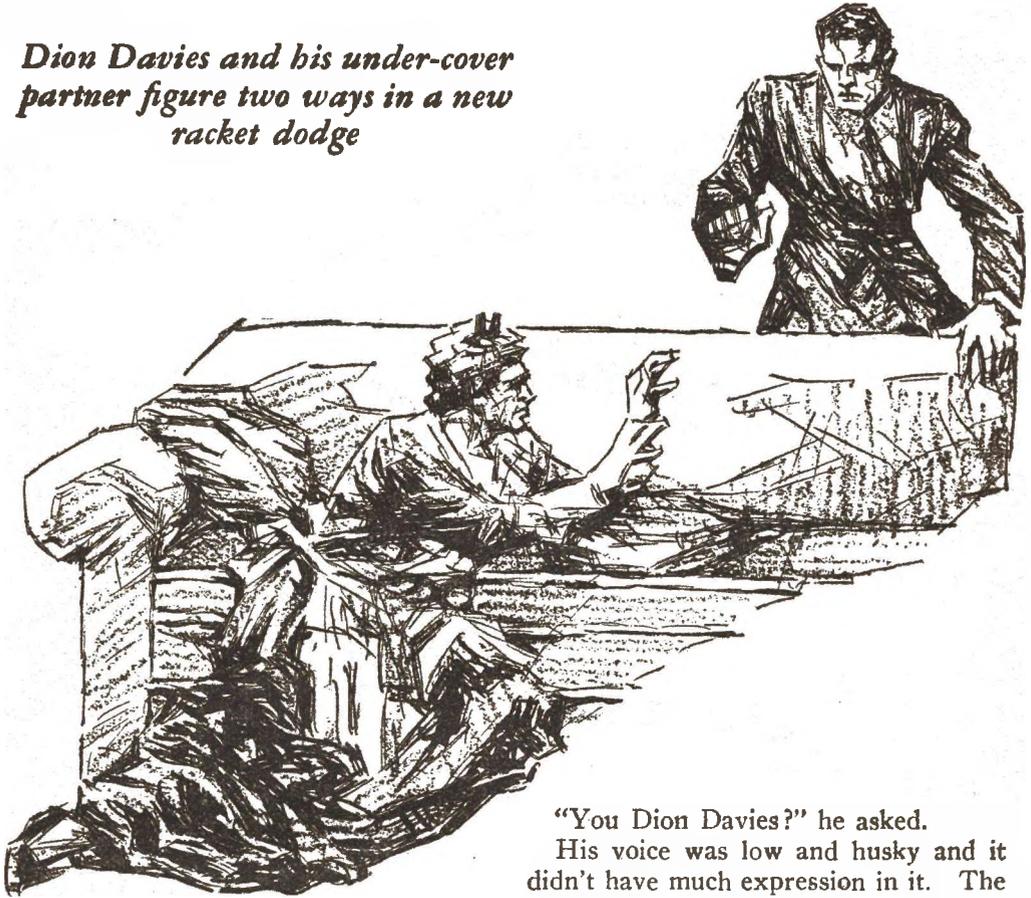
We are very well aware that **BLACK MASK** fans know that **BLACK MASK** is in a class by itself; that not one of the statements in the *Vanity Fair* article above quoted, truthfully applies to it; but we become a little weary when a careless member of the so-called class magazine fraternity parades its snootiness at the risk of rank misconception.

The Editor

A Woman Can Kill

By RAOUL WHITFIELD

Dion Davies and his under-cover partner figure two ways in a new racket dodge



"You Dion Davies?" he asked.

His voice was low and husky and it didn't have much expression in it. The cigarette moved up and down when he spoke, then dangled again.

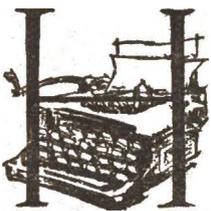
"I am Dion Davies," I told him. "And sure 'tis an Irish name that me mither was proud of."

He blinked his left eye a few times to squeeze smoke out of it.

"Your brogue's rotten," he said disgustedly. "I'm — dam' sure your mither wouldn't be proud of *that*."

He did a better job on the word "mither" than I'd done. Got more roll to the "r", and the cigarette still stayed between his lips.

I said: "I'm sorry, Mr. McQuirter. Circumstances have forced me to move,



He was tall and scraggly looking and the colors on the band of his straw hat brightened up the office a lot. Just inside the door he halted; smoke from a cigarette, that dangled just a little from full lips, curled past a left ear that wasn't shaped much like the other. Blue eyes squinted through a detached wisp of smoke, at me. The Tower clock, across the avenue, made five separate hunks of sound.



ofttimes, in circles of culture and refinement. In so doing I have, perhaps unconsciously—”

McQuirter said slowly: “Joey Tay didn’t tell me you were one of these funny guys. Why don’t you quit this racket and go in for the Pappy Cakes hour on the radio?”

I tilted my desk chair back slightly, opened my mouth pretty far and tapped both lips with palm and fingers of my right hand.

McQuirter’s long face smiled in several places. He lifted a left hand loosely and got the cigarette away from his lips.

“Say—what we getting like *this* for?” he demanded cheerfully. “Maybe it’s the heat, eh? The boss told me you were a good guy. And me—I got a reputation for being right all the way.”

I said: “Sure you have, Mac. You don’t mind if I call you Mac, do you? Somehow, I feel as though we’ve known each other for a long time.”

The cigarette he was holding just below the level of his chin rolled from his fingers into the palm of his hand. He

closed the hand until it made a white knuckled fist. Smiling at me, he opened the hand slowly and surprise showed in his blue eyes as he looked down at it. He whistled softly.

“Look what I done!” he said gently.

I smiled and nodded. “I noticed it, Mac,” I replied. “A symbol, wasn’t it?”

There was a brief silence. He raised questioning eyes to mine.

“I don’t get you,” he said quietly.

I pointed to the waste-basket, and then to a chair.

“Dump the pill and squat,” I suggested.

While he was doing it Julie came in and handed me a telegram. I held it while she said:

“Everything is under control in the Faber case, Mr. Davies. Marks has just reported in from Cleveland. Rader and Leftovich are using the files. Connelly won’t be in tomorrow. Mr. Dancer will telephone you tomorrow at ten, from Chicago.”

I said: “Thanks, Miss Ryan. Finish up those letters, please.”

She said: "Yes, sir," and went from the office.

McQuirter eased his scragginess into a chair at one end of my desk.

"Busy but polite," he said in a clear and amused tone. "Very commendable, I'm sure."

I coughed suddenly, covering up the jolt he had given me. He nodded his head and chuckled.

"So we both can put on an act, eh, Dion?" he said pleasantly. "You don't mind my calling you Dion, do you? Somehow, I feel as though I'd known you a long time."

I tore open the envelope of the telegram and unfolded the yellow paper. Julie's even handwriting was easy to read. "Gun in left hip pocket—bumped into him outside purposely—left-handed."

Folding the yellow paper, I replaced it in the envelope, nodded thoughtfully, slipped the envelope in a drawer of the desk.

"My real intimate friends call me Dee, Mac," I said without looking at him. "And I want you to feel right at home with me."

McQuirter got a very clean handkerchief from his coat pocket, carefully tied a knot in one corner. He leaned back in the chair, held the handkerchief between two fingers by another corner and swung the knotted end in a slow circle.

"Dancer and Davies, Limited," he recited slowly. "The second biggest detective agency in New York, and maybe tougher than the first biggest. What's the 'Ltd.' stand for?"

"Speed," I answered. "Like a fast train, see? That's the way we work."

He grinned. "They say around Broadway that Dancer was a lawyer, and a smart one. Maybe too smart. So now he's a senior partner. A quiet partner."

I looked at the electric clock. "They say around Broadway that Jim McQuirter is as smart a fellow as Joey Tay, only so far he hasn't had the breaks. So now he's Joey's right-hand man."

McQUIRTER swung the knotted handkerchief slowly, his blue eyes watching the swing.

"A lady by the name of—"

He broke off, looked at me sharply. "This is just between the two of us, Dee," he said.

I nodded. "Private chat." I opened the lower left drawer of my desk a few inches, which cut in the dictograph, put my feet on the drawer. McQuirter watched the swinging knot of his handkerchief again.

"A lady named Greenway," he went on—"Sylvia Greenway—owns the old *American Theatre* near Ninth on Forty second. She's about eighty years old, a sort of crusader. You know—when she gets an idea she stays with it. She's been running highbrow plays for the poor in her theatre, for years. And losing plenty. Lately the poor have been getting poorer and she's been losing too much. A couple of weeks ago she leased the theatre for ten years to a guy named Reginald Fox."

I nodded. "Read about that—a theatrical man from the West. Had an arty theatre out in Seattle or some place. Came into some money and felt that he could carry on Mrs. Greenway's ideas, only in a better way. Calls the new spot *The American Gardens*."

McQuirter stopped swinging the handkerchief and tied a second knot near the first.

"Yeah," he said. "That was the idea. Then something funny happened. This fellow Fox changed his mind. He figured maybe a beer spot in the theatre would go better. It's a big house; he could run entertainment on the stage, even use the balconies. The location was right—a thirsty neighborhood and not so far from Broadway. So he started alterations."

I whistled a few bars from a tap-dance song. McQuirter stopped looking at his swinging handkerchief and looked at me.

"The old lady got wise, found out what was going to happen. That was

about a week ago. She started to raise hell. You see—she's been dead against the return of beer, even the kind that you have to drown yourself in before you can go home and beat up the wife and kids. She crusaded against it for years."

I grinned. "Didn't Joey Tay know that when he sent in his man Fox?" I asked.

McQuirter looked hurt. "You don't think Joey would worry about *that*, do you, Dee?"

I lighted a cigarette. McQuirter shrugged. "There was a lot of lawyer talk, but Fox had the lease and it didn't say anything about not changing things around and serving beer. The old lady had fallen hard for his art talk."

I said: "Well, what's worrying Joey?"

McQuirter frowned. "The old lady's a scrapper," he said. "She owns half a block directly across from the theatre. Some empty stores and a few with short leases. She bought up the short leases and a couple of days ago a big squad of workmen started in. Want a guess?"

I widened my eyes a little. "Don't tell me the old lady hit on the one scheme to make Joey yelp," I said "Not another beer garden, maybe a better one, to give him too much competition?"

McQuirter said bitterly: "You guessed it the first time. With a million or more fish behind her, and plenty of fight, even at eighty. And to make it worse—she can fix an entrance on Ninth Avenue and she's on the best side of Forty-second."

I grinned. "And as soon as Joey's licked—she'll close up."

McQuirter swore. "Sure—and go back to losing money on orange juice and chocolate nut bars. But that won't help Joey any. He's got a lot of coin sunk in the lease and in contracts for fixing over—and in the beer deal."

"Well, well," I said. "That's what Joey gets for trying to rob the cradle."

McQuirter untied the knots in the handkerchief and narrowed his blue eyes on mine.

"The boss suggested Dancer and Davies for a tailing job," he said tonelessly.

I stared at him. "Frame the old lady—at eighty?"

McQuirter didn't smile. "Ever hear of Nancy Gale?"

I nodded. "Park Avenue stuff. Composes tone poems. Sings once in a while. Had a concert at Carnegie not long ago. A looker. Engaged to Jason Cummings—lawyer and definite dry."

McQuirter chuckled. "You been reading the papers. Well, Nancy is the old lady's granddaughter. And her weak spot. That's the big point—Sylvia Greenway thinks Nancy couldn't do wrong. She's crazy about her—and her tone poems and her dry husband to be."

I waited. McQuirter lifted a lean finger and pointed it at me.

"The boss wants Nancy tailed. And about three nights a week you can pick her up at the *Tree Club*. Upstairs, where the boys and girls try to beat the cards and wheels."

I looked at McQuirter thoughtfully. He stood up, ran the handkerchief across his forehead, got it out of sight.

"Retainer?" he asked.

I said: "A hundred to start."

He tossed the hundred on my desk without much fuss. I said:

"Receipt?"

He shook his head. "The boss and me—we've both got good memories."

I took my feet off the desk drawer and stood up. McQuirter said:

"The sooner we get the reports—the better. And the tougher they are for the old lady to look at—the better. And the easier they are for the newspapers to grab—the better. And we're glad you're taking the case."

I smiled. "It's an honor, Mac."

"Honors even," he replies. "And I hope we get an ace in the hole."

"That's another game," I said.

He moved towards the door. "Yeah—but I don't mind mixing my games, Dee. I'm lucky that way."

His tall, scraggly body reached the

door; a lean arm was lifted. The door opened and he went out.

I shut off the dictograph, lit a cigarette from the tip of my short one. After a few seconds Julie came in. She closed the door behind her, walked to the chair McQuirter had vacated, sat down.

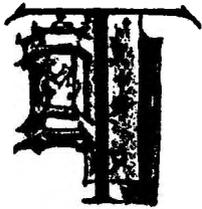
Her dark eyes were narrowed and her fine lips pressed closely together. I looked at her black hair, almost jet, in the reddish light of the low sun. It was parted in the middle and drawn close to her head. There was a knot of it in back that I couldn't see. Her features were small and strong.

"Well, Miss Dancer?" I said slowly. "Joey Tay and Jim McQuirter. Two Chicago boys who made good in a bigger city. They're tough, fast and smooth. You listerfed in on the little bed-time story. Do we stall out of it?"

Julie lifted her head and smiled coolly.

"Stall hell!" she said simply. "We'll ease right *into* it!"

2



THE American Gardens weren't doing much business. Julie and I sat near the big stage, on the lower floor, mixed up in a lot of rustic benches,

tables and considerable fake foliage. On the stage there was a brass band, yodelers and singing waiters. It was nine o'clock and the night was hot. Even the cooling system didn't help much—not to get a crowd inside.

Julie looked nice in a simple sport dress and a tiny hat. She was a quiet little package—to look at, with the odds a hundred to one you'd not guess the kind of dynamite behind those dark eyes of hers.

I'd been getting along, moderately, in my solo agency at the old Sixth Avenue address; then I had a break that rated first-page space. On the strength of that advertising, I'd always supposed, Julie Hazard blew in one morning with a check and a proposition.

We kept the D.—D. idea, but made it Dancer and Davies. She was never Stephen Dancer, although she picked the name and insisted on playing the incognito role of the senior partner. Said the slight mystery end wouldn't hurt our business and would always give me the chance to stall.

She worked something of the same racket on me. Told me her name was really Hazard, that she'd come from some spot she mentioned in Pennsylvania and that I could look her up if I wanted to.

I'd never found the time to do it; and what's more, as the weeks went by and business went over the peak, it didn't seem necessary. She fitted all the way. But the mystery of her antecedents, how she came to be the way she was, *did* keep me thinking about her, more, perhaps, than I should; but I couldn't figure she wanted that.

She was Miss Julie Ryan, secretary-stenographer, to the clients and casual callers. That *Ryan* pick of hers gave me an idea; but I didn't make much of it. I took her the way she acted, and I could see *that* gave *her* something to think about.

"**S**TILL like the racket, Julie?" I asked, lifting a stein.

She smiled. "More than ever."

I grinned. "You know, for the last six months your agency has been making fair money."

"Our agency," she corrected. "We're in it fifty-fifty. In a few more months you can square things up."

I said: "It's a possibility. And Joey Tay may help me a lot."

Julie said: "*Trammer's* is doing better business than this spot."

She sipped her beer. "The answer's easy," I said. "Sylvia Greenway is doing everything in a bigger way. Her place hands out more free stuff. There wasn't room for two spots here, anyway. She's a shrewd old lady. It'll cost her some money, but Tay's licked right now. In a couple more weeks she can get this

spot back from Tay, and have some profit at that."

Julie said with admiration in her voice: "She's a spunky woman, Mrs. Greenway."

"Almost a fanatic," I replied. "But I like her guts, too. And Joey tricked her into getting this spot. This is a funny thing, too—Joey Fay hiring a private detective agency for a push-over. Joey's too tough to act that way. Or maybe he *was* too tough and figures now it's better manners. Or maybe he's only *starting* this way, to see if it will work—trying a new dodge in the racket."

The German band made terrific sound. Julie shivered. I ordered two more beers and finished my third.

"I'm pretty crazy about you, Julie," I said. "I wish ——"

She waved a cheaply gloved finger at me. "Going sentimental, Mr. Davies? *That* wasn't in our contract."

I scowled at her. "Trouble is—you've got business too much on your mind," I said.

She leaned back and looked me over. "Brown hair, slightly curly. Brown eyes, slightly squinted. Nose slightly long. Rather nice lips. Six feet and weight about one eighty before that last beer. Fair chest. Feet slightly big. I suppose a lot of girls would——"

I interrupted softly: "Easy—McQuirter!"

Julie threw back her head and laughed. "Oh, I really couldn't go to Atlantic City with you," she said rather loudly. "After all—that——"

McQuirter said: "Hello."

I said the same thing as he looked down at Julie. He kept on looking at her.

"Don't do it, lady," he said, finally. "Never trust your boss." He looked at me. "Can the steno take a walk to the ladies' parlor and powder her nose?"

"Sure she can," I replied. "Would you like her to do that?"

Julie rose, smiled at me. "I'll run along home. I'm worried about Tim, anyway. Good night, Mr. Marvin."

I told her good night. McQuirter sat on my right.

"Smart girl," he said. "She even knows when to use wrong names."

I nodded. "It's my careful training," I said. "Have a beer?"

He scowled at me. "Hell, no. I don't drink legal beer when I can get good stuff."

THERE was a short silence. "How's business?" I asked, breaking it.

McQuirter swore. "It's just as bad as we figured it would be, with the spot across the street. Not that *she* isn't losing plenty of fish, too. But the point is—she can afford to lose it, and Joey can't."

"Too bad," I muttered, and shook my head. "One spot along here could clean up."

McQuirter made the pebbles under his feet scatter. His red, yellow and black tie was colorful and terrible.

"Listen, Mr. Dion Davies," he said softly and slowly, "you wouldn't play games with the boss, would you?"

The band stopped making brassy toots and a costumed yodeler went to work.

"Games?" I said.

McQuirter leaned across the table, and his blue eyes grew hard.

"The reports your office has been turning in on Nancy Gale for the past week—they don't mean much."

"That so?" I replied. "The critics gave her latest tone poem nice praise. It's got undertones——"

McQuirter said: "Listen, Dee—the boss sent five hundred over to you a couple of days ago. That makes a total of six hundred you've had. And what do *we* get? Nancy Gale giving concerts at the *Colony Club*, dining with this fellow Cummings, staying at home."

He broke off. "Well?" I said.

McQuirter leaned back a little. "You were within five feet of her at the *Tree Club*, three nights ago. You saw her gambling. You heard the way she talked to Jerry Salem. And you know Jerry's

a big-shot gambler, if there ever was one. You saw Nancy at the bar—you saw her dancing, upstairs, with Jerry. She left with Jerry—and maybe you know where she went.”

I said: “Well?”

McQuirter’s voice was low and sharp. “All that *wasn’t* in the reports. I had a man tailing *you*, Dee. That’s how I know what you saw. But we didn’t get it in the reports. What we got was that Nancy Gale remained at home.”

The yodeler finished yelping. I smiled in the direction of the big stage. McQuirter spoke in a toneless voice.

“You know about Joey Tay, Dee. He doesn’t stand for double-crossing.”

I said: “Sure—I like that in a guy. And he wouldn’t want to double-cross me, would he?”

The scraggly body of McQuirter straightened a little.

“Meaning what?” he said softly.

I kept the smile on my face. “A shrewd, fighting lady by the name of Greenway has Joey in a spot, Mac,” I said. “In order to get out of the spot Joey has to get something on the old lady’s granddaughter, Nancy Gale. To keep that something quiet he figures Mrs. Greenway will close up the beer spot she doesn’t want to run, anyway—and give Joey the break he thought he was going to have when he tricked her. Am I right?”

McQuirter half closed his eyes. “Maybe—but what’s that got to do with Joey double-crossing you?”

I leaned forward a little and stopped smiling.

“The girl he *planted* at the *Tree Club* looks a hell of a lot like Nancy Gale,” I said softly. “But she *isn’t* Nancy Gale, and that’s why he didn’t get the reports he wanted.”

McQuirter sucked in a deep, slow breath. His long fingers tapped wood of the rustic beer table. He kept his eyes on mine.

“Sure you didn’t make a mistake, Dee?” he asked, after a few seconds.

I nodded. “Positive,” I replied. “It

was Joey Tay who made the mistake, Mac.”

McQuirter said grimly: “How?”

“Dancer and Davies isn’t that sort of an agency,” I said quietly. “If it’s a tailing job—that’s okey. We play fair and report straight. But we don’t frame anybody for somebody else. That clear?”

McQuirter lighted a cigarette with deliberation. He got a handkerchief from a pocket and tied two knots in one corner. When he had it swinging he watched it and spoke without much expression.

“Too bad, Dee—too bad. Joey was saying to me, after I told him that you’d spotted the Gale kid in the *Tree Club*: ‘I think we should send Davies along five grand, Mac, when those reports come in. He’ll have done a nice job.’”

I smiled at McQuirter. “It’s a lot of money, Mac. But the office doesn’t work that way. We don’t have to work that way.”

McQuirter took his eyes away from the handkerchief and narrowed them on mine.

“Joey *might* think the reports would be worth ten grand,” he said thoughtfully.

I shook my head. “He wouldn’t get them for fifty grand, Mac. What do you think of that?”

He stopped swinging the knotted handkerchief, but he didn’t untie the knots.

“I think you’re a damned fool, Davies!” he said harshly.

I shrugged. McQuirter got the handkerchief out of sight and leaned across the table. His face was pretty close to mine. His lips were curved into a harsh smile, and his eyes were very small.

“This means big money to Tay, Davies. Big money—get that? You had a chance to do a job that you were paid for. Who’d you sell out to, the Greenway lady or the girl?”

I laughed at him. “Don’t get rough, Mac. You wanted Nancy Gale followed. You wanted reports on her.

You paid for them, and you got them. We didn't sell out to anyone, and you know it. But we didn't fall for a frame-up. We weren't fooled by it, and we weren't willing to go through with a frame-up, after we spotted what it was."

McQuirter looked at me coldly for a little time. Then he shrugged.

"Okey," he said. "We're calling it quits, eh?"

I nodded. McQuirter half rose from his chair, then sat down again. He said very quietly:

"You *think* you know something, Davies. But you don't, see? And if you go to Sylvia Greenway, or to the Gale kid—"

He stopped, his lips twisting, working. I said:

"We don't go after clients—they come to us."

"Yeah," he breathed. "But if we should learn that either of these two had come to you, and you were working for them—"

I cut in. "We're a well-known agency, McQuirter. If they got in trouble they just might come to us."

McQuirter smiled nastily. "Maybe. But you'd turn down the job—either job—whatever either of 'em wanted. You'd recommend another agency. And you'd keep your mouth closed about other things."

I said: "Would we, McQuirter?"

He stood up and smiled down at me, almost pleasantly.

"Sure you would, Dee," he said cheerfully. "You got brains, and you want to keep 'em working, don't you?"

HE waved a hand carelessly and turned his back on me. I signaled a waiter and paid for the beer. He had to change a ten-dollar bill and went away from the table to do it. It seemed to take a lot of time. After almost five minutes he came back with the change, a German accent and apologies.

I got up and walked between tables and fake foliage, over gravel, towards

the entrance of the beer garden. In what had been the foyer of the theatre I stopped and swallowed a mint to take the taste of the beer away. There was a drizzle of rain on the pavement and I could hear a distant roll of thunder. The heat was pretty bad.

On the pavement there was a lot of light and no taxis. I waited a few seconds, then decided the chances would be better on Ninth Avenue. Pulling my soft hat over my eyes, I turned westward towards Ninth. An elevated train made a lot of sound as I reached the avenue, and shot blue flame from the third rail. The rain was coming down more heavily, and I couldn't spot a cab. I crossed Forty-second and went downtown towards Forty-first.

Halfway between the two streets I stopped. There were few people walking; traffic wasn't heavy. Behind me there was the sound of someone running fast. I swung around. The man passed me with his head down, gasping for breath. He was trying to cry out something that sounded like: "For God's sake—don't—"

No one was running after him. I swung towards the curb, saw the closed car coming along, rolling downtown on the wrong side of the street. The running man must have been a quarter of a block past me.

The rear, curb-facing window of the car was down; a black curtain flapped as the car rolled on. I swung my body as it passed.

When the sub-caliber gun shoved the curtain to one side it wasn't pointed towards the running man. I ripped at my rear right pocket for my Colt, but it didn't come loose. As I was reaching for it I dived for the curb, breaking the heaviness of the fall with my extended left hand.

Bullets drummed along the sidewalk behind me. My left shoe jerked. I crawled out on the soaked street as the clatter of gunfire died. The closed car pulled between elevated girders, reached the right side of the avenue, and picked

up speed. I got to my feet, limped to the nearest girder and leaned against it. The cloth over my left knee was ripped; the skin was scraped. A chunk of rubber from the heel of my left shoe was missing—a bullet had done that job.

A man with a raincoat collar turned high came out from the sidewalk. His eyes were staring.

"What was that—what happened?" he asked.

A uniformed cop crossed from the other side of Ninth, his slicker flapping as he reached my side.

"Shooting, eh?" he yelled at me above the racket from the El train. "They get you?"

I shook my head. The cop said: "Know who tried it?"

I shook my head again. The cop said: "Get the license?"

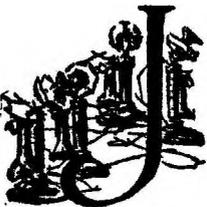
I shook my head once more. The cop said: "Got any enemies?"

I looked puzzled. "Enemies, officer? I'm the friend of man. I think there was a mistake."

The cop grabbed my arm. "Let's get the hell out of the wet," he muttered. "I got questions to ask."

We moved towards the curb. "Right now," I said cheerfully, "I can tell you I don't know the answers."

3



ULIE sat opposite my desk, with a shorthand note-book ready for action. The note-book didn't mean a thing. "Kelly's no good," she stated firmly. "I want him fired."

I said: "Okay, Mr. Dancer."

Her dark eyes smiled a little. "Rader is one of our best men. I think you should have him closer to you."

I said: "Very well, Mr. Dancer."

She frowned at me. "Anything new on the Joey Tay-Sylvia Greenway case?"

I smiled more broadly. "Yeah. After you left last night, McQuirter told me

some things. He said we'd call it quits, only if Mrs. Greenway or Nancy Gale came into the office, we were not to take them as clients. And we were to keep quiet about what we knew."

Julie said: "So?"

I nodded. "I suggested we might not do either of those little things, and he suggested that if I had brains and wanted to keep them I'd better play it that way."

Julie looked as though she might be thinking.

"I went over to Ninth to pick up a taxi," I went on. "A pretty good actor ran past me, making sounds as though it was his finish. Then a car came along on the wrong side of the avenue, as though after him. But the bullets were for me. One got my rubber heel. At Headquarters I talked to the right man, and we kept it out of the papers."

Julie said: "Dee! They almost—"

She broke off. I nodded. "Almost," I agreed. "I had sense enough to dive for the street and get behind the car. Didn't see anything but a sub-caliber gun. Didn't get the license number, and the car got away. The waiter at Tay's place held me up a long time on change. They probably had the car somewhere nearby and the hold-up gave them time to get set. I told the cops that I thought the men in the car were after the other guy."

Julie got a pencil between even, white teeth and chewed on the wood. She shook her head slowly.

"I don't like having the agency mixed up with Tay," she said finally.

I smiled grimly. "We can send him back the six hundred and promise not to tell anyone what we know."

Julie said: "Don't be silly. We're in it now. We've been mixed up with things we haven't liked, before this."

"It's all right," I said thoughtfully, "so long as the old lady or Nancy Gale don't get the idea that we might be able to help—"

The phone box from the reception room made buzz sound. I pressed a but-

ton and the Jones girl on the outside desk said, through the small loud-speaker:

"A Mrs. Sylvia Greenway wishes to see you, Mr. Davies. She states that it is extremely urgent."

I said: "In about five minutes I'll have her in. Please ask her to wait."

When I snapped the button on the phone box Julie stood up and swore. Her eyes held a serious expression. She kept the heel of her small right shoe on the rug and tapped the toe sharply.

"How about Mrs. Greenway?"

"You bring her in, Miss Ryan. Just show her to the door. I'll send for you when I need you."

Julie half closed her dark eyes. "Before I become your steno again, Dee—if Mrs. Greenway has a job for us to do—"

She hesitated. I said: "Sure, I know—it puts us in a sweet spot. Turning down Joey Tay and working for the woman he's out to get."

Julie said: "Just the same—we take the job."

I grinned. "Okey, Mr. Dancer," I replied. "And that's a swell shave you had this morning."

Julie swore at me and went away.

SYLVIA GREENWAY was tall and thin. She had a sharp nose and dark eyes. She came into the room slowly, using a heavy cane. She was dressed in black, but not quaintly. Her hair was white. Near my desk she halted, leaning on the cane. I was standing up.

"Mr. Davies?" she said in a voice that was not quite steady.

"Yes, Mrs. Greenway," I replied. "Let me get a chair for you—"

"Don't trouble," she said sharply. "I have been in the habit for quite a few years of getting things for myself and can still do it."

I smiled at her.

"I'm sure you can, Mrs. Greenway," I said, "but—"

"I do not care for flattery, Mr.

Davies!" Her voice was sharper than before.

I stood behind my desk until she reached a chair facing mine, seated herself. She laid her cane across her lap.

"Your agency has been recommended to me. Never mind who recommended it. What I will tell you is confidential. Is that so?"

I bowed. "Absolutely," I said.

She drew a deep breath. "I have reason to believe that my life is in danger. I wish to be protected as much as is possible. That does not mean that I want two or three of your operatives under my feet all the time. You understand?"

I said: "Perfectly, Mrs. Greenway." I toed out the dictograph drawer and rested one shoe on it. "You suspect some person, one person, of wishing to injure you?"

She regarded me with considerable contempt. "Well, I don't suspect all of New York, Mr. Davies."

"Good," I said cheerfully. "That will make our defense simpler."

She narrowed her eyes on mine and made sniffing sound. Her black gloved fingers moved around the cane handle.

"You are a drinking man, Mr. Davies?" she asked grimly.

I said: "Water and milkshakes, and now and then a glass of beer."

"Beer?" Her eyes widened and held an angry expression. I prepared myself for a speech on the evils of beer drinking, but it didn't come. Instead, she shrugged.

"You are probably familiar with *The American Gardens*, on Forty-second Street, if you drink beer," she said coldly.

I nodded. "I prefer the place across the street," I replied casually. "*Tram-mer's*."

Her thin body stiffened. She glared at me. I said: "Do you object to my smoking?"

"Yes!" she replied sharply.

I tossed the cigarette pack on the surface of my desk. The Tower clock struck eleven. A faintly cool breeze

drifted into the office, from the direction of the Hudson.

"I own *Trammer's*," she said coldly.

Traffic sounds reached the office from Broadway.

"Yes," I said simply. "I know."

She stared at me. "You know?"

"Yes," I said. "I know."

Her eyes narrowed again. She was sitting very straight.

"How do you know?" she demanded.

I said: "You were tricked into leasing *The American Theatre*, to a racketeer, through one of his men who posed as a theatrical man. The theatre was turned into a beer garden. There was no way you could prevent that, so you opened up another beer garden on property you owned, directly across the street. You called it *Trammer's*. A man named Trammer runs it for you. The object is to drive the racketeer across the street out of business. Then you will close up your *Trammer's*."

Mrs. Greenway drew a deep breath. "Goodness!" she murmured. "But how did you—"

I interrupted. "The racketeer came to this agency, knowing it was a reputable one and that you would believe reports submitted by us. He wanted your granddaughter, Miss Nancy Gale, followed."

Mrs. Greenway half rose from her chair, without the aid of her cane. Then she sank back again.

"He wanted—Nancy—followed?"

I nodded. "He said she was gambling at a certain club, drinking—and in bad company. He said you loved her and that if he went to you with our reports and told you that if you didn't let him run *The American Gardens* without competition he would expose your granddaughter—he thought you would close *Trammer's*."

Mrs. Greenway said: "Well!" She leaned back in the chair and looked thoughtful. Her hands moved the cane slightly. For a short time there was conversational silence in the office.

"Well?" she said finally. "You followed Miss Gale?"

I said: "Yes."

Mrs. Greenway seemed very calm now. "I have not been told of any such reports."

I smiled. "This racketeer had stated that we could pick up Miss Gale at a certain club. I handled the matter personally. I didn't pick up Miss Gale. I *did* pick up some girl who resembled her very much and who used her name. It was a frame-up, so there were no reports."

Mrs. Greenway took her cane in her right hand and tapped the rug with it. I said:

"The agency was offered ten thousand dollars to pretend we had been fooled and send in reports that Miss Gale had been seen gambling, drinking—and chancing off with a big-shot gambler. I turned it down."

Sylvia Greenway tilted her head and closed her eyes.

The cane stopped tapping the carpet. Mrs. Greenway sat very straight and looked directly at me.

"I have said that my life is in danger—and that I want protection," she said.

She stopped and after a little time I said: "You suspect a certain person?"

Mrs. Greenway battered the ferrule of her cane against the carpet.

"I do," she stated firmly. "I suspect my angelic granddaughter, Nancy Gale!"

4



ULIE said: "What a set-up! The old lady is tricked by Joey Tay. Then she puts one over on him. Then he tries to put one over on us, in order to get her to be good. Then you tell her the truth, and she tells you that she thinks her granddaughter intends to murder her. The same granddaughter that Tay tried to frame, and you thought you were protecting!"

"Rader is on the job now. He'll watch the old lady. She's in a spot.

Tay's out to get her, and so is Nancy Gale, according to Mrs. Greenway. *That* gave me a jolt."

Julie said: "You're in a spot, too. Tay knows that you know too much."

I shrugged. "He's missed once. He'll be more careful the next time. The thing that beats me is—"

I stopped and fingered the retainer check that Mrs. Greenway had left on my desk. Julie said in an irritated tone: "Go on—don't play games."

"I couldn't swallow Mrs. Greenway's idea of the reason Nancy Gale wants to kill her," I said slowly. "Nancy wants money—and the old lady won't give it to her. All right. But if Mrs. Greenway dies she won't get it, anyway. Because Nancy gets only five hundred a month. The rest goes for crusading against the return of whiskey and wine. So what does Nancy gain in a murder job?"

Julie smiled. "Five hundred a month."

I swore. "She'd risk getting life for that?"

Julie nodded. "Mrs. Greenway told you that she was hated because Nancy *knew* she was only going to get the five hundred a month. How about revenge?"

I shrugged. "I hate to show disrespect to age. But I think Mrs. Greenway was lying. If she *does* fear her—and she acts as if she does—she has some reason that she won't tell us; so she gave us that hooley. But the point is, she fears Nancy Gale, fears for her life. We begin from there. We don't have to dig in and find the reason, or that Joey Tay may have seen that someone supplied her with a reason that seems real enough to her. Or at least, we don't have to, just yet."

I stood up and looked at my wristwatch. It was after four. The private phone buzzed and I lifted the receiver.

"Davies," I said.

Rader's voice came clearly over the wire. "Mrs. G. had her chauffeur drive her around Central Park for an hour or so. Then over to the Drive. I trailed

in a cab. Then she went to the *Mary Ellen Tea Room* on Seventy-second Street, west. Had lunch. Then to her home."

I said: "The one that has the garage connecting? Sixty-eighth, just east of Park?"

Rader said: "Right. She got there at one-fifteen. She told me not to get under her feet, so I didn't crowd her. The car was driven into the garage, and after a while her chauffeur came out and said he was through for the day. He was off for the baseball game. He said Mrs. G. had gone into her house, by the garage entrance. She always does. Said she wouldn't be out until tomorrow—maybe not then."

"All right," I stated over the phone. "What of it?"

Rader's husky voice said: "At three-ten a cab stopped at the corner of Park and Sixty-eighth. The Gale girl got out and paid up. She walked past the Greenway house a couple of times, and when things looked right went into the garage building. She's still out of sight."

I whistled softly. "Sure it was the Gale girl—Nancy Gale?" I asked. "You covered her while I was spotting the other one—the one Joey Tay *wanted* us to think was Nancy Gale. They look a lot alike, you know."

Rader said: "Yeah, but they don't walk alike. This was the real article."

I said: "How'd she get in the garage—double doors, aren't there?"

Rader said: "Yeah—double doors; they open out. But there's a single door at one side, and the chauffeur and footman have quarters upstairs. The chauffeur told me that. His name is Haney."

"Where was the footman, when Haney headed for the ball game?" I asked.

Rader said: "He wasn't in the car today. His day off. He's over in Brooklyn. Got it from the chauffeur while Mrs. G. was having lunch. Haney said he'd be alone in the garage quarters and he didn't like that much. So he was off to the ball game."

"All right," I said. "How'd Nancy Gale get in the garage entrance—just open the door?"

Rader said: "I'd passed her once, to get a good look, and I was pretty far away when she went in. She seemed to just open the door and walk in. But a few minutes ago I tried the door. It was locked. So maybe she used a key."

I said: "Maybe. You stick near the place—and if she comes out—call the office. But don't tail the girl. Stay where you are."

Rader said: "Okey."

I hung up and told Julie what Rader had told me. She frowned.

"Why would Nancy Gale use the garage entrance, to get into the Greenway house?" she asked slowly.

I smiled a little grimly. "We don't know that she *got* into the Greenway house," I said.

REACHING for the outside phone, I gave the switchboard girl a number. After a few seconds a voice said: "Hello."

I got my voice flat. "Howard Stevens, of White, Stevens and White," I said. "I have important news for Miss Gale."

The voice, which was feminine, said: "Just a minute, please."

I waited. Julie lighted a cigarette. The phone made clicking sound and a different voice said:

"This is Miss Gale—I think my maid failed to tell me the correct name—"

I said: "Good news, Edith—the court has decided—"

The voice cut in: "I am Miss Nancy Gale. You have made a mistake."

I said: "Miss Nancy Gale? I'm terribly sorry. My secretary must have given me—"

There was more clicking sound. I hung up and frowned at Julie.

"Sounded like Nancy," I said. "I only heard her speak once or twice, when Rader and I were tailing her. But it sounded like her voice."

Julie pulled hard on her cigarette as I bummed one from her pack.

"What the devil?" she murmured. "Maybe Rader was fooled, and it was Joey Tay's girl that went into the garage."

I shook my head. "Rader and I have been close to the other one. We've been right beside her. Rader wasn't fooled."

Julie said: "All right. Then Nancy Gale went in the garage at three-ten or a little after. It's four-twenty now. Nancy left some other way, and got back to her apartment."

I shook my head. "Don't see it, Julie. What other way? Climbing fences?"

Julie said impatiently: "We don't know anything about the rear of the house or the garage, or other ways she might use to get out without being seen by Rader."

I agreed with that. "I'd rather play with the idea that Nancy is still inside the garage somewhere, and that someone did a good job with her voice, or tried to do a good job."

Julie pointed towards the phone. "Better call Sylvia Greenway," she said.

I nodded and called. A maid answered; I gave my name and said it was necessary for me to speak to Mrs. Greenway. The maid said that Mrs. Greenway was sleeping. I said:

"Has she had any visitors since she returned from her drive?"

The maid hesitated and I said: "This is important. Answer the question or wake Mrs. Greenway and give her my name."

The maid said that Mrs. Greenway had received no visitors. She had retired immediately after arriving in the car.

I said: "She couldn't have visitors without you knowing it?"

The maid was very certain. "No, sir—she could not."

"Fine," I told her. "Now wake Mrs. Greenway up, tell her Mr. Davies is calling and it is very important."

The maid started to protest and I spoke sharply and to the point. After

about a minute Mrs. Greenway said irritably:

"What is it, Mr. Davies? I was sleeping."

"Sorry," I told her. "You haven't seen Miss Gale since you returned to your home?"

Mrs. Greenway said: "Of course not!"

"Good." I watched Julie's narrowed, dark eyes. "You remember what Mr. Rader looks like?"

Mrs. Greenway snapped: "Of course."

I interrupted. "Rader is outside, somewhere near the house. Send someone out to tell Rader to come in and stay near you. But don't stay alone while you do it."

Mrs. Greenway's voice held sudden fear. "What is the matter—what has happened?"

"Nothing," I said quietly. "I'm coming up right away. I don't want you to be left alone until I get there. I want Rader inside and near you or your room—"

Mrs. Greenway said in a high-pitched voice: "Nonsense!"

I spoke slowly. "When you talked to me this morning and said you were afraid of a certain woman—I was inclined to think there wasn't much reason for you to be afraid. Do you remember what you said to me, Mrs. Greenway?"

There was silence at the other end of the wire. I held the French phone to an ear, waited. Mrs. Greenway remained silent.

"You said," I told her, "'a woman can kill. Men aren't the only killers.'"

Mrs. Greenway spoke rapidly, in a high-pitched voice.

"You are afraid that Nancy—"

I interrupted. "Send someone out for Rader. Tell that person what he looks like. Have someone stay with you. I'll be right up."

Mrs. Greenway said in a shaken voice: "Yes—yes—I will!"

I said: "Goodbye," and hung up.

Julie held her cigarette low and pursed

her lips to blow rising smoke away from her face.

I reached for my soft hat. "She's eighty and I'm thirty-four," I said grimly. "But when she said *that* she wasn't telling me something I didn't know."

5



TURNED the key in the lock, at the side of the two-storied garage building. The door gave way and I went inside. According to Rader, who had left Mrs. Greenway locked in her room, this was the door Nancy Gale had entered. Rader followed me in. The small hallway was dark. Rader said:

"I've got a flash."

"Use it," I told him, "but keep it low. And close the door behind you, first."

He closed the door and a few seconds later the flash beam hit the wood of the floor.

"Pick it up," I said. "Must be a light switch here somewhere."

I found the light switch, snapped it. Stairs ran up from the hallway to the next floor, where the chauffeur and footman had rooms. To the right of the stairs was a door. Rader said:

"That's the door leading into the garage. Mrs. G. said the one leading into her house is halfway back in the garage, and on the left as you go back."

I gave the door on the right a shove, but it didn't move. When I pulled it towards me, it opened. There was dull light in the rear of the place as we walked past two cars, side by side. Rader said:

"Door's on the left."

Behind the two cars were barrels of gas and oil and a long work bench with some small machinery on it. I stopped and looked to the left when we were near the work bench. Rader said:

"God!"

The body was lying face downward.

I went over close to it. The door leading into Mrs. Greenway's house was less than three feet from the head. A small, blue hat lay several feet from the body, battered out of shape. A blue handbag was close against the base of the door, which was closed.

Leaning down I turned the body over. Rader, standing close to me, muttered: "Nancy Gale—all right!"

I said: "Nancy Gale—but not all right. Dead as hell!"

Rader leaned over with me, and when we straightened up he said:

"Head smashed. Lot of blows."

I nodded. "Back of the head, top of the head—across the forehead. Probably got the first from behind and wasn't worried about any of the others."

Rader said: "—! The old lady was scared of her—and look what happened?"

I got a handkerchief around my right hand and picked up the blue bag.

"I'm looking," I told Rader. "What *did* happen?"

I took the bag over to a clean spot on the work bench and opened it. It took five minutes to look over the contents, and the five minutes were wasted. Lipstick, rouge, powder, small bills and change. Some criticisms of a concert of hers. Two handkerchiefs, one small and clean—the other small. A hunk of green jade in the shape of a monkey. A small tin of aspirin. A vial of some sort of perfume. That was all.

I got the contents back in the bag, put the bag where I'd found it. Rader said:

"No good, eh?"

I shook my head. "Poke around the dead lady a little," I ordered. "But don't move her any more than you have to."

I walked around the garage, looking at a lot of things pretty carefully. When I got back to Rader he was shaking his head.

"Sport dress, hat and gloves—gloves on, hat off. Nothing in the pockets but a blue handkerchief to match the blue of

the dress. You went through the bag."

I nodded. "No key to the garage?" I said slowly.

Rader frowned. "If there is one—I missed it."

I shrugged. "Maybe the murderer didn't," I said. "I'll check up."

The check-up didn't do any good. I stood near the door leading to Mrs. Greenway's house. There was a knob on it, but no lock. I used a handkerchief again and turned the knob. Nothing happened.

Rader said: "Mrs. G. told you it was kept bolted on the inside."

I nodded. The next ten minutes were spent in looking over the garage for the second time. Nothing turned up. Rader and I stood near the body. Rader's gray eyes narrowed.

"You go to Mrs. Greenway and tell her about this," I said. "Then call the police. I'll keep in touch with you. Better stick around here. Your story to them is that the agency was hired to protect her. She can tell them what she was afraid of. You were tailing Mrs. Greenway; saw a woman enter here and called me. We came in and found Nancy Gale."

Rader said: "Okey. Do we forget about Joey Tay and McQuirter?"

I nodded. "And the fact that I called Nancy Gale at her apartment, after you called me and said she'd come in here—and someone who said she was Nancy Gale answered the phone."

Rader said: "The hell you say!"

We went away from the body of Nancy Gale, towards the door that led from the garage to the hallway. At the foot of the stairs I stopped and looked towards the first floor.

Rader said: "Want to take a look up there?"

I shook my head. "The police can do that. If I'd known that Nancy was being smashed out I'd have told you to stay outside. I didn't know, so you went to the old lady. That left the murderer the chance to get out to the street, if that was what happened."

We went to the street and shut the door behind us. When I tried the door from the outside it was locked. I gave Rader the key.

"When you get to Mrs. Greenway, break the kill news to her gently, Rader. Remember, she's eighty."

Rader said: "I got a hunch she can take it."

"She's been through a few wars," I agreed. "Maybe you're right."

6



HE doorman swung open an ornate door and I went into the foyer. A uniformed gentleman near a switchboard turned his head in my direction.

"Miss Nancy Gale? That's Apartment 1803, isn't it? The name is Davies and I'm expected."

The uniformed one nodded and plugged in. I walked over soft carpet, went into the nearest elevator and said: "Eighteen, please."

On that floor I got out and went to Apartment 1803.

I pressed the button and after about ten seconds the door was opened. The maid was in a quiet uniform. She had very large brown eyes and a fat face. She was middle-aged. I smiled at her.

"Miss Gale among those present?" I asked cheerfully.

She shook her head. "No, sir. Miss Gale is not at home. I told—"

I nodded. "I know. I didn't wait for the switchboard gentleman to tell me that."

I moved into the foyer of the apartment. The maid's large eyes grew larger.

"But Miss Gale is not—"

I nodded again. "I know that. What's your name?"

Her lips tightened. I stopped smiling. "Rather talk at the police station?"

"You're not the police," she said firmly, but there was a flickering expression in her eyes.

"I'm damn' near the police," I told her harshly. "And *you're* damn' near the police right now."

I kicked the door closed. She stood near a white-gray wall and watched me.

"Why did you play two parts a little while ago, when I phoned Miss Gale?" I said.

Fear showed in her eyes. I said: "Ever been mixed up in a murder?"

Her lips parted; she stared at me. She was breathing quickly.

"You've got a good chance to be," I told her. "You tried to do Nancy Gale's voice over the phone. You did a fair job—your voice has something of the same quality. But Nancy Gale wasn't here when I called. That mixes you up in a murder."

She said tremulously: "A—murder?"

I nodded. "Why did you do the voice job?" I asked softly.

She took the back of her left hand away from her lips.

"She told me to," she said slowly. "She said Mr. Cummings might call—that's her fiancé. She wanted him to think that she was at home. I was just to say that she felt badly, couldn't see him. And then hang up."

I shook my head. "You're lying. I told you my name was Stevens. And still you played Nancy Gale."

She said: "I thought Mr. Cummings might be trying to—"

I smiled. "Trick Nancy Gale?"

She nodded. "That's the truth—the whole truth," she said.

There was a brief silence. "All right—I think that's straight," I said. "She was playing games with him, eh? And he suspected her?"

She just stared at me. I said gently: "Where was Miss Gale going, when she left here?"

She shook her head. "I don't know—I never knew where she went. I'm just—her maid."

I said: "Well, you're not her maid any more. She's dead. Murdered."

She shut her eyes and lowered her head. Her arms hung loosely at her

sides and her back pressed against the white-gray wall. I lighted a cigarette.

"Show me the telephone," I said.

She opened her eyes and looked stupidly at me. After a short time she turned and went along a hall. Her arms seemed dead at her sides.

Near the living-room she stepped mechanically aside. I stopped and said:

"You sit near the phone. It won't hurt for you to hear what I say."

She sank down on a divan and covered her fat face with her hands. I picked up the phone and called Mrs. Greenway's house.

A voice said: "Yeah—hello!"

"Calling Mr. Rader," I stated. "Is he around?"

The voice said: "Yeah—there's a lot of us around."

"Sure—there *would* be," I replied.

The voice said: "Who in hell's—"

I cut in. "Get me Rader, will you? It's Dion Davies talking."

The voice said: "Say—I figured that out. This is Delahenty."

"I figured *that* out, too," I told him. "Sergeant Delahenty, isn't it?"

He chuckled. "They haven't busted me yet. Say—you got an inside on this job, Davies?"

I said: "Sure—I was sitting in one of the cars when she was knifed."

Delahenty swore. "The knife must have had a solid handle," he said. "Here's Rader—"

Rader spoke tonelessly. "Rader."

"Can anyone hear you talk?" I asked.

"No. Booth—sound-proof."

"Anything turn up, besides the police?"

Rader said: "Yeah—things are popping. That tough lieutenant, Fendler, came along. He found something."

"What did he find?" I asked.

Rader's voice was still toneless. "An extra cane of the old lady's. Blood-stained, with some hair on it. No fingerprints. He found it inside the house, on the other side of the door leading in from the garage."

I thought that over. It was some-

thing I hadn't expected. Rader said:

"You still on?"

"Yeah," I replied. "Still on. Is Fendler going at Mrs. Greenway?"

Rader swore. "Sure, but carefully. She's seen what he's getting at and already has called him a damn' fool."

"What's *her* story on the cane?" I asked. "How'd the murderer get it?"

Rader said: "She says she hasn't used the cane in months. It was in a closet on the street floor, the last she knew about it. Someone gave it to her as a present, but it was too heavy. She put it in the closet herself."

I said: "What's Fendler's idea of a motive?"

"Seems to think the old lady knew her granddaughter hated her. Sent for her, trapped her and killed her. Murder because of fear. Didn't think she'd be suspected if Nancy was killed in the garage. And her age, too—figured that would get her off. Fendler hasn't said that, but his mind seems to be working that way."

I thought that over. "How's *your* mind working?"

Rader swore. "The cane was the weapon. The murderer wore gloves. The murderer got inside the house, even though the servants swear the inner bolt was shot. The servants seem to be all right—three of them. I can't figure Mrs. G. She's a strong woman, physically and mentally, for her age. And she was afraid of Nancy Gale."

I said: "All right—stick around and keep your eyes open. I'll call you later."

7



ANGING up, I looked at the maid. "What's your name—I asked that once before."

"Bunter," she said dully. "Norah Bunter."

"Nice name," I told her. "Even for a liar."

She sat up straight, and there was rage in her gray eyes.

"You're taking this pretty hard—considering how little you know about it," I said slowly.

She was breathing quickly. "I was Miss Gale's—maid—for two years—"

"Sure," I agreed. "It's a shock." I went over close to her and looked down at her. "Why did Nancy Gale go to Sylvia Greenway's house this afternoon?"

Her eyes held a sullen expression. "I didn't know she went to Mrs. Greenway's house," she said in the same dull voice. "All I knew was—"

She checked herself, shook her head slowly. I went to the edge of the divan and sat down.

"Go ahead," I advised. "It's easier to tell me than to tell the police. I'm a sentimental guy."

She made a little gesture, spreading her hands.

"I knew that she hated Mrs. Greenway. And yet—she was afraid of Mrs. Greenway. She said her grandmother was a hard, strong woman."

"Many women are hard and strong," I said. "Why was she afraid of Mrs. Greenway?"

Norah Bunter pressed her lips tightly together. I waited.

"I don't know," she said finally. "But she was afraid of her. She did what Mrs. Greenway made her do."

I nodded. "What did Mrs. Greenway make her do?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I don't know. But she sent for Miss Gale often. She made her sneak into the house—she couldn't use the main entrance. She had to go in through the garage. Miss Gale would come back hating her."

I looked at Norah Bunter for a long time. Then I stood up.

"You wouldn't be fooling me, would you?" I asked.

She stared blankly at me. I went to the phone and called the office. When I got Julie I said:

"Any news from Mr. Dancer?"

Julie said: "A wire from Chicago—he will be there several days."

I said: "So? Well, I'm in Miss Gale's apartment." I gave her the address and apartment number. "I've been talking with the maid, Norah Bunter, the one who played she was Miss Gale, over the phone. I'm going to talk with her some more. She had her orders from someone, and I don't need two guesses on that. Perhaps if I stick around, they may show—for a check-up, and I'll get a story. I'm playing it that way. I wanted you to know in case you had to reach me."

Julie's voice sounded hard. "Very well, Mr. Davies."

I called the Greenway house again, got a dumb dick and then Rader.

"Anything new?" I asked.

Rader said that Lieutenant Fendler was still battering away at Mrs. Greenway. He believed she'd killed her granddaughter in the garage and then had come into the house and had been careless about the cane. She had picked a time when her footman was off duty and her chauffeur was at the ball game. One of the other servants was away, too. Fendler hadn't got the motive yet, but thought it had something to do with money.

I said: "When he says that Mrs. G. was *careless* with her cane it's a beautiful understatement. Apparently she just left it around for anyone to pick up."

Rader said: "Mrs. G. hasn't mentioned Joey Tay or McQuirter, or the beer business. Not yet. She's sitting up and snapping back at Fendler."

I said: "Pretty good for eighty, eh? Well, stick around."

Hanging up, I turned towards Norah Bunter.

"Who do *you* think murdered Miss Gale?" I asked softly.

She shivered. "I don't—know," she muttered.

"I didn't ask you what you *knew*; I asked you what you *thought*," I said. "Who do you think killed Nancy Gale?"

She shook her head. I spoke harshly,

and looked at her very steadily.

"You know something you're not telling me. That puts you in a bad spot. A very bad spot. The police think Sylvia Greenway murdered Miss Gale."

She shook her head slowly. "I don't know," she said. "All I know is that Miss Gale was afraid of her grandmother."

I said: "You think Mrs. Greenway killed your mistress, Norah?"

Her eyes flashed anger. "Don't call me Norah!" she snapped.

"Several pardons," I said. "Isn't your name Norah? You can call me Dion, or Dee, if you wish."

Her eyes were narrowed, sullen. I spoke in a soft voice.

"Nancy Gale was afraid of Sylvia Greenway. Mrs. Greenway is a hard, strong woman. She made Nancy do things she didn't want to do. Made her sneak into her house through the garage. Nancy would return here hating her grandmother. You've *said* those things."

Norah Bunter said dully: "Yes—yes."

I nodded. "You've *suggested* that the murdered woman's fiancé suspected her of being something-or-other—and Nancy knew that. So when he tried to trick her, Nancy had you try to trick him."

She looked at me with narrowed gray eyes, but did not speak.

I said: "You wouldn't keep anything back from me, would you? Nothing that might get you a stretch of years in a spot where you'd only see the movies the warden wanted to show?"

She leaned back, closed her eyes. "I've told you all I know," she said slowly.

"Fine," I said. "And just to show you that I appreciate your frankness and honesty—I'll tell you all I know."

She opened her eyes, and her fingers moved nervously.

"Once upon a time," I told her pleasantly, "there was a racketeer by the name of Joey Tay. He had—"



CHECKED myself as her eyes stared past me, towards the entrance of the living-room. I didn't turn. My right hand slid downward until a voice said:

"Never mind the gestures, Davies! Keep those hands where I can see them!"

The voice was very low and very hard. I stood perfectly still. Norah Bunter leaned back again, closed her eyes and drew a deep breath. She said bitterly:

"I wish to God I was dead!"

I kept my back to the man who had spoken and kept my hands away from pockets.

"You may get the wish, at that," I told Norah Bunter. "They hanged a woman out West, not so long ago—and if the law can hang them it can burn them."

She swayed to her feet and called shrilly: "No—no—"

Another voice behind me said: "Shut up—and sit down!"

Norah Bunter turned sidewise and half fell on the divan. She lay on her stomach, with her head buried in a pillow. Her body shook.

I said: "Don't be rough with her, McQuirter."

When I turned around, McQuirter was standing just inside the living-room. Both hands were in pockets of his suit coat. He looked as scraggly as ever.

Five feet nearer me, and slightly to the left of McQuirter, stood Joey Tay. He was wearing a close-fitting blue serge suit and there was a white flower in a buttonhole. His small, dark eyes were on mine—his right hand was buried in the right pocket of his blue-serge suit coat. He was medium in size, smooth-shaven and pale. His very new soft hat was turned down in front and gave the ensemble a rakish effect.

I said: "Hello, Joey."

His voice was cold but easy. "Hello, Davies. Social call?"

I shook my head. "My partner and

I talked things over and he thought I'd better drop in on Miss Bunter."

Tay said: "Yeah? I thought Dancer was out of town."

I nodded. "He is. But the town he's in has a telephone."

Tay said: "So? Must be a big town."

"Chicago," I replied. "They've been trying to get a phone for a long time. I think it's a good thing."

McQuirter said harshly: "Who the hell cares *what* you think, Davies?"

I made clicking sound. "Mr. McQuirter! Is that nice?"

McQuirter jerked an automatic from his right pocket. He held it low and moved the muzzle slightly from side to side.

"Is *that* nice, Davies?" he said huskily.

Tay looked at McQuirter without moving his head.

"Put the water pistol away, Mac," he ordered quietly. "If there's any killing to be done around here—I'll do it."

McQuirter shrugged. "Okey," he said, and got his gun out of sight.

I looked at Joey Tay's buried right hand, then at his eyes. Tay smiled just a little, and his smile wasn't too pleasant. He tilted not much of a chin in the direction of Norah Bunter.

"Trying to get something out of her, Davies?"

I said: "Yeah—a girl by the name of Nancy Gale was murdered this afternoon. Maybe you've heard of her."

Tay smiled so that his teeth showed, but his eyes were hard.

"The name sounds familiar," he said calmly.

I nodded. "When you walk into her apartment the way you did just now—I should think it would."

Tay nodded very slowly. "Did Norah tell you anything that helped, Davies?" he asked in the same easy tone.

I said: "Yes—and no."

Norah Bunter pulled herself up, turned wide eyes towards Joey Tay.

"No—I haven't said—"

Tay moved his right hand upward

from the pocket. Norah Bunter was on her feet, facing him. She took a step towards him and sank to her knees.

"Joey—Joey!"

Her voice was pleading. The gun hand jerked and a Maxim-silencer that only half worked gave a loud popping sound. Norah Bunter gasped: "Joey—I didn't—"

Her body slipped downward, crumpled on the rug near the divan. I stood very still, looking down at her. After the fall she didn't move much.

Tay said softly: "Take a look, Mac."

McQuirter went past me and bent over the crumpled figure. When he straightened up he said:

"That did it, Joey—she's through."

I kept on standing still. Joey Tay said: "Damned if I thought Norah would suicide this way."

He looked down at the body, shook his head slowly from side to side.

McQuirter said huskily: "She was in a tough spot, Joey—I guess it was the only way out."

I stood very still and kept very quiet.

8



TAY said: "Sit down on the sofa, there, Davies. See that cigarette box? Pick it up and put it down again. Lift that decanter, and use your

fingers."

I did as I was told. "How about pressing my fingertips on the wood of the table?" I asked. "It'll take a good print."

Tay smiled grimly. "We don't want to overdo things. Now sit back and listen." He turned to McQuirter, who was standing behind him again. "Keep your hands off everything, Mac—and we go out the way we came in—the service entrance, all the way down. Handkerchiefs on the knobs again."

McQuirter nodded. Tay handed him the gun he'd used on Norah Bunter.

"Fix it so it'll be sure to go off again," he ordered. "I'll talk fast, Davies. It happened like this—you suspected her of the murder of Nancy Gale. You came up and gave her the works. She shot you and suicided. The gun will be in her hand, and the silencer won't count, one way or the other. Simple, eh?"

I said: "Very. Only how will the police know I suspected her of the murder of Nancy Gale?"

Tay said: "They won't *know* it—but they'll figure it that way. You discovered the body, and you came here."

I said: "Joey—you're getting old. They'll figure I came here to *question* the maid. They won't figure I suspected her."

Tay shrugged. "When they look over her suicide and your kill—they'll figure you got something on her."

I said: "Good—that will let Mrs. Greenway out."

Tay narrowed his eyes. "That'll depend," he said coldly. "It'll depend on just one thing."

I leaned back on the divan and nodded my head.

"Joey," I said quietly, "did you have to murder Nancy Gale to frame the old lady? If you'd knocked off Mrs. Greenway—wouldn't that have closed up the beer garden across Forty-second Street, and let you clean up?"

He shook his head. "I don't know how she has things fixed, after her death," he said slowly. "I'd rather see her live and *order* it closed up."

I nodded. "Norah Bunter's dead. I'll be dead. Then you get after Mrs. Greenway. You can fix it so that the police know the truth, if Mrs. Greenway closes up her spot across the street from *The American Gardens*. But if she *doesn't* close it up—"

"We'll just fix it so things look tougher for the old lady," Tay said softly.

I watched McQuirter fiddling with the gun. Tay said:

"You had a chance, Davies. There

was money in it for you. You wouldn't give us reports."

I shook my head. "You slipped on that. The reports wouldn't have done you any good. Mrs. Greenway would have laughed at you. She didn't give a damn about Nancy Gale. She was afraid of her."

McQuirter stopped fooling with the gun and looked sharply at me. Tay said: "Oh, yeah?"

I nodded. "A woman can kill," I said slowly. "That was in the old lady's mind."

Tay ran left-hand fingers across his forehead. He smiled with his lips.

"You put yourself in a spot, Davies. You didn't go through with us. Then the old lady went to you, and you played in with her."

"Sure," I said. "And then you had to work fast, before things got away from you."

McQuirter spoke anxiously: "Listen, Boss—he's talking a lot, and—"

"And that doesn't matter," Tay said in a hard voice. "He's having his final chat around town."

I said: "Norah Bunter called you Joey, before you shot her out, Tay. She fed me a wild story about Nancy being afraid of her grandmother. That was the bunk. Nancy was only afraid of one thing."

Tay said: "What?"

I looked at his narrowed eyes. "You," I told him. "She was playing nasty with her fiancé, because you were more interesting, because you could take her places on the quiet and show her things. A nice girl falling for a big-shot racketeer. That's happened before. And you put Norah Bunter in as her maid. Right?"

Tay smiled coldly: "You were a pretty good dick at that, Davies."

"Thanks," I said. "It wasn't hard to figure. You'd been seen once or twice. One of my boys got some underground stuff. And when you tried to frame Nancy by having us trail that other girl—you did a fair job. The reason you

did so good a job was because you *knew* Nancy pretty well. And you had to have help on the inside. Norah Bunter tipped you when you could safely produce your imitation Nancy Gale for us. That was when the real Nancy was not going to be moving around town."

Tay said: "Well, well!"

I nodded. "You had to fake a Nancy Gale for us, Tay," I said, "because the real Nancy Gale had got wise to you. She was afraid of you, but she knew what you were trying to do. You were afraid she'd take it to the old lady, and with her information Mrs. Greenway could wind you up quick. Perhaps you had some other reason—enough to make you want to kill. You had Nancy stopped, and in a way that you could still play against Mrs. Greenway."

Tay moved his buried right hand slightly in the right pocket of the blue-serge suit.

"How did Norah murder Nancy Gale?" he asked in a peculiar tone. "With the old lady's cane? How did she get into the garage? How did she get out?"

I forced a smile.

Tay said: "You've been pretty bright up to this point. Dancer and Davies, Ltd.—A tough agency. How'd Norah do the job on Nancy Gale, Davies?"

I shook my head. "I haven't the slightest idea," I said. "I don't know *why* Nancy Gale went in the garage entrance. I don't know *how* Norah Bunter got the cane, or how she got away. I don't *know* that Norah Bunter was the murderer. But I do know that she faked Nancy Gale's voice on the phone, after Nancy was dead. That was the tip-off. She faked, thinking it would make things tougher, hold back the discovery of the body. It wasn't sense, but she was getting panicky. And she was losing her nerve, when I talked to her. She *felt* I suspected her, when I really didn't. I was trying to get at the murderer through her. Trying to frighten her by making her think *she* was suspected. And suddenly I

realized her fear was deep—and that *she* was—"

Tay said: "Gun all right, Mac?"

McQuirter's voice was husky. "Yeah."

He handed it to Tay. Looking at me, Tay took his right hand from the coat pocket and held the Maxim-silenced gun in it. His face was expressionless.

"In a way—you were a good guy, Davies. You had a lot of things right." He broke off, spoke to McQuirter without taking his eyes from mine. "Get a handkerchief ready—so I can wipe off this gun before we squeeze it into Norah's fingers."

McQuirter said: "Yeah—and for God's sake remember she was left-handed."

Tay swore tonelessly. "I remembered that when I gave her the dose. The coroner'll say she could suicide the way things are."

He looked at me again, with eyes almost closed.

"It's the hour for kiddies, on the radio, Davies—so *I'll* end up tonight's story before I sign you off."

I tried to get a smile going, but it didn't work. Tay said very softly:

"Norah Bunter got the old lady's cane—a few days ago. She went over with a note from Nancy Gale to Mrs. Greenway. The closet door, downstairs, was open. Norah got the cane under her coat. One of the boys worked a couple of nights and had some keys made for the garage lock. It wasn't much of a job."

McQuirter was looking at the body of Norah Bunter. Tay kept his eyes on mine.

"Today Norah went to the garage with the cane—while the old lady was out driving. She hid in the cellar until the car came in and the chauffeur cleared out. Then she used the garage phone and called Nancy Gale. She said her sister was ill—she'd been called away. And that the old lady had telephoned that she wanted Miss Gale to come to the house immediately, entering by the garage. She was in trouble. Nancy

had gone into the house through the garage before and naturally she had the key to that side door.

Tay shrugged. "Nancy Gale went to the garage—and Norah used the cane. I promised her ten grand, or a lot of trouble if she didn't do the job."

I said shakily: "She did the job—but she got the trouble."

Tay spoke very quietly. "You were close to her, getting to her."

I tried to keep my voice steady. "The cane was found inside the house—and the door was bolted on the inside."

Tay smiled just a little. "I had one of the boys inside the house, reading meters. He went in just as the old lady came in from her drive, and stalled around, fixing a couple of them. He unbolted the garage door—the one leading to the house. After Norah did the job she took her time, went into the house and dropped the cane, shoved the bolt back and left by the servants' entrance of the house."

I said: "Maybe the police will think about the meter reader—and look him up."

Tay shrugged. "He's riding out of town right now, and he hasn't got a record. Norah's dead—a suicide after she shot you dead. The police may worry about that—but the old lady's on the spot. She was afraid of Nancy, because Nancy always needed money and the old lady didn't give it to her. And there's the blood-stained cane."

I said: "You may win—if Mrs. Greenway gets scared and thinks you can help her out of a jam. She may let you clean up on Forty-second Street—"

Tay's voice was hard. "Stand up, Davies! Over there beside Norah."

I said: "For God's sake—"

Tay spoke more softly: "Stand up!"

I stood up and he lifted his right hand. There was a sharp crack from somewhere beyond him. Tay dropped the gun and went down. McQuirter

swore and swung around. I started to dive for McQuirter, and heard Julie say:

"Hands out from your sides, McQuirter!"

I straightened, picked up the silenced gun from the floor and got the other gun from Tay's pocket. Then I went over to McQuirter and got his one gun.

Julie said: "I had to shoot, Dee."

I said: "You certainly did." I went over and looked at Joey Tay. Julie's bullet had got him low under the heart. His eyes hated me, but he didn't speak.

Julie said: "Did he get you, Dee?"

"You didn't give him time," I said. "Call an ambulance."

Julie called an ambulance.

"Hear the kiddies' hour story?" I asked.

Julie said: "Most of it. I got to thinking and decided I'd better come up the way they did—service elevator. They'd left the servants' door conveniently unlocked, and I've been waiting to hear their story. I waited almost too long, and had to shoot."

I brushed sweat off my forehead. "Wish I'd known you were there," I said. "Now call the police."

While she was doing it I said to Tay: "You'll sell that beer garden lease cheap now, won't you? Need the money for defense, eh?"

Tay said thinly: "I won't—have—to worry."

McQuirter swore hoarsely.

"Any calls while I was away, Miss Ryan?" I asked Julie.

She grinned. "Mr. Dancer—called—from Chicago—"

I put the hand that didn't hold a gun on her shoulder.

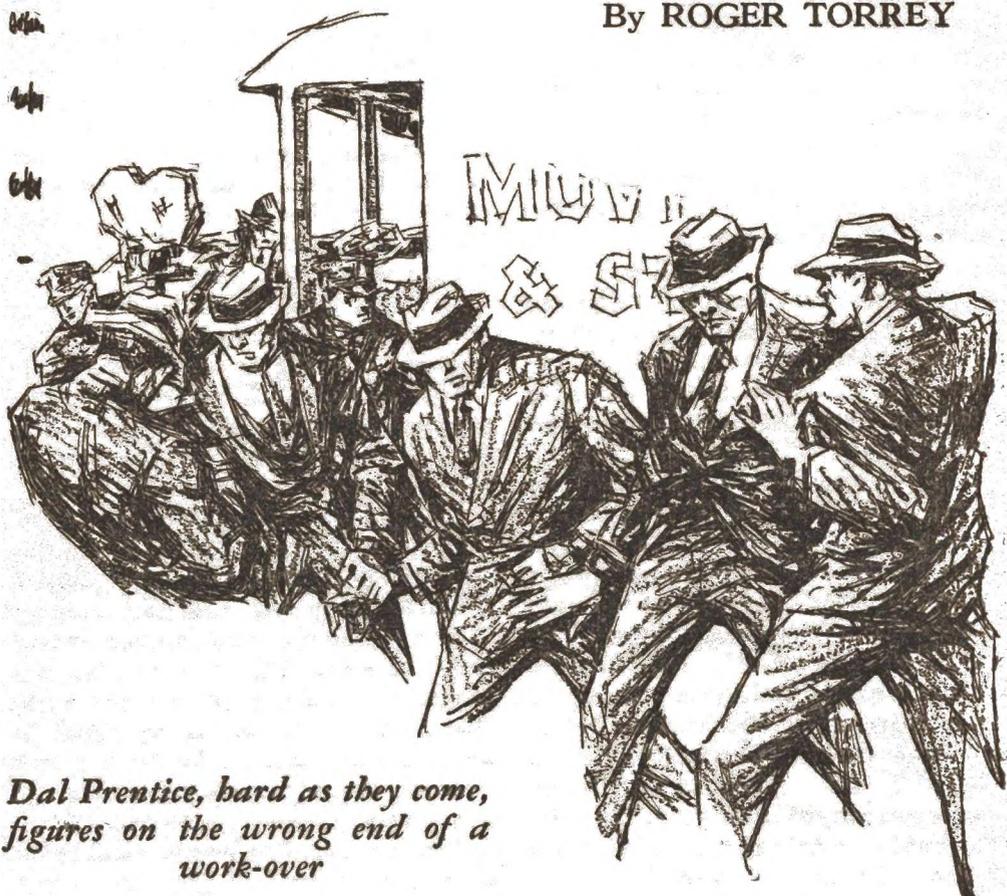
"Well, he'll be glad to learn you saved his partner for him," I said.

Julie's eyes were very dark and very hard to read.

"Yes," she said very slowly, "I expect—he will."

Murder in Jail

By ROGER TORREY



Dal Prentice, hard as they come, figures on the wrong end of a work-over

FIVE men walked down the steps of the County Jail and forced their way through the crowd of curious onlookers. Five men—first, two uniformed polisemen; then John Bruner, prisoner, handcuffed to Prentice on one side and Allen on the other.

There was a clatter of talk from the mob; mumbles of, "That's him in the middle," "That's Bruner there,"—and three cameramen were frantically shooting pictures from as many angles, and fighting off exhibitionists who were

spoilng the bulk of them. One enterprising reporter, daring the two guards who were officiously waving the crowd back, stepped close to Bruner as he reached the sidewalk and said hurriedly: "Mr. Bruner, are—"

Bruner's hat was pulled well down in an effort to shield his face, and a cigarette dangled from his thin lips. He said: "Let's get out!" but they did not seem to move. He blew smoke from under the hat brim and watched the street with pale, expressionless eyes. One of the uniformed men caught the newshawk by the shoulder, said: "Keep back, bud! He won't talk."

The reporter said in an injured voice: "Well, ——!" and they argued.

Bruner's eyes flickered to them a moment, then through the crowd and back to the street. He shook his head as if to clear his eyes of smoke.

A ramp at the left led down to the basement of the jail building and as the five waited for the police wagon that would take them to the Court House for Bruner's arraignment on a murder charge, a truck, coming towards them on the same side of the street and some fifty feet above the ramp, weaved erratically for a moment and then, apparently out of control, smashed across the sidewalk and blocked this entrance. Its bulk extended out in the street and following cars were forced well out in the center lane to pass.

A rattle-trap Ford, following the wrecked truck, crashed into the back of it and flames shot from the hood. The driver got out, waved his arms excitedly, shouted for help. The fire leaped to the back of the car with suspicious suddenness, a dense cloud of smoke rolled up from the wreck, and the driver of the truck dashed to the back with his helper and made frantic attempts to clear the Ford away from his endangered truck. The crowd surged away from the prisoner and his guards and turned their attention to the new excitement. The truck-driver shouted hoarsely for help. The uniformed man engaged in the altercation with the reporter started towards the burning car, but Prentice said sharply: "Hey! Let it go!"

Almost as he spoke, even as the man turned back to him, a car slid out from the curb a few feet below where they stood and, taking advantage of the eddy the truck and burning Ford caused in the traffic, backed and stopped in front of them. Four men drifted back from the crowd, fifty feet away, Bruner spat the cigarette out and as if this were a signal one of the four pressed close to Prentice and said evenly: "Get in that car!"

Prentice jerked out: "What!" and

glanced sidewise, startled, and the same even voice said: "Don't move wrong, copper. You're covered plenty." Prentice felt a gun jammed in his side and looking past the grin on Bruner's face saw his partner, Allen, in similar shape, saw the two guards standing motionless.

The newsman, entirely unconscious of anything wrong, pressed in again and the man standing by Prentice reached out his free hand and pushed him away and at the same time growled to Prentice: "In the car, I said! Quick!" He jammed the gun harder in the detective's side.

Prentice gave a desperate glance around and the man insisted: "Quick!"

Allen, speaking across Bruner, said: "Might as well, Dal!" and, with the gun pressing harder into his side, Prentice said sullenly: "Oke!" His face showed sudden beads of sweat.

The driver of the car reached back and shoved the back door open, and the man guarding Allen stepped in and sat in the far jump seat. He said harshly: "Come in, muggs," and to Allen: "You first." He pulled the gun from his coat pocket and held it on his lap and while Allen, handicapped by being linked to Bruner, and followed by Bruner and Prentice, clumsily clambered in, watched him narrowly.

The man guarding Prentice had never eased the pressure of the gun against his ribs and followed him in and sat on the other jump seat. The car pulled smoothly away from the curb, and the first man in leaned across and jerked the gun from the spring-holster under Allen's arm and slid it into his side pocket. Prentice's guard did the same for him, but poised it, said: ".45," in a reflective voice. He balanced it tentatively in his hand as the big car hit a green light at the intersection, rolled on and made a left turn at the next block. He seemed puzzled by the weight of the heavy revolver.

As they straightened from the turn, Bruner spoke for the first time, and to the man across from Prentice. He said: "Unlock these damn' cuffs!" jerked his

elbow in Prentice's side and added: "He's got the keys."

The man shoved his own gun under his arm, took off his hat, pushed blond scant hair back from his forehead. He was smiling but broke this off to yawn. He asked indifferently: "Why?" Bruner stared at him as if he didn't understand and the blond man offered: "They're easier to watch this way. A one-armed man can't do half what a guy on the loose can."

The strain of his escape suddenly took hold of Bruner, made his voice shake and change key oddly. He quavered: "Damn it, let me loose! Now! You got a gun, haven't you?"

"Yeah! Two of them, now." The smile returned to the towhead. He threw out the cylinder of the gun he had taken from Prentice, picked out a cartridge and looked at it curiously. He said: "That's sure a slug. The damn' gun's too hard to cover up, though." He ignored Bruner, said to Prentice: "Me, I use a .38 automatic. Always did. Don't make no bulge under your coat. See what I mean?"

Bruner choked out: "Take—these—damn'—things—off!" and the blond man swung on him. "You keep harping on that, mugg, and I'll tie 'em around your ——— damned neck. See!" He glared at Bruner and Bruner dropped his eyes. He turned back to Prentice, said: "All lip and no guts. The cheap ———!"

Prentice asked curiously: "Don't you work for him? How come?" But Allen broke in. He asked: "You're Harry, Happy Schultz, ain't ya?" and the blond man said: "Yeah!" and grinned.

Allen told Prentice: "St. Looney, he comes from. This is his racket. He snatched Bald Jake Kranter and got a hundred grand for him." He asked Schultz: "Ain't that right?" and Schultz said: "Hell, no! Thirty-five. The papers made it big." His grin was wide and he seemed proud to be recognized as he queried: "How'd ja know? I never been West before."

"Saw your picture once and remem-

bered it. You gotta face easy to place."

Schultz fingered his nose, said: "Huh! I shoulda got the beak fixed up. I ain't made ail-jay in five years. Even for investigation. How's that?"

Prentice said: "You got a lot o' guts to snatch two coppers, fella, I'll say that. Lots of guts and no brains."

Schultz corrected him. "Four coppers and some nosy punk that got wise there was something wrong. I seen him stick his head in the other car that's got the harness bulls, and the boys reached right out and took him. I seen it through the back window. That screw that started to ask questions."

"What you going to do with 'em?"

"Not one damn' thing. Turn 'em loose. They'll be yapping about the mean things that got fresh with 'em inside of ten minutes. I didn't want 'em or no part of 'em. Or, for that matter, no part of you."

"That was smart work." Prentice's voice was admiring.

"You know it, bud! The truck was rented under a phoney name and we paid twenty-five bucks for the flivver. It cost us another five to fix it up so she'd burn when she smashed and with a couple of smoke bombs in the back the trick was done. They can't get any cars to follow us because the truck's blocked 'em off. I'll say it was smart. That closing up that runway was good."

"What about the truck-driver? And the mugg that run the fliv?"

"Cinch! I got another car behind to stop and pick 'em up. What in hell d'ya think they was doing out at the back of the truck the way they was? They're in one car and the two boys that was with you and the egg that wanted to know so much is in another. I don't miss."



SIREN on the car wailed as they came to a boulevard stop with the red light against them and Prentice said: "For ——— sake!"

Schultz grinned: "This heap belongs

to the Police Commissioner. Some mugg named Richards. I bet he raises hell when he finds out we borrowed it off him. I bet he just raises hell and—"

Bruner broke in with: "Listen, Schultz! In the first place, you talk too much. Unlock me and I'll—"

Schultz leaned over and slapped him across the face. "You'll shut that trap. See! I got paid to break you out and I'll do it my way. See!" Prentice laughed as Bruner shrank back in his seat and Schultz said complainingly: "I know my business. This is my dish. Once this heel gets to where I'm paid to bring him, he can order his punks around all he damn' well wants to, but not me. See! I get my ough-day for the crash-out but I don't take no talk off any o' these small-time chiselers. See what I mean?"

Prentice caught Allen's swift glance and grinned admiringly back at Schultz. As long as he wanted to talk, it seemed policy to let him. He said: "You know your business all right. That was sure neat."

"I always work neat. That's how come I got this job. I gotta reputation."

"Did this — hire you?"

"What d'ya think?"

"That he did."

"You lose. He didn't."

Prentice looked puzzled, then across at Allen. He said complainingly: "I don't get this. What in hell's—"

The man supposedly watching Allen was short and dark and ugly faced. He had turned his head away from Allen in listening to Schultz and Prentice and his hand holding the gun in his lap had relaxed slightly. Allen suddenly kicked up at him and grabbed with his free hand at the gun but this failed and the sour-faced man slammed the gun against the side of his jaw. Allen slumped back in the seat and Schultz said regretfully: "That's the way. Never satisfied."

The ugly man reached across and felt Allen's jaw, said harshly: "Hell! It ain't broke none. He ain't hurt one damn' bit." Schultz looked relieved and

Bruner broke in again. "When are we going to change cars? The squawk's out for this one by this time and the radio cars'll be on the watch."

Schultz said: "Shut up and leave it to me, will ya!" He seemed to have had an active dislike for Bruner from the first. "If it wasn't that I only got part of the dough that's coming to me, damned if I wouldn't dump you out on the street. You blat all the time. For —sake, you make me nervous."

Prentice said slowly, feeling his way: "Don't make him sore, fella. He might not pay off."

"No? I'd hate like hell to have to put him together if he don't. I should fool with a cheap heel like him."

"Cheap?"

"Hell, yes. Cheap. I was to get twenty grand for this job—it's no set-up to bust a guy loose like that—and half of it was to be before I turned the trick. Well—they try to pay me off in Liberty Bonds. What in hell do I want bonds for? Them things can be traced if they're hot. The next thing'll be cigar coupons." He looked his disgust at Bruner and his voice got even harder. "If you think you or that shyster of yours ain't going to pay off in iron money inside of five minutes after you're delivered, you're screwy as hell. See! Hell of a big-time hustler you are. Can't raise a lousy ten grand." He turned to Prentice. "Just a cheap punk. — sake! I got that much dough on me all the time and more too."

The siren wailed again as he reached in his pocket and produced a wallet, showing its bulging contents with pride. "See! For bail. Though I could stay in this town forever and never need it. I cased that gow for three days—even asked directions from some opper-copper, and me with my rep."

Allen stirred weakly and Prentice asked: "What you going to do with me and my partner?"

"Turn you loose after Mr. b— pays off. I ain't lost anything you guys got, but I don't want to take no chances on you making trouble before I get mine."

Prentice said approvingly: "That's smart."

"Sure! If the hustlers weren't all starving, believe you me I wouldn't be messing around on a deal like this. I pick guys in the racket so there'll be no beef."

Bruner said: "Another five grand if you leave 'em with me."

"Not any. And have something happen to 'em. I ain't nuts."

"Now listen, Schultz. If—"

"Save your wind. This racket is tough enough without getting hotted up over a copper getting knocked off. I'm in dutch enough now."

"That's it. What the hell difference would it make now?"

"Plenty. The difference between five years and the hot squat. Not that I'm any cop lover but I use my head."

Bruner snapped: "You seem chummy with this heel." He jabbed Prentice viciously with his elbow and Prentice reached over with his free hand and slugged at his jaw. Schultz said reprov-ingly: "Ix-nay!" and Prentice leaned back on the seat and growled: "He started it."

"Sure. But you guys fight your private battles some other time. See!"

Bruner's voice was shaken by the hate in it. He snarled: "Ten, then. And that's all."

"Real dough? None of this bond hooley?"

"Real dough."

Allen sat up and looked blearily at the man across from him. He said: "You cheap heel! I'll remember that."

The sour-faced man looked back and laughed.

Prentice nodded at him, asked Schultz: "St. Looley, too?"

Schultz grinned wider. He said: "I wouldn't know," and to the man at his side: "Where you from, kid?"

Sour Face glowered at him, said sullenly: "That mouth o' yours'll fry us yet. You see!"

Bruner said again: "Ten grand. Real dough." His voice had steadied but his pale eyes glowed oddly.

"What you want 'em for?"

"I've reasons."

"I guess you have. You want to knock these muggs over. I know."

"It's not that."

"Then what?"

"They've got some stuff I want. Or rather, they can get it."

"Sounds screwy to me."

Bruner leaned ahead. The cuff that linked him with Prentice bit into his wrist and he jerked irritably to clear it, and Prentice, taking the cuff that encircled his own wrist with his free hand, jerked with all his strength. Bruner gave a half-muffled scream and Schultz said curiously: "Can't take 'em, huh! What a man!" His eyes showed disgust as he watched Bruner nurse his bruised arm.

Prentice said: "Take it easy, — I'm still tied to you." He spoke earnestly to Schultz. "Don't get sold on this, Happy. It'd be curtains for me and my partner and you'd take the rap. You can be identified on the snatch and they'll stick you for a cop killing, you know that."

Schultz's distinguishing feature was an oversize nose, humped in the middle with an old break. He held his forefinger against one side and breathed noisily through the other nostril, said: "Yeah! But ten grand! That's a lot o' dough," in an undecided voice.

"It won't do you any good on the hot seat. You can't spend it there."

Bruner said: "Now listen! These fellows got enough on me to make it plenty tough. All the way tough, if it comes right down to it. I was taken up on a warrant and during it there was a shooting and I got mine. You know that."

"Sure! Go on." Schultz sounded bored. He tested the other nostril, added: "It was the copper right here that popped you, if I'm right on it."

"That's right. I used to have this town sewed up pretty, but this damned copper wrecked me. He's the one that put me in this spot, him and his partner."

"He's got you up on the big rap, huh?"

"That's right. I was indicted but if I got a couple of confessions these two heels are holding up their sleeves and could get to two men that are held in jail as witnesses, I could beat the case like a damn. Get the angle now?"

"How could you get the confessions?"

Bruner smiled palely. "Don't worry about that. If I had these two where I could work on them—give them some of their own third degree—they'd send after them plenty quick."

Schultz displayed an entire lack of interest. "Sure. And after that, the two eggs they got in the gow would go right ahead and swear you into the chair. Sure! I knew damn' well you were screwy as well as a — heel."

"Now listen, Schultz! Heineman talked to you, didn't he?"

"You know damn' well he did. He sent for me when you told him to and then tried to pay off in wooden money. He said you were a cinch to fry and that your only chance was to take a powder and that I was the only guy smart enough to get you clear. He didn't say anything about you beating any rap. He said you could go some place where they couldn't extradite you and that was your only out."

"He doesn't know all I know, Schultz. Listen close. I was a lawyer until I was disbarred. Heineman worked for me. I know what I'm talking about. I tell you I can beat this if I get a break."

"Yeah! And it's only worth ten grand to you, is it screwball, to beat it? I'm half smart. If you had a chance to beat the big rap you'd lay plenty dough on the line. Not a lousy ten grand."

Bruner's voice cracked. He pleaded: "I'm damn' near broke. It's the best I can do."

"And you'll turn these guys loose if they come coco? It's no rib?"

The car pulled into a public garage, clear through to the back, and Schultz said: "Out! Change cars!" He clambered out of the car and stood with his

hand in his pocket as the prisoners climbed out and transferred to another car, equally as big and well kept. He told an oil-soaked man that came up: "'Key, keed! Take the hearse out an' lose it. It's hotter'n hell."

The man nodded and they pulled out of the garage and doubled back on the highway. Schultz asked: "It's no rib? Real dough and the coppers get loose when they crack it?"

"Keep 'em until you see the money if you want to. And I'll turn 'em loose afterwards."

Schultz leaned over and tapped Bruner on the knee with the gun he had again taken from his pocket. He said: "As if I wouldn't. Listen then. It's a deal if you put up the dough right away. I'm leaving an hour after we get to the hideout and if the jack ain't there, the coppers go with me. I'll spot 'em someplace and call somebody that don't know me and tell them to tell the law where they're at. See!" He paused and flashed a vicious glance at Bruner's thoughtful face. "And if you think you can connive around and do better than that—if you think up some screwy notion about how some of these dopey punks on your payroll can help you out on this—just take your Sunday cut. Me and Benny here, 'll be right at the party. See!"

"Don't be a fool. I won't cross you."

"You're telling me."

Prentice, knowing in his heart that speech was useless, said: "Don't be a fool, Happy."

"Ten G's is a lot o' ough-day. If you're nice and give the mugg what he wants he won't hurt you."

"Don't stall. You know damn' well it's curtains for us if you go for this."

Schultz looked troubled but his indecision had left him. He scratched the hump on his nose, argued: "But he says—" His voice trailed.

"I can do a lot of talking too. You believe me or him?"

"Well, you. But ten G's is—"

Allen broke in quietly. "Save your breath, Dal. It's no dice. If Happy wants

to have all the law in the world looking for him on a murder rap, you can't stop him."

Bruner asked: "Where we going?" He saw Schultz was not looking at him and winked at Prentice.

"You'll see. That mouthpiece of yours is there waiting for you."

"Why not let me loose? This is damned uncomfortable."

Schultz said shortly: "When we get there. Not before. Now save your breath," and they finished the ride in silence.



HE car turned off the highway on to a dirt road, a full five miles back from where the commissioner's stolen car had been left and not more than that from

Magna City. It bounced in and out of ruts for a half mile, turned into the yard of a shabby farmhouse. Chickens scratched dispiritedly in the littered yard and an overalled man opened the door and watched the car empty.

Schultz said: "Okey, keed?" and he answered: "Yeah!" Schultz motioned with the gun he held towards the house, and Prentice, in a last attempt, said earnestly: "Listen, Schultz! Give us a break!"

Schultz waved the gun in silence and they strung into the house, into a filthy hall, where the overalled man searched Prentice roughly and found the handcuff keys. He freed Bruner, left the unfastened cuffs dangling from the two detectives' wrists, and Schultz, watching them narrowly, waved the gun at the stairs leading to the second story and ordered: "Up you go. And don't make no breaks. See!"

With the sour-faced man from the car preceding them and Schultz following, they silently climbed stairs and saw a long corridor, doors opening from it, three on each side. As they passed the first of these it opened and Prentice got a glimpse of a short swart man and

heard a girl's voice in a giggle. He snapped out: "'Lo, Heineman!" and the short man slammed the door shut with a curse.

Schultz chuckled behind them and motioned them into the middle room on the right-hand side, followed them in, made them sit on the floor with their backs to the iron bed that was the only furniture. The sour man clamped the free ends of the cuffs to the side rail, making sure they were locked tightly enough to preclude any chance of being slipped over the lumpy ends of the rail. Schultz motioned him out when this was done and said loudly: "I'd put a guard in the hall and turn you loose in here but you'd try to make a break and hurt yourselves. He gave a quick glance at the door, whispered: "I'd give in quick if I was you. It'll save you a lotta grief."

The door opened and Sour Face said: "That guy's calling you. What's the matter?" He looked at the two men on the floor with distaste.

Schultz winked meaningly at them and strolled out with the other man. They could hear Heineman come out of the front room as the two went down the corridor, could hear the low murmur of voices as the trio went down the stairs. After a few minutes, they heard someone open the door of the front room, heard the girl they had heard in the hall say: "Well, just a minute, Honey." In a little while this door slammed and high heels tapped down the stairs, then silence.

Prentice said slowly: "Looks like the deep end, Al." His voice seemed unworried and of normal loudness but his face was wet and his eyes looked sick.

Allen said: "Sing low, Dal! There might be a guard at that. It ain't the deep end yet and we might get a break."

Prentice said bitterly: "Might! What gets me is this — getting away after we had him. I can take it, it ain't that. We been looking for it."

"I never figured Schultz for a play like this. His dish has always been to

work on some hustler that couldn't cry. He's been taken up and mugged but I don't believe he ever took a rap."

"He's just like any other heel. Sell his mother out for enough dough."

"Looks that way. What'll we do?"

"Nothing. We get ours anyway so we might just as well take it right at the start. There's a chance that Bruner'll be picked up some time afterwards that way."

"I guess." Allen shifted position in an attempt to ease the drag on his handcuffed arm.

The door opened and Schultz came in, quietly, on his toes. He held his finger warningly to his lips, whispered: "S-s-s-h! Listen, guys."

Prentice gave him an ugly look, snapped out: "All right, heel! We are."

"Don't be like that. Be quiet. The mugg paid off just like a slot machine. He says he'll give you an out if you come coco but I don't believe him."

"I told you that."

"All right, then. You want to listen to a proposition?"

"Not from you—"

Allen said swiftly: "Shut up, Dal." He said to Schultz: "Speak up. I do."

Schultz winked broadly. "You know my racket. If I stick around and get you out do I go clear on this other? I can do it."

"When?"

"Well, not now. I only got Benny with me and the heel downstairs has got him four boys already. If you stall and give me a break, it's a cinch."

Prentice said: "I get it, Al. We're supposed to stall by giving Bruner his damned confessions and this is part of the build-up."

Schultz said earnestly: "You're screwy. I don't like the heel. Can't you see that this is an out for me if it works?"

Allen said: "We'll do it. We'll stall the best we can. When can you get action?"

Schultz shrugged and fingered his nose. "I can't crash in with just Benny

so I'll have to wait a chance. He figures I'm going to take a powder but I'll duck right back and turn the trick when I can. I can't say when that'll be."

"What in hell did you turn us over like this for?"

"Ten G's is one reason." He shrugged again and grinned. "Besides, I'm half smart. If I'd turned you loose I'd have had you on my tail for breaking him out and this way I don't. That is, if you don't cross me."

"We won't. We want out too bad."

"I know you won't, but what about your partner? Him and me's been getting along all right but it ain't lasting, looks like."

Allen looked earnestly at Prentice. He said: "Listen, Dal! This might be the break we're looking for. Why not play along?" and Prentice nodded sullenly. Allen asked Schultz: "If we stick it out and don't give the — what he wants, is that any skin off your neck?"

"Not one damn' bit. I'm paid for what I'm supposed to have did and that lets me out. If I knew what he was like I'm damned if I'd done it. He'd take it off me only he knows damn' well that Benny and I'd go for him first and he's got no guts."

"It's a bet then."

Schultz beamed, turned his head as he heard footsteps in the hall, and as he heard the door open, snarled: "I don't give a damn. I ain't no bull lover." He turned, said: "Hey, Bruner! These wise boys say that the finger'll be out and I'll never make it clear. What about it?"

Bruner looked at him suspiciously, said: "Don't fret about getting away. That's all ready now. I'm going to send you and Benny with one of my boys in another car and he'll take you a few miles up the line where you can get a train." He paused a moment, glanced from Schultz to Allen and Prentice and asked: "What—"

Allen said swiftly to Schultz: "And I hope you burn, you rat." Schultz saw

his eyelid flicker, and laughed. "Plenty tough boy, huh!" He leaned over and slapped at Allen's face, and Allen fended the blow with his free hand and struck back.

Bruner grinned: "I'll start you out. The car's ready now—that's why I was looking for you." He put his hand on Schultz's shoulder, steered him out, but turned at the door, said: "I'll be seeing you." His smile was nasty and both captives glowered back at him.

In a few moments they heard the grind of a starter, then a roar as the motor caught. This dimmed as the car went down the road, and shortly Bruner, followed by Heineman, came back in the room. Bruner said: "You going to come through with what I want or must I get dirty?"

Prentice glared at him. "We'd get rubbed out either way. Heineman, you'll be disbarred for this, same as this — you're working for. See if you're not."

Heineman pulled his hat over his eyes. He was palpably nervous. He said: "Maybe so—maybe not," in an undecided voice.

Bruner leaned over without warning and hit Prentice fair in the mouth, and Prentice tried to roll with the punch. Handicapped by his bonds, the attempt was a miserable failure and he spat out a tooth. Bruner said: "No lip! —!" Prentice, locked to the bed frame, jerked a foot up and kicked as hard as he could at Bruner, who stepped out of range and jeered: "Not even close." He evaded another frantic effort, knocked Prentice's guarding hand aside, stepped in and struck again.

Prentice wiped blood from his face with his free hand, snarled: "I'll remember that."

"Think about where the stuff I want is planted. That'll do you a damn' sight more good." He struck again, and Allen broke in: "Wait a minute! This ain't going to buy you a thing." His eyes were hot. He was shaking so the cuff rattled where it was fastened to the bed.

Bruner hit out again and Prentice ducked and took the blow high on his head. Bruner cursed and stepped back nursing his knuckles and Prentice choked out: "Like that, —?" His voice was thick and uncertain with rage. Bruner drew a blackjack from his pocket and Allen said hurriedly: "Now wait! Give me and Dal a chance to talk this over."

Bruner balanced the blackjack, rapped out: "Talk now."

"Like hell! We'll figure it out. What's the matter?" Allen added persuasively: "We can't run away, can we?"

Heineman looked sick. His face a dirty yellow, he nudged Bruner, offered: "Hell, Jack! Let 'em talk." Prentice, at the side, could see the feeble wink he attempted. "They'll see reason if they get a chance to talk it over."

Bruner said shortly: "Five minutes, then. That's all." He looked at the blackjack regretfully and slid it back in his pocket and, followed by Heineman, left the room.

Allen, listening intently, could not hear them go down the hall and he called out: "Hey! I want to talk to Dal without you listening in." Bruner shouted back: "Whisper, then," and Allen grimaced, said under his breath: "Dal! We can never stall with it going this way. You get slugged a few times and you'll go screwy—you know that."

Prentice said stubbornly: "No. I can take all that — can put out."

"And be slug-nutty the rest of your life. I tell you he's figuring on beating you to death. I could see it. We'll have to stall."

"Stall, hell!"

"Dal, I never asked many favors of you, have I? I've done my part."

"Well?"

"Do it my way. Just this once."

Prentice had blood streaming slowly from a cut cheekbone, running down over his collar. His lips were already puffing and one eyelid was drooping. He

stared at Allen, said disgustedly: "Yellow! By ——!"

"Now, Dal! You know better."

Prentice dropped his glance. He said: "Oh, hell, Al! Do it your way." He lifted his head. "I can take all he can give."

"I know it. But I can't watch you take it."

He called out: "All right, Bruner!" and to Prentice: "Let me do the talking, then. It'll save trouble."

Prentice shrugged assent, and when Bruner and Heineman came in Allen said: "See if I got this right. If we get this stuff for you we go out first class?"

Bruner hesitated a moment, said: "That's right. First class."

Allen said sharply: "I don't mean the wrong way."

Bruner's eyes showed a pale glint of triumph, but his voice was calm. "I'm glad you got a little brains, Allen, even if this partner of yours never had. You're playing smart and I'll give you a break."

"I'll give you a note and Heineman can go down and get the stuff."

"Like hell! He'd get grabbed and I'd have to trade you for him or some play like that."

Heineman rattled in his throat.

"Well how, then? Your dice. And you might make these cuffs a little easier."

"I might." Bruner's voice was jeering but Heineman nudged him warningly and he said with an effort: "Okey! I'll ease 'em." He held a gun while Heineman slackened Allen's cuffs and then Prentice's. This done, he said: "Now we get to business. I want you to write a note."

"To who?"

"Hymie Lefkowitz."

"Why him?"

"Because that's the way we want to work it. That plain?" Bruner slid the sap from his pocket and Allen said hastily: "Okey! Have it your way. It's your dice."

Bruner smiled nastily, asked: "You

want to write the note to who I want? And what I want?"

"——! yes!"

"All right, Heine, turn him loose and he can go downstairs and do it." He slid a gun from his pocket, added: "Make a break if you want to. This is too easy."

"I'm not crazy."

"Just yellow. That's one thing for him—" He motioned to Prentice. "He's at least got guts."

Allen flushed redly, started to speak but stopped. Heineman released him and stepped quickly back out of line as Bruner sneered: "All right, guy." Allen turned obediently towards the door but Prentice caught his wink as he did and felt better.

Some few minutes later Allen was returned and again cuffed to the bed. After the captors had gone he told Prentice that the note to Hymie was merely a request to follow the bearer and that the overalled man had taken it to deliver. The note had nothing in it regarding their situation but contained a two-hour time limit.

Prentice said: "Sorry about the other, Al! I was sore."

"Sure! Forget it!"

"Think Schultz'll come through?"

"If he don't, we are."

"Are what?"

"Through."

They waited for Hymie.



HYMIE LEFKOWITZ was the Magna City manager for a national bail bond company, and as he was willing to pay a commission on business brought him, he was a good friend of both Prentice and Allen who had no scruples about accepting this same commission. He was short, fat, far too well dressed—and carried the known loyalty of the Jew when dealing with his own race into his relations with the two officers. They laughed at him and with him—and trusted him.

Neither man had any doubts about his not following the request in the note and they waited in patience for his arrival, which was inside the two hours Bruner had allotted him.

Bruner brought him up to the prison room and told Allen: Lefkowitz knows the score. You talk it over with him," and left. As he did, Lefkowitz said cautiously: "Watch it! I saw the door of—" he motioned towards the adjoining room—"close as I hit the hall."

Allen whispered: "That'd be Heineman."

Lefkowitz blinked nearsighted eyes. "Heineman, the lawyer?"

"The shyster, rather."

The bond man took off horn-rimmed glasses and polished them, said in a worried voice: "That's bad. Plenty bad. Bruner told me he was going to turn you loose if there's no beef but—" He shrugged. "With Heineman in it and you knowing it, I don't know. I'd think he'd've stayed clear."

"We run into him. I think he was going to."

"I see." He blew his glasses misty, rubbed thoughtfully.

"What the hell's the odds! We both knew he worked for Bruner."

Hymie said thoughtfully: "That's right, at that. They may figure you knew he was in the mud all the time." He brightened. "You know, at that, this —'s smart. Plenty smart. I'm supposed to go and get these confessions he's worried about and do it any way I can."

"And then?"

"That's the smart part of it. And then nothing."

"What d'ya mean? Nothing!"

"Well, first he says he'll turn you boys loose right then and there and when I tell him not to lie right in my face, of course in a nice way, he says he figures to keep you here until he can see what he can do with these guys in jail."

"He told us he'd turn us loose."

"Did you believe him?"

"Not any."

"I don't see how he can. You'd just make it tough for him or anybody else to get to Russo and the other guy, the butler that worked for him. Heineman can get the butler out any time he wants to, Bruner says. He's got a writ signed by Judge Clark."

"Tough for the butler."

"I figure that, too. They'll shut him up the big way, I think. Though Bruner just told me he had it figured to slide the guy out. He knew I knew what it was all about and told me plenty." He added severely: "That's your fault. You booked him as a material witness and if you'd hung a bum murder rap on him like you did on Russo, Clark could turn the bail down."

Allen said: "When you go back, Hymie, tell Hallahan that."

Hymie held one pudgy hand out in protest. The nails shone glassily and a yellow diamond winked on one finger. His voice shook slightly. "Not me. Bruner told me in these same words: 'You play ball or I'll pitch.' He meant it, too. I tell you boys, that man's fighting for his life and I don't want in. If he can get these hoods of his out and those papers back he's safe. If he don't he's an escaped murderer. I won't want in."

Prentice said reasonably: "You are in, Hymie. Up to your neck, right now."

"Yes and no. I'm here because of you, but I'm not taking sides. It wouldn't do no good to tip Hallahan." He shrugged.

"Why not? If Hallahan foxed up about the butler and you tipped him to keep Russo in the hole where he couldn't be got to by anybody, why not?"

Hymie shrugged again, spread both hands wide. "Just this. I'd be on the spot. You and Dal would be deader than two dried herring and what the hell. Bruner wouldn't be one damn' bit worse off than he is now. He figures you can burn only once for murder. Ix-nay. I wouldn't say a word."

Allen said: "You're probably right. What you figure now?"

"Easy enough. You give me the dope on how to get the stuff he wants and I'll dig it up. He's going to send the same fella that brought me here back with me and I'm to give the stuff to him or come back with it, one or the other. I was blindfolded from the time we left Ash Boulevard and had to sit on the floor of the car. He knows I can't tip off where the place is."

"I know. I can tell you."

Hymie said hastily: "*Don't* tell me. I might not lie good if he asks me do I know where it is myself. *Don't* tell me." His face was sweating and he mopped it, wiped his glasses again with the same gaudy cloth. His eyes, when his glasses were off, showed a soft appealing brown.

Prentice asked: "How long does he figure it'll take for this play of his to go through? Did he say how long it'd be before he'd turn us loose? Which he won't."

"Not over three days. He promised me."

Prentice said: "Promised!"

Hymie Lefkowitz shrugged, answered: "He said."

Prentice shut up, staring at the floor. One eye was now entirely closed, the other nearly so, and his words came with difficulty through his swollen lips. The blood had dried on his cheekbones and collar—dried a rusty brown.

Hymie looked at him in sympathy, ventured: "Looks like you talked out o' turn," but Allen shook his head at him warningly and he subsided. Prentice, starting to change his position, pulled against his wrist where it was cuffed to the bed and cursed to himself, almost silently.

Allen said: "Hallahan's got the dope, Hymie, but I don't know whether he'll give it up or not."

"He will." Hymie's voice was confident. "He may figure like Dal does, that it won't do any good, but he'll do it. He'll figure it might."

"Well, I hope so."

Hymie got up, shrugged his checkered

coat into shape on his shoulders. "And then you'll just have to wait, I guess. I sure hope it comes out all right. I'll even pray."

Allen smiled slightly and Prentice grunted. The little Jew turned to the door, stopped and came back. His voice broke with earnestness. "If it's a cross, he'll get his. I'll see to it." He tapped his pouter breast. "Me, Hymie."

Allen said softly: "I know, Hymie. Good luck."

Hymie went to the door and out.

Prentice shrugged, said: "A white man at that. And some people knock the Jews." He shook his head and Allen asked: "What's the matter?"

Prentice shook harder. "I don't hear so good out of this ear. I guess maybe when I ducked into that one the ——— hurt his hand on, I ducked too far to the right. Or maybe the left."

Allen made a clucking noise of sympathy and they resumed their wait.

LATE that evening the tramp of feet in the hall was again heard and Bruner, followed by Hymie, came in. Hymie looked tired and worn but there was a broad grin on Bruner's face. He said: "I got 'em. That's the first step."

Allen said: "How's chances for some water?" and Hymie said indignantly: "Haven't they given you any?" He turned on Bruner. "I thought you said they'd be treated right?"

"Let it go, Hymie. You might have known," Allen told him, and Bruner turned back, said: "I'll send some water up. Hymie, you got about ten minutes before you go back." He slammed the door.

Hymie made warning motions towards the room next door and came closer. "Heineman got the butler out this afternoon on that writ. That's action."

Allen said: "Yeah! What about Russo?"

"Heineman tried to bail him out and Clark refused to accept bail. He said he was booked for murder and was a

witness in Bruner's case besides and he wouldn't go for the shot."

"I figured he wouldn't." Allen's voice was grim. "When we put that mugg in, we put him in to stay."

"Bruner don't seem worried about him one damn' bit. There's something screwy about that."

"What could happen to him?" Prentice argued. "He's in and he's safe in jail if he ever was any place."

Hymie shrugged. "You may be right." He mopped his forehead. "——! I had a time. Bruner sent another guy in with me, some young hood that acted like he could chew nails and eat spikes. He was that hard. Hallahan went straight up when I told him, and here was this yegg standing there, grinning at him. He went right around with me, just like Bruner told him to do. Hallahan wanted to take him down and give him the business and the only thing this yegg says was: 'Go ahead and see what it gets your two coppers.'

"There was just the three of us there in the office and I bet it took me ten minutes to get the captain down to where I could talk sense to him. I finally got him to understand I didn't know where the hideout was and that if I did know I wouldn't tell him. This finally makes sense and he goes out and digs up the stuff, and while he's gone McCready comes in and sits at his desk and I thought sure as hell that Mac was going to pick the hood. He must have had a hunch that this guy was mixed up in your snatch, 'cause he just sat there and stared at him and the damned torpedo had one gun under his coat and another one in his pocket and was just set for action. He acted like he wanted Mac to start something. ——! I never was so scared in my life."

"Who is this yegg?"

"Bruner called him Slick. Slick what, I don't know."

Allen shrugged puzzled shoulders, pulled wearily against the bed. He complained: "I wish they'd hurry with that water. The only way you can keep your

arm from going to sleep is stay awake and keep moving it. This is getting tough."

"I'm sorry." Hymie looked sorry.

"We'll make it."

"Hallahan would've given me a key to the cuffs but I never got the chance to ask for one."

Allen grinned: "And he never thought."

"I think he did. I told him how you were fastened and he started to take me out of the room and the hood started to go right along. I told him what Bruner said about if anything happened to the hood what would happen to you. I made Hallahan put up with him on you boys' account."

"Maybe it was best. Seems kind of funny that Hallahan didn't put a tail on you so's he could come out and crash the joint."

"I told him not to. And made him believe it. ——! If he did find this place and started to take it, you boys wouldn't last a minute. Bruner'd shove you off the deep end and right now. You know that! I told him that."

"I guess that was smart."

Bruner came in with a pitcher of water and both prisoners drank. He set this down within their reach, said to Hymie: "Time to go."

Hymie said: "If I can help, get in touch with me the same way." He shook hands awkwardly, said: "Good luck!" and followed Bruner out.

A few minutes later Bruner and the overalled man came into the room, both men carrying guns in their hands. Bruner said: "You get a break, Allen. You're going to sleep downstairs."

"What about Dal?"

"What about him? He's tough! He can take 'em."

Prentice said through clenched teeth: "I can!" He cursed Bruner with a beautiful vividness, Bruner listening half smiling and the overalled helper with rapt attention. When he stopped to get his breath, Bruner said: "My! See if you can do as well tomorrow." He mo-

tioned towards Allen. "Turn him loose."

Allen said: "I'll stay here." He kicked at the man, who dodged and looked at Bruner. Bruner snapped out: "Weil. You got lead in your pants?" The man slid behind Allen—Allen caught a glimpse of him from the side and ducked—and then blackness.



ALLEN woke up in total darkness, his head splinting, and found himself lying on an army cot, his wrist chained to the side yet in such a position that he could sleep. The wire on the cot was not covered—the springs sagged badly—yet it was comfort compared to his former position.

From the dank odor and chill in the air, he was certain he was in the cellar of the farmhouse and as his eyes became accustomed to the absence of light he saw the gray blanks of two small windows high on the walls. Despite the pain in his head and his worry about Prentice, he finally slept—woke as the gray patches lightened with dawn.

It was very quiet for some hours, then finally, faintly, he heard movement above him—then this ceased. He tried to estimate time as it passed—tried to figure some way out of the tangle—and finally dozed again to be awakened by the opening of the cellar door and furtive steps descending the stairs.

He twisted his head and saw Schultz, tiptoeing down the stairs, finger to his lips. Schultz came over to the cot, stooped, and the handcuffs rattled and eased on Allen's swollen wrist. Schultz said: "That's better, copper! Here, take this," and passed over a blunt automatic. He added: "That belongs to that mugg that wears the farm makeup. He don't need it."

Allen sat up stiffly, holding to the gun. His left wrist, the wrist the fetters had locked to the cot, was swollen, stiff, but he ignored it, stared at the gun. He slid the breach open, saw the glint of

brass and dull gleam of the lead, and said: "A-h-h!" He stood up, staggered, and weaved towards the cellar steps.

Schultz took him by the shoulder, said anxiously: "Now wait, copper! You'll feel better in a minute," but Allen shook him off. He said: "Prentice!" and started to climb the stairs and Schultz followed him.

They came into a kitchen, from this into a dining-room, from this to the front hall. Allen started to climb the stairs and Schultz warned: "Watch it! I think they're all gone but I dunno."

Allen ignored him, stumbled up. He went directly to the second door on the right, threw it open and entered, and Schultz, after opening doors and making sure the upper floor was untenanted, followed him in, found him sitting on the floor, one arm around and supporting Prentice.

Prentice was mumbling to himself. His coat was off and his shirt hung in rags from his shoulders. His arm, where it was cuffed to the bed, was a mass of raw, swollen flesh from being chafed and bruised. The links could hardly be seen through the swelling. Both eyes were closed, one ear was torn and hanging, his face was lumpy, bloody, lop-sided, and his hair was a mass of blood over a bruised forehead.

He had plainly been very sick—his undershirt was caked with blood and vomit. He held his free arm stiffly across his lower ribs. Allen was holding him so he would not sag against his chained wrist, trying to free the arm that he held so stubbornly against his chest, saying: "Oh, Dal! Oh, Dal!" over and over again.

Schultz came forward with the key, unlocked the cuff, and they lifted him on the bed. Allen, without turning, said: "Water!" and Schultz nodded, went to the kitchen and returned with the pitcher. He put this down, shook Allen sharply by the shoulder, said: "Listen! You better get the lay." He laid a revolver on the bed, said: "His! Now

listen! I think they're gone for a little while but I'm not sure for how long. See! I put that one mugg in the barn and tied him up after I seen the rest of 'em go, but they'll be back."

Allen nodded, working on Prentice with clumsy fingers. Schultz watched him a moment, said: "Doctor for him. You ain't doing no good," and Allen said: "That's right." He suddenly seemed to realize what Schultz had told him, said: "They're all gone, huh! Is there a phone here?"

"No."

"A car?"

"Uh-huh! In a shed alongside the barn."

"I've got to take him to town. Help me with him." Allen seemed to have regained his own strength, and Prentice, partially revived by the water, seemed to have a dim understanding of the situation. He struggled weakly in an attempt to sit up and when they lifted him to his feet made a faltering try at walking. He still held his short ribs with his arm and carried his head far to one side.

Allen picked up the gun from the bed and, carrying it in his hand, and helped by Schultz, assisted Prentice down the stairs and into the kitchen. They were half across the room when the back door opened and the overalled man appeared in the doorway. He stood there, framed in the light, and Allen took a step away from Prentice and shot him in the stomach. He fell away from the door, and Allen caught Prentice as he slipped in Schultz's supporting arms. He said: "One down."

They went through the door, saw the overalled man lying by the single step that led down to the yard. He was on his side, silent, hands holding his belly and his knees brought up to his hands. Schultz said curiously: "That .45 sure puts 'em down and keeps 'em there."

Allen said: "Wrong man!"

They eased Prentice to the ground by the barn and Allen sat by him, held him up while Schultz ran the roadster in the

shed out in the open. Prentice was still mumbling to himself but his words were indistinct and Allen said soothingly: "There, Dal! Okey now."

Prentice clutched his arm, spoke louder, and Allen made out: "Stay! Stake-out!" He said: "No!" and Prentice, still holding his head on one side, nodded insistently.

Allen said: "You go with Schultz, then," and Prentice nodded again.

Schultz ran the car out and Allen said: "We'll load him in and you take him to a doctor. Hospital would be better."

Prentice made dissenting noises.

"A doctor then."

"Why me?" Schultz asked.

"I'm going to stay here and wait for 'em to come back."

"Hell, copper, I can't do that. I'm hot. I'm squared with you but not with the rest of the law."

"You can take him to where there's a phone and leave him." Schultz looked undecided and Allen urged: "You could phone and then take a powder. If I stake-out here I'll get the whole damn' crew."

"This bird ought to go to a doctor right now."

Prentice mumbled protests through swollen lips and Allen said: "He ain't hurt so bad that a few minutes either way'll kill him. Just phone for an ambulance and lam. You can do that."

Schultz pointed, said: "Look!"

The lane from the house to the highway ran straight for a quarter of a mile and a sedan, coming towards the house, was just making the turn. The three men were in plain sight in the open yard and the sedan slid to a stop as they watched it, swung crosswise in the road.

Allen rapped out: "Bruner!" slammed open the door of the car, fumbled for an unfamiliar starter button, but as the motor roared into life saw the car in the lane back and complete the turn and roll away. He climbed out, said in disgust: "No dice. I can't catch 'em in this crate."

Schultz said: "Good thing. They must've figured all the law in the world was here or they'd have come ahead and shot it out. You'd've looked good chasing them by yourself and them four or five. You got a break."

Prentice mumbled, trying to see down the lane with eyes he could not open and Allen said: "Load him in. I'll take him myself. They'll never be back."

"That's smart."

They loaded the beaten man into the seat and Allen turned to Schultz, asked: "Where'd you get the keys?"

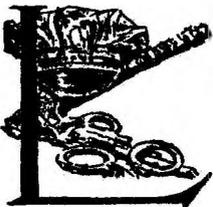
"I was watching the house and when I saw that little Jew that runs the bail bond place come out here with one of the yeggs, I got smart. I knew who he was and I sent Benny in with a note to him and the yid got the keys from some copper and left them at a chili joint for me. I used my bean. I'd have busted in before but there was always somebody around and Benny wouldn't go for the shot. He hates cops."

"Where you going now?"

"Benny's waiting down the road for me with a car. I'm getting out."

Allen kicked the starter, said: "Well, I'll be seeing you."

"Like hell you will." Schultz waved as the battered car gathered headway, bawled out: "Not unless you come to St. Looney."



LEAVING Prentice at the police hospital, where the doctor assured him his injuries were superficial, Allen drove to the Central Station. He was sick, sore, and very tired. As he parked the car, Captain Hallahan and McCready, another detective on the Homicide Squad, dashed up with excited questions, and Allen said: "Inside. I need a drink bad."

"Where's Dal?"

"Hospital!"

"How bad?"

"He's beat up pretty bad but the Doc

says he ain't really hurt. He needs rest and quiet."

Hallahan, sputtering questions, led the way into his office and Allen took the bottle he dug out of his desk and, without waiting for a glass, took two big gulps. He coughed, choked, said: "That's better." Still holding the bottle he sat down, told of what happened at the farmhouse.

Hallahan said thoughtfully: "Good thing for you they come back when they did and figured we had the place staked. It'd been too bad for you alone."

"Maybe."

"Maybe hell. Cinch. It'd do no good to go out there now."

"You gotta send the wagon out after the stiff."

"Oh, yes." Hallahan reached for the bottle. "Take a drink and gimme that."

Allen obeyed orders. With bodily resistance lowered, the liquor was already taking hold.

"I don't quite get letting this Schultz go."

"Had to." Allen defended himself. "We told him we would and if it hadn't been for him, we'd have been put out. Probably by now."

"Well, you could've brought him any-way."

"Would you have? I mean in case you were in the same place."

"Well, no."

"We didn't, either."

McCready said: "How bad is Dal hurt?"

"Couple of broken ribs. They had to take about twenty stitches in his head. One ear's hurt but the Doc thinks that'll wear off. He can't see 'cause his eyes are too damn' black." Allen laughed. "He told me he felt pretty good, before I left the hospital. That's takin' 'em."

"I'll say!"

Hallahan said: "And now I got news. The news is—Russo got killed."

"How? Who by?"

Hallahan shrugged. "A guy named Keefer. There was three of these birds out of the fourteen in the cell that saw

it and they claim it was self-defense. Russo, Keefer, and these three men were in the lavatory and Russo's supposed to've gone for Keefer with a shiv and Keefer's supposed to've taken it away from him and beefed him with it during the fracas. The shiv was made out of a file."

"Hooley!"

"Sure! Keefer and these three heels that claim they saw it are all broke and they'll get paid off for this and have a lawyer clear 'em on it and the charges they're booked on. Sure it's hooley. Cinch! Bruner's got fun."

"Well I'll be damned! Right in jail. Murder in jail."

"Money still talks out loud . . . even in jail. And these hoods'll stick to their story. They'd hang if they cracked on it and they know it. It was self-defense and they'll prove it in court. Bruner is smart."

Allen said: "Bruner's just the same as dead. Right now."

"Like hell!"

"He is if Dal sees him. I'm telling you."

"What about you?"

Allen's grin was evil. He said: "If he's alone *and* the street ain't too crowded."

A clerk entered, said: "Heineman wants to see either you, Captain, or Lieutenant Allen or Prentice. Any or all of you."

Hallahan looked startled, said: "Okey. Send him in." As the clerk left he said: "Now, Al! No rough stuff. I'll do the talking." Allen stared at him sullenly and said nothing and Heineman came in. He looked jaunty. He looked at Allen, asked: "Where's your partner? I hear you boys been away for a while."

The whiskey was singing through Allen's head. He bounced out of his chair, lunged at the little lawyer, but Hallahan and McCready caught him and held him. He said: "You — damned shyster!"

Heineman held up his hand in protest. He had flinched back against the wall but as he saw Allen was harmless he

came forward. He said smoothly: "Why, I don't understand. It's in the paper." The color started to drift back in his face.

Hallahan growled: "What's the act for? I know damn' well we can't prove anything against you, if that's it."

The lawyer made sure Allen was still in custody. Watching him, he said: "I'm here with a message. Not mine. My client, you know who, has asked me to tell you boys he will be out of town until I get his case dismissed. That will probably be about six months. He didn't want the police force to waste valuable time searching for him."

Allen snarled: "Where is he?"

"Out of town." Heineman smiled. "He'll be back."

"Can you get word to him?"

Heineman shrugged. "He informed me that when I wanted him, a personal in the paper would reach him."

"When you do this, tell him to stay out! That clear? Out!"

Heineman's eyes narrowed. "Is that a threat? These things are actionable, you know."

"Try and prove anything by these boys." Allen's voice was level. "Tell him to stay out. Get me?"

Heineman shrugged again. He said: "He'll be back!" and strolled to the door. He turned there, added with a half smile: "In-a-big-way!" and walked out.

Allen watched him go, dragged a gun from his side pocket, asked Hallahan: "You got any .45 shells, Cap? This has got an empty." His voice was still even but his eyes were glazed with the rage he was controlling. He said: "It's Dal's. He'd want it full." He paused, added: "That is, if Bruner's coming back. In such a big way."

Hallahan grunted: "What the hell! It'll be six months." He grinned wryly at Allen. "Maybe you and Dal can get something done—now your private war is put off for a while. You boys are still on the force, though a man'd never know it."

Whispering Justice

By

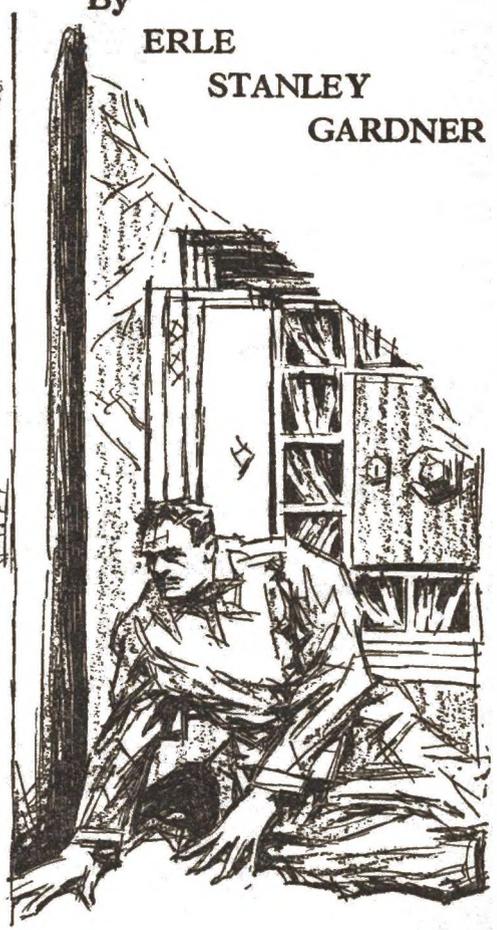
ERLE

STANLEY

GARDNER



*Ed Jenkins invades
the slimy web of crime
to get loose an innocent
victim*



HE sound of the siren purred through the loud-speaker on my roadster. Then came the voice of the police announcer repeating in a mechanical monotone: "Calling car thirty-one."

I slowed the motor to listen.

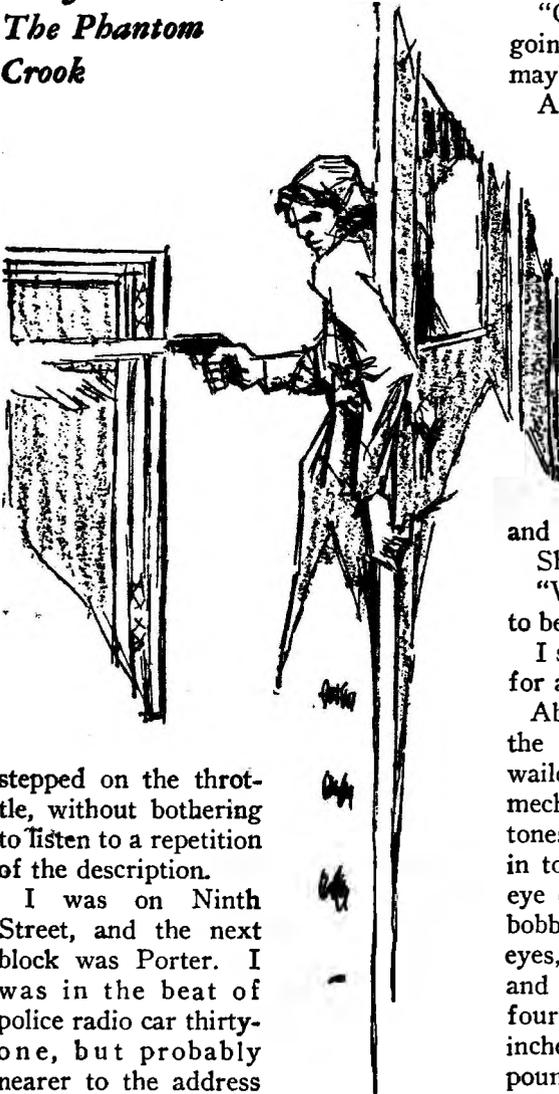
The voice of the announcer continued in its same expressionless tone: "Car thirty-one—go to 659 Porter Street. Make a quick run. Howard Cove, having an apartment at that address, found a woman burglar ransacking his rooms.

There was an exchange of shots. The burglar is believed to be wounded.

"Here is a description of the burglar: A woman twenty-four years old, height about five feet three inches, weight about one hundred ten pounds, hair dark, eyes dark, wearing imitation Mink coat, brown skirt, suede shoes. She ran from the back door of the apartment, down an alley, and disappeared. She will probably be found in the neighborhood, as it is believed she did not have an automobile. We will repeat the description . . ."

I flung the car out from the curb, and

A story of
ED JENKINS,
The Phantom
Crook



stepped on the throttle, without bothering to listen to a repetition of the description.

I was on Ninth Street, and the next block was Porter. I was in the beat of police radio car thirty-one, but probably nearer to the address than the police car. I swung to the right and crossed Eighth Street. Midway in the block I saw a young woman walking towards me with nervous, rapid steps. She wore an imitation Mink coat, a brown skirt, and a tight-fitting hat.

I swung the car in a circle and in to the curb.

"Hello, cutie," I said.

Her face was white, save where the orange rouge on the cheeks showed pain-

fully distinct, but her eyes were glittering. She flung up her chin in a gesture of contempt.

"Oh come on, cutie," I said, "nobody's going to bite you. Just a little ride, and maybe a picture show."

A siren screamed in the distance.

The girl paused, standing as rigid as a startled deer.

Then she smiled.

"I don't mind if I do," she said, and walked towards the roadster.

I flung the door open. She got into the car, and dropped back against the cushions with a tired sigh.

The siren on the police car sounded measurably closer.

I coaxed the car into speed and skidded a bit at the corner.

She kept up the pretense.

"Well, big boy," she said, "you seem to be in a hurry."

I sped down Eighth Street and slowed for a right-hand turn.

Abruptly, the loud-speaker underneath the dash burst into sound, as a siren wailed its demand for attention, and the mechanical voice said in emotionless tones: "Calling car twenty-nine. Swing in towards 659 Porter street. Keep an eye out for a female bandit with black bobbed hair, a close-fitting hat, black eyes, an imitation Mink coat, brown skirt and suede shoes. She is about twenty-four years of age; height five feet three inches; weight about one hundred ten pounds."

The girl gave a little gasp, turned towards me with eyes that were wide and startled.

"A cop!" she exclaimed, and reached for the door of the car.

I slammed my foot on the brake, grabbed her left arm.

"Take it easy, sister," I said, "I'm not a cop; I'm a crook."

She had the door open, one foot out on the running-board, the wind whipping her skirt. She stared back at me over

her shoulder, with a doubtful expression.

"What are you doing with that thing on your car?"

"Simply checking up on the cops."

"How do I know you're telling the truth?"

"Because you aren't wearing bracelets right now. Do you think I'd have let you go this far, without making a pinch, if I'd been a dick? There was a call came through just before I picked you up, calling car thirty-one, reporting a robbery of a man named Howard Cove in an apartment house at 659 Porter Street. The description fits you."

She made a grimace of disappointment.

"Ain't that just my luck?" she asked.

"What?" I wanted to know.

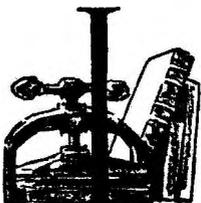
"To pick up a crook, when I wanted a nice, genteel petting party. I don't know where they got the description from, but I'm not the one who was in the stick-up. I'm a manicurist who went out to the *Rex Arms Apartment* to doll up the fingernails of a cutie who was stepping out and couldn't come to the shop. Then you come along and proposition me. I pull the virtuous stuff until I get a look at your eyes, and then decide it's okey, and here you turn out to be a crook, and you think I'm one. What a hell of a break I get."

Her eyes stared steadily at me, straightforward and sincere.

I removed my hand from her arm. It was wet and sticky. I looked down at the discolored palm.

"Okey, sister," I said, "but you've got to get that bullet wound fixed up."

She swayed towards me, then slumped forward in a dead faint.



DIDN'T like the doctor, but I hadn't expected to, so I was nothing out. Doctors who make a specialty of dressing gun-shot wounds, with no questions asked, are not, as a rule, the leaders of their profession.

He was tall, thin and cold-blooded, with a black mustache and wary, watchful eyes.

"You're Doctor Krueg?" I asked.

He nodded. His eyes didn't change expression. The man seemed standing perfectly still and holding his breath; like some long, thin spider feeling a preliminary tug at his web, but waiting until the fly should enmesh itself more securely, before coming into the open.

"'Two-pair' Kinney told me about you," I said. "He told me the password was the last name in the telephone book, in case I should forget it."

The black eyes bored into me with glittering scrutiny.

"What was it you wanted?" he asked.

I indicated the girl who was clinging to my side. Her left arm was out of the coat now, and a handkerchief which I had tied tightly around it, had checked the bleeding.

"It's a simple wound," I said. "The young woman, here."

He stared at me, rather than at the wound.

"'Two-pair' Kinney, eh?" he said.

"Yes," I told him.

He turned abruptly towards his private office.

"Come in here," he said, "both of you."

We walked into the private office. The girl was weak from excitement and loss of blood. I held her up with a supporting arm around her waist. At sight of the white-walled operating room, with the grim table, the glitter of instruments, and the glare of a cluster of lights, she shuddered.

"Keep your grit," I told her. "It doesn't amount to much; just a clean wound, but it's got to be disinfected."

Doctor Krueg raised his voice.

"Miss Tiel," he called.

A door opened, and a young woman in the uniform of a nurse stepped into the room. She was cool, calm and efficient. She cast me a single appraising glance, then let her eyes drift to the left

arm of the young woman, and the blood-stained handkerchief.

Doctor Krueg merely nodded.

The nurse came forward. With swiftly competent hands she slipped the imitation Mink coat from the girl's shoulders, untied the handkerchief, produced a pair of blunt-nosed scissors and clipped away the soggy sleeve of the waist.

The girl fainted again when she saw the round hole with the welling blood seeping down her forearm.

The nurse nodded to me and indicated the operating table. I lifted the girl on to it. Doctor Krueg filled a bowl with hot water from the tap, dropped three white tablets into the water from a blue bottle. He took a piece of cotton, dropped it into the hot water.

"Nothing serious," he said.

"Better make it snappy," I told him, "while she's still in a faint, then she won't know anything about it."

He continued to move with the same mechanical efficiency.

"If she doesn't like it, she can always faint again," he said.

The nurse held the bowl of warm water. Doctor Krueg washed the wound with antiseptic. He stopped the bleeding. The girl was regaining consciousness as the doctor wound bandage around the arm.

"The dressing should be changed tomorrow afternoon," he told me.

I nodded and pulled a wallet from my inside pocket.

"One hundred dollars," he said.

I gave him two fifties. He nodded and pocketed the money. The nurse held the fur coat up to the girl and indicated the blood-soaked sleeve.

"You'd better carry it over your arm," she said. "Wash it out with water when you get home."

I nodded and arranged the coat so that the sleeve was on the inside, and concealed the bandage on the girl's arm.

"Come," I told her.

As I closed the door, Doctor Krueg was looking at us with that inscrutable

stare of glittering black concentration. He said no word of farewell; nor did I.

I piloted the girl down the long corridor of the building to the elevators, and down to the car, which I had parked in the alley. There was a convenient parking place there which was only apparent after you drove into the alley. "Two-pair" Kinney had told me about it. He said that Doctor Krueg kept it there because it was near the freight elevator, and bad cases could come up that way.

"He charged a hundred dollars?" the young woman asked.

"Yes," I said, "that's his specialty. He treats only emergency cases and never asks names."

"I'll pay you back," she said, "if you'll open my handbag for me, please."

"That can wait," I told her. "Where do you want to go?"

"Some hotel," she said.

"Haven't you got an apartment?"

"Yes, but I can't go to it."

"Why?"

"I can't explain why. I can't go to it. Take me to a hotel, please."

"You can't go to a hotel with your arm wounded, and in those clothes. You'll have to get some other clothes first," I told her.

"I can't get any other clothes," she said.

"Why?"

"Because I don't dare go back to my apartment."

"Look here," I told her, "there's no use kidding yourself about this, you're in a jam. In the first place, if you go to a hotel without any baggage, that will arouse suspicion. In the second place, the morning papers will have a description of the woman bandit, and an account of the robbery. The bellboys or the clerk at the hotel will start checking up on your description, then they'll tip off the police. You've got a wounded arm and you've got no baggage. What's more, it's late."

She looked at me with a tired, pathetic look in her eyes.

"Have you got a spare bed?" she asked.

I nodded.

"That's where I'm going to stay," she told me.

I started to protest.

"It's all right," she said. "I've been around, and I know a square shooter when I see one."

"I told you," I said, sternly, "that I was a crook."

"So'm I," she told me, settling back against the cushions of the car with a little snuggling motion, and smiling up at me.

"Home, James," she said, and closed her eyes.



HAD told her I was a crook, and had not lied. Yet, I could as well have told her that I was a private detective.

The city knew me as Bob Sabin, a private detective, whose business success had been based upon an uncanny knowledge of the underworld. The police also sought for me as Ed Jenkins, calling me The Phantom Crook, because I had so often slipped through their fingers. Neither public nor police suspected that Bob Sabin, the detective, and Ed Jenkins, the crook, were one and the same.

The police have announced a smug axiom: "Once a crook, always a crook." Perhaps not even the police realize how frequently the truth of the axiom is demonstrated because of this attitude. Let a crook get sufficiently in the limelight to attract public attention, and immediately he becomes the goat for every unsolved crime that the police either cannot, or do not care to clear up.

In my own case, I had been wanted by the police of a dozen States. I had fought for years to clear up my record only to find that the police continued to blame crimes on me, whether I had been within a hundred miles of the scene or not.

And among the police, who are human, there is a small percentage who are crooked. These crooked police found me a very convenient means for hiding their misdeeds. Tagging me with their own crimes freed them from suspicion of guilt.

On the other side was the underworld. Those sinister prowlers, drawing their livelihood from crime, to whom human life and suffering are meaningless words, knew me, feared me, hated me. Too often, to save myself, I had enmeshed them in their own slimy webs, in which they had sought to ensnare me, to their own extermination or to such effect that they paid the penalty for their crimes.

Crooked police and the underworld alike sought my destruction or capture to be faced with a long term from which, a labeled crook, I could not escape. I was never at peace; always alert, my life and freedom ever at stake. And I had to live.

IN the morning sun which streamed through the apartment window, I could see every little expression on the girl's face. And I could see that she had reached some definite decision during the night.

"My name's Edith," she said. "What do I call you?"

"Call me Ed," I told her.

She nodded her head.

"You said that you were a crook."

"Yes," I said, waiting for what was to come.

"What sort of a crook?"

"Well—I've never gone in for stick-up stuff or booze running."

She leaned forward across the table, and balanced her coffee cup on the edge of her plate.

"How about doing a job for me?" she asked.

"What sort of a job?" I wanted to know.

"The job that I fell down on last night."

"You were after something particular?" I asked.

She nodded.

"What?" I wanted to know.

"Look here," she said, "you knew about the Vivian Loring gems?"

"Only generally," I said. "That they had been taken to a jewelry store for cleaning and polishing; a messenger was returning them when a car drove up to the curb, and a man tried to hold up the messenger; the messenger put up a fight, shots were exchanged, the messenger was killed, the bandit got the gems and escaped, was subsequently captured by the police, and the gems are still missing. The bandit never would tell what he did with them."

"That's the newspaper version," she told me.

"All right," I said, "what's yours?"

She set her coffee cup back in the saucer, moved her left arm, winced with pain, and reached out with her right for a cigarette.

"Arm hurt much?" I asked.

"Sore," she told me.

"Any fever?"

"A little, I think, but not much. I feel sort of groggy."

"Slept all right?"

"Fine."

"All right, what's the inside dope on this Loring case?"

"Howard Cove did the job," she said.

"I thought it was a chap named Frank Jamie."

"That's the one the police arrested."

"All right," I told her, "go on from there."

She looked me full in the eyes.

"I'm Frank Jamie's pal," she said, and waited for me to make a remark.

I made none.

"We had an apartment together," she told me. "All my clothes are there."

I knew, then, why she hadn't dared go back to the apartment the night before, but said nothing.

"Frank had been one of a gang," she said. "I'd been a pal of his. I never thought very much about how he made his living. Probably you're not interested in my story?"

I nodded.

"Go on," I said.

"Frank was arrested. He got a jolt and came out. He left me enough money to carry on. I carried on and waited for him."

"Then what?" I asked.

"I didn't want him to go back to it," she told me. "I'd had a chance to think things over while he'd been away. Frank was young and attractive. I wanted him to make something of himself."

"Then what?" I asked.

"Then the gang started to bring pressure to bear on him. They had some jobs they wanted him to do. He wouldn't. He was looking for work."

"Did you have any trouble persuading Frank to go straight?" I asked her.

She lowered her eyes for a moment.

"At first I did," she said. "He didn't want to go back on his pals, and they made him feel that he was running out on them. For a couple of months I wasn't certain, and then . . ."

She ceased speaking for a moment, then suddenly raised her eyes and stared directly into mine.

"Go on," I told her.

"It was the day he told Howard Cove that he was finished, definitely, finally, once and for all. Two days later the Vivian Loring gems were stolen. Frank didn't know anything about it. He was with me at the time. We had a car—a Ford Eight. It had been parked in front of our apartment. Frank went down to get it to drive around to the gas station for some gas and oil. We were going to the movies. He came back to the apartment with a funny look on his face and told me the car had been moved, the motor was hot, and someone had put in gasoline. I went down with him to look at the car. There was a bullet hole in the back, and a place where another bullet had struck one of the headlights. Just then the officers came along. They arrested Frank. I told them he'd been with me. They were going to arrest me for a while. Finally they told me to beat it, and took Frank.

"You know how much chance Frank stands of beating that rap—a man with a criminal record, his car used in the stick-up; the only alibi he has that I would testify he was with me. I can just hear the District Attorney commenting to the jury on the weight they should give to *my* testimony—an unwed wife."

There was bitterness and anguish in her tone. I looked for tears to come, but her eyes were dry, bright and steady.

She saw my look.

"I can take it," she said, "don't worry about that. When the time comes I'll stand up and take it on the chin, but it won't do any good. What I wanted was to do something that would do Frank some good. I wanted to get the gems. The insurance company has offered Frank probation if he'll turn in the stones."

I smoked for a while in silence.

"What's the insurance company?" I asked.

"I'm not certain of the name, but I think it's the Inter-Indemnity Exchange."

"Where can I get a list of the jewels that were taken?" I asked.

"I've got it," she said, "in a newspaper clipping in my coat pocket."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to pick up Cove and get those jewels. Then the insurance company will see that Frank gets a light sentence. It's the only thing to do. We can't beat the rap—not with his record. We've got a little money. I've got it in American Express checks; not much; a little over a thousand dollars. You can have it all."

"All?" I asked. "Even if they give Frank a light sentence," I said, "he'll be where he can't work for a while."

She nodded again.

"If you give me all your money," I asked, "what are you going to do?"

She stared at me steadily.

"I'll find something," she said quietly.

There was nothing helpless or beseeching in her eyes; merely a calm,

steady determination that I liked.

I got up and put on my hat.

"Promise me," I said, "that you will wait here and make no attempt to leave the apartment until you hear from me."

She nodded.

Perhaps it was the expression in her eyes, as I turned away, and she didn't see that I was watching her, or it might have been intuition, but I knew then that she had more to contend with than even she had told me.



WILLIE THE WEEPER" made a business of selling and re-selling information in exchange for dope or for money, but he preferred dope.

He knew me as Bob Sabin, the private detective.

I shoved the two cubes of morphine across the dirty, sticky table towards him. He grabbed them with a claw that trembled. His eyelids fluttered as he looked up at me. Tears came to his eyes and trickled down his pallid skin.

"Gawd, Bob," he said, "you're good to me! If it wasn't for you, I don't know how I'd get by. You're one of the real friends that I've got in the world. You always think of me."

"Some of these other guys only come in here when they want to buy some information. You come in every once in a while and pay me a friendly visit. I don't know what I've done to deserve your friendship."

His shoulders shook with sobs. Tears followed one another in trickling procession down his cheeks.

I didn't say anything. It was all part of the game with Willie. It was easier for him to cry than not to cry. It made a good line.

After a while he brushed the tears away with the sleeve of a ragged coat and pulled a blackened tablespoon from a drawer in the table.

"You don't mind, do you?" he asked.

I shook my head.

I watched him and said nothing.

"Willie The Weeper" had been on the hop too long to quit. Take it away from him now, and he'd die. Even the authorities knew that. They didn't bother "Willie The Weeper." He made it up to them by peddling bits of underworld gossip.

Where he got his information, I never knew. It was encyclopaedic, and, for the most part, accurate. He was a veritable clearing-house of everything that happened in the underworld.

After the shot he felt better. There was a sparkle to his eyes; almost a trace of color in his skin. He looked at me and nodded his head sagely.

"What you working on now, Bob?" he asked.

"That Loring gem robbery," I told him.

"They got the man that did that, didn't they?" he said, and I thought there was a knowing leer about his face.

"They got the man," I said, "but they didn't get the stones. I'm after the gems."

"Oh," he said, "representing the insurance company?"

"Yes," I told him, "the Inter-Indemnity Exchange."

"They tell me," he said, "that you pulled the old line on Frank Jamie about giving him a light jolt in return for the stuff, and Jamie fell for it."

"Not so we got the stones," I said.

I lit a cigarette and was conscious of the man's bright eyes staring at me in glittering fascination through the haze of the first smoke exhalation.

"There's something funny about that case," I said.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "I'm not so certain that Jamie did it at all."

He laughed; a harsh, cackling laugh, but said nothing.

"Jamie doesn't seem to know the inside dope," I said.

The cackling laugh had faded into a smile. Now the smile faded from his lips, and his eyes were hungry for in-

formation. Information was the thing that kept "Willie The Weeper" going.

"What do you mean," he asked, "the inside?"

"He doesn't know what was taken," I said.

"Why, the newspapers gave a list of everything that was taken."

I laughed sarcastically.

"Be your age, Willie," I told him.

He was leaning forward now, his mouth open, his eyes wide.

"No," he said, "I don't know what you're getting at. What's the low-down?"

"The newspapers," I said, "published the facts that we gave them, but they didn't get all the facts. The stuff that they listed was stolen all right, but there was a lot of other stuff in the loot. The messenger was carrying it in a black bag. In addition to the Loring stuff, he had the Matlink necklace and the Rajah's Seal. Those two things are worth three times as much as all the rest of the Loring jewels put together."

"Willie The Weeper's" face showed incredulity, and then a cunning comprehension.

"But why weren't those things reported as stolen?" he asked.

"Because," I said, "the messenger was pretty badly shot up. He was unconscious when he got to the hospital. Mrs. Loring knew only about the stuff she gave out to the newspapers. Mr. Loring had made a clean-up on a business deal, and he'd bought the Matlink necklace and the Rajah's Seal for her. He was sending them out as a surprise.

"After the first announcement in the newspapers, the police decided it'd be better to keep the other stuff quiet, and see if they couldn't spot the crook because of his knowledge that the other stuff had been taken."

"Willie The Weeper" stared at me as though I had given him a new lease on life.

"And you're for the insurance company?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

"Are you playing with the police?"

"Only to help us get the stuff back," I told him. "What we want is the stuff, and we're willing to pay big for it. We're willing to make a payment and no questions asked."

"Jeeze!" he said. "What a swell chance that is for the crook who pulled the job."

"What do you mean?" I wanted to know.

"Just suppose," he said, "that it had been a gang job, planned by a gang, but pulled by one man? Suppose that the crook had grabbed the bag and found that extra stuff in there, and had turned over to his gang only the stuff that the newspapers published as being lifted? Gawd! What a sweet chance it would be for a crook to hold out on his own gang! The Matlink necklace and the Rajah's Seal. Jeeze, what a sweet break!"

I nodded moodily.

"Of course, Willie," I said, "don't say anything about that end of it. We're working under cover, but I'm willing to pay a hell of a price for the stuff. I thought, perhaps, you'd know who I could make an offer to."

He shook his head.

"No, Bob, I don't, and that's gawd's honest truth. I'll cross my heart and hope to die."

He made a swift mechanical gesture of a cross over his heart.

"Well," I said, "don't say anything about it."

He stared at me steadily, put out an uncertain hand until he touched my arm.

"Bob," he said, "you've been like a brother to me. You're one of the few men I can depend on. I wouldn't double-cross you by telling anything you didn't want me to tell for all the money in the world. Wild horses couldn't drag it out of me."

He started to weep, then his shoulders quivered, and the weep became a blubber. Tears coursed down his cheeks.

Willie was like that.

They say he'd had a college education at one time, and started out as an architect. A woman had jilted him, and he'd tried to forget his troubles in booze. The booze had mastered him and he'd switched to dope.

That'd been twenty years ago.

I sat and watched the man weep, the shoulders shaking with the convulsive sobs, the tears dropping unheeded to the table.

It was part of his stock in trade. Guys that didn't know him well said he was nuts. It was just a habit of his. Back of all that weeping was a mind that was keenly alert to any bit of underworld news.

After a little while he straightened up and the coat sleeve smeared the moisture over his face.

"Just like a brother," he said.

I waited and said nothing.

"How much would your company pay to get the stuff back, Bob?" he asked me.

"Plenty," I told him.

"How much is that in money?"

"I'd have to bargain with the man who could produce the stuff, and with the company."

"Maybe I could help you, Bob," he said.

"You know where the stuff is?" I asked him.

He shook his head with such eager vehemence that I knew he was lying. There wouldn't have been any occasion for so emphatic a negative if he hadn't known.

"Honest to gawd I don't, Bob. And I'd tell you in a minute if I did. You've been just like a brother to me. But," he went on, "I get around. Every once in a while I pick up a little piece of gossip here and there. I might be able to help you."

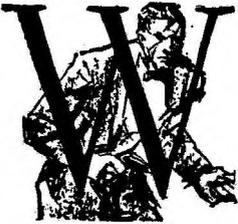
"You would if you could, wouldn't you, Willie?" I asked him.

He nodded and started pawing at my arm again.

"Well," I told him, "I'm on my way. I just had a couple of cubes and thought I'd bring them in for you. Keep your

ears open, Willie, and if you hear anything let me know."

He was weeping again as I went through the door.



WILLIE THE WEEPER" had his hide-out in a place that was near the border of Chinatown. There were cheap, fire-trap

structures huddled together in dirty proximity. It was a fine neighborhood for shadowing. Every few feet was a doorway, and the street was narrow and dark.

I planted myself in a doorway and had the car parked in an alley by the corner. I didn't think Willie would use a taxicab, but I couldn't tell. I knew there was no telephone in his room.

I waited for not more than ten minutes.

"Willie The Weeper" came out and looked up and down the street, not because he suspected anyone might be tailing him, but simply because it was a matter of habit.

"Willie The Weeper" was one of those creatures who are of the shadows. Turn them loose in a desert where there wasn't a human being within a hundred-mile circle, and they'd still slink from shadow to shadow, hugging the sage and skirting the cacti, peering, pausing and listening.

He fooled me, at that. He stepped to the curb and started looking for a cab. I had to wait until one came along and Willie had climbed in, before I could duck around the corner into the alley and start my roadster.

I tagged along behind the cab, keeping it in sight but not being too ambitious.

The cab swung down towards the streets of the high-class shopping district, went through the district, and along a side street, until it came to a locality that didn't have any individuality whatever. It wasn't respectable, and it wasn't tough. It was simply a place

that had been outgrown. Once it had bordered the better grade of stores, then the better grade of stores had moved away and left the district high and dry.

The place that "Willie The Weeper" went into looked like a speake with a restaurant on the ground floor, a bar downstairs, and bedrooms upstairs. I didn't know the place, and I didn't dare follow "Willie The Weeper" any farther. I had to content myself with sitting in my roadster and cooling my heels.

Willie had discharged the taxicab, and he remained inside for what must have been fifteen or twenty minutes.

When he came out, I knew that his mission, whatever it had been, was completed, and completed very much to his satisfaction. There is no one who is more prone to moods than the dope fiend, and no one who is more ready to show those moods by tricks of mannerisms and expressions.

When "Willie The Weeper" had gone into that speake he had been hopped up with morphine, and yet his manner had been uncertain. His clothes hung on his bony frame, and there was a nervous uncertainty about him.

When he came out, he had swelled up to fit his coat, and someone had telephoned for a cab for him, because a cab swung around the corner and into the curb about the time "Willie The Weeper" reached the sidewalk.

I wasn't interested further in "Willie The Weeper." He had discharged his function.

I sat and watched the door of the speake. I figured that if any of the known crooks had come out, I would have spotted them. I sat and waited for them to come out.

No one came.

I waited an hour; two hours, wondering if I could have been wrong, puzzling over what my next move would be.

Then I saw Carl Rankin, one of the torpedoes of the gem stick-up game; but Carl Rankin wasn't going *out*; he was coming *in*, and he looked as though he

was going some place with a very definite mission.

I stuck around.

People came and went from the speake. Once or twice I spotted faces that I knew as being on the shady side of the borderland, but they were not the faces of gem men.

Twenty minutes after Rankin had gone in, Sam Stillwell showed up.

Sam Stillwell was one of the men who kept pretty much in the background on underworld activities. He was one of the spotters who would get the lay of the land and figure out a job. Then he would get some gang to back the job, collect the most minute information about the whole lay, and be a hundred miles away when the job was actually pulled.

Things commenced to look interesting.

Five minutes later, three men came out and stood waiting at the curb. There was Carl Rankin, Sam Stillwell, and "Frank The Fixer."

"Frank The Fixer" had been a fixer in a law office. He knew almost all of the big shots in town, and knew the best way of approaching them. It was said that he had been one of the best in the business. Then he got tired of working for other people, and decided to branch out for himself. His activities were shrouded in a veil of mystery, but I had heard rumors of big gem jobs that had been cooked up between "Frank The Fixer" and Sam Stillwell. Carl Rankin was the torpedo who had pulled the jobs.

The men stood at the curb for less than thirty seconds, when a big Buick sedan swung around the corner and to the curb. A garage attendant jumped out, saluted "Frank The Fixer," received a tip, touched his hat, and walked away.

I got the roadster warmed up.

Carl Rankin climbed in behind the steering wheel of the Buick. "Frank The Fixer" and Sam Stillwell got in back. The Buick snorted away from the curb and started going places in a hurry. I tailed along behind.

I'll say this for Carl Rankin—the boy could drive.

And it took more than mere ability as a driver to go the places they went in the time they went. It took a supreme contempt for traffic regulations; a certain knowledge that anything they did could be squared somewhere along the line.

I kept along within sight, but momentarily listened for the wail of a siren pulling me over to the curb. As it happened, we were all lucky.

I knew where they were going by the time they had turned into Seventh Street, and I lagged a little bit behind and let them turn down Porter, without making any attempt to follow, giving them a few minutes before I rounded the corner.

The Buick was parked in front of 659, but across the street from it. Carl Rankin was at the steering wheel, and the motor was running. I could see little puffs of smoke coming from the exhaust. But only "Frank The Fixer" sat in back. Sam Stillwell had gone up.

I couldn't exactly get the sketch. I'd figured that "Willie The Weeper" would go to someone; that the someone would go to someone else, and somewhere in between the two I'd have an opportunity to learn more than I knew at the start. This business of getting a convention of crooks, and waiting until everyone could be in attendance, didn't sound just right, but I'd started the play and the only thing to do was to stick around.

Sam Stillwell came out of the apartment house and shook his head. He walked across the street and stood by the side of the running-board of the sedan, chatting for a few minutes. Then he got in, and someone pulled curtains down in the back and on the sides, which suited me all right. The little spurts of smoke continued to come from the exhaust, keeping the motor warm for a quick getaway.

I waited.

The afternoon shadows became dusk; the dusk deepened into twilight. Then

a taxicab went past me, going fast. I saw the red brake-light flare into angry brilliance as the cab swung in to the curb. The door nearest the apartment house opened, and a man stepped out and tossed the cab driver a bill.

The man was tall, rather slender, carried an overcoat over his arm, and walked with a quick, nervous manner.

The taxi started to draw away from the curb.

I knew then, but it was too late.

Little spurts of ruddy flame flashed from the side of the sedan. I heard the explosion of firearms, the spatter of bullets against the pavement and the front of the apartment house, and I heard, also, that peculiar, unmistakable *thunk*; the sound which is known to sportsmen and crooks the world over; the sound that a high-powered, steel-jacketed bullet makes when it impacts flesh.

The tall man staggered, his left arm straightened, and the overcoat dropped to the pavement. He went down on one knee, lurched forward, caught himself with his left elbow on the cement, and tugged a gun from a shoulder-holster.

The little spurts of flame came with mechanical regularity from the parked sedan.

The man on the curb fired twice. One bullet struck the glass on the window of the Buick. I saw chips of glass fly, and heard the tinkle of glass particles striking the running-board and fenders. The second shot went high in the air as the man slumped forward, flat on his face, and the gun slid from his nerveless fingers.

The sedan crawled into motion.

Here and there a head was thrust out of windows. A woman was screaming somewhere, but the sidewalk was deserted, so far as pedestrians were concerned.

I had my car in motion before the shooting had died away, and swung it in to the curb just as the tail-light of the Buick was skidding around the corner.

I jumped from behind the wheel and went to the man.

It was Howard Cove, and he was still alive. He felt something like jelly as I picked him up.

I saw his eyes open and stare at me in puzzled bewilderment, then his head drooped.

I loaded him into the roadster and stepped on the throttle.

I was around the corner before any pedestrians hit the street. I'd left his overcoat and his automatic behind. Those things couldn't be helped.

He slumped down on the seat, an inert mass, and blood seeped through his clothing and welled in little pools along the leather cushions.



"TWO-PAIR" KINNEY had told me there was always a big packing box and a hand-truck parked in the rear of the building where Doctor Krueg had his office. I swung the car into the parking place and found the big packing box and the hand-truck.

It was a messy job, getting Cove out of the car and into the packing box, but I did it, and covered him over. The packing box went on the hand-truck, and I rang the bell at the rear entrance. I thought possibly I might have trouble with the janitor, but he was in on the play.

"Special package of medicine for Doctor Krueg," I said. "It's got to go right up."

"Okey," he said, "let's go."

From the way in which he handled the box, I knew I didn't have anything to fear from him. The freight elevator rumbled upward. When we came to the floor, the janitor, himself, took the box on the truck and trundled it down the hallway. We met no one. There was a light in Doctor Krueg's office. I pushed open the door.

"Not this door," said the janitor. "It goes in that other door."

He went to one marked private and knocked.

The door opened, and Doctor Krueg's glittering black eyes stared at us in cold-blooded appraisal.

"A case for you, Doctor," I said. "The case of medicines you wanted in a hurry."

"In this way," he said.

The janitor set the box down on the floor in front of the operating table, and held out his palm.

I handed him ten dollars. He kept the palm out, and I handed him ten more. He folded the bills, thanked me and went out. Doctor Krueg lifted the lid of the packing box.

"Miss Tiel," he called.

The door opened and his nurse came in. He indicated the figure in the packing box.

The three of us lifted him out and got him on to the operating table.

"I want to use the telephone," I said.

"Go ahead," he told me, "you'll find it in the other office. This is going to be a job."

I went to the outer office, found the telephone and dialed the unlisted number of my apartment.

While I was waiting for an answer I stared speculatively at the big safe which was over in the corner. It was different from the ordinary type of safe.

There were years when I specialized on opening safes that other men couldn't touch. My interest in this one was pardonable. The more I saw of it, the more respect I had for it. It had been made to look innocent enough on the surface, with the conventional black finish, and the painting of the pastoral scene which gave it an old-fashioned look, but it wasn't old-fashioned at all. It was a safe that a cracksman could have wasted a lot of time on and still not get anywhere.

Why the devil should Doctor Krueg have a safe like that in his office?

I turned the matter over idly in my mind, and had come to the conclusion that it was filled with dope that the doctor dispensed on the side, when I heard Edith's voice on the telephone.

"Yes," she said, timidly, "who is it?"

"Ed," I told her. "How's the arm?"

"I was waiting for you," she said.

"It's throbbing pretty badly."

"All right," I told her, "get a taxicab and come directly to Doctor Krueg's office. I'm there. Pretend that you just happened in, without knowing that I would be there, and don't be surprised at what you see, no matter what it is."

"In a hurry?" she asked.

"In a hurry," I told her, and hung up.

I went back to the operating room. The nurse looked up at me and put a finger to her lips. Doctor Krueg was busy.

I'll say this much for him—his veins may have been filled with ice water, but he was a good workman and a fast workman. He probed, bandaged, disinfected. From time to time he consulted his watch and clamped a finger over the patient's wrist. Twice he nodded to the nurse, and the nurse gave the man a hypodermic.

Cove lay on his back, his face white as marble, unconscious.

Once I saw his eyelids flutter, and occasionally I could get the motion of his chest that showed he was breathing.

No one said anything. The room was so still that the rustle of the physician's garments as he moved hastily about, or the sound of a surgical instrument grating against the edge of a pan of antiseptic, sounded startlingly loud. I kept over in the corner, out of the way, watching, waiting and saying nothing.

Abruptly, Doctor Krueg turned to me.

"What do you want him to do?" he asked.

"I want him to get well," I said.

"He won't."

"All right," I told him, "I want him to talk."

The doctor nodded, motioned to the nurse. He snipped off a last bit of bandage, took the hypodermic which the nurse gave him, and jabbed the needle into the man's white skin.

"I think," he said, "he'll regain consciousness."

There was the jangle of a bell somewhere in the office, and the doctor looked significantly at the nurse. She walked through a door, towards the outer office, was gone for a moment, and then came back.

"It's the arm case," she said.

Doctor Krueg looked at me, and I nodded.

"Sure," I said, "it's okey so far as I'm concerned."

"All right," Doctor Krueg said, "show her in, Miss Tiel."

Edith came in. She looked at me, smiled, then saw the figure on the operating table, and recoiled.

"It's all right," I told her, "you're interested in this, too."

Doctor Krueg watched us both and said nothing.

Howard Cove's eyes fluttered. He opened them and looked at me. There was recognition in them.

"Thanks, buddy," he said.

He rolled his head and looked around him at the white walls of the physician's office; the surgeon standing there in his white robe, splashed here and there with red; the nurse in the background.

"Have I got a chance, Doc?" he asked.

Doctor Krueg's face changed expression by not so much as a line. His eyes remained hard and glittering.

"Not a chance in the world," he said.

Howard Cove closed his eyes, then he opened them and looked at me.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I'm a friend," I said. "I was coming to see you. I can't tell you who I am right here and now, but I had a proposition to put up to you about those Loring jewels."

A spasm of expression twisted his face—whether of pain or anger I could not tell.

"Did you see who gave me the works?" he asked.

"'Frank The Fixer,' Sam Stillwell and Carl Rankin," I told him.

"How did you know?"

"I tagged them and tried to tip you, but it was too late."

"The dirty double-crossers," he said, "they ratted on me."

I nodded and waited.

"I pulled the job," he said. "Rankin covered me. 'Frank The Fixer' was back of it, and Sam Stillwell cooked it up."

I said nothing.

Edith pressed forward so that she could hear. Doctor Krueg stood a little way behind us, his manner purely professional and cold-blooded.

"Listen," said Cove, "they tried to double-cross me, to make me the goat."

I nodded again.

"Perhaps," I told him, "if you could tell me where the stuff is I could fix it so it wouldn't help them any."

He thought for a moment, then a smile twisted the corners of his lips. His eyes closed and remained closed for several seconds. I thought at first he was sleeping. Then I saw Doctor Krueg reach forward and feel the man's wrist. The doctor stepped back. I looked at him questioningly. He shook his head. After a moment Cove's eyes opened again.

"I turned all the stuff over to Carl Rankin," he said. "He's got a room in the *Continental Hotel*. Pull the bureau drawer out all the way and you'll find the stuff in back of the drawer."

He sighed peacefully, as though drifting off to sleep.

I leaned towards him.

"Quick, Cove," I said, "what's the number of his room, do you know?"

"Five nineteen," he said, "and if you can get the stuff it suits me swell."

He sighed, opened his eyes.

"Sure I've got a chance, Doc," he said, slowly. "I feel swell."

Doctor Krueg turned and nodded significantly to the nurse. She tiptoed from the room. Doctor Krueg didn't lower his voice.

"It won't be long now," he said, "the stimulant is wearing off. He'll lose consciousness and probably never regain it."

The man on the operating table smiled peacefully.

I heard a gasping intake of the breath. It was Edith, but she wasn't crying, she was standing with her knuckles pressed to her teeth, her eyes big, round and dark with sympathy, staring down at the man who had shot her.

Doctor Krueg turned to me.

"Let me know if there's any change," he said. Then he took Edith's left arm, stripped back the sleeve and unwound the bandage.

Howard Cove opened his eyes once and looked up at me.

"You still here?" he asked in a voice that was thick, as though it was difficult for him to move his tongue.

I nodded.

He grinned again.

"So am I," he said.

Doctor Krueg finished dressing the arm, came over to the man on the table, felt the pulse, pulled back an eyelid, looked at me and shook his head.

"You've got to get him out of here," he said.

"Do we dare to move him?" I asked.

"It won't make any difference to him," he said. "Even with the best of care it's only a matter of an hour or two."

"Well?" I asked.

"That's the understanding," he said. "I patch them up, but I don't sign any death certificates and I don't make any explanations. You take care of your own bodies."

"How do I get him out of here?" I asked.

Doctor Krueg looked significantly at the packing case.

"All right," I said, "let's not have any misunderstanding about this. You and your nurse both heard the man's confession, that he pulled the Loring job."

Doctor Krueg's black eyes stared at me, glittering and cold.

"I heard nothing," he said.

"Your nurse heard it," I said.

"She heard nothing," he told me. "If

'Two-pair' Kinney told you the truth about me, he told you that I merely give first-aid service. In extreme cases I have a couple of beds in an adjoining room. But I sign no death certificates, I ask no questions, and I hear no comments."

"But, my God, man!" I told him. "There's an innocent man in jail for this crime. The guard was shot up and may die. It may be a murder rap."

Doctor Krueg shrugged his shoulders.

"You owe me," he said, "fifty dollars on dressing the arm case, and two hundred dollars on this case."

"Isn't that steep?" I asked him.

"That," he said, "is the price of the service, with no questions asked and no reports made. If you'd prefer to pay regular rates and have me notify the authorities that you're here with a gunshot case, it suits me all right."

I took out my wallet and counted out the money.

"I could give you more," I said, "if you could remember what you heard."

"I didn't hear anything," he told me, pocketing the money.

WE loaded the man into the packing case and trundled him back down the freight elevator. The janitor was nowhere in sight. Edith held the back door open for me, and I wheeled the packing case out to the loading platform. Then the door closed behind us, and the spring lock clicked into place.

I paused for a moment to take stock of the situation.

"Where are you going to take him?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said. "My car's out of the question. There's blood all over the seat. I've got to take it somewhere and ditch it."

"And Cove?" she asked.

"We've got to ditch him."

"But he confessed," she said.

I looked at her bitterly.

"Try to make anyone believe it," I said—"the word of two crooks to support a confession."

"But he told us where the stuff was."

I nodded. "That," I said, "is the only break we've got."

I wheeled the hand-truck out to the curb, leaving the roadster where it was. Edith hailed a cab.

"Continental Hotel," I told the driver, "and be careful of the box. It's got some stuff in it that might spill."

The cab driver helped us load the box on the side of the cab. He held it in place with a strap. Edith and I got in the car.

"It's only five or six blocks from here," I told her.

I felt her shudder every time the cab jolted to a stop or lurched in motion, but said nothing. My mind was busy hatching out a scheme that might hold water.

The cab slid in to the curb. I told the driver to wait while I went in and hunted up the head bellboy. I got a room on the third floor, and the bellboy took a hand-truck and brought up the packing case as though it had been filled with gun cotton. The girl and I closed and locked the door behind the bell captain and opened the packing case.

Cove was just about finished. We managed to lift him out and get him on the bed. He was unconscious and his face was slowly turning a putty gray.

"What are you going to do?" she asked me.

"Wait here, will you?" I said.

She nodded.

I slipped out into the hall.

It took me but a matter of seconds to run up the two flights of stairs, and to find 519. I knocked at the door. There was no answer. A passkey put me inside, and I clicked on the light. I didn't have time to use any caution.

I pulled out the bureau drawer, set it on the bed, looked in back of the place where the drawer had been. There was a cunningly concealed wooden receptacle which had been fashioned by some skilful cabinet-maker. I had to get out two more drawers before I could work out the receptacle. It was lined with

cotton. I took off the cover and shook it.

It was empty.

I must have sat there for ten seconds, staring at the empty cotton-lined receptacle. Then I put it back into position and replaced the bureau drawers.

I switched out the lights, slipped out into the corridor and locked the door behind me with my passkey.



STOOD in front of the door of Doctor Krueg's office and emptied my wallet.

A man who stands outside the pale of organized society must carry a roll. There is no place where the truth of the axiom "Money is power," is more evident than in the underworld.

I had approximately eight thousand dollars in the wallet. A couple of thousand, in hundred dollar bills, I left in the wallet. The balance, in five hundred dollar bills, I made into a roll, snapped with an elastic and put into my hip pocket.

I walked to Doctor Krueg's office door, pushed my way inside. I could hear the jangle of the bell in the back room.

The nurse came to the door.

She was a pretty thing, with a pair of wide-set eyes, clear and innocent, a face that was youthful and virginal.

She looked at me without expression.

"You?" she said.

I nodded. "I have to see the doctor right away."

"What about?" she asked.

"I'm afraid that one of the bills I gave him was bad," I told her.

She stepped to the inner office.

Doctor Krueg came out in a moment. His manner was warily watchful.

"Yes?" he said.

I pulled the wallet from my pocket.

"One of the bills I gave you was bad," I said. "One of the hundreds."

The nurse came to the door and stood by him. Doctor Krueg took his wallet from his pocket, took out the two one-

hundred dollar bills I had given him, handed them to the nurse. The nurse brought them to me. I looked at them, nodded, put one in my pocket and replaced it with one I had taken from the wallet.

She took them back to Doctor Krueg. He turned the one over and over in his fingers, looked up at me and nodded.

"Very well," he said.

I turned to the door, and, as I did so, jerked a handkerchief from my hip pocket. I had placed that handkerchief so that the roll of bills came from my pocket and fell to the floor.

I mopped my forehead with the handkerchief, turned and grinned at Doctor Krueg.

"Gosh," I said, "I was frightened about that. Don't think that I'm showing the queer. It was just a bad one that was given to me, and I was holding it to get it redeemed by the chap who gave it to me."

"It's quite all right," he said.

I replaced my handkerchief and stepped out into the corridor. The door closed behind me.

I walked rapidly down the corridor, in the direction of the elevator.

After a moment I detoured back, walking silently and hugging the far side of the wall.

Doctor Krueg had a suite of offices. I had been in three of them. There were five adjoining doors, each marked private. I picked one of the doors that was dark, and wasted about fifteen seconds getting a key that would work the lock.

It was a good lock.

The door swung open and I stepped into a room. It was a room containing three hospital beds. Two of the beds were occupied. One of the figures was still. The other raised on an elbow and looked at me in staring curiosity, then his right hand started groping under the pillow.

"Take it easy, brother," I told him. "It's okey."

I walked across the room to the door

which communicated with the other office. It had a spring lock on it, and I clicked back the lock and stepped into the operating room.

It was deserted. I walked on through it and into the other office.

Doctor Krueg just had the safe open. He was standing in front of it, with the roll of bills I had dropped in his left hand; his right held a key that he fitted into a lock on the inner steel door. Then he twirled the knobs on the combination. There was both a lock and a combination on that inner door.

The door clicked back and I stepped quietly behind the tall form of the doctor.

There was still another lock to work, and then a door disclosed a little vault in the interior of the safe. Doctor Krueg was just dropping the bills into this vault when, somehow, he sensed my presence.

He whirled.

I caught the glitter of his eyes—cold rage and a murderous impulse. His right hand swung to his hip.

My blow caught him squarely on the jaw. He slammed his head against the edge of the safe as he went back.

I eased him to the floor and looked in the vault.

My roll of bills was the first thing that went into my pocket. Then I took stock. The Loring jewels had been too well described to be easily mistaken. I dropped them in my pocket.

God knows by what devious chain of battle, murder and sudden death the other gems in that safe had found their way into that vault-like compartment! But I was absolutely certain they hadn't come there by legitimate means.

I had just reached the outer door of the office, when I heard the half-scream of a woman.

I turned, to see the nurse standing in the doorway. Then I caught the glitter of the light on nicked steel.

The shot shattered the glass front of the door as I slipped into the corridor. There were no more shots. Doctor

Krueg was not in a position to court publicity.

I reached the *Continental Hotel* and went to the seventh floor, just in case the elevator boy would remember too much about me later on. Then I dropped down to the fifth, by taking the stairs two steps at a time.

Carl Rankin was still away. I slipped into his room, turned on the lights and pulled out the bureau drawer. The Loring diamonds dropped back into the cotton-lined compartment. Then I replaced the bureau drawers, locked the drawer, raced down to the third floor, and caught sight of the drawn anguish on Edith's face as I slipped into the room.

I raised my eyebrows.

She nodded.

"Just now," she said. "He never did regain consciousness."

I walked over to the bed, sat down beside the corpse and took the telephone.

"Police Headquarters," I said.

I got the desk sergeant on the line and lowered my voice to a point to which it was barely audible.

"Get this," I said. "I'm Howard Cove . . . *Continental Hotel*. . . Carl Rankin covered me on the Loring job . . . I did it . . . 'Frank The Fixer' and Sam Stillwell backed it . . . they gave me the works tonight in front of my apartment . . . six five nine Porter Street . . . the diamonds are in Rankin's room behind . . . behind bureau drawer . . . room five nineteen *Continental* . . . I'm finished. . ."

I banged the receiver on the floor, and hit the transmitter against the side of the bed. Then I closed the fingers of the dead man's hand about the receiver, and let the telephone itself lay on the floor.

I got the packing case apart and made two bundles of the light boards.

"Come on," I said to the girl.

There was a back way out of the hotel. We made it without anyone seeing us and got rid of the boards in the alley.

I GLANCED across the breakfast table at the girl. The headlines of the morning paper told the story.

"Spectacular Raid Recovers Loring Gems."

Down below, in smaller headlines:

"Police Smash Gem Ring, Solve Murder."

The account was the usual line of hoey, about the wonderful detective work of a couple of the big shots in the police department; the manner in which they had patiently trailed the criminals for days, only finally to run their quarry to earth in a cheap downtown hotel, where they found one of the men dead from gunshot wounds received in a gang war. The man had been shot in front of his apartment house on Porter Street, and, in some mysterious way, had managed to get to the hotel.

The article stated that the police were looking for a surgeon who had made a visit to the dead man's room in the hotel and had given first-aid treatment.

In the hotel, the police had raided the room of Carl Rankin, a notorious gangster. They had lain in ambush for him; had arrested him when he came to his room. The gangster had refused to heed the police warning, and had opened fire. In the fusillade he had been fatally shot. Before he died, he made a complete confession, naming "Frank The Fixer" and Sam Stillwell as accomplices in both the robbery and the murder of Howard Cove.

The newspaper went on to state that police were investigating a rumor which was circulated in the underworld, and which was substantiated by the confession of the dying gangster, to the effect that the loot taken from the messenger who was delivering the Loring gems was much more extensive than had originally been suspected. In fact, it was the failure to account for some of this additional valuable loot that had precipitated the gang war.

"Is it true," Edith asked, "that Cove held out some of the loot?"

I shook my head.

"What makes them think he did?"

"A blunder on my part," I told her.

She raised her eyebrows.

"The line the police handed your man," I told her, "was a stall. It wouldn't have done him any good to have returned the stones, but I thought I could find out who did the job and perhaps get a confession from one of the men, so I trapped a crook into rushing to the head of the gang that pulled the job, with fictitious information, figuring they'd start moving around and I could get somewhere. But they thought Cove had crossed them on the delivery, and gunned him out."

"But," she said, "Cove was a double-crosser, himself. He crossed Frank Jamie by framing the crime on him, and he tried to kill me. I wasn't robbing his apartment at all; just pleading with him to come across and he pulled a rod and took a shot at me."

"I figured it like that," I told her. "He was a crook, but the doctor was also a crook. They heard Cove's confession when he gave it to us, and the doctor had the nurse slip out and hijack the stones for him. I had to pull

some rough stuff to get them back."

She pointed her finger at the last paragraph of the newspaper account.

"What does that mean?" she asked.

I looked at it.

It was a statement to the effect that there was an underworld rumor linking the activities of Ed Jenkins, The Phantom Crook, with the gang war that had resulted in Cove's death, but that as usual, The Phantom Crook had left no tangible clue for the police; only an underworld whisper.

I thought of "Willie The Weeper" and of Doctor Krueg and wondered.

"Just newspaper talk," I told her.

"I hope," she said, "that if the police have heard an underworld whisper, the whisper was that The Phantom Crook had done only simple justice, where the police couldn't, or wouldn't, act."

"Don't worry," I told her, "the police don't hear whispers of justice; only whispers of guilt, and you can forget The Phantom Chook stuff. It's just newspaper talk."

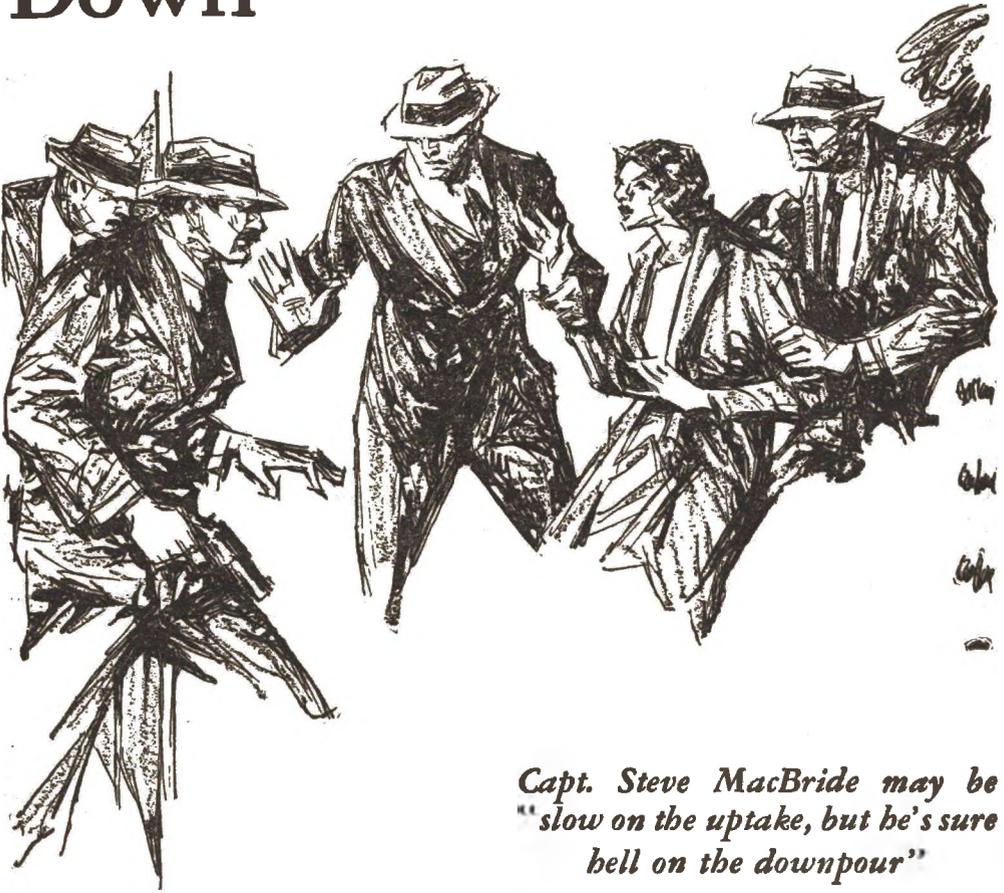
"All right, Ed," she said, "I'll forget it."

But her eyes were starry with gratitude, and the emphasis on my name had been just a little too pronounced to be casual.

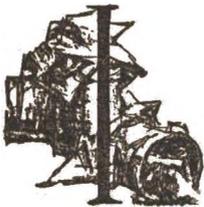


Guns Down

By FREDERICK NEBEL



Capt. Steve MacBride may be "slow on the uptake, but he's sure hell on the downpour"



It was quiet now. The orchestra members sat on their dais, beneath the huge inverted glass tulip. Their instruments lay beside them. The dance-floor was a bright, deserted field. Tables, row on row, surrounded it, and at these tables men and women sat, waited. Occasionally there was a faint flash as someone raised a glass to his lips; the flash instantly drew the attention of scores of eyes, and the drinker lowered his glass with a guilty, self-conscious look.

At the wide entrance, which was

shaped like an enormous keyhole, Sanarens stood with Rigardo. Sanarens owned the *Keyhole Supper Club*; Rigardo was his steward. They stood side by side, Sanarens, with his mouth appearing and disappearing behind a white handkerchief; Rigardo, with his hands locked behind his back, his chin down, a dark up-from-under look in his eyes. The waiters, scattered about, stood like images. The cigarette girl had not moved during the past five minutes. The oldish man who lay face down on a table near an open window had not moved in six minutes. Nor would he move again. Ever.

Sanarens raised one ear in a birdlike, listening attitude. Rigardo, keeping his hands locked behind his back, swiveled neatly and peered down the wide corridor that led towards the lobby. There came the sound of feet shuffling and striking on the tiles, and the careless mutter of voices.

Then Sanarens turned, patted his lips with his handkerchief, thrust the handkerchief into his breast pocket. He inhaled deeply, held his breath. A straggling group of men came towards him; the group was led by a tall, bony-looking man in a dark suit and a gray fedora, shoes polished so highly that every time one swung forward it caught and reflected the lights in the corridor. A uniformed cop walked beside him. A short fat man, carrying a small black bag, followed the cop. Two plain-clothesmen came next. Last, and well in the rear, came a small, spare man in nondescript clothes; he swayed gently from side to side, hummed absent-mindedly, and seemed to take a passing, foggy-eyed interest in the swooning murals on the walls.

Sanarens said: "Hell, MacBride—hell . . ." and made a vague, sickly gesture.

"Added attraction, huh?" MacBride said.

Rigardo said in a clipped, lipless way: "Guy got it, skipper."

"Lovely murals!" the fat assistant medical examiner chirped.

"Lousy, you mean," Kennedy said.

"I maintain they're lovely."

Kennedy sighed: "Maintain, then—maintain. Who cares!"

MacBride walked across the dance-floor as he would walk down a street—firmly, matter-of-factly, objectively. Behind him, the assistant medical examiner—Oscar Hirsch—bobbed on his short fat legs; his nose-glasses danced on his nose and flashed brightly, hiding his eyes. Sanarens walked sidewise, pointing.

The skipper nodded. "Yeah, I see."

He came to a dead stop beside the table, reached down, grabbed the back

of the dead man's neck and lifted the head. Two tables away, a woman smothered a scream. But MacBride looked at the dead man's face, tightened his lips, let the head drop back on to the table.

"Go to it, Doc."

"Right, Steve!" Hirsch said cheerfully.

The skipper turned, put his hands on his hips, leaned back on his heels and let his dark, weary eyes cruise around the large room. Moriarity was snapping gum with his tongue and teeth and MacBride said out of the side of his mouth:

"Cut it, Mory."

Sanarens was trembling—he had the handkerchief out again—and Rigardo was still standing with his hands locked behind his back, his face a smooth, swart mask.

Ike Cohen, rubbing dice in his palm, dropped one; he bent and picked it up and found MacBride's hard, disapproving eye on him. Cohen shrugged and drifted away, and Kennedy stood erect now but swaying ever so gently from side to side—quite placid, quite drunk.

MacBride said to Sanarens: "Joe Sibbold, of course."

"Y-yes. He was sitting there and—"

"Everybody here?"

"I—I don't think so. When the shot came, there was a grand rush. You know how there would be a grand rush and—"

"How many got out?"

"I couldn't tell. How could I tell? There was a grand rush—"

"Ah," sighed Kennedy, sleepy-eyed, "a grand rush."

MacBride said: "Where'd the shot come from?"

Sanarens pointed to a small window above the table. It was open. Several other windows, equally small, were open.

Rigardo said: "It was that window. The lights were out—all except those little table lamps—and there was a spotlight on Flossie Doane—she was dancing. I saw the gun flash at that window.

Before we got the main lights on, there was a rush for the doors. At least half a dozen got out before we could close the doors."

"Get a doctor?"

A man stood up. "I looked at him. I'm an M.D. I happened to be dining here. He was dead when I looked at him."

Hirsch bobbed his head. "I guess he was dead, all right!"

MacBride spoke to Rigardo: "What's outside that window?"

"An alley."

MacBride turned. "Mory—Ike, take a look at the alley."

The two detectives went out.

Kennedy said: "There were three at that table, Rigardo. Who besides Sibbold?"

"A guy and a jane—both young."

"Names make news, you know."

Rigardo lit a cigarette. "The jane's Louise Maybanks. I don't know the guy. They had a table over there by themselves. Sibbold came in, sat down, saw them and asked them over to his. They went over."

Moriarity and Cohen came in and Moriarity said: "Nothing out there. The window's pretty high, about eight feet from the ground. A guy'd have to stand on something."

"Another's guy's shoulders, maybe," Kennedy offered.

Hirsch, bending to the floor to snap shut his bag, said: "Look what I found."

"What?" MacBride asked.

"The bottom side of a cufflink."

"Look for the top. The top might have an initial on it."

They all looked, moving the table and the body, but found no more. The part that MacBride took from Hirsch was shaped like a miniature egg, of solid gold. He slipped it into his vest pocket.

"Get the Morgue, Mory," he said; and to Sanarens: "Okey; take away that table cloth. The City will pick up the body."

Sanarens was rubbing his palms against his handkerchief. "Is—is there

going to be any trouble for me?"

MacBride dropped his voice: "Better close till this blows over—say about a week. You'll be in the papers and the Federals may take it into their heads to knock you over."

"B-but no trouble from the Bureau?"

"What the hell do I look like?"

"Jeeze, thanks, skipper!"

"Forget it and—" He stopped short, took three slow but purposeful steps and gripped Kennedy's arm.

Kennedy shrugged, removed a pint flask of liquor from his pocket and replaced it on the table from which he had taken it.

"Sibbold," he explained, "always had good Scotch."

"Mugg!" MacBride grunted.

SLUMPED in a chair in MacBride's office, Kennedy let cigarette smoke dribble from his nose. Half of his face and most of his nose were hidden by the downward slouch of his shapeless, faded fedora. The smoke mushroomed against the under side of his hat brim, oozed around the edge, flowed upward. His right leg was jacked over the left knee; a garterless sock was wrinkled and twisted down to a worn oxford.

MacBride was pacing the office, trailing fragrant pipe smoke from an old briar.

His voice came husky, hard: "Poor old Sibbold . . ."

"He brewed the best beer in this man's town—the best three-point-two, I mean. There was a character for you. When Prohibition hit this country, the Sibbold Brewery closed down—and I mean closed down. Sibbold had an unusual respect for the law. He said then, 'I'll close now. But it won't be long. This law can't last long. Then I'll open again.' Well"—Kennedy sighed—"he sure had a long wait. And then, by the grace of God and thirsty senators, we were allowed to have three-point-two. And Sibbold's brewery was ready. The old braumeister came back from Munich at Sibbold's expense. The wet, pungent

tang of malt and hops again on Exeter Street . . . Sibbold in his glory, sitting in his great office, with a picture of Lincoln on one wall and one of Frederick the Great on another. A lonely old mutt . . . ever since his wife and daughter were wiped out in the Long Beach 'quake. It was lucky he had his old business to turn to, or he would have gone ga-ga. So endeth the house of Sibbold . . . so endeth a dynasty. Finis," he sighed, with a weary gesture of his hand, and let his body slump deeper into the chair.

MacBride stopped pacing, took his pipe from his mouth, jabbed the stem in Kennedy's direction. "It's a smack in the jaw to me, Kennedy—it's a kick in the gut. Only the other day Sibbold sent me a case of lager, with his compliments. In the old days, I was in harness, with a beat past his brewery. We wore helmets then. It was in the days when hoodlums used to toss bricks at us from roofs.

"And this is lousy, reporter. Ever since Prohibition hit us, ever since the bootleg song-and-dance began, mugg after mugg, gang after gang, tried to muscle into Sibbold's brewery. But not a chance. He kept three men there; they kept it clean, polished, swept, scrubbed—while Sibbold waited for the return of legalized beer."

Kennedy stood up, yawned, stretched. "Old horse, there's more bootleg beer being sold in this city today than ever—more, by far, than your legal three-point-two. The Chicago Era beer barons have got to keep the ball rolling. They've got to think of their women and children—yowssuh, skipper, their women and children. Our old palsy-walsy Sibbold was killed because he refused to play marbles: that's a guess, but it's as good as any and if you—"

The phone rang and MacBride grabbed it. "Yeah, Charlie. . . . Uh-huh. . . . Swell and thanks, kid."

He hung up, crossed to the clothes-tree, took down his hat and overcoat. He put on his hat, hung his overcoat on

his arm. He cleaned out his briar, placed it on a tray.

"Going home?" Kennedy said.

"I can always go home, Kennedy."

"Where to?"

"Just places."

The door banged behind him.

2



HE sat alone, in a corner of the back seat of the new Bureau sedan. It was a long black machine, shiny, powerful, with eight competent cylinders beneath the lean-flanked hood. He watched the lights of midtown wheel past—red, green, blue, white; moving lights and stationary lights; lights that commanded you to buy this and that. The bleat and blare and drone of traffic beat upon his ears—the clash of gears, the whine and whir of accelerated motors.

Joe Sibbold's mangled face danced against the background of shifting, gyrating lights. Old Joe Sibbold—a little quaint, with fixed ideas, sharp scruples. Once in a blue moon he used to put on evening clothes, go to a supper club, dine by himself. A lonely old guy.

The skipper moved in his seat, muttered a congested oath. Benninger took a left turn sharply, made a taxi brake suddenly; shot down a narrow side street between lean buildings with smart façades. Braking easily, the car edged towards the curb, came silently to a stop. MacBride left his overcoat in the tonneau, climbed out and said:

"Pull up a bit and wait."

The lobby glowed with a mellow radiance; light poured gently from hidden nooks and crevices. A black marble desk stood at one side, with several phones on it. The clerk looked up.

"House call," MacBride said, and picked up one of the phones; and to the operator—"Miss Maybanks." He waited,

staring absently at the black sheen of the desk. And then he said: "Miss Maybanks? . . . This is Captain MacBride, Police Headquarters. I'd like to see you a moment. . . . Yes, now. . . . Thanks."

He pronged the receiver, crossed the lobby and entered a black lacquer and chromium elevator that lifted him noiselessly to the seventh floor. Walking down the corridor, he carried his hat in his hand. His hair was black, thick, wiry; he was well-dressed in a quiet, plain man's way. Lean and straight and bony on the nape.

There was a door, tan in color, with a knocker shaped like a crouching tiger. He raised the knocker, let it fall, and stood pinching his lower lip between thumb and forefinger, waiting with his eyes downcast, dark and brooding. In a moment a latch clicked, the door opened. He looked up at a tall, black-haired woman.

"Yes . . . come in."

She backed into a small foyer, and he entered, holding his hat with both hands now. He saw that she was lovely, with a fine columnar neck, eyes dark as her hair but more luminous, full red lips, a figure that did well with the long black evening dress she wore. And she was a little frightened, a little expectant, with her dark eyes flickering back and forth across his face. She indicated the living-room with a slim white hand, long, tapered fingers.

He dipped his head, went past her into a large room lit by scattered floor- and table-lamps. In a high-backed chair sat a large, high-chinned man smoking a cigar. Rising, he was very straight, big-chested, neatly groomed. His cheeks were flat, his forehead broad, and from it a mane of darkish hair swept backward without a part, and was dappled gray above the ears. He had, MacBride saw, a striking presence, a sound self-assurance.

The woman was saying: "This is Mr. Boyd."

Boyd made a slight, brisk movement

of his head. "Hello, Captain MacBride."

In the gloom at the farther side of the room MacBride saw white curtains blowing inward, kiting and flopping. The woman moved, hovered beyond the radius of glow of the nearest lamp. He could see her white face floating above the slender length of black dress.

She said quietly, almost in a whisper: "You wanted to see me."

"About this *Keyhole* shooting. You know Sibbold was killed." He turned to Boyd. "You were there with Miss Maybanks?"

"No, I wasn't. I just dropped by here. . . ." He made a half-turn, stared towards the blowing curtains, moved his cigar. "Fellow over there—Hendricks."

MacBride peered hard.

Boyd explained: "Drunk."

The woman's voice pleaded: "Please don't wake him. I put a wet towel on his head. He's frightfully drunk. He drank too much."

MacBride made his way slowly across the room, turned on a floor-lamp. The man lay on a divan beside the open window. A coverlet had been thrown over him, and a wet towel, padded, covered his eyes and forehead.

"Please," the woman pleaded in a hushed voice.

MacBride shrugged, turned. "Why did you run out of the *Keyhole*? Why didn't you hang around?"

"God knows. That shot. Well, everyone jumped up and ran. I grabbed Tom and ran with him, and out in the street we ran and ran until he began stumbling so much I had to call a cab. I brought him here. I didn't think I was doing wrong."

"You knew Sibbold well?"

"Not at all. Tom knew him."

MacBride turned. "You knew him, Mr. Boyd?"

"No." Boyd was looking at his cigar. "Only of him."

MacBride said to the woman: "Did you see a face at the window?"

"No. I only—heard—the shot. I jumped up—everybody jumped up and there were screams and—" She clapped hands to her face, buried her eyes. "It was awful—awful. For an instant I saw Mr. Sibbold's face—" She choked, shook her head violently.

Boyd was matter-of-fact: "Don't you think, Captain, you ought to give her time to pick up?" Without bending, he rubbed ash from his cigar into a tray.

"You're a good friend of Miss Maybanks, I suppose."

"Kind of, yes. Too good, maybe. I disapproved of this fellow Hendricks. Not bad, I suppose—but drinks too much."

"You live in this burg?"

"Yes. Boyd's Investments. My office is in Race Street. I live at the *Williamsport*. Hendricks used to work for me and I had to fire him because he drank too much. Liquor's all right—but in its place." He smiled wryly. "Try to tell Miss Maybanks that!"

She said: "Tomorrow, Captain. Would tomorrow be all right? I know nothing—and I'm sure Tom knows nothing. We were just sitting there when it happened. But I'll tell him—tomorrow. Please?"

MacBride looked at the inside of his hat. "All right. Tomorrow morning—first thing—at my office." He moved towards the door. With his hand on the knob, he turned to say: "Take it easy, Miss Maybanks. I don't bite." A tight smile cracked his left cheek.

She was standing with her hands folded on her breast, her eyes wide, all expression suspended in her lovely face. She nodded slowly, like a mechanical doll. Back of her, and to one side, Boyd stood looking down at his cigar, rolling it round and round between thumb and index finger. He seemed enraptured in thought.

The skipper took his hand off the doorknob. His brows bent, coming down and together above his nose. His nos-

trils twitched ever so slightly, and he sucked against one cheek, drawing his face awry for an instant, then letting it snap back.

Boyd looked up candidly, then curiously.

MacBride said: "What's the matter?" to the woman.

"I—I feel just a little ill."

Boyd took hold of her arm. "Lie down. You'd better go in and lie down. I'll wait till Hendricks wakes up. I'll take him home. Come." He put a firm pressure on her arm without seeming to do so, turned her about. "You'd better."

MacBride said: "Wait." He took a few steps, tossed his hat on to a chair, said again: "Wait."

Boyd said: "I'll take her in and then—"

"Shut up. Wait, I said."

Boyd shrugged and was calm, leisurely when he replied: "You're the doctor, officer."

"That's settled, then. Good. Miss Maybanks—" He walked towards her with his fists on his hips, his elbows jacked high and wrinkling his coat collar. "Come on; what's up, what's the matter? Is this an act or are you sick?"

She held her face in her hands, looked between her hands with dark, shining eyes. "I want to be alone," she sobbed. "I want to be left alone. Please leave me alone."

"I'd like to. You may be sick. Okey. But you're sick about more than just a little thing. Listen, girl; for crying out loud, I'm an old cop and I've been around and I've seen girls go and come, and I can tell when something's wrong. . . . You want to be alone! Spill it, girl. What's wrong? . . . Okey, you're sick. Now what's making you sick?"

Boyd offered: "No doubt the shooting at the *Keyhole*—"

"Stay out of this?" MacBride said. "I'm talking to the girl."

"Of course, but on the other hand—"

"Will you for cripes' sake keep your mouth shut! How many times do I have to tell you?"

Suddenly Louise Maybanks burst into tears, turned, ran across the living-room, into the bedroom, slammed the door.

Boyd shook his head, made a regretful face. "She does that, Captain—frequently. Do me a favor, will you? See her later—tomorrow. Remember, she saw a man's face half blown off. She's a sensitive woman—hardly more than a girl."

"Tomorrow might be too late. You may have been around with women a lot, and I haven't—but I know 'em. I know the signs. This one's got that nutty look in her eyes that spells trouble—suicide. And why? *Why?*"

"I'll—"

"You'll do nothing. A tip for you, Mr. Boyd, would be to get the hell out of here."

MacBride went hard-heeled across the room, palmed the knob of the bedroom door, pushed it inward.

Boyd called: "I'll be going then, thank you."

"Good-night!" MacBride snapped.

The woman was lying on the bed, face down. The skipper sighed, wagged his head. He crossed to the bed, bent down and tapped the woman on the shoulder; but she did not respond. He turned her over, saw that her face was bathed in sweat. Her eyes were closed. She had fainted.

He felt a twinge of conscience. She was lovely to look at, and he thought he might have been a bit rough with her. He went into the bathroom, soaked a towel with cold water, brought it to the bed and bathed her face, left the towel on her forehead. Standing up, he scratched the back of his neck, wandered back into the living-room and over to the divan where Hendricks lay. He stood on wide-planted feet, pinching his lower lip.

Something hit him on the head and instantly he was unconscious.

3



HE taxi clanked down the street, cut around a sedate limousine, swerved sharply towards the curb and came to a violent stop in front of the tall, narrow hotel. The handle on the rear door clicked and rattled but did not open, and finally the chauffeur climbed out, grabbed the outside handle, twisted and yanked and finally whipped the door open. Kennedy fell out and took the chauffeur down with him. It was a full minute before the two men became sufficiently straightened out to rise, and it was the chauffeur who helped Kennedy to his feet.

"I gotta have the handle fixed, bud."

"You ought to have more than the handle fixed, Casanova. Tariff, please?"

"I don't getcha. Huh?"

"Fare—fare!"

"Oh! Seventy-five!"

"Ought to have the meter fixed too."

He entered the lobby diagonally. His hat was crushed on the back of his head, one of his shoe-laces was untied, his tie-knot did not quite meet the inverted V of his collar. In his face was a sodden, wasted but good-humored expression. He hiccupped twice, half-heartedly, before he reached the black desk.

"Good-evening to you," he said to the well-groomed clerk. "Press . . . Kennedy. What apartment's Louise Maybanks in?"

"You want to see Miss Maybanks?"

"Oh, no. I just want to know where she lives."

"Seven-O-seven."

"Thank you very kindly. This is a nice chateau you have here."

He made a dizzy swivel, zigzagged across the lobby and slid sideways into an elevator. He was very drunk, but genial, good-natured and polite.

"Seven, please, my lad."

"Seven, sir."

"Nice boy . . ."

The elevator rose, stopped quietly and without a jar. Kennedy flip-flopped into the corridor, turned left and teetered leisurely on his way, singing in a husky, cracked whisper, "Life is just a bowl of cherries . . ." He found 707 and used the knocker. He stood teetering from foot to foot, backwards, sidewise, and hummed placidly to himself; tried the knocker again, violently this time. Finally he gave it up, grabbed the knob and sailed in with the door. Reeling around recklessly, he accidentally banged the door shut. And then he shot into the living-room, covering half of it in a perilous headlong stumble that did not end in a fall. Because MacBride stopped him; the skipper stopped him with a hard right hand, held him up, while he used his left hand to hold a wet towel on his head.

"Omar Khayyam! By God, if it ain't Omar Khayyam!"

MacBride backed him across the room, lowered him into an armchair, said: "Drunk as a coot again. Swacked. Plastered." The skipper stood holding the huge wet towel on his head; beneath it, his face was severe, hard-lined. "What are you doing here, fat-head?"

"See Louise Maybanks. . . . S' listen, d' you have to wear that turban or—"

"Pipe down," MacBride growled. He lowered the towel, balled it, pitched it through the bedroom doorway so hard that it hit with a wet smack against the opposite bedroom wall. He brushed his hands. "I just came to about three minutes ago. I was beaned, sweetheart—I went out like a light."

He made a sharp turn on his heel, crossed to the telephone and scooped it off the table. "Gimme Police Headquarters." He looked at Kennedy and laughed bitterly, harshly. "Taken for a sleigh-ride, I was. What I get for being human to people. I ought to have my pan kicked in. I ought—"

He broke off, said into the mouth-piece: "Otto? . . . MacBride. Listen, Otto. I want a broadcast for three persons: Louise Maybanks, Thomas Hend-

ricks, and a man named Boyd. This guy Boyd owns Boyd's Investments, office in Race Street, and he lives at the *Williamsport Hotel*. The dame is about five feet seven, about twenty-five years, about one-thirty pounds, black hair, wearing a black evening dress. I don't know what Hendricks looks like. Put that on the short wave. Send Moriarity or Cohen out to the *Williamsport* for Boyd. I'll be seeing you." He whanged the receiver into the hook, flexed his arms, his legs, tightened down his jaw as a hard glitter came into his eyes.

"So she's mixed up in it," Kennedy said.

MacBride was pointing. "The guy Hendricks was drunk—and out—on that divan. He's the guy must know something. The jane fainted. I was standing in front of that divan when—bingo!—I'm beaned. The guy Boyd had left a few minutes before. I guess he did. Maybe he didn't. But if he did, then I was conked by somebody hiding in a closet or something. When I came to, everybody was gone—even the drunk. But the jane, the jane"—he held up his fist—"she was scared, scared about something. So scared, so damned sick with fright, that she passed out. And me—I was out for at least twenty minutes."

He picked up his hat. "Come on." He hauled Kennedy out of the chair, steered him to the door and on into the corridor. They walked to the elevator bank, and when the door slid open MacBride shoved Kennedy in and said to the operator:

"Do you know Mr. Boyd?"

"No, sir?"

"Do you remember taking down a tall, heavy-set man, gray around the ears?"

"About half an hour ago?"

"Was it half an hour ago?"

"I took a man like that down about half an hour ago."

"Was he alone?"

"Yes."

"Did you take Miss Maybanks down later?"

"No."

"Is there another elevator?"

"Only the service."

"Man on that?"

"Not this late. This late, it works automatic. You press a button and it comes up, or down. You know, just like—"

"I get you."

The skipper helped Kennedy from the car, hung on to his arm and piloted him to the desk. He said to the clerk:

"Got a house officer here?"

"Why, yes, sir."

"Get him." MacBride jerked his thumb. "Tell him to park in 707 till a cop gets here. Meantime, if anyone comes in the apartment, they're to be pinched."

The clerk stammered: "Ah—oh—uh—b-but . . ."

And by that time MacBride was hauling Kennedy through the door. Up the street, he found Benninger snoring at the wheel of the police sedan. The man's rubicund face was a study in peace and well-being.

MacBride said to the night at large: "Sure—I could die and be dead for hours, and Benninger would pound his ear just the same. I could be—*Benninger!*"

Long training made Benninger snap awake, choke the motor and step on the starter—all in an instant.

"Ah!" hiccupped Kennedy. "A robot, by God!"

"In, drunk. And you, Benninger—Headquarters."

The sedan rolled quietly through the dark streets.

"How's the knob?" Kennedy asked.

"Lousy," MacBride said. He went on: "The jane—I wouldn't call her a broad, because I don't think she is—"

"Getting sentimental in your old age?"

"I can do without any wisecracks from you, Kennedy. A nice girl—breeding, poise: things a mugg like me likes

because I don't run across them any too often. I don't say she knows anything, but I've got a hunch this young guy Hendricks does, and she knows he knows—and she loves him—and that's why she's frightened stiff. It could be that she played 'possum—that when she saw me standing by the divan she sneaked up and let me have it; then she woke him up and got him out of the apartment."

"And now where is she?"

MacBride slapped his knee. "We'll get her. Through her we'll get Hendricks. Hendricks will know who killed Sibbold. The more I think of it, the more I believe it! . . . That's the third red light you went through, Benninger. Did somebody steal your brakes?"

"Oh, hell," Kennedy chided. "Boys will be boys, Stevie."

WHEN MacBride entered the central room at police headquarters, Otto Bettdecken, the man at the desk, was having midnight snack consisting of pumpernickel, liederkrantz and lager. His mustache was creamed with foam, his apple cheeks glowed.

"Any news?" MacBride said.

"About that what it was you called up about?"

"Yeah."

"Nope. Mory and Ike shot right out, and the roof put it on the short wave. Your wife called up and said when you come home you should pick up a bottle of milk of magnesia, I think it was milk of magnesia."

"You're sure it wasn't citrate?"

"Well, now that I think of it—"

"Call her back and check up."

He went on up to his office, and Kennedy trailed in after him, looking very white and drunk. MacBride took a long look at him, then opened his desk drawer, took out a whiskey glass. Into the glass he poured equal parts of Worcestershire sauce and Scotch.

"Try that."

"Thanks."

"It either picks you up or knocks you down completely."

"If it'll stay down it'll do me good."

"If you think it's not going to stay down, go in the washroom and be decent about it."

"Ah," said Kennedy, setting down the empty glass, "I think it'll stay down."

The phone rang and MacBride picked it up. "MacBride, yeah. . . . The Fourth? . . . Okey." He hung up. "They want me over at the Fourth Precinct house. You stay here."

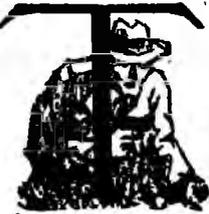
"The air'll do me good."

"Come on, then."

They went downstairs, and MacBride was half-way across the central room when Otto Bettdecken called:

"Hey, Cap! That was bicarbonate of soda your wife wanted!"

4



THE FOURTH, was a tough, ragged precinct. The precinct house stood in a narrow street of ancient brick houses, its twin green lights making a ghostly glow. It was a frame building of two stories, with six wide wooden steps leading up to two swing doors. The central room was dim, the walls a dull drab brown, the desk high and pulpit-like.

Entering, MacBride saw that the room was filled with cops, a few detectives, some newspaper men. There was more activity in the rear. Bollingay, the detective-sergeant attached to the precinct, said from the crowd:

"Got something back here I thought you'd like to see."

A red-head said to Kennedy: "Got anything on your hip?"

"A bruise—private, brother."

MacBride went through the crowd, following Bollingay's heels. They turned right into a narrow corridor, then left into a large room. Bollingay stopped and nodded to a cot upon which a man lay.

MacBride nodded also, crossed the room and gazed down at the wide eyes, the dead pale face.

Bollingay said: "Automobile license," and passed MacBride a yellow card.

MacBride looked at it and said: "What happened?"

"Melcher was on beat along River Road. Found him laying alongside an ashcan in Hilt Street—dark as hell there, and Melcher fell over him. He rang in and I ran down. A doctor was there when I got there, but the guy was dead. I ran him over here for the time being."

"Shot?"

"Nah. Socked on the head. In the back. It's split."

"Anything else on him?"

"Thirty bucks and some change. I put it in an envelope."

"Anything else?"

"Nah."

Kennedy came in and said: "Who's he?"

"Hendricks," MacBride said.

"Sick?"

"Dead."

There was a moment of silence and then MacBride stirred, said to Bollingay: "Okey. Shoot him to the Morgue and tell 'em to get to work on him right away."

"This connects with the Sibbold job, huh?"

"There's a connection, Al. There's got to be. I was counting on finding things from this bird. Come on, Kennedy."

The Bureau sedan carried them out of the ragged neighborhood. MacBride sat in the darkness, chewing on his lip, saying nothing. He had been certain—dead certain—of extracting valuable information from Hendricks, and he had been certain of apprehending Hendricks in a very short time. His main balloon of hope had burst: Hendricks was dead.

Inside, deep down, he felt a sense of guilt. He should have roused Hendricks in the first place. He should have been deaf to the importunate pleading of the woman; it would have saved the man's life—obviously it would have saved

Hendricks' life. The skipper inhaled deeply, let the breath out slowly, bit by bit. Was Kennedy right? Was he getting sentimental in his old age? His hand became a fist on his knee. His lips came together tightly over his teeth. Maybe the woman knew something too. Maybe she would be found dead also. A lump rose in MacBride's throat; it was with an effort that he downed it, swallowing hard.

Police work: he was tired of it, sick to death of the blood and intrigue that went with it. Long, irregular hours. When he was a harness bull, he had regular hours on and off. Now, as head of the Detective Division, he had no hours at all. He should have been in bed long ago.

When he swung into Headquarters, Otto Bettdecken said: "Mory and Ike came back with a guy."

MacBride nodded and climbed the stairs, went down the corridor and pushed into his office. Kennedy drifted in after him.

Boyd was sitting on the desk, swinging his feet, rolling a walking stick between his palms. Self-possessed, calm, he said:

"I'm in the limelight, eh, Captain?"

The skipper was not in a facetious mood. He hung his hat on the clothes tree, blew his nose; his eyes had a dark inward look and there was a tautness around his mouth.

He said: "When you left Miss Maybanks' apartment, where'd you go?"

"Home."

"Right home?"

"Right home."

MacBride said: "It ought to interest you to know that Miss Maybanks has disappeared."

Boyd stood up, dipping his head, placing a curious direct stare on MacBride. "Perhaps she took Hendricks home."

"Hendricks is dead."

Boyd dipped his head a little more, made his stare more intently curious. "My Lord!" he said with quiet concern.

Moriarity was shaving down a match.

Cohen was shuffling dice in his hand.

"In Hilt Street," MacBride said in a dull, drab voice. "He was found dead in Hilt Street. When you left Miss Maybanks' apartment—a few minutes after you left—I was knocked cold from behind. When I came to, Miss Maybanks and Hendricks were gone."

Boyd was grave. "That's curious."

Came Kennedy's voice from a far shadow of the room: "Mr. Boyd, what's your specialty in investments?"

"General investments—no specialty. It's hard to specialize in these parlous times."

"Beer stocks, for instance, are swell now."

"I believe they are."

"Aren't you handling blocks of Wes-serbrau, Red Band, Hilderbrau, and Black Prince?"

"Experimenting, yes."

"Didn't you have a long interview with Sibbold?"

"I had no interview with Sibbold."

"Didn't you suggest a combine with Sibbold and didn't he refuse flatly to go into any combine?"

"I had no interview, suggested no combine." Boyd bowed. "I'm sorry if you've been misinformed." He turned to MacBride. "Is there anything I can do for you, Captain?"

MacBride said: "It keeps pounding in my head, over and over again, that you know what lays behind all this. Just what were you to Louise Maybanks?"

Boyd shrugged. "A friend . . ." He mused a little, flexed his lips. "And like a friend, I catch trouble for my pains."

"She's got dough," Kennedy drowsed. "Dough. Were you her financial adviser?"

"Naturally, since I'm her friend."

"You advised her, I suppose, to plant a lot of dinero in these brewery stocks?"

"I suggested that, did not urge. Naturally I would have suggested that."

A match flamed, lit up Kennedy's worn and sallow face, brought out clearly the marks of self-indulgence, the

stamp of in temperate man killing himself by inches with drink.

MacBride snapped: "If you've anything to say, Kennedy, say it. Don't fandango all over the place."

"Let it slide," Kennedy said. "I was just talking through me hat. I don't know anything. Not," he added, with a curious intonation, "a thing."

Boyd revolved his walking stick between his palms, said slowly to MacBride: "I regret this embarrassing position—but I don't regret having tried to offer Miss Maybanks some advice. I only hope she is safe. I know nothing, Captain. I'm sorry I know nothing. I regret I did not urge you to wake up Hendricks. That I do regret."

"And me too," MacBride muttered.

"I should like to catch some sleep."

"Okey. You can go."

Boyd made a leisurely exit.

Moriarity clipped: "Ya-a-ah—Kennedy making left-handed cracks again—like all the time."

Kennedy was languid: "Nerts to you, darling—precious nerts to you."

"F'r two cents—"

"And who did you say your father was?"

"Stop it!" MacBride barked. "You're like a lot of damned hoodlums! All of you!"

Cohen rolled the dice on the desk, showed a seven, snapped his fingers.

"Take those dice, Ike," the skipper said sulphurously, "and get the hell out of here. Mory, you go too. Hang downstairs. And I said downstairs—not down the street in the Greek's."

The two detectives went out and MacBride landed in his swivel-chair, filled his briar, lit up and puffed furiously. His dark, hunted eyes danced back and forth across the desk's bright surface; his fingers worried the pipe bowl.

"It's like this, old tomato," said Kennedy wearily, hardly above a husky whisper. "This Boyd may be okey, and maybe he is. But he dug into the beer stocks when the brewers opened their

shops. He handles power, railroads, steel. Okey. But he dug deep into beer. Sibbold was in beer. Hendricks worked for Boyd and was fired. Boyd was a financial adviser to Louise Maybanks. It connects—all around, link by link.

"Boyd says he knows nothing. He's in the clear. But watch him, skipper, watch him. The betting was that this state would stay dry. Bootleg breweries went full blast up to the last. Then the state went wet. Think of thousands of barrels of beer, the thousands of bottles of beer, that were on hand at the time. Think of the dough sunk in all that beer. And where goeth that bootleg beer?"

"Listen. Sibbold was killed for a definite reason. He was killed because he wouldn't play ball, wouldn't get in line, or he was killed because he found out something and was primed to spring what he knew. Nail this guy Boyd. He's smooth, polished, and he can take it. But how long can he take it? Nail him! Hold him as a material witness. Frame him. But nail him—get him in the jug. He knows something. Uncle Kennedy says he knows something."

MacBride said: "You're guessing. You believe in a hunch. I never frame a guy. I wouldn't frame Boyd."

"You're getting weak-minded. Damn it, you're getting weak-minded!"

MacBride said nothing.

5



LOUISE MAYBANKS: missing.

The morning newspapers said so. From dusty files they had rooted out pictures of Louise Maybanks—taken five or six years ago, when she made her debut. Sibbold dead. Hendricks dead. Louise Maybanks missing. Once she had spun in the social whirl of the swank West End. The winter of 1929 and '30 had killed her father, and his death had killed her mother; between them, they'd left heavy insurance

to Louise Maybanks. Some phrased it this way: "And then Louise went native." By that they meant that she had moved out of the West End, taken a suite in a sleek hotel, run the gauntlet of night-clubs, night life, men by the score. Erratic, unreasonable—but perpetually lovely; a moth badgering a flame.

These headlines haunted MacBride. He saw them wherever he looked: Louise Maybanks Missing. He was not only a conscientious policeman, he was a conscientious man. It occurred to him that the blood of Louise Maybanks might already be on his hands. He thought of it that way. If he had acted properly in her apartment, Hendricks would have been saved, Louise Maybanks would not now be missing.

"Oh, hell," Kennedy said, "don't go around looking like Macbeth—or maybe it's Othello I mean. What's to be, will be."

"In your mind maybe; not in mine."

"If I'm walking down a path and I come to a tree and the tree's in my path, I walk around the tree; I don't bust my head against it."

"I've got a one-track mind, Kennedy. I'm the kind of guy brainy people make jokes about. But I'm what I am. You're wasting your breath, sweetheart."

He sailed out of his office like an ill wind, pounded his heels down the stairs, went out and walked to the Morgue. The morning was bright, crisp; people looked happy; a hurdy-gurdy played *Valencia* and kids danced. But MacBride wore a face as long as a mule's.

He spent ten minutes in the Morgue, and when he came out his hat was jerked an inch lower on his forehead, his jaw jutted a fraction of an inch more than when he had entered. And he was cursing behind tight lips. He had made a phone call from the Morgue, and in a few minutes Benninger arrived with the Bureau sedan and MacBride climbed in, snapped an address, sat back with a somber look and folded his arms.

The sedan sped west, went through

the park, came out on the Boulevard and followed it for half a mile. It turned right into a wide street, stopped in front of the *Williamsport*. MacBride swung out, hiked up the long cement walk and slapped his way into the lobby. He reappeared in a minute, slammed into the sedan and rasped out another address. Benninger, looking very alive, whipped the car into gear and MacBride folded his arms again and continued to look very somber. The way led east, bearing northward. Benninger used the siren and jumped the stop lights.

Race Street was on the fringe of the financial district, and half-way down it there was a seven story brown building in front of which Benninger stopped. MacBride's coat tails flew as he crossed the sidewalk, and entering the revolving door violently, he floored a man who was on the way out. He didn't look around.

An elevator lifted him to the fourth floor, and he went up the fourth floor corridor stabbing dark looks at the names on frosted door panels. Then he grabbed a doorknob, opened the door, and saw a youth pounding a typewriter. A connecting door was open, and through it he caught a glimpse of Boyd. The youth was saying, "Yes? You want to see—" but by this time MacBride was in the inner office, and he slammed the door behind him.

Boyd looked very neat, very well groomed, self-possessed behind the large, flat-topped desk. And he was cheerful, though offhand:

"Good-morning, Captain."

MacBride did not lose a flow of language. He pulled up, tightened down; he was suddenly calm and cool, but with an effort. He placed both hands on the desk, leaned on his straightened arms.

Boyd said: "Indications are you know something about Miss Maybanks. Please don't keep me in suspense."

"Mr. Boyd, how drunk would you say Hendricks was last night?"

"Drunk? Well, quite drunk. Very drunk. When a man can't stand on

his feet, he's very drunk, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's very drunk when he can't stand on his feet. You say then that he was so drunk he couldn't navigate."

Boyd nodded leisurely. "He was very, very drunk."

"That's all I wanted to know. Good-morning."

He turned on his heel, left the office and made a phone call from the lobby. "Mory," he said. "You and Ike grab a cab and shoot down to 45 Race Street. Snap on it."

He stood outside the lobby, tapping his heels. Ten minutes later Moriarity and Cohen alighted from a cab, and MacBride said:

"You guys plant yourselves here. If Boyd comes out, tail him. Tail every move he makes."

He crossed the sidewalk, climbed into the Bureau sedan and shot Benninger another address. It was five minutes ride to the *Flower Apartments*, on Winscott Street, and MacBride was out of the sedan before it completely stopped. Inside, he had a few words with the elevator man, and was then lifted to the fifth floor. A door marked 510 was the door that felt the rap of his knuckles.

Sanarens, the *Keyhole* owner, puffy-faced from a long night, opened the door, pulled his robe tighter about his beefy stomach. His eyes flickered and he said:

"I just got up and—"

"That's all right, Sanarens," MacBride said, pushing in, closing the door. "It's this: how much did Hendricks drink last night?"

"Hendricks?"

"The guy was with Louise Maybanks."

"I—oh, that fellow. Well—"

"He drank a lot, didn't he? He was cock-eyed drunk, wasn't he? He was swacked, plastered—wasn't he?"

Sanarens' puffy white face jounced. "I guess he was pretty drunk, Cap. But I told him, I advised him—"

"You told him to lay off, huh?"

"Yes. Personally I told him. My place is a nice place and I don't like to see—"

"You don't like to see a guy get so swacked he can't walk. Is that it, Sanarens?"

"Y-yes."

"Then you'd say Hendricks was so lousy cock-eyed drunk he couldn't walk. You'd say that, huh?"

"Uh—yes."

MacBride roared: "You'd swear to that, would you?"

Sanarens went backward across the living-room, flopping his hands, making a round startled O of his mouth. MacBride went after him, dogging his backward footsteps; and he yelled:

"You will swear to that, won't you?"

"My God, skipper—you look crazy!"

"I am crazy! I'm nuts! I'm out of my mind!" And then he snarled in a low, contemptuous tone: "Yes I'm out of my mind, I am, I am!" He caught hold of the lapels of Sanarens' robe, heaved the man on to a divan, growled: "Sit down, mugg!"

Sanarens not only sat, but he shook also—he shook from his puffy jowls down his arms and down his chest to his fat stomach; nor did his legs escape. And sweat came so suddenly to his face that it seemed to have been pumped there.

"So I'm crazy, am I!" snarled MacBride.

"Jeeze, skipper, what's the matter? Ain't I always been a decent guy? Ain't I been square, on the level?"

"Like a corkscrew you have. . . . Listen, Sanarens," the skipper went on in a low deadly voice. "I'm looking for Louise Maybanks. I want her. I've been gypped and double-crossed, and I want her."

"You're asking me!"

"I'm asking you. You're a lousy, two-tongued bum, Sanarens, and you're going to come across or I'll make a hospital case out of you. You hear that? A hospital case!"

"Now look, Cap! Now wait! Jeeze, now wait!"

"I'm waiting. And to speed you up, I'll tell you something you already know. This: Hendricks wasn't drunk. The autopsy showed that there wasn't a drop, not one drop, of liquor in his system. Not one little drop, Sanarens! You hear that?"

Sanarens jumped up. MacBride gripped him, held on to him.

"That's a lie," Sanarens choked. "You can't kid me. That's a lie!"

"I'm suddenly beginning to hate the sight of you, baby. Spill it quick! What's the hook-up? What happened to the jane?"

"I tell you—"

"I'm telling you I've got no patience. Where is she?"

"I don't know—"

MacBride hit him with the flat of his hard hand. The sound of the blow frightened Sanarens as much as the blow itself.

MacBride's voice was thick: "I gave you every break a guy in your business could get. I never grafted. I never took a cent from you. I let you run your place wide open and I tipped you when the Federals were hot. I was a white guy to you, Sanarens, and you gyped me."

He planted his fist in Sanarens' face, drove him toppling across the room. The skipper's face was red with rage. He watched Sanarens fall, take a table down with him; and he went after the man, picked him up and hit him again and again—and he meant every blow. Sanarens flopped to the floor, his face bloody. He crawled on hands and knees, in a circle, gibbering, a grotesque figure in a silk robe, silk pajamas. Finally he stopped crawling and lay sprawled on his back, only half-conscious.

MacBride picked up the telephone. "Emergency Hospital," he said. His breath was laboring, his eyes humid. "Emergency Hospital? . . . *Flower Apartments*, *Winscott Street*. Apart-

ment 510. . . . Yeah, a mad dog bit a man named Sanarens."

6



As the skipper walked down from the lobby of the *Flower Apartments*, he saw Benninger beckoning excitedly. MacBride lengthened his stride,

and Benninger said:

"Mory and Ike just went past in a cab, tailing another cab."

"What 'd they say?"

"Nothing."

"A cab drew up here, but the guy instead of getting out, he went on again. Then Ike and Mory came along—and followed.

"Boyd." MacBride was looking at the ambulance.

"Huh?"

MacBride jumped into the tonneau. "See if you can pick up Mory and Ike. Step on it."

Benninger pointed. "They're just making a left, way ahead there. See?"

"Get after them. Just tail them."

"Oke."

Benninger squared off behind the wheel, got the motor into high gear and stepped on it.

"No siren," MacBride said.

"I gotcha."

The skipper sat in the middle of the rear seat, his hands braced on his spread knees. The knuckles were a bit sore, a bit chafed. It was madness to have hit Sanarens the way he did, but the old boy could stomach almost anything but a double-deal. He was still warm under the collar, his blood had not yet cooled off. His body was rigid, his face granite-hard, pale now rather than red, for his purpose, despite the heat of body and mind, was a cold and deadly one.

Benninger picked up the tail easily, followed the taxi across a broad plaza,

down a boulevard, left into a commercial thoroughfare. Traffic offered obstacles, but Benninger, fully awake now, was an able driver, worming his way in and out of line, browbeating other cars out of the way. His siren would have cleared the way instantly, but MacBride did not want the siren.

They cut south and east towards Little Italy, but turned sharp east before they reached it, and went over a short but abrupt hill, down a street of decent-looking dwellings, small second-rate apartment houses, rooming houses: a German district, sedate, busy, not blatant.

Suddenly the cab stopped in front of a drug-store, and Benninger drew up behind it. Moriarity and Cohen remained seated in the cab, leaning forward, peering hard. After a moment they moved, opened the door and stepped out. MacBride walked up to them.

"Good work, kids."

Mory spun, shrugged. "Hello, Cap."

Cohen said: "He just left that gray cab and went in that frame house there with the hydrant in front of it. We'll wait and see when he comes out."

"I'll go in," MacBride said. "I'm going to nail that baby."

"What was the ambulance doing in front of the *Flower*?" Moriarity asked.

"I poked Sanarens."

"Why don't you wait till Boyd comes out?"

"I'm through waiting. Come on."

"Should we knock?"

"No. We'll take the door down."

"Bust a window instead," Cohen offered. "You can always say you fell against it by accident."

MacBride nodded. "Idea."

He led the way because his legs were longest. But Moriarity and Cohen were right behind him as he turned into the short flag walk leading to the low veranda. MacBride did not pause, did not slow down. There was no second thought. He put his feet on the veranda, took four steps across the boards and put his elbow through the nearest

window. Then he put a leg through, followed with his body. He did not draw his gun, but his hand was on it. Moriarity and Cohen joined him. The room was empty—a small, stuffy sitting-room with a door at the left.

"This way," MacBride said.

They went through the doorway into a square hall. A stairway led aloft. MacBride went up on the run, two steps at a time. He heard a door bang, heard quick voices, sudden movement. He reached the upper hall as a door opened. Instantly the door slammed shut. Cohen went past him like a streak and hit the door with his right shoulder. It did not give. There was excited movement behind the door.

MacBride said: "Open it."

There was the sound of running feet.

"Where's that?" Cohen muttered.

They all looked around but did not know.

"Open it!" MacBride rasped.

A door banged somewhere distant in the house.

"If there's a back stairway. . . ." Moriarity said.

Cohen dashed to the rear of the hall, opened a window there, looked down into a large yard; the yard had a field behind it, a street beyond the field.

MacBride drew his gun and put two shots through the door's lock. He grabbed the knob. It fell apart in his hand and the door opened and the skipper stepped in, stopped short in his tracks.

Boyd stood in the middle of the room, unarmed. Two small men, one a blond, the other a red-head, stood on either side of him; both were armed, with the guns leveled at MacBride and Moriarity. A tall bald man stood holding Louise Maybanks in front of him; he held her with one hand, with the other hand he held a gun to her back. He had white eyes, brown skin—or his skin was so brown that it made his eyes seem white.

"This is the situation," Boyd said. "You cornered us, but the book's not

closed. Not by a long sight. One move out of you or that fellow with you, and the woman gets killed. That plain?"

MacBride lowered his gun. "Plain enough. So what then?"

"We're leaving town. We've got to. We're taking the woman with us. We want a head start out of this building, and if you throw a squad out after us, the woman gets killed. I want to make it clear that she gets killed just as soon as any attempt is made to apprehend us. I saw the ambulance in front of the *Flower*, drew my own conclusions. I hope I've made myself plain."

Louise Maybanks' hair was tousled, as though she had struggled. There was a bruise on her lovely white face and there was a kind of dead terror in her eyes. She uttered no sound. She stood tall and straight, a convulsive movement in her breasts, an intermittent pulse in her throat. But her lips remained shut, tight.

The blond little man and the red-haired little man had faces like masks of wax—cold, bloodless. The bald man kept lifting and dropping his upper lip, and his left hand held Louise Maybanks in a grip of steel.

MacBride grunted: "Put those guns down, you pups. How far do you think you'll get with this?"

Boyd said: "It all depends on you. If you want the woman killed now, start now. If a week from now, start then. If a month from now . . ." He shrugged. "It's up to you."

Louise Maybanks' lips opened. "Start now," she said in a dead voice. "This minute . . . now." And then she screamed: "Now! Now!"

Heat rushed over MacBride and he said to Boyd: "A swell spot you put me in—a swell spot."

"Her life is in your hands, Captain."

MacBride backed up. "Okey. It won't be on my hands."

"My God!" she cried. "Make them kill me now!"

"I'd like to get them now," MacBride said. "I could—the little rats

there, the two little punks—and Boyd—and the lug holding you. But it's guns down with me—though your face 'll haunt me, girlie, till I nail these babies."

Moriarity muttered: "Come on, Cap—before you blow off."

MacBride backed up to the threshold.

At that instant Cohen appeared on the threshold of the doorway leading to a room beyond. Cohen stood quite easily on his feet. He did not shoot from the hip because that is chance shooting. He aimed. His arm was up, level. He sighted. He fired. The shot broke the bald-headed man's gun-hand at the wrist. The room shook.

MacBride had no time to aim. But the two little men were close and they erred in looking towards the other doorway. MacBride fired four times, lightning fast. He knocked down the red-head with two shots, hit the blond with one. Moriarity put three shots into the blond as Boyd drew sluggishly.

"Down, Boyd," MacBride said sadly. "Gun down, Boyd—"

But he had to shoot Boyd. He nailed Boyd's hand to his chest while the red-head threshed around on the floor and called to God.

Louise Maybanks stood very tall, very straight, with her eyes closed tightly, her back arched, her hands doubled at her sides. She did not collapse, but her slender body shook, vibrated, and every bone in her jaw was visible.

MacBride said thickly: "You get around, Ike."

"Yeah," Cohen said. "Before you shot that door open I dropped to the back yard and came in the back way, and up. I guess I walked into something. . . . Catch the girl, Cap. I think she's going to slam down."

MacBride caught her.

KENNEDY poured himself a generous portion of the skipper's Scotch, raised it, said: "I suppose this is because I didn't say, 'I told you so' . . . Well, down the hatch, tomato!"

"Boyd—yeah, Boyd." MacBride mut-

tered. "One of the smoothest articles I ever ran up against. It was like this. Boyd had his foot deep in beer. He got these bootleg brewers on the string and he made a tie-up with most of the legal brewers. But not with Sibbold. He explained the racket to Sibbold, but Sibbold wouldn't get in line.

"The bootleg breweries had thousands of gallons of beer on hand and the hook-up was this: the legal brewers were to let their labels be slapped on the bootleg beer and they were to get a cut. It was explained to them by Boyd that this would hold only until the bootleg beer was used up. But Sibbold saw the catch. He knew that once he'd get in it, he'd have to stay in it. He'd have to keep slapping his labels on bootleg beer, because the racket was too good to let go—for the bootleg crowd.

"Then some of these guys got wise, sneaked a batch of Sibbold's labels and slapped them on their bootleg brew. Boyd fired Hendricks because Hendricks took Sibbold's part. Then Sibbold threatened to bare the whole scheme. Boyd urged him to think it over and urged him to have supper at the *Keyhole*.

"Sibbold went there, but Boyd hadn't arrived yet—though he'd reserved a table by that window. Sanarens was in on it. By accident Hendricks and the woman were there, and Sibbold asked them over for a drink. Hendricks didn't drink but he went over, and Sibbold offered him a job. The kid was glad to have it. Sibbold was on the spot.

"Hendricks saw that hand come through the window and he grabbed, but not soon enough. The shot was fired. But he tussled with the hand, broke a cufflink. He got the top part but not the bottom. I got the bottom. He ran out and the girl ran after him, and they ran several blocks after what they thought was the man. But they lost him.

The girl didn't want to go back to the *Keyhole* because she'd got a glimpse of Sibbold's face. Hendricks took her home. They were followed by the redhead and the blond, and by Boyd, who'd picked up his two muggs.

"Boyd thought it would be easy with Hendricks. It seems the blond—the guy who actually killed Sibbold—had helped himself to a pair of Boyd's monogrammed cufflinks. . . . Well, they finally slugged Hendricks. But just then I turned up. When I went into the apartment, the two punks were hiding in the closet. Boyd had threatened Louise Maybanks that if she didn't talk the way he told her to, the two punks in the closet would kill me and her. So she acted—and damned well.

"After I was beaned, the two punks carried Hendricks to the service elevator and made the woman go with them. She went gladly. She thought Hendricks was only unconscious. She didn't know he was dead. Imagine—while I was in that apartment, Hendricks was on that divan—dead! Ought my pan be red!"

Kennedy said: "Boyd and his muggs sure balled things up."

"Of course they did. But they couldn't help themselves. Their only out when I entered Louise Maybanks' apartment was to pretend that Hendricks was dead drunk. They had no time to think of the consequences. And they fooled me—boy, how they fooled me! Two hot rods in the closet and a dead guy on the divan!"

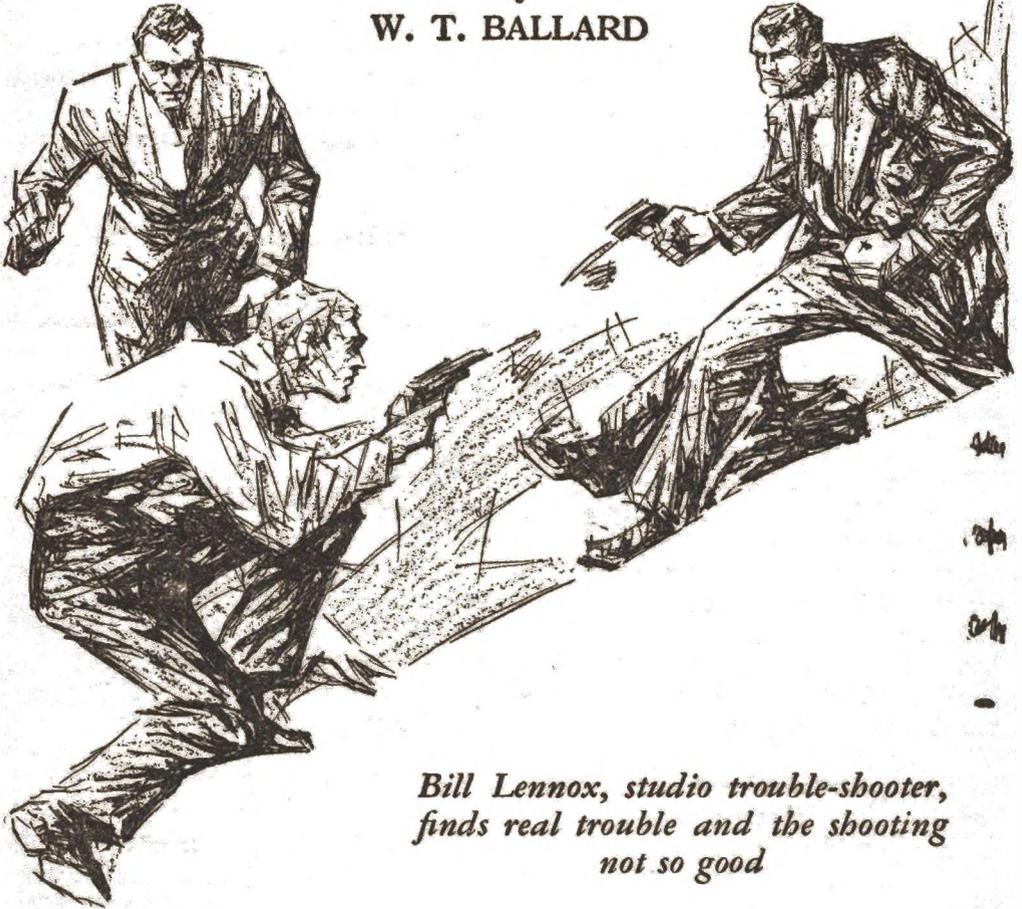
Kennedy grinned. "You may be slow on the uptake, old tomato, but you're sure hell on the downpour. . . . I'd drink to you, but the glass is empty, and I never hint for a second drink, even though at present I'm unusually dry."

"That's what I like about you, you bum. You're so bashful. Here, souse!"

He slid the bottle across the desk.

A Little Different

By
W. T. BALLARD



*Bill Lennox, studio trouble-shooter,
finds real trouble and the shooting
not so good*

BILL LENNOX nodded to the gate-man and climbed on to the shine stand, just inside the General gate. The shine-boy grinned, his white teeth flashing in his dark face. "When is you all gwine tuh star me, Mister Lennox?"

Bill said, absently: "Pretty soon, Sam. Lean on that brush, will you; I'm in a hurry."

"I'se leaning." The boy ducked his head and went to work briskly. A big gleaming car came through the gate.

Bill could see the woman on the rear seat, a dazzling blonde with dark eyebrows. He watched the car sourly until it halted before the star's bungalow dressing-room. The blonde descended, assisted by her maid, and disappeared. Lennox said something under his breath, found a quarter which he tossed to the boy, and climbed from his seat.

Sol Spurck, head of General-Consolidated Films, put his short fingers together and stared at Lennox as the latter came into his office. "Where was you yesterday?"

Lennox looked at him without visible

emotion. "Out, Sol. Out doing your dirty work."

The short figure behind the big desk shifted uncertainly. "I told you that you should watch out for that dumb cluck Wayborn. He's in a jam."

Lennox shoved his hands deep into his trousers pockets and sat down upon the corner of the desk. "What, again?"

Spurck seemed to explode. "Again—again! Always that guy—"

"Save it." Lennox's voice was very tired. "What's he done now?"

"Am I a mind reader—am I?"

Spurck had come to his feet and was bouncing about the office. "What is it that I pay you for—what is it? Must I do everything—everything? I tell you that Wayborn's gone. Fifty thousand they want—fifty thousand for that——"

Lennox said: "Remember your arteries, Sol. Who wants fifty grand and for what?"

Spurck was wrenching open the drawer of his desk. He pulled forth a dirty scrap of paper and shoved it at Lennox. "Find him—find him quick. Are we half through shooting *Dangerous Love*? I ask you. Can we shoot without Wayborn? But fifty thousand for that *schlemiel*. I wouldn't pay fifty thousand for Gable yet, and they ask it for a ham like Wayborn."

Lennox said: "You wouldn't pay fifty grand for your grandmother," and stared at the piece of paper. On it were printed crude letters with a soft pencil. They said:

"We've got Wayborn. You've got fifty grand. Let's trade. Go to the cops and we drop him into the ocean. More later."

Lennox looked at his boss. "Where'd this come from?"

Spurck threw up his hands, appealing to the ceiling. "He asks me riddles yet. Mein Gott! He asks me riddles."

Lennox said, roughly: "Cut it. Where'd this come from? Who's seen it?"

His voice seemed to quiet the little man. Spurck returned to his chair and

lit an enormous cigar with care. "No one has seen it," he said in a surly tone. "I found it on the floor of my car this morning."

"How long has Wayborn been gone?"

Spurck shrugged. "Yesterday, he was here. Today, he is not. Find him? Yes—but fifty thousand—no. Ten maybe. Not one cent over ten."

Lennox said: "I suppose you know what this will mean? The picture is half in the can. If we don't find Wayborn, we shoot it over and Price is three days behind schedule now."

Spurck's eyes were narrow. "Why did you let me use Wayborn? That ham—what is it I pay you for?"

Lennox said: "Because I'm a fool"; he said it bitterly. "Because I stick around this mad house and keep things going. Some day, Sol, I'll quit this lousy outfit cold. I'll sit back and watch it go to the devil."

Spurck grinned. He'd heard the threat before, many times. "Find him, Bill." He reached across and patted Lennox's shoulder with a fat hand. "Find him, and I take you to Caliente. That's a promise yet."

2

BILL LENNOX, trouble-shooter for General-Consolidated Studio, walked through the outer office. Trouble-shooter wasn't his title. In fact, one of the things which Lennox lacked was an official title. Those in Hollywood who didn't like him, called him Spurck's watch-dog. Ex-reporter, ex-publicity man, he had drifted into his present place through his inability to say yes and his decided ability in saying no.

His searching blue eyes swept about the large waiting-room. A world-famous writer bowed, half fearfully. A director whose last three pictures had hit the box-office paused for a moment to speak to him. Bill grunted and went on. As he walked down the line towards the row of dressing-rooms he was thinking quickly. Wayborn was gone. They

needed him for *Dangerous Love*. No one seemed to know anything about him.

Lennox paused before the door of the third bungalow and knocked. A trim maid opened the door. Her eyes were uncertain when she saw who it was. Bill said: "Tell Miss Meyer that I want to see her."

The maid's eyes got more uncertain. "I don't think—"

His voice rasped. "You aren't paid to think. Tell Meyer that I want to see her at once."

Elva Meyer's eyes were cold, hostile beneath her dark brows as he walked through the door. She was seated before her dressing-table, but there was as yet no greasepaint on her face. "Well?" Her voice was colder than her eyes.

He was staring at her blonde hair. "I'm not so hot," he said, helping himself to a chair. "When did you see Wayborn last?"

The eyes flecked, glowed for an instant. "I told you some time ago that I was perfectly capable of looking after my affairs without your help."

"Yeah?" He'd found a loose cigarette in his pocket and was rolling it back and forth between his strong fingers so that the tobacco spilled out at both ends. "Well, sweetheart, it so happens that I'm not sticking my schnozzle into your playhouse at the moment. You and Wayborn were at the *Grove* last night, then you turned up at the *Brown Derby* about one—"

She pushed back her chair, noisily. "I'm not going to stand this any longer—your jealous spying is driving me insane. I'm going to Mr. Spurck."

He said, "Nerts! You'll get damn' little sympathy from Sol today, honey. He left it at home, wrapped in moth-balls—but you're getting ideas under that peroxide-treated mat of yours. I'm not checking on you because I'm still interested. I'm washed up, baby, washed up. You're not the first chiseling tramp that forgot my first name after I boosted them into lights, and I don't suppose that you'll be the last. I always was a sucker

for a pretty face with nice hips for a background; but this is strictly business. *Dangerous Love* should be in the can by the last of the week. It won't be unless Price can shoot."

She said: "I've been here all morning, waiting." She said it in the tone of one who does not like to wait.

Lennox grinned. For the first time in days he was enjoying himself. "You're good, baby," his voice mocked her. "You're plenty good. You should be. I found you, trained you, but you aren't good enough to play love scenes by yourself. Wayborn isn't around. He's been snatched."

She made her eyes wide. "Snatched?" she said, slowly. "You mean—"

His voice rasped with impatience. "Quit acting. You read the papers. You know what snatched means. They want fifty grand and they won't get it."

She sank back into her chair as if her legs suddenly refused to support her. "This is terrible. When did it happen?"

His eyes were sardonic. "That's what I'm asking you, sweetheart. You were with him last night. He hasn't been seen this morning."

Her eyes blazed and she made two small white hands into little fists. "You're lousy, Bill Lennox. You can't tie me into this." Her voice threatened to break. "Ralph took me home at one-thirty. I haven't seen him since."

His eyes searched her face. "I guess you're in the clear, kid." He sounded almost regretful. "Wayborn's boy says that he came in around two, but that he went out again, without his car."

She gained assurance at his words. "But what will Spurck do? He'll have to pay the fifty grand."

"Will he? You don't know Sol, sweetheart."

"But he can't junk the picture. Why, he's spent more than that on publicity."

Lennox shrugged. "We'll reshoot it if Wayborn doesn't turn up." He was on his feet; the girl came out of her chair.

"But he can't leave Ralph to—to—die. It isn't human."

Lennox's voice grated. "Want to pay the fifty grand yourself?"

She stared at him. "I pay the fifty thousand? Don't be absurd."

"There's your answer," he told her. "That's the way Sol feels, and Wayborn isn't Sol's boy-friend."

She said, angrily: "You're getting nasty again; but Sol will have to pay. I'll go to the papers, to the police."

"Do that," he suggested, "and you and me will be going to one swell funeral; that is—if they find the body."

3



NANCY HOBBS was eating in Al Levy's when Lennox came through the door. She nodded to the empty chair, and he sank into it. "Hello, Brat."

She smiled at him. "You look worried, Bill."

He ordered before he answered. "And you look swell. Why don't you go into pictures instead of writing about them?"

She said, "Because I know too much. You have to be dumb to get by, like Elva Meyer."

He scowled. "Seems I saw an interview in a fan magazine where you said that she was just a home girl—"

Nancy laughed, not nicely. "She is. Anybody's home girl. Look at the ones she's wrecked."

He said: "Lay off! I'm trying to think. I can't when you chatter."

She was silent with no sign of resentment. He broke a piece of bread savagely. "Wayborn's been snatched."

Her eyes were narrow. "What is it? A publicity gag?"

"I wish to — it was. The dumb cluck is gone; someone wants fifty grand."

Her eyes were still suspicious. "I don't trust you, Bill; not since you pulled that burning-yacht stunt."

He didn't grin. "I'm out of that racket, sweetheart. I've got to find Wayborn. The picture's half in the can and the big slob looks like a million. Sol is howling his head off."

She said: "Why don't you chuck it, Bill—pull loose? You used to be a decent pal; now you're nothing but a two-timing mugg. Get loose. Shove off to New York. Write that book. You've been writing it in your mind for ten years."

His mouth twisted with a shade of bitterness. "What would I use for money, sweet?"

She stared at him. "You're getting three fifty—"

He spread his hands. "It goes—I'm living on week-after-next now. Sol lets me draw ahead."

"Sweet of him. He knows that he can hold you as long as you're broke. Listen, Bill. I've got a few dollars that aren't working their heads off. I'll stake you. Get the Chief tomorrow and get the hell out of this town."

For a moment he was silent, then he patted the back of her hand. "It won't work, babe. I gotta find Wayborn. I gotta get that damn' picture into the can; after that, we'll talk about it."

She sighed, knowing that she had lost. "This Wayborn thing? It's on the level?"

He said: "So help me."

She sat there, playing with her fork, thinking. Finally she looked up at him. "Better see Red Girkin."

He stared at her. "Who's Girkin? What is this?"

She said, in a tired voice: "I'm helping, pal. Helping as I always do. Go on. See Girkin. He's got an apartment on Van Ness off Melrose." She gave him the number.

He said, roughly: "What do you know, babe?"

She shook her head. "Just a hunch. Go see him. Stall." She gathered her bag and gloves and rose. "You can pay my check, that is, if you have enough."

He said, absently: "My credit's good, but Nance, what's the—"

"For a smart guy, you ask plenty of questions. You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

She was gone, leaving him staring after her. Lennox said something under his breath, then went on with his dinner. Afterward he took a taxi.

The cab dropped him at the corner of Melrose and he walked to the apartment house. A row of brass-bound mail-boxes stared at him from the tiled-lobby wall. One of them, number five, had the name, W. C. Girkin. There was another name, but Lennox did not notice it. He pushed the bell viciously. The door at the bottom of the carpeted stairs buzzed as the catch was released from above. Lennox pulled it open and started up the steps. At their head a man in a light, close-fitting suit waited.

The man said: "What the hell?"

Lennox stared at him and said: "Hello, Charley."

Charley took a thin hand out of his right coat pocket and wrapped the fingers around those of Lennox. "I'll be a so and so. How are you, pally? How'd you know that I was in this burg?"

Lennox started to say that he hadn't known, then stopped. "I know things," he grinned. "What's the matter? Cops in the big town get rough?"

The other shrugged. "Pal of mine had a doll out here. I drifted out with him. Jeeze. What a country!"

Lennox said: "Some of us like it. You ought to have blown in a year sooner. Could have used you in a gangster picture."

Charley said, "Me?" and made his eyes very wide. "You've got me wrong, pally. I'm just a business man with ideas. But come on. Red will think they've put the finger on me." He turned and led the way towards the door of number five. The door was closed and he knocked, three knocks close together, another after a slight pause. The door came open and

Charley said: "Okey, just a pal. Meet Red Girkin. This is Bill Lennox."

The red-headed man said hello without evident pleasure. He was big, with heavy shoulders and a rather short neck. He sat down on a chair before the small built-in desk and went on with his game of solitaire. Once he swore to himself and turned over a pile of cards to reach an ace. Charley said: "What are you doing in Suckerville?"

Lennox laughed. "That's one for the book. You'd make a swell gag man."

The other nodded slowly. "There's money in these hills, Pal. Like to cut you in."

The red-headed man at the desk said: "Shut up." He made it sound vicious.

Lennox looked at him with narrow eyes, then back at Charley. "Your friend doesn't like me."

The thin man grinned. "Don't mind him; it's just the bad booze. Lemme have your number. I might put you on to something swell."

4



ILL LENNOX said to Spurck. "I haven't found the slob yet, but I know who's got him."

Spurck was excited. He came out of his chair and bounced around the corner of the big desk. "You know—you know, and you don't go to the police yet?"

"Listen, Sol. Why don't you try thinking once in a while before you open that mouth of yours? I know who's got Wayborn, but I don't know why and I don't know where he is."

"Who's got him?"

"That's one thing that it isn't wise for you to know. These boys are tough, Sol. It don't mean a thing to them that you're the biggest shot in the industry. They'd as soon rub you out as look at you. In fact, they'd a little

rather. You never won any beauty contests, you know."

Spurck sat down at his desk again. "What do we do, then?"

"We pay fifty grand."

"You're crazy!"

"Sure, I got that way, working for you. We pay the fifty grand, finish the picture, and then I try to get it back. If I don't, we spread the story all over the front page and charge the fifty grand to publicity. What the hell else can we do?"

Spurck swore. He raved. He almost cried, but Lennox paid no attention. "Take it and like it," he said. "You've spent more than that on New York flops and kept nothing but the title. Have you heard from the gang?"

The little man pulled out his desk drawer and found an envelope which he handed to Lennox. "They want I should bring the money down to Redondo, in a suitcase. I should bring it myself, and I should not bring the cops; no one but me and my chauffeur."

Lennox said: "Okey. Go to the bank and get the dough in small bills as they say. Don't be a sap and mark them. Then take a ride to Redondo tonight."

Spurck rolled his eyes. "It ain't that I'm afraid, you understand; but I don't like it, I'm telling you."

Lennox grinned. "I'm your chauffeur, Sol. I wouldn't miss this party for a lot."

At seven o'clock Lennox swung the Lincoln town car out of the driveway of Spurck's Beverly Hills home. Dressed in brown livery, borrowed from the chauffeur, he was hardly recognizable as he cut across towards Inglewood and picked up Redondo Boulevard.

In the back seat Spurck, with a black bag clutched between his fat knees, was nervously watching the passing traffic. Lennox stepped the car up to sixty and watched the back road in the rear-view mirror. At Rosecrans Avenue a Chevrolet coupé swung in behind them and followed them through Manhattan and

Hermosa. Lennox slowed down to twenty and the coupé slowed down also. As they reached Redondo city limits, the Chevrolet speeded up and ran them to the curb. Two men were in the coupé, hats drawn low over their eyes. Lennox saw that the one beside the driver carried a riot gun across his knees.

For a minute, the road was empty, no traffic coming either way. The man with the riot gun said: "Keep your hands on that wheel, mugg."

Lennox obeyed, a thin smile twisting his lips for a moment. He knew that voice, knew it well. The man with the gun said to Spurck: "Toss the bag over, quick!"

With trembling fingers, Spurck obeyed. The driver of the coupé opened the bag, inspected the contents. "If these are marked, guy, it's curtains for you. Okey, Charley."

The man with the gun nodded. "Keep driving through Redondo and up through Palos Verde till you come to where the road ends and another road goes off to the left and into Pedro. Drive out in the field at the end of the road. You'll find your ham along the top of the cliff, tied up. We were set to push him over if you didn't show up." The coupé's motor speeded up and they jerked away, swinging left at the next street.

Spruck moaned: "Fifty thousand!" He sounded out of breath.

Lennox put the Lincoln in gear. They went through Redondo, climbed the hill beyond and skirted the ocean until they came to the road's end. Five minutes later, with the aid of a flashlight from the tool-box, Lennox found Wayborn. The actor was tied securely, lying flat on his back so close to the cliff's edge that had he made any effort to free his bonds, he might have rolled off. Aside from chafed wrists and stiff ankles, he appeared none the worse for his experience, nor was he even thankful. "You might have gotten here sooner," he told them, in a

peevish voice. "I assure you that it was far from comfortable lying here, bound hand and foot."

Spurck exploded. For five minutes he called the actor everything that he could think of. Wayborn listened silently, then climbed into the car. Lennox grinned to himself as he turned the Lincoln towards town.

5



T A N B R A U N , Spurck's nephew, walked back and forth across his uncle's office. He was slight, with black curly hair and long eyelashes. He looked like an actor and wasn't. He was production manager for the studio.

"It's strange," he said, "that Lennox advised you to pay that money. I wish that you'd have asked me about it." He pouted as a small boy pouts when his feelings have been hurt.

Spurck threw his hands wide. "Ask you? What good does asking you get me? Does it bring back Wayborn? Does it catch Price up with his schedule? It was you that wanted Wayborn—that ham. It was you that held up the schedule three days, changing the story. Maybe you would have got him back and saved us fifty thousand—you—"

Braun said, harshly: "At least I'd have marked the money. You say Lennox wouldn't let you do that?"

Spurck's face became crafty. "Which shows what you know. Me, I got a list of them bills from the bank. Every number. A copy I have made which Lennox takes. If we had marked the bills, they might have killed Wayborn when the picture is only half shot, to say nothing of retakes. Such ideas you've got."

Braun's voice was stubborn. "You could have hired private detectives."

"A swell idea, when the barn door is closed and the horse is—"

"Anyhow," his nephew's voice rasped, "I've hired some. They're waiting outside now."

Abe Rollins and Dan Grogan came in. Grogan was big with a flat Irish face. Rollins was small, dark, with shifty eyes and too white teeth. He said: "Please tuh met yuh, Mr. Spurck. Braun's been telling us about your trouble. Don't worry, we'll turn these muggs up." He examined the two notes from the kidnapers. "I'd like to talk to Lennox," he said. Spurck hesitated, then pressed one of the buttons at the side of his desk.

Bill came through the door and nodded slightly to Braun. His blue eyes narrowed as they went over the two detectives; then he looked at Spurck. "What's eating you now, Sol?"

Spurck explained. As Lennox listened, his eyes got narrower. Then he looked at Rollins. "Okey. What do you want me to tell you?"

The man cleared his throat with importance. "Did you recognize either of the men in the Chevy?"

Lennox hesitated, then said: "No. Their faces were shadowed by their hats. I couldn't have recognized my grandmother."

"Yet you told Mr. Spurck that you knew who had Wayborn?"

Lennox said: "Yeah, I also told him that I'd try to get the fifty grand back, if he let me work it my way. I didn't figure that he'd run in a couple of lame brains to mess things up."

Rollins' face got red, Grogan shifted his feet. "Don't be too smart, fella," Rollins warned. "You're not in the clear on this thing, not by a damn' sight."

Lennox said: "Now isn't that just too swell? You'll be telling me next that I framed the whole play and got the fifty grand myself."

"That's not such a bad idea," Rollins snapped. "Maybe you did. As I remember it, you advised Mr. Spurck to pay the money."

"That's right, Bill, you did." Spurck sounded excited.

Lennox looked at him. "So you got me tagged as a kidnaper too. Okey, Sol, get your own fifty grand back. I'm quitting, washed up." He swung towards the door. Rollins' voice stopped him.

"Not so fast, punk." The detective's hand was in his coat pocket, shoving the gun forward against the cloth.

Lennox shrugged. "You seem to be running the set." He turned back into the room.

Spurck said: "Just a few questions, Bill. Don't get sore."

Rollins said: "Isn't it true that you are always broke?"

"Ask Sol," Lennox advised. "He's my banker."

"And isn't it true that you told Mr. Spurck that you knew who had Way-born?"

"What of it?"

"You may be asked to explain that statement at the D. A. office." Rollins' voice was threatening.

"Nerts!" Lennox found himself a cigarette and lit it.

"And isn't it also true that you offered to drive the car to Redondo? I should say that you insisted that you be allowed to drive; yet you made no effort to follow the kidnapers after the money had been passed?"

Lennox shrugged. "Go right ahead, bright boy. Wrap me up in cellophane and deliver me at San Quentin; but while you're talking, the muggs are spending Sol's dough." Spurck groaned, and Lennox laughed.

6

NANCY HOBBS said: "So you finally quit." She said it in the tone of one who hears about a miracle and does not believe.

Lennox nodded. "Can you feature that? After all I've put up with from that fat slob he accuses me of kidnaping. There's one of his funny-

looking dicks outside this joint now. I'm getting important."

She said: "Now's your chance to get out of this town. No," as he started to speak. "I know you're broke, but I've still got a stake."

He was silent and she read refusal in his silence. "Too proud to borrow from a woman?" There was a jeer in her voice. "You've done worse."

He said: "It isn't that, Nance. You're a pal. I could borrow from you, but I can't scam with this hanging over my head. I'll get Sol's fifty grand back, then I'll take a powder; but I can't go until I do. I said that I'd find that dough and I will."

"Don't be a fool," her voice was hoarse. "These boys play rough. If they get the idea that you're gumming their game, they'll plant you in a ditch."

He looked at her with narrow eyes. "What boys, Nance? You seem to know a lot about this play."

"I know plenty about this town that I don't print in fan magazines," she told him. "I get around."

"Words," his voice was harsh. "Why not pass out some names."

She said: "Girkin. I gave you that once."

"Where's he tie in? A cheap New York hood."

"He used to hang around the New York club where Elva Meyer undressed," she said, softly. "That wasn't her name then, but she's the same girl that you promoted into lights."

"Is this straight?"

"Did I ever give you a wrong steer, Bill?"

Lennox was silent for a moment, then he shrugged. "That's nothing to keep me awake nights. Girkin may be a big shot in New York, but he doesn't rate out here."

"Doesn't he? I saw him on the boulevard yesterday with French and they didn't act like strangers."

Lennox swore softly. "French of the *El Romano Club*, huh? Nice people."

The girl smiled with her mouth, but

her eyes were serious. "Friend of yours, isn't he?"

Lennox shrugged absently. "So long." He rose. "I'll be seeing you in New York."

She rose also. "You're not losing me, Bill Lennox. I'm in this if you are." She followed him into the street. He grasped her thin wrist in strong fingers.

"Don't play the sap, sweetheart. It would be just that much tougher, having you along."

A cab cruised by. He let go her wrist and jumped to the running-board. The next moment he was inside. "Go ahead fast," he told the startled driver. The cab lurched forward. Lennox peered through the back window. He saw Grogan cross the pavement and wave wildly to an approaching taxi. Lennox found a five in his pocket and passed it to the driver. "There's a guy following us. Lose him."

The driver grinned and turned sharply into Vine, right on Sunset, left at Highland, crashing a signal. Finally, at the corner of Arlington and Pico, he pulled to the curb. "Where to?"

Lennox said: "Take me to Melrose and Van Ness." The driver shrugged and turned towards Western.

Lennox got out at the corner and walked to the apartment house. He rang the bell of suite five, got no answer, tried nine and was answered by a buzz from the door. He jerked it open and started up the stairs. A woman's voice called: "What is it, please?"

Lennox said: "I pushed the wrong bell. Sorry." Her door slammed, and he paused before number five. He knocked without response, then tried the knob. The door was unlocked. He opened it cautiously and stepped into the small hall. For a moment he stood listening. There was no sound in the apartment. He closed the door softly and went along the hall to the living-room door. There he stopped and said something under his breath. The door

was partly open. Through the crack he saw the figure of a man sprawled in the middle of the rug. His quick eyes went about the room, then he pushed the door wide and crossed to the body. The face, twisted with fear and pain, was that of Charley, and he was very dead

7

BILL LENNOX found nothing in the apartment that interested him. There were no papers in the desk, nothing, in fact, except a soiled deck of cards. He went into the bedroom and looked through the closets. Two suits hung there, flashy garments of extreme cut, nothing more. He walked back to the living-room and stopped just inside the door. There was a man looking at the body, a man with a gun in his hand, who said: "Now isn't this swell?" The man was Grogan.

Lennox didn't say anything and the private dick laughed.

"Imagine finding you here." His voice held a note of gloating self-satisfaction. His gun came up so that it bore on the second button of Lennox's vest. "Get the paws in the air, nice boy."

Lennox obeyed, and Grogan picked up the phone. "Gimme Hollywood station, and make it snappy." His eyes never left Lennox's face, the gun did not move. "That you, Bert? Grogan of Rollins and Grogan. Yeah, listen. Is Lew there? Swell. Let me talk to him, will yuh? Hello, Lew, Grogan. Listen. There's a stiff in an apartment on Van Ness." He gave the number. "It's close to Melrose, apartment five. Yeah, I got the mugg. He's standing against the wall with his hands in the air. Make it snappy." He hung up and grinned at Lennox. "Nice weather we're having."

Lennox didn't say anything. He

stood there with his hands in the air. They stood there seven minutes, then a siren moaned below, heavy feet made noise on the stairs, and three men in plainclothes came in. The leader nodded to Grogan and looked at Lennox, then at the huddled body on the floor.

He said: "What's going on here? Who's the stiff?"

Grogan shrugged. "I don't know who he is. I was trailing this bird. He came up here and I sneaked up after him. When I got here, he was searching the joint."

The city detective's eyes went to Lennox. "Well, what's the story?" His voice sounded bored, uninterested.

Lennox shrugged. "When I got here, Charley was on the floor with a knife in his guts. That's all I know."

Grogan pursed his lips and made a funny sound of disbelief. The homicide man said: "Charley who?"

"Bartelli."

"Where's he from?"

"New York."

Two other men came through the apartment door. One said: "What's going on here, Lew?"

The other looked at Lennox and said: "Hello, Bill." Lennox recognized Alder, of the *Post*.

The city detective said: "So you know this guy?"

Alder's eyes widened. "Sure, everybody knows him. He's Bill Lennox of General-Consolidated. What's it all about, Lew?"

The city man looked hard at Grogan. "Thought you said that you were trailing this dude?"

Grogan shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "I was, Sol Spurck's orders."

Both reporters looked interested. Lennox snapped: "Be careful, you fool."

The city detective looked at him. "When I want to hear you talk, I'll ask you. All right, Grogan. Go ahead with the story and don't skip anything."

Grogan said: "Well, yuh see, it's this

way. Ralph Wayborn was snatched—"

"Snatched?"

"Yeah." He went on and told the whole story. The reporters looked at each other. "So I was trailing Lennox to find where he had the dough planted, and I walked in on this."

The city detective said: "So we've got a kidnaping charge on you along with a murder rap."

Lennox said, in a tired voice: "That man's been dead hours. If you birds would think before you open your mouths, you'd know that. Grogan here is my alibi. He can swear that I wasn't in this place five minutes before he walked in." Lennox smiled sweetly at the now silent private detective.

8

NANCY HOBBS said: "So you wouldn't listen to me and you get yourself into a worse jam." They were seated before the Hollywood Station in her car. "Will you go to New York now?"

"Such ideas you have, Brat. I'm going to get that fifty grand."

"You'll probably get a knife about where Charley got his."

"At least that would be a new experience. Who was it that said there is nothing new under the sun?"

She swore whole-heartedly and stepped on the starter. "Where do we go from here?"

"You don't go anywhere," he told her.

"I suppose I'm to hang around, ready to bail you out?" her voice was sarcastic.

He grinned without mirth. "That's a thought," and unlatched the door at his side. "I'll be seeing you." He turned up the collar of his coat against the cold wind from the ocean and walked rapidly along. A block farther down he hailed a cab and climbed in.

"Know where the *El Romano Club* is?" The man didn't and Lennox gave him the address. Fog was beginning to roll in from the southwest. The street lamps looked fuzzy and the auto lamps

glowed with funny rings. Lennox lit a cigarette, snuggled his chin deeper into his coat collar, and stared at nothing.

The *El Romano Club* is located on the top of a storage building. The attendant looked at Lennox, nodded, and motioned him to the elevator. They shot skyward, stepped out into a hallway with blank concrete walls. There were doors off this hall. Lennox knew that some of them opened into storage rooms. The door at the end seemed to open automatically as he stepped before it. He said: "Hello, chiseler," to the man that stood aside for him to enter.

The man grinned in what he thought was a pleasant manner. "Evening, Mr. Lennox. How are you?"

Bill said: "Pretty lousy, Bert. Big crowd tonight?"

The man shrugged expressive shoulders. "Fair. What can you expect with the studios on half-pay?"

Lennox nodded and tossed his hat and coat to the hat-check girl, "lo, gorgeous."

She gave him a dimpled smile. "Hello, Bill. You look like the devil."

"Sure, that's because I've been working for him so long."

He went down the short, carpeted hall and into the main room. The room was large, high-ceilinged and comfortably filled. Three roulette wheels set in line, occupied the center. In the far corner were a group of men and one woman about the crap table. Chuck-a-luck and the half-moon blackjack tables were ranged against the wall. Lennox crossed the room, conscious that people were turning to look at him. A blonde who a week ago would have rushed across the room to attract his attention, presented a pair of too prominent shoulder blades for his inspection.

Lennox's lips thinned. "Just a friendly town," he thought. "When the knife falls, everyone helps you down into the gutter." He paused before the grilled window of the cashier's cage and, picking up a pad of blank checks, filled one in for five hundred.

The man behind the grill took it in his soft white fingers and pretended to study it. Lennox watched him with narrowed eyes. "Don't you read English?"

The cashier said: "You're sure that this is good, Mr. Lennox?"

Lennox said: "Hell, no; it isn't good, and you know it, but you've cashed a hundred like it. I've never failed to pick them up, have I?"

The man shrugged. "Sorry. My orders are not to cash any more checks."

"You mean any more of mine?"

Again the shrug, as he pushed the check towards Lennox. Someone behind him snickered. A voice said: "Did you hear that Sol was getting himself a new office boy?" Several people laughed.

Lennox apparently had not heard. He said: "Is French here?"

The cashier shrugged for the third time. Lennox picked up the check, folded it carefully and slipped it into his pocket as he crossed one corner of the room, went around the end of the metal bar and through a curtained doorway. Before him was a wide hallway with a door at the end. A young man with too black hair was seated on a chair in the bare hall, reading a confession magazine. He dropped the magazine and came to his feet with cat-like grace. "You can't come in here, you."

Lennox said softly: "I'm coming in, lousy. Out of the way."

For the space of a half-minute neither moved. The black-haired one's hand was in his pocket. He said, slowly, distinctly: "You don't rate around here any more, Lennox. Take a tip and get out."

Bill's smile was very thin. "That's where you have your cues mixed, handsome. I still rate, plenty. I'm seeing French, and he's going to like seeing me."

The other's voice was confidential. "Why don't you get wise? When you're through in this town, you're through. Go out easy, pal. I wouldn't like to throw you out."

Lennox hesitated, shrugged, and half turned. The other relaxed slightly. Sud-

denly Lennox's right shoulder sagged, his left came up, and his right fist crossed to the gunman's jaw. The black-haired one went down with a look of surprise and pain. Lennox caught him, eased him to the floor, knelt on his chest, pulled the gun from the side pocket and got another from the shoulder-harness. There hadn't been much noise.

"Now I'll give you a tip," he said, in a low, grim tone. "This town isn't healthy for you. Remember that killing at San Clemente? The D.A.'s office might hear something about that if you aren't out of the village before morning."

He straightened his coat, pocketed the two guns, and went on down the hall to the door. Looking back, he saw the gunman get slowly to his feet. Lennox stuck a hand into his pocket. The man looked at him once, then disappeared into the gambling room.

There were voices in the room beyond the door. One that Lennox knew said: "But, French. How was I to know they had a list of the numbers?"

"You fool! That's what you should have found out. A hell of a help you are. Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"Because I couldn't get away sooner. My uncle kept me at the studio until late. He's half-crazy."

"Yeah." French's voice had a biting quality. "Now get out of here and don't let anyone see you go. I'll call you when I want you."

A door closed somewhere within the room, and Lennox retreated down the passage towards the gambling room. His eyes were narrow, but there was a thin, half-mocking smile about his lips. The voice he had heard belonged to Stan Braun, Sol Spurck's nephew.

He came back along the passage, taking pains to walk heavily.

"Hello, handsome," he said to the empty hall. He didn't shout, but his voice was loud enough to carry to the room beyond. "The boss in? Yeah, well, don't move, rat. This thing in my hand isn't an ornament."

He covered the remaining distance to

the door in quick strides. It wasn't locked and he pushed it inward, only far enough to slip through. A man was just stepping around the flat-topped desk, a man with a young, cold face, and gray hair. He stopped when he saw Bill, his face showing no emotion, his eyes very narrow.

"Hello, Lennox! Didn't Toni tell you that you weren't wanted?"

Lennox's smile was almost child-like. "He did mention something like that, but I didn't believe him."

The gambler took a step backwards and sat down in the desk chair. "Maybe you'll believe me?" The direct, prominent eyes measured Lennox carefully.

Bill walked slowly towards the desk. He took his hand from his coat pocket, calling attention to the fact by doing so very slowly. "The cashier turned down my check. I got the idea that it was your orders."

The man at the desk shifted his weight slightly. "We've had plenty of trouble with your paper, Bill. That bank account of yours is like a sieve, a rubber one."

Lennox said: "You never howled about my paper before. It's always been covered."

The other shrugged expressively. "Spurck always took care of that. I hear that he isn't taking care of it any longer."

"Meaning?"

"Just that. You're off the gold standard as far as Spurck is concerned. Sorry, Bill. If ten will help you?" He drew a large roll from his pocket and hunted through the big bills slowly, insultingly.

Lennox grinned. "Thanks, French, but I'll eat tomorrow." He turned towards the door, then said, across his shoulder: "Don't mind if I hang around a while? I always did like raids."

The man at the desk laughed. "So you'll have me raided. Your mind's getting twisted. You've got yourself mixed with someone important. There isn't a cop in town that would dare touch this joint."

"Like that?" Lennox's voice sounded interested.

"Like that," French told him, blandly.

9



LENNOX went back into the main room. Toni, the slick-haired gunman, was not in sight. Lennox stopped before the bar and spun a half dollar on the polished surface. The white-coated bartender shoved across a scotch and soda, with a twisted bit of lemon peel in the bottom. Lennox tasted his drink, then, hooking his elbows on the edge of the bar, he considered his next move. The blonde, who had given him her back when he first came in, swept past with a black-haired youth in tow. She turned her head.

"Why, it's Mr. Lennox. My dear, I didn't recognize you."

He said, sourly: "It's your age, sweetheart. Age dulls the eyes."

Her face reddened beneath the rouge and she moved hastily away. Someone tugged at Bill's arm. He turned to see Frank Howe. He'd gotten Howe a job in the publicity department six months before. Howe was a little drunk, but it affected neither his speech nor actions.

"Listen, Bill," his voice was a hoarse whisper. "I heard that lousy cashier hand you the runaround. This is my lucky night. Beat the wheel, I did." His hand disappeared into his pants pocket and came out with a crumpled stack of bills. "Money no use to me. Never had any, don't know how to handle it—hey, bartender, a drink. I'm burning up."

Lennox said: "Thanks, kid," he was genuinely touched. Out of a hundred people in the room that he had helped at one time or another, Howe was the only one who seemed to remember. "No can do. Get you in trouble with Spurck."

Howe said: "To hell with Spurck. To hell with the whole lousy industry. Swell job. You take some tramp from be-

hind a lunch counter and build her up until she's writing autographs instead of orders."

He shoved the bills into Lennox's hand and went away from the bar, his drink forgotten. Lennox watched him go. The bartender brought the glasses. Lennox drew a crumpled bill from the wad in his hand and started to hand it over. Then he stopped, stared for an instant at the number on the bill and put it into his pocket. He found some loose silver, paid for the drinks and drank both of them.

That done, he crossed the room and disappeared into the men's lounge. There was a shine stand in the wash-room. He crawled on to the stand and watched the kinky head bob as the boy applied the brush. After a moment, he drew a sheet of paper from his inside pocket and compared the numbers on the bills with those on his list. Five of them tallied. He put the five bills into his breast coat pocket, and shoved his white silk handkerchief on top of them, then thumbed through the rest of the roll.

As he counted them he whistled softly. There were four hundred dollars left. Certainly Howe had been lucky. Lennox knew him well enough to know that the ex-reporter seldom had four dollars at any one time. He paid the shine-boy and climbed from the stand. As he emerged into the main room a newspaper man with two girls walked past.

Lennox said: "Know Frank Howe?"

The man nodded.

"Didn't notice which table he was playing at a little while ago?"

The man nodded again. "Yeah, the center one. He was on thirteen and it came up. He let the money ride and she repeated."

Lennox said: "Thanks," and looked about.

A man came out of the passage which led to French's room. Play stopped at the first table while the man exchanged cases of money with the croupier. This was repeated at the other tables. Lennox frowned. He started forward, then

stopped. For perhaps a minute, he stood, undecided, then moved towards the center table. He had the idea French was withdrawing the bills which bore numbers that were on Lennox's list.

As he stepped to the table, the rat-eyed croupier glanced at him sharply. Lennox apparently did not notice. He watched for several minutes, then bet twenty dollars on black. Red came up and he bet forty, only to be rewarded by double-O. He switched and played the middle group of numbers, won and let it ride. He won again, and shoved the whole pile on to black. Black appeared. He gathered up his winnings and moved towards the crap table.

The lone woman had the dice when he reached the table. He put twenty on the line and watched the green cubes dance across the cloth to turn up a five and six. He picked up his winnings and transferred them to no-pass. She threw snake-eyes.

French came through the curtained door at the end of the bar. He stood for a moment just inside the door, a striking figure, his shirt front gleaming, his gray hair carefully brushed, then he walked across to the crap layout, just as Lennox picked up the dice.

"You're through, Bill."

Lennox turned slowly, deliberately to face him. The room was suddenly quiet. Everyone was watching, breathlessly. Lennox said: "Meaning?"

"Just that," French's voice held a flat quality which was almost metallic. "We don't want your play here. We don't even want you."

The dice rattled in Lennox's hand. He shoved the whole pile of currency on to the line and sent the green cubes dancing across the table with a twist of his wrist. They turned up, six and one. Lennox's eyes met the croupier's. "Pay off, mister."

The man hesitated, his eyes went to French. The owner nodded imperceptibly and the man counted out bills beside those which Lennox had laid on the board. Bill gathered them up slowly,

stripped two tens from the pile and tossed them to the croupier, then folded the rest and slipped them into his pocket.

"Okey, French. I thought that you were yellow." His voice carried across the silent room. "Now I know."

He walked calmly towards the door. No one said anything, no one moved. He got his hat from the check girl, slipped into his overcoat and tossed her a folded bill, then he rode down in the elevator. The elevator man said:

"Take it easy, Mr. Lennox." There was a gun in his hand.

Lennox grinned, "You, too, Mac?"

The man shrugged. "Orders." He stopped the car at the second floor and opened the door. Two men stepped in, one of them was Toni. He smiled when he saw Lennox. "If it isn't my little boy friend." He ran quick hands over the other's coat and removed the guns. "Come on, mugg. This is where you get off."

Lennox obeyed. They went along a poorly lighted passage and down a flight of stairs. Lennox said: "I never knew how French got rid of people he doesn't like."

Toni grinned. "There's lots of things you don't know. One of them is how to keep your mouth buttoned. In there." He pushed open a steel door and shoved Lennox into a curtained touring car. "Hey, Frank!" he called to the driver. Lennox turned his head a little and the gunman brought the barrel of his automatic crashing down on Lennox's skull. "That's for clipping me on the jaw," he muttered, as he shoved his way into the car.

10

CONSCIOUSNESS came back slowly. Lennox groaned, moved slightly, then lay still for several minutes, his eyes open, staring about the dark room. To the right, a window gave an oblong of lighter sky. Morning could not be far away. He raised a hand to the side of his aching head, felt the knob

there, the hair, matted with dry blood. Sounds from another room reached him indistinctly. A cry, a thump as if a heavy object had been thrown against the wall, then the door opened. Instinctively, Lennox closed his eyes. Light showed against his lids.

French's voice said, from a distance. "Take the — in there and let him think it over."

Heavy feet made noise in the room. There was a groan, a hoarse laugh, and the door slammed. The groans continued. Lennox opened his eyes. The room was again in darkness. Cautiously he swung his feet from the couch and sat for a moment, his head in his hands. Then he rose, swayed, and looked about. There was a huddled shape in the chair beside the window. Lennox blinked at it and said, cautiously:

"Who're you?"

The groans ceased. The room was quiet except for the labored breathing from the chair. Lennox moved closer. His head was clearing.

"Come on!" his voice was louder than he intended. "Who *are* you?"

His hand fumbled in his pocket and found a box of matches. He struck one with fingers that shook. The match flared, and Lennox stared at the battered features of Red Girkin. He said: "My —!" and let the match drop to the floor. "They don't play nice, do they?"

Girkin swore heavily, tonelessly. "Let me alone."

Lennox's voice got sharp. "Your playmates will be back in a few minutes to give you another dose. What do you want?"

The gangster said: "Go to hell!" He said it indistinctly, as if his lip got in the way.

Lennox managed a laugh. "Boy, you love punishment. Come on! Who decorated Charley with the chiv?"

"Charley?" There was a new note in Girkin's voice. "What about Charley?"

"Only that he's dead."

"Say, who are you?"

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"A pal of Charley's. Don't you remember? Bill Lennox. I was up at your place the other day."

The man in the chair said slowly: "Yeah, I remember, and Charley's dead. You sure?"

"I found him on the rug with the chiv in his side."

"That damned French."

"So it was French?"

"I'm not talking."

Lennox got mad. "Listen, sucker! Why don't you get next to yourself? Do you think that they've been pounding your pan because they love you? It's a wonder that you aren't in a ditch by now."

The man in the chair found a laugh somewhere and managed to turn it on. It was a poor effort. "They'll keep me until they find out what I did with the ten grand, the dirty — They can beat me, but I don't talk."

Lennox tried a shot in the dark. "Still figuring that Meyer will help you?"

The gangster started to swear again. "That tramp! She got me into this, then she tied a can to me."

It seemed that the flood gates had opened. He talked and talked; finally he got to repeating himself. Lennox turned away and walked towards the window, his lips very thin, his eyes bright.

Suddenly the door opened, a light switch clicked, and Lennox swung about to see Toni. The gunman said, with surprise: "Look who's come to. Hey, chief! The boy scout's awake."

French's voice growled: "Bring him in."

Lennox took a quick step towards the window. Toni seized his shoulder, forcing him towards the door. With a shrug, Lennox relaxed. "Okey! You win."

Toni said: "We win every time, mugg. Start walking."

French sat in a leather chair. His coat was off and the gray hair mussed. There were pouches under his eyes and he looked very tired.

"Well, Bill—"

Lennox said: "Not so hot. Your

boy friend here swings a mean gun."

French said: "Little boys who play outside their own yards get hurt sometimes. Why the hell can't you keep your nose clean?"

Lennox shrugged. "Mind if I sit down?" he moved towards a chair.

The gambler's voice cracked. "Stand still."

Lennox let his eyes widen slowly. "What is this?"

French said: "It's your show-down," he came out of his chair, and they faced each other. Toni shifted his feet, grinning loosely. "What did you tell Frank Howe?"



Lennox hid his start of surprise. "What did I tell Howe? When?"

The gambler growled: "Don't stall, Lennox. You and Howe talked it over last night at the bar. You gave him something and he went away fast. The boys didn't tell me about it until later. They haven't found him yet, but they will. Come on! What did you tell him?"

Lennox grinned. He was beginning to understand why he was still alive. French thought that he had told Howe something at the club, something about the money, perhaps. Lennox said: "I gave him some dough to take home for me, some dough to put in a safe place."

"You—" the gambler took a step for-

ward, his hands clenching at his sides. "Where is he?"

"That's a little mystery you can solve for yourself." Lennox grinned carelessly, much more carelessly than he felt. There was a desk in the corner of the room. He stepped sidewise towards it. French said:

"Stand still, you."

Lennox nodded. "Okey, French, I wouldn't try anything with you." He took another step. "I'm in a jam, I know it. I've been around long enough to know when my number is coming up. What's it worth to you for me to get Howe on the phone and call him off? Does it buy me a ticket to New York?"

French said: "Yes," quickly. He said it too quickly. Lennox knew that New York meant a wash in San Fernando Valley, but—

"Okey! Gimme the phone."

French's eyes searched his. "Don't try any funny stuff," he warned.

"Would I try any funny stuff when Toni has his gun on me?"

He crossed to the desk and, picking up the phone, called the first number that came into his head. As he waited, his hand toyed with a heavy glass inkwell hidden by his body from the other men. Toni still stood beside the door. He had his gun, but he let it hang carelessly at his side.

"That you, Howe?" Lennox demanded, as a sleepy voice asked what the hell he wanted. The voice protested that it wasn't Howe, that he had never heard of Howe, and that if he did now, it would be too soon. Lennox paid no attention.

"Listen, boy!" he said, making his voice sound serious. "That money I gave you, you know, those——"

He picked up the inkwell and half turned so that he could see both French and Toni. "What'll I have him do with them?" he asked the gambler.

Toni's eyes switched from Lennox to his chief's face for an instant and in that instant, Lennox dropped the phone and threw the glass inkwell. He threw

it underhanded, threw it with all the force that he had.

It caught the gunman just above the temple and he went over on to the rug without a sound. Lennox sprang at French. The gambler was tugging at his coat pocket. He had his gun half free as Lennox's fingers closed about his wrist. French tried to jerk free, couldn't and struck Lennox in the face with his free hand. Lennox grabbed his throat and tried to force the gambler's head back. French was too strong.

Slowly, ever so slowly, his hand came from the pocket, bringing his gun with it. Desperately, Lennox clung to the man. French hit him again, squarely on the nose. Tears started from Lennox's eyes, his fingers sank deeper into French's throat. The gambler swung about, carrying Lennox with him, and then across French's shoulder, Bill saw something which almost caused him to relax his grip.

The door into the other room had opened. Girkin, on hands and knees, was crawling towards the gun which lay on the carpet at Toni's side. Even as Lennox saw him, Girkin's hand reached the gun, closed over it, and he reeled to his feet, his eyes burning with hate, staring at French.

The gun came up slowly. Lennox cried out. He was never sure afterwards exactly what he said.

"French!" Girkin's voice cut across the room.

Lennox's fingers slipped from the gambler's throat. Girkin's gun flamed and French stiffened. Lennox threw himself sidewise, out of the line of fire. French paid no attention to him. It was as if the gambler had forgotten his existence. He turned slowly and, as he turned, Girkin fired again. French staggered, went to his knees.

His gun came up, and Lennox saw a hole suddenly appear between Girkin's eyes. The gunman pitched forward without a sound.

French stared at him, coughed twice, went over on his hands, and then set-

tled to the floor. For a minute there was silence in the room, then Lennox bent above Toni, and noted that he was still breathing, but unconscious.

Lennox rose, found a handkerchief, and dabbed at his bleeding nose; then he looked around the room. Behind the desk, a wall safe, its door half open, attracted him. He crossed to the safe and drew out bundles of currency. In all, there were thirty-five thousand dollars. He found a newspaper, wrapped up the money and moved towards the door. Everything was quiet. Evidently there was no one in the house. He wondered vaguely why the shots had not attracted attention.

Outside, it was broad daylight. The house, he saw, was set far up on one of the hillsides north of Beverly. He walked down the long, curving roadway without seeing anyone. He walked for a long time, his head aching dully, the sun growing warmer on his back. Finally he reached a drug-store and called a cab.

11



HE shine-boy looked up as Lennox came through the General gate.

"Morning, Mr. Lennox."

"Hello, Sam." He went on across the lot towards the executive offices. Steps sounded on the concrete behind him. Nancy Hobbs' voice called.

"Oh, Bill!"

He turned and managed a grin. "How 'r' you, Nance?"

She said: "I've been hunting for you since I heard you were out of here, looking every— Your face! What's the matter? What happened?"

"I've been playing house with the boys," he grinned. "Come in while I see Sol, if you want some fun. Then you can drive me to the station."

She followed him towards Spurck's

office. "So you're really going to pull out?"

"You said it. Just as soon as I see Sol."

"I'll wait out here," she said stopping in the reception room. "And Bill, don't let him talk you into anything."

He stopped also, and patted her shoulder. "Don't worry, sweet, I'm washed up." He went through into Spurck's office. Spurck's secretary was beside the big desk taking dictation. Spurck came to his feet.

"Bill?"

"Mr. Lennox to you," Bill told him. "Get Elva Meyer and that precious nephew of yours in here. I want to see them."

Spurck said, "But—your nose!"

"Never mind my nose. Get them."

Spurck swung on the secretary. "What is it you're standing there for? Get them—can't you? Must I do everything about this plant yet?"

"Yes, Mr. Spurck." The secretary bobbed, and disappeared.

Spurck said: "Where have you been? All night, I don't sleep, wondering."

Lennox clipped: "Save it until Braun gets here." He helped himself to a cigarette from the box on Spurck's desk and stood, rolling it between his fingers so that the tobacco spilled out a little at each end. The door opened and Elva Meyer came in. "You wanted—" she stopped when she saw Lennox.

Bill said: "Sit down."

"I—er—"

His voice snapped: "Sit down!"

She sank into a chair. Spurck looked at her, then at Lennox, started to speak, then changed his mind. Again the door came open and Braun entered the room. His face changed when he saw Lennox, losing its color; his lips grew almost pallid. "Hello, Bill?" he managed.

Lennox nodded. He crossed to the desk and tore the newspaper wrapping from the package. Money spilled out upon the desk. Spurck made a glad sound, deep in his throat. Braun and the girl exchanged quick, startled glances.

Lennox said: "There's thirty-five grand there, Sol. You'll have to take the rest out of Braun's salary."

Spurck, who had been fingering the money, looked up quickly. Braun made a strangled noise. "You can't —"

Lennox said: "Shut up! Listen, Sol! This relative of yours has been bucking the wheel. He dropped plenty to French. French had his paper for fifty grand and was threatening to come to you. Someone got the bright idea of snatching Wayborn and soaking you fifty grand to get him back. They figured that you'd call Braun in and let him handle it, but you didn't. You showed the letter to me." He stopped and lit the cigarette.

"Meyer here has been playing around with Braun when people weren't watching. He told her about his jam and the Wayborn idea and she put him in touch with Girkin. Girkin and Charley did the dirty work—"

"It's a lie!" Braun was on his feet.

Lennox said, coldly: "See this nose?" He touched it with his finger. "The man that gave me that is dead. Shut up!"

Braun sank back in his chair with a sick look.

Lennox went on:

"Girkin thought that Meyer was still his moll. He didn't know that he was washed up there. When he found out, he held up ten grand. I don't know where it is. Neither did French. They grabbed Girkin and tried to make him talk. They searched his apartment and stuck a chiv into Charley's ribs when he walked in on them. That's about all."

Braun said: "You can't prove it, you can't prove it."

Lennox looked at him. "For the first time in your life, you're right. French and Girkin are dead, but I don't have to prove it. Sol knows."

Spurck was looking at his nephew. "Loafer!" he shouted. "Loafer! Get out!" He waved his arms wildly. Braun tried to say something. Spurck moved around the desk towards him. Braun went out fast.

Lennox said: "That will be about all, Sol. I'm washed up here. It's New York and some rest for me."

Spurck said: "But listen once, will you? I——"

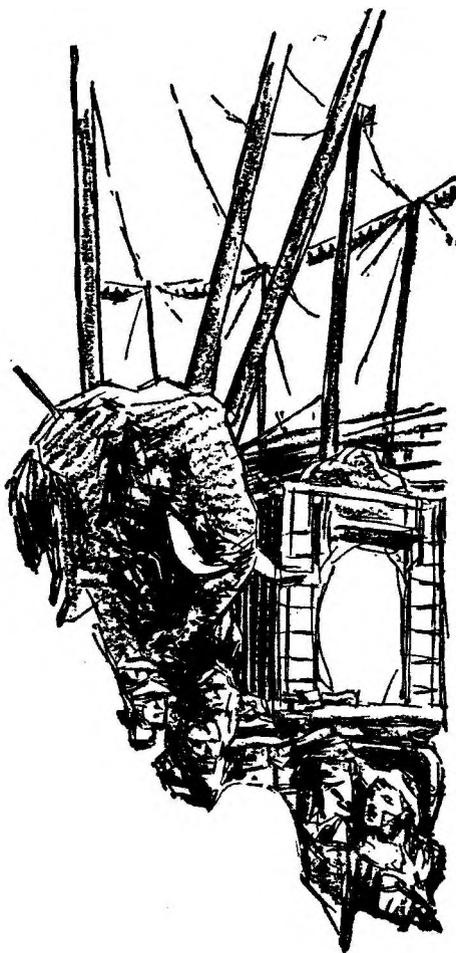
NANCY HOBBS had been waiting a long time. She looked at her watch again, just as the door opened and Lennox came out. She told him: "You'll have to hurry. There isn't much time."

He didn't meet her eyes, "I'm not going today, Nance."

"Bill!" she was facing him, her hands

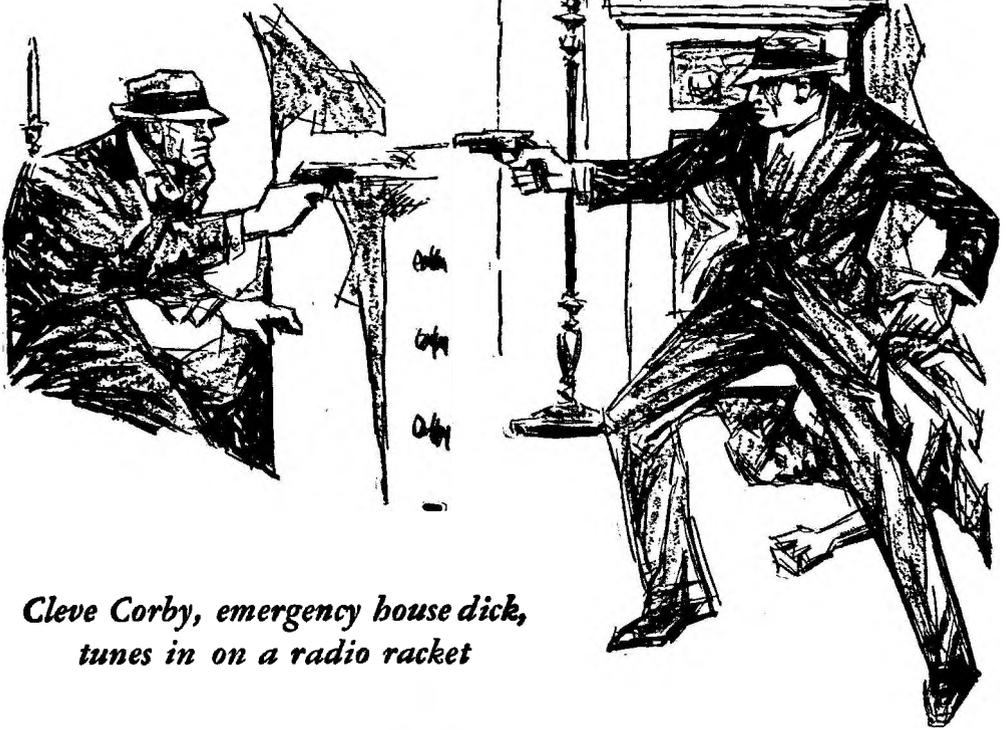
on his shoulders, forcing him to look at her. "You've let Spurck——"

He shrugged wearily. "Sol's got a new idea for a picture. All about an actress who has her leading man kidnaped to raise money for her boy friend so that he won't have to go to the big-house. Sol says that it's the best idea in years. That it is 'superb, stupendous, colossal.' That's just the usual bunk talk, of course, but I think that I'll hang around and see how it turns out. A few weeks won't matter, and this picture may be a little different."



House Dick

By EUGENE CUNNINGHAM



Cleve Corby, emergency house dick, tunes in on a radio racket



ORBY, Ranger Captain, now on special duty under cover as house dick of Alrio's *Capitán*, swept the lounge with mechanical stare, but found nobody of interest.

He came down five steps into the lobby and looked around. He was tall, wide-shouldered; tailored gray flannels showed off his lean, flat-muscle straightness.

At the cigar stand young Geoff Annis, KXNE announcer, and his bodyguard were smiling at Dorris Morell, the slim, blonde girl behind the counter. Corby moved that way, putting into his coat pocket the letter he had been reading from the Adjutant General. He looked

at Annis with a narrowing of his dark blue eyes.

Corby was thinking that things had a way of interlocking here in Alrio, as elsewhere along the Rio Grande. The twenty stolen cars run into Mexico *might* tie up to Shonny, Annis' radio boss, who was making a racket of an anti-vice crusade.

Corby stopped, facing young Annis, and spoke what was on his mind.

"You and Shonny are working a racket!" he told him. "Don't try to kid me! This yen of Shonny's for a radio crusade to wipe out gambling and drinking and the red lights on this side the River is a plain shake-down!

"Shonny landed in Alrio from Lord knows where. He leased KXNE from the Mexicans. He announced that, from

then on, The Voice of the Middle Border would speak for reform. La-loney! When he opened up the studio on our roof—and bought you along with the mike, Geoff—he started shaking down the boys over here.”

“Ah, now!” Annis protested. He got a package of Chesterfields from the pocket of his blue coat. As he put a cigarette in his mouth and bent to the electric lighter, his hand shook. Behind him, the plain-clothesman shaped a word soundlessly — *Screwy!* Annis straightened, puffing jerkily.

“Why else would he want the station?” Corby demanded. “Where would he make the price of *frijoles*, except in a racket? Through advertising? That’s a panic! What he does is sing piously to our honest busybodies over here and collect a little from ’em to carry on the great moral crusade. Promises to name every man and woman who rides to our top floor and goes into the *Club Capitán*. Calls the *Club* a private gambling house and saloon and den of sin. Promises he’ll broadcast the address of every gambling house in Alrio and ask the police why they don’t raid. Then he goes around and collects—for *forgetting* names.”

Annis moved slim shoulders uncertainly. He looked vaguely down at the crease of his gray trousers, faked a grin.

“You’d better tell Shonny all that!” he murmured. “Me, I’m just a wage slave. If Shonny tells me to fake a tap dance, or sing *Little Joe the Wrangler*, or serve as KXNE Funny Paper Man on Sunday, I do it! It’s the Depression. Thirty a week buys—Chesterfields.”

“Does it pay the life insurance premiums, too?” Corby asked grimly. “Is it pay enough for handling dynamite? I see that Cap’ Ramsdale’s had to give you and Shonny police protection. *Por dios!* I have drawn some tough assignments in my time. But even when I was helping clean up the oil fields, I didn’t take the risks you’re taking.”

“And it was *clean* work, too—what you were doing,” Dorris Morrell said

in a thoughtful voice. “If you’d got rubbed out, Cleve, they would have buried you without fumigation. A racket’s different.”

Annis looked bitterly at her, with blood surging up into his thin, pleasant face. But the girl’s dark eyes were trained on one of the Conquest frescoes of the lobby ceiling.

“Listen, Geoff!” Corby said angrily, moving in closer to the boy. “Am I a friend of yours? *Bueno*, then! Take my advice and cut loose from that pot-bellied racketeer before you get hurt. Shonny’s grabbing the coin. Let him take the trouble.”

Annis would not meet his eyes.

“Don’t try to play innocent with me!” Corby growled. “I have been in this game too long. You know damn’ well it’s a dirty racket. Alrio’s no worse than any other town its size on the Border. Forty thousand whites and forty thousand Mexicans, on the dry bank of the Rio Grande, with Norte for a wide open, dripping wet suburb across the River, make for a special situation.

“Over here, we’ve got about what the mine-run of the people want. A few gambling houses. A red-light district officially disowned and damn’ well regulated. Race books and slot machines in the cigar stores and pool halls. Such bootlegging as we need. Maybe a few wild parties here and there, now and then. And Shonny calls *that* Vice Rampant!”

“I don’t know a thing about it!” Annis said—too quickly.

“No? Well, here’s what I’m trying to keep you from finding out: What it’s like to stop a hot slug from somebody who’s out to shut Shonny’s big, blabbing mouth. If he was honest, it would be different. But we all know it’s a racket.”

“I—well—” Annis dropped his shortened cigarette into a tall vase. “I’ve got to get up to the studio,” he finished lamely.

Corby stared grimly after him. In a sense, none of this particularly affected him. The Adjutant General at

Austin had planted him here to nose out an international gang dealing in everything from hot cars to dope. But it did seem a shame to see Annis going to pieces. He watched as the boy trailed towards the elevators with the bored cop at his heels. Then, at the stair Annis stopped and looked down at his tan-and-white oxfords.

THE smudgy hollows under his eyes were plain. Partly liquor, Corby thought, partly worry over Gwen Sayre. It was common gossip that the big red-head had given Annis the air when his money had been blown on her.

Annis took off his Panama, tugged a gray handkerchief from his breast pocket and mopped his low forehead to the roots of his yellow hair. He went slowly down the stairs towards the street.

"He gets in my hair!" Corby told Dorris angrily. "Shonny knows his racket. But that poor Born Amateur, all *he* can see is his lousy thirty a week!"

"You're a good egg—you know it?" the girl said softly. Then she moved a flat magazine towards him. "Oh! I spotted a mugg a while ago. Wide, dark face, nose a little flattened—sort of Italian type. I've seen him in one of these Wanted line-ups, not so long ago. He didn't wear sun glasses, then, of course."

Corby nodded absently. He had placed the girl in this spot, but this was known as little as was Corby's official standing. She pinched his arm.

"Listen to me! He's been pussyfooting in here five times within four days. I don't believe it's because he likes our ice water, either! I spotted the amber glasses for green whiskers, the minute I saw him. I knew I'd seen him in one of the line-ups. But now I can't find him."

"If he comes in again, give me the high sign and I'll try to check on him. Oh! Has my dear friend, Captain of Detectives Daniel Wall, been gumshoeing, today?"

"He came in, while you were at the

station with the paperhanger," she nodded. "Dan's interested in *how* you hook to Shonny. Not *if* you're snooping for Shonny, understand, but *that* you are. I told him you wouldn't touch Shonny money with a ten-foot pole. But he didn't believe me. He's not fond of you, Cleve. You've walked on his toes too often. And, too, Dan has notions. . . . He thinks maybe you're not just the house dick you proclaim yourself. He wonders if Captain Pat Ramsdell and Chief Lowrey don't know more than they tell about you—more than he knows."

Corby patted her hand and smiled.

"But *you* know that I'm just a common ex-Ranger, glad to make my room and board as the *Capitán's* house dick? If we place this lamster of yours and the magazine pays you a hundred, can I bum five *pesos* off you?"

"Sometimes I have notions about you, too," she said—without an answering smile.

"Shake 'em off! And be careful, Dorris. Depression's still on. Don't identify any of our cash customers as yeggs. We can't even afford to throw Shonny off our roof, for fear of a lawsuit for busted contract. We—"

He checked himself abruptly and went quietly away from the counter and towards a Phoenix palm in a tube at the stair-head. He leaned around the palm and tapped a squat, chocolate-colored Mexican with his left hand. The man spun like a startled cat, then grinned.

"A month ago, Cuchillo," Corby said grimly, "I told you to stay out of here."

"But my *patron*, the *señor* Blackie, commanded me. I look for him. It was a message for me to carry."

"I have so much sadness," Corby sighed. "But Blackie Drake is not here. I know. For when such as he is within a mile of me—I do not fail to know it."

"But I have the permission to look, to wait, for him?"

"If you give to me those two belly guns you carry," Corby nodded pleasantly. "Certainly!"

Blackie Drake's chauffeur skated back towards the elevators. He crouched a little, but he kept his clawing hands at his sides. Corby leaned a little towards him, with his right hand up under the left flap of his coat. This Cuchillo was all bad.

"*Afuera!*" Corby ordered him grimly. "Outside with you! And do not come back. Careful, Cuchillo! But—you will please yourself. . . . In an alley, I have heard, you are quite a fellow with those pistols. In a hotel—why, what do *you* believe?"

The squat gunman began to circle, to move towards the stair and keep his face towards the tall man. Corby pivoted, also. He watched Cuchillo go downstairs and slam through the door opened by the *Capitán's* doorman. Scowlingly, then, Corby turned back towards the lobby. He looked vacantly around, then stared down the flight of steps again. He stood there for a while, but Cuchillo did not come back.

"Now, what was Blackie's pet chimp' doing in here?" Corby muttered to himself. "Shonny hasn't mentioned Blackie's *Manhattan Club*, yet. This damn' business is getting complicated!"

Dorris called to him, lifting her hand. Against the desk, Hurd, the *Capitán's* manager, leaned beside Ron Brady, who managed the *Club Capitán* on the hotel's twelfth floor. They were both watching him, Corby observed.



He had taken two steps towards them when the shot sounded downstairs. Corby spun about and jumped for the stair-head. A second shot roared below him, and a third. He took the twenty steps in three great dropping jumps.

The *Capitán's* ground floor was lined on both Ninth Street and De Vaca Avenue by small, smart shops. They backed on a dusky corridor that enclosed two sides of the gift shop. Corby ran along this corridor, passing the side-door on

De Vaca a moment after the echoes of the last shot had died away.

He whirled left, towards the men's washroom. The policeman, who was bodyguard for Geoff Annis, was now sitting in the corridor outside the washroom. He gripped his right shoulder with his left hand. Corby merely glanced at him, then stopped to stare into the long, tiled room.

There was a shoe-shining bench across the end of the washroom, its back just below the sill of the window opening upon a paved alley. At the foot of this bench Geoff Annis sprawled face-down upon the floor. His yellow hair was blotched by red, now.

From under the door of a stall two huge, white canvas-shod feet projected. They shook as Corby stared. He squatted to look under the other doors. Nobody was in the place but Boston Brown, the attendant, owner of those trembling feet.

Corby ran to the bench, his heavy single-action Colt in his hand. He stepped up on the bench and cautiously looked out, towards the alley-mouth on De Vaca, towards the railroad on the left hand. He could see nothing moving. He went back, then, to the door. The policeman was on his feet now. Blood seeped down his white shirt front.

"Somebody popped him from the alley while he was gettin' his shoes cleaned," he said stiffly. "I was standin' here in the door. I seen a gun pushin' on the screen after the shot. I pulled an' whanged away. But I couldn't see him clear. He seen *me* easy. Gawd! Annis is sure dead!"

Corby pushed past him and ran to the De Vaca side-door. Men were beginning to crowd out of the brokerage office and the little stores—a woman or two. They shook their heads as Corby snapped a question. He banged outside and to the alley. He ran up it, clear to the auto park adjoining the *Capitán's* near the railroad. It was well-filled with cars. He wasted ten minutes here. Nobody had seen a man run in.

When he came back to Ninth Street

and down to the hotel's main door, a police radio car was standing empty before the entrance. He went around to the washroom. Two uniformed policemen were there, and a tubby, bald little man—Rule, justice of the peace and coroner. Captain Dan Wall stepped from a corner and looked at Corby. He was shorter than the detective, wider of shoulder, beginning to get paunchy and to show jowls.

He stared suspiciously, now, hazel eyes merest slits as he tilted his big head and let his lids sag. Corby shrugged.

"I went up to the auto park. Nobody saw a thing. Took the shots for backfires. There were so many people, tourists and drivers, in and out, that our man could easily have walked through 'em without being noticed."

Silently, Wall held out two shells. Corby looked at them, nodded.

"From a .45 automatic," he drawled, without interest. "You find 'em outside the window? I had an idea they'd be there."

"Any—notions?" Wall asked him in a flat voice, staring steadily at Corby.

"I chased Blackie Drake's Cuchillo out of the place, three or four minutes before the first shot sounded. That mean anything?"

"Cuchillo!" Wall grunted. His heavy mouth sagged a little under a wispy black mustache. "What was that gorilla doing?"

"He was hanging around behind a palm. *That* was plenty, for me—when the palm belonged to the hotel. I told him he'd be acceptable, if not welcome, after I'd searched him. So—he high-tailed it. I watched him through the door. Don't know which way he went. But we can find out, of course. Cuchillo, though, packs two .38 double-actions."

"There'd be a law against his borrowing a .45," Wall nodded sarcastically.

"Well, no. . . . No more than against his packing the .38's," Corby shrugged. "And if that's okey with you people—"

He looked down at the still body of

Geoff Annis. His eyes were dark and hard as he looked at the pitiful huddle on the white floor.

"The Born Amateur," he said slowly. "At a racket, or with a woman—the Born Amateur."

He did not see Annis for an instant, after that, though he was staring straight at him. Slowly, he turned back to Wall, who was watching him steadily.

"I'd not say it was Cuchillo," he grunted, as much to cover up his thoughts as to offer Wall information. "Cuchillo could have made it around to the alley on a tip, all right, and shot Annis through the window. But it would seem funny—his loafing around the lobby in my sight, the way he was—right before pulling a kill. And if Cuchillo has been in the place lately, until today, I don't know it."

"How about his boss? How about Blackie Drake?"

"I saw Blackie in the coffee shop, a week or so ago. Well—I'm going upstairs—break the sad news to the management. So far as I'm concerned, Hurd can tell Shonny."

"*You* won't tell Shonny?" Wall's voice was openly skeptical. "Why, you'll surprise me yet, Corby—maybe."

"What? A common house dick?" Corby grinned. "Surprise *you*?"

"I *said*—maybe," Wall nodded. There was no answering grin on his lips. "Be seeing you."

Corby met Hurd in the corridor. With the manager was Frazier, Number Two house man, a grim-faced ex-sergeant of the Army, and a detail man without equal. Hurd's hands were shaking. He swallowed as he stopped before Corby.

"Young Annis! God! I knew something like this would happen. The Board of Directors will give me hell. But how I could help it—It'll give the hotel a black eye—"

"I don't think so. Maybe it'll give it a fascinating rep. Frazier, will you go to bat? I'm liable to be—just anywhere, for a while. So, don't bother to look for me. Just handle whatever comes up

in your own way. It'll be routine, mostly, anyway. That dumb cop who was supposed to be guarding Annis didn't see anything but a gun against the screen, after the first shot. He blazed away and missed and got winged himself. They've run him down to the Emergency. But watch Wall. He's making himself felt all over the place."

"But—where are you going?" Hurd demanded fussily. "It seems to me that, right now, with Shonny due to raise hell, you ought to be here—"

"Maybe Shonny will work himself down to a whisper on Frazier, while I'm gone. And think what it'll mean to me, to meet Shonny when he's just whispering!"



ORBY worked his way through the women shoppers on the ground floor of the *Model* and squeezed into an elevator. A

directory in the car informed him that Ladies' Ready-to-Wear was on the fourth floor. He got out and looked helplessly around the countered space. He stepped back near a big three-part mirror, then stepped away when two women came up and looked indignantly at him.

He crossed the carpeted aisle. Gwen Sayre was coming between counters and he stared hard at her face. There was nothing about the girl's swaying walk to show feeling of any kind. Corby frowned. Then she saw him. Hard alertness came into her long, light-blue eyes and she seemed to hesitate. But she checked herself so briefly that it was hardly apparent. Then she came on, face expressionless, humming softly. She put up a shiny-nailed hand and touched her gorgeous red hair.

"Miss Sayre," Corby said quietly, "I'm Cleve Corby, house detective at the *Capitán*. May I ask you a question or two?"

"Of co'se," she said in a flat, indifferent drawl. "But what po' little

me could tell Mr. Cleve Corby—"

She looked slantingly up at Corby, sat down in a modernistic black-and-silver chair and stretched her legs. She looked pleasantly along the curves of thigh and calf.

Corby studied her. She was a cool proposition, by all reports. She had played around with Annis for six months—while his savings lasted, Corby guessed. Then there had been a break—something like two weeks before. The announcer had begun to appear in the *Club Capitán* and elsewhere in their usual haunts on both sides of the River, without Gwen Sayre.

"Why did you give Geoff his ticket?" he asked abruptly.

"Suh?" she said frigidly. "I won't answer any questions about my p'sonal affairs—"

"When'd you see him last?"

"Oh—not for ages. We—just wasn't so *sympathetic*."

She looked up at him, then down again. Corby's mouth tightened. Thought she could stage an act for him, did she. . . . He leaned a little towards her. And she braced herself. He saw her stiffen.

"Geoff Annis came to see you yesterday!" he said flatly. "Now, you can talk to me, or you can talk down at the station. I don't particularly give a whoop which you elect to do. Maybe you were Geoff Annis' idea of a big heart throb, but you don't show anywhere on my indicator! Get that! and can the Soft Southern accents, too. I happen to be Texas—and *not* via Cincinnati! You'd better talk, when I ask you something! Who are you going places with, these days?"

"Nobody!" she said viciously. She glared up at him openly. "And I'll thank you—"

"You won't thank me, later on! So nobody's taken Geoff's place? We'll pass that one for a while. What did Geoff say, when he came up yesterday?"

"What would you *expect* him to say? Begged me to let him hang around some

more! Him! on a lousy thirty a week!"

"What else did he say? When you said you could only be a sister to thirty a week."

"Ah, he peddled a lot of baloney! Bragged and begged — begged and bragged. I told him when he *done* all the things he bragged he was going to do, to come around."

"What'd he brag about?" Something was here. Corby smelled it!

"Ah—I couldn't make it out. He was just handing me a line. Something about KXNE—about making a lot out of it. I asked him—how. But he wouldn't tell. He *couldn't* tell. It was nothing but a line. Him—at thirty a week! Talking real money? I told him to show me when he got it."

"I—see!" Corby said slowly. But he did not see, at all. "Oh! Was he jealous of the new one?"

"I told you there wasn't a new one! You can't trip me up by asking the same question over again. There's no new one! And now—"

Gwen Sayre got up in a languorous fashion best calculated to bring all her exciting curves into prominence. Head a little back, she smiled faintly.

"And now, Mr. Corby—"

"I was wondering," he said in a puzzled voice. "Is this new one jealous? Was *he* jealous of Annis?"

Her eyes flickered, then she caught herself.

"Jealous enough," he went on, very slowly, "to, say—put a bullet into Annis' head, about a half-hour ago, in the *Capitán's* washroom?"

She screamed, then flung up her hand and caught the back of it between her teeth. Corby stared into the cold, narrowed blue eyes. But he could not read them.

He went back to the elevator.

"He was going to make thousands, he told her." Corby was muttering to himself again, not a rare habit of a rider of the plains. "It doesn't add up. If I know my Shonny, a five-dollar raise would have been the limit of Geoff's extra

prosperity. *Was* it just a line? Or did he think he could cut in on Shonny's shake-down of our greats and near-greats, our gambling-house and red-light guys?"

Leaving the elevator, going almost blindly through the people in the store, he whistled soundlessly.

"The one about Gwen's new flame being jealous of Annis is *not* so good. For Gwen was clear off Geoff. Now, if Geoff had gunned up the new meal ticket, *that* would have been too regulation to print!"

CORBY crossed Fifth Street from the *Model*, to a drug-store showing a Bell sign. He shut himself in a booth at the back and called the *Capitán*.

"Cigar stand," he told the switchboard girl. After a moment, Dorris answered. He said: "How's old Camera Eye?"

"Listen!" she gasped. "I got my man. It's Dago Dominick, from Cleveland! Wait a minute—I'll read you what it says—it was three months ago they published his picture—I got the back numbers of the magazine and hunted—"

"You don't say!" Corby cried politely. But he listened frowningly.

"He was in the hotel, pussyfooting, not twenty minutes before Geoff was killed! Toughest egg in Cleveland—Wanted for a double-murder—rates up in the Top Dozen of Gorillas for the United States and Chicago! Cleve—"

"Well, I'll hear more about him, later on. Is Shonny there? What'd Wall say to him? And what'd he say to Wall?"

"Yes—and plenty, plenty! for the next two questions. Shonny's in the studio, now. He's getting ready to take the mike himself. Going to tell the world that the Organized Forces of Evil have struck down the Young Crusader. But Annis' blood will only be a sacred scarlet token, the banner under which—and so forth. He and Dan Wall staged their act right here. Dan wanted to know who had made threats. Shonny waved with both hands, indicating—who *hadn't*?

Wall got ugly—wanted names and dates. Shonny got uglier. And you're to get in touch with Tom Embert at the first opportunity."

"What does Tom want? Exclusive story for the *Star*? Hasn't Dink Boly been around?"

"Dink phoned in a flash for the *Star* extra. He said to tell you that he trusted you to save him something exclusive. What his boss, Embert, wants, I don't know. Hurd's all burned up, to know what the publisher of the *Star* wants with the *Capitán's* house dick. Embert wouldn't tell him. It's something special. Where are you?"

"Neck-deep, darling! Just neck-deep. I'll call you back."

He hung up, got out another nickel and dropped it in the slot.

"North 5," he said absently to the operator. To the *Star's* switchboard girl he grunted: "Mr. Embert, Corby calling."

"Fine! I'm keeping a line clear for you, Mr. Corby," the girl told him. "One minute. He's on the other phone."

"Corby?" Young Embert had a pleasant low voice. He was excited, now, and talking fast. "My end's okey. How's yours?"

"This is a pay-phone in a booth. Ought to be all right."

"Listen, then: I'm going to tell you something that only Dink Boly and I know. I'm not giving it to Dan Wall if I can help it. Or to Captain Ramsdale, for that would be the same thing. I don't like Wall. In case this information pans anything, you and Dink will get together on a story for us. Is that fair?"

"It sounds fair enough. I'm not likely to spill over to the *Informér*. Shoot!"

"Annis came to me, three days ago. We'd run an editorial or two, you know, sort of—well, inquiring into Shonny's insides. The *Star* stands for decency, of course. But it also stands for moderation, for common sense. And when a stranger comes to town and begins to lecture us about our morals, he ought to be willing to produce his *bonafides*."

"I read the editorials. I liked 'em. So Annis came to see you?"

"He wanted to know if I'd pay him five thousand cash for the lowdown on Shonny—everything on him. His real purpose in taking over KXNE, his hook-ups— Well I knew that Geoff was hard up. I get around. I knew why Gwen Sayre gave him the air. His proposition sounded pretty much on the up-and-up. But I explained to him that I'd have to sell about a hundred thousand extras just to get the money back. *But* I offered him five hundred, out of my own pocket, for his proofs."

"I get the picture. Five hundred wouldn't get him Gwen Sayre back," Corby grunted. "So what?"

"He went off. But yesterday, he phoned me! Laughed it all off! He said he was just peddling a line. Said that Shonny is absolutely on the level."

"That sounds as if he'd met somebody who offered him more than five hundred. Well, I'll think about that angle, Tom. Thanks!"



DETECTIVE CORBY came out of the drug-store into the brilliant sunlight of afternoon. He hesitated under the drug-store awning, then crossed the pavement of De Vaca. Alrio was split into East and West by the wide boulevard. A mile-square eastern section was as foreign as anything across the Rio Grande in Mexico. "Little Mexico" was almost a town in itself, east of De Vaca from the sandy river-bank of De Soto Avenue.

Corby went at his cat-like step up to Seventh, turned east for a block, then moved north on Coahuila to the dingy, stuccoed city jail. He nodded to lounging policemen on the bench outside Headquarters door and went on into a dingy hallway, climbed a narrow stair and stepped into a barn of an office. A sergeant bent over the finger-printing table looked around and nodded.

"Ramsdale in?" Corby asked him.

The sergeant shook his head. Then, from the street below, came the squeak of brakes. Heavy steps shuffled on the stairs and a grim, drawling Texas voice said:

"*Git up there, Cuchillo!*"

"My *patron* will—"

The sentence in Spanish ended midway with a grunt. Corby turned and watched the doorway he had entered. The squat gunman who drove Blackie Drake's yellow Packard was first inside the room. A tall, pink-faced young patrolman was just behind Cuchillo. Then little Pat Ramsdale, senior captain of Alrio police, who had been a famous Ranger sergeant twenty years before, came loafing in.

"*Como 'sta, Cleve?*" he drawled. "I reckon you can help out with this monkey. It was your tip put me after him. Dan Wall told me."

Against wizened brown skin his narrow eyes glinted like bits of turquoise on saddle leather. He jerked his head slightly, indicating the closed door on the right. The big policeman pushed Cuchillo that way, reached past him to turn the knob, hustled the Mexican through.

"We checked that slug out o' Annis' skull," Ramsdale told Corby. "I figured it for a .45, account o' the shells Dan picked up. But they *might've* been chunked in the alley for a stall. The slug was a .45, all right. Automatic. Cuchillo was packin' his usual two .38 belly guns."

"Blackie know you pinched him?"

Something like the shadow of a grin played about the wrinkles of Ramsdale's face. He ran an easing finger under the shoulder-strap of the black Sam Browne belt that crossed his blue serge shirt.

"Cuchillo can worry about that," he drawled.

They went into the chief's office and Ramsdale locked the door. Cuchillo stood in the middle of the floor. His face was sulkily set. The big patrolman watched him with eyes almost closed.

"Did you kill the man, Annis, in the *Capitán?*" Ramsdale asked in Spanish. He spoke without tone. "Through the alley window?"

Cuchillo laughed, staring insolently at the little captain.

"Hell with you!" he said in harsh English.

The patrolman's sleepy eyes slid around to Ramsdale. Then he took a tigerish step forward and hooked a right to Cuchillo's belly. The gunman groaned agonizedly, skated backward and sat down upon the floor. The patrolman leaned to Cuchillo, caught him by the shoulder and hauled him up. He looked at him for a moment, then hit him again in the belly.

"You killed him through the alley window," Ramsdale suggested drawlingly, when Cuchillo was sprawled on the floor, gasping painfully. "With an automatic pistol. Where is the pistol?"

"I did not kill anybody!" Cuchillo panted. "I came from the hotel—when *Señor* Corby told me to go. I saw my *patron* on the other side of Avenida De Vaca. I crossed to him. He gave me a note. Then we heard the shots. We did not go to see what they might mean, even. There was need for hurry about this note. I went on. So did my *patron*."

"Where did you take the note?"

"Ask my *patron!*" Cuchillo snarled. "It is his affair."

The patrolman's sleepy eyes rolled inquiringly to Ramsdale, who made a slight, dissenting nod and stared fixedly at Cuchillo.

"Did anyone see you, on the far side of De Vaca, while you talked to Blackie Drake?"

The Mexican shrugged indifferently. "I do not know. Ask my *patron!* You come, you arrest me, you take from me the pistols which I have the permit to carry. You will hear from him!"

A hand beat hard on the other side of the door. Ramsdale slid back and turned the key, opened the door and looked through the crack. Then he stepped aside. Corby faced that way. Blackie

Drake, tall, immaculate in gray worsted and stiff straw, shouldered in. The gambler's long face, his liquid dark eyes, had no expression. That made his furious voice sound strange.

"You can't pull this, Ramsdale! By —! I'll have you know that—"

"You mean I can't pull Cuchillo?" Ramsdale asked softly. "Well, I have pulled him. An' don't bother about havin' me know somethin'. Sometimes, I think I know almost too much already!"

Cuchillo got up from the floor. He watched Drake.

"You pulled him for that Annis kill. And he didn't have a damned thing to do with it. He was talking to me in front of the Diamond Shop, clear across the street, when the shooting started."

"So he said," Ramsdale nodded. "But when a monkey like Cuchillo's close to a kill in Alrio, we naturally try to pass the time o' day with him. He's been close to *so* many, you know."

"You never pinned any of 'em on him, though!" Drake said contemptuously. "Now, I'll alibi him across the board. Is that good enough for you, or do I have to get Cohen down here, or—something?"

"You wouldn't have any *reason* for wanting Annis gunned up, *would* you, Drake?" Corby asked sympathetically.

The gambler turned his mask-like face on him. He stared steadily. Again, face and tone seemed to belong to different men as he snarled: "Any fool'd know that!"

The door opened. Dan Wall came in. He looked around from one to another. He jerked his head towards Cuchillo, looking at Ramsdale. He took off his Panama and wiped his pink forehead with a sleeve of the striped seersucker coat he carried over his arm.

"Alibi?" he asked Ramsdale, who nodded.

"You damn' well right he's got an alibi!" Blackie Drake rasped at Wall. "Now—"

"But I'll hold him, Blackie." Ramsdale said negligently. "A one-man alibi's

not so hot. This is a murder case. An' Shonny'll be on my neck. That means all the churches an' such-like, too. While the Chief's gone, it's *my* neck."

"When'll Frank be back?" Drake demanded.

"Week after tomorrow. He's goin' to stop off in Dallas to see his folks on the way home. I won't bother him if I can help it."

"He'll be bothered, plenty. So will you—if Cuchillo's not out of here *pronto*! What the hell's into you eggs, anyhow? Because Corby gives him the bums' rush out of the *Capitán*—where I'd told him to come, to see me!—you try to frame him for Annis' kill. Hell's bells! Anybody knew what was coming to Annis! When he helped Shonny stir up this mess about exposing gamblers and all, the dumbest cluck in Alrio knew that a blowup would come! Him and Shonny *asked* for it—"

"We looked for it," Corby admitted in a worried voice. "But—why Annis? The—'dumbest cluck in Alrio' knew that Annis was just reading Shonny's copy. *He* didn't know anything. Or—*did* he? Has Shonny come to you, Drake? Or—Annis?"

"Neither one came to me! Good thing! I'd have chucked 'em out on their rump! Maybe they went to Ron Brady—to try a shakedown from the *Club Capitán*. Hell! It's the *Club* that Shonny's really been gunning for."

"Neither one came to you, then?"

"I said it, once. You know, Corby, for a house dick, you take a hell of a lot of interest in things outside the *Capitán*. You have, all along. You're *watching* your step, of course?"

"I liked the kid," Corby said in a flat voice. "Before somebody talked Gwen Sayre into chucking him over—and before Shonny bought him with the mike at KXNE, too—Geoff was a damn' nice kid. It's going to be a real pleasure to run down to Huntsville, when his killer fries in the chair! I'm promising myself that little trip."

Drake stared at him, then turned to Cuchillo.

"Don't worry," he told the Mexican. "These birds haven't a damn' thing on you, *hombre!* And I'll spring you—*pronto!*"

"*No tengo trabajo!*" Cuchillo shrugged stolidly. "I have no worry!"

Drake stared from Ramsdale to Corby. Then he turned, went fast to the door, opened it and shouldered through. Corby whistled softly, staring at the closed door.



RIGINAL dead pan!" he drawled. "You never know except from his voice what Blackie's feeling. Where's he from, Cuchillo? New York?

I can usually spot Chicago."

"Cleveland, I have heard," Cuchillo said without interest. "I did not hear *him* say that, though. Perhaps it is not so."

Ramsdale signaled the patrolman. Cuchillo went out with him.

"Well?" Dan Wall asked slowly. He straddled a kitchen chair. His fat face rested on folded arms across its back.

"I talked to Gwen Sayre," Corby told him carefully. "But all she'll admit is that Annis begged her to take him back, yesterday. She threw an act when I told her he'd been murdered."

"Who's behind Shonny?" Wall asked. Only his lips moved. Hazel eyes were slits under sagging lids, steady on Corby.

"*Quien sabe?* Talk is, it might be Ruiz. That Ruiz would naturally be for anything that closed gambling and guzzling on this side, and ran the customers over to his *San Carlo Casino* in Norte. But—it's just talk."

The detective captain's thick body drooped against the chair. He seemed no more than half-awake. His voice was languid. But his eyes never wavered from Corby's still face.

"Sounds reasonable. He's got a big layout in the *San Carlo*. Taxes are

higher'n hell. Every nickel spent on this side he naturally feels is a nickel out of his pocket. What do you really think about Annis' bumping off, Corby?"

"It's bad for the hotel. But, if Ruiz happens to be Shonny's angel, that helps you, Wall. It takes *one* candidate off your killer list. And if you don't have to hunt Ruiz' Mex gorillas, who can slip over the bridge from Norte, and powder a man, and slip back—or lose themselves in Little Mexico—hell! That's a day's work saved for you!"

Wall's sleepy stare was unchanged. He lifted his head, let his arms slide from the chair. He got up slowly and came lounging over to stand a foot away from Corby. Then his pinkish face suddenly turned deep red. A pulse hammered in his throat.

"You got too damned much to say, sometimes, Corby. Too damned little, other times. I been thinking a lot about you. Just the house dick at the *Capitán*, huh? Well, *I* got a notion you won't even be that, a lot longer. And I got another notion—that when you hit the sidewalk on Ninth Street, you'll land right in the middle of a hell-slew of trouble! You're a pain to me. You been a pain a long time, now. And I'm telling you, nobody stays that way long!"

Corby laughed, staring down at Wall. The captain swore thickly and whipped up a big fist. Corby rocked his head and it went past his ear. Missing threw Wall close against him, right arm around his neck. Corby punched him hard in the belly. Wall's arm tightened. He struck viciously at Corby's face with his left hand, landing high on the head. Corby wrestled him back, flung him off and was stepping in at him when little Ramsdale got in front of him.

"Cut it out!" he said grimly. "We got enough grief without you two clawin' one another. You keep back, Dan. Cleve, you listen to me! I don't want no more o' this. *You* know why! I ain't goin' to ask no foolishness like you-all shakin' hands. But I *tell* you I don't want you-all tanglin' ropes again!"

"Keep him off me, then," Corby shrugged grimly. "He's been hunting trouble with me for ten years, now, Ever since '23, when I got Dick Dill and collected eight thousand reward—that was walking the streets here under his nose—and wouldn't split with him. Wall thought *he* ought to have four thousand just for wishing! Then he pulled wires to get appointed a Ranger captain. Thought he had it cinched. But *I* was appointed—with no political pull. Wall's a touchy man. Hates to be beat. He's got something else against me he ain't telling, and he thinks this ex-Ranger is soft meat. But if he wants trouble, I've got more of the stuff than *his* gut'll hold."

"Yeh? You ain't strutting that Ranger badge, now! You're nothing but a cheap house dick—"

"I'll be the highest-priced one *you* ever tried to stop! I'll cost you a lot more than you can afford! You've got notions about me, have you? Maybe I own one or two about you! For instance—why are you so worried about what Shonny'll do? What have *you* got, down the alley, that you're afraid he might uncover?"

Ramsdale moved like a cat. The Frontier Colt snapped out of his belt-holster and the end of its arc was Dan Wall's wrist. Corby watched the .38 Special fall from Wall's fingers, watched Ramsdale hook it across the floor with a toe. Then he put his own Colt back into the shoulder-holster from which it had come, cocked, as fast as Ramsdale's own.

"Wall," he said with cold evenness, "you try that again and I'll kill you as sure as death and taxes! You've tried everything *but* gunplay, before this. Don't you ever pull a gun on me, again, without remembering that!"

"Damn it!" Ramsdale snapped. "I told you—all this has got to stop! Dan, I'll take that badge an' gun off you if you don't listen to me! Cleve, you got no right to make a crack like that without you can back it up! Now, you got to play with me. You know that, well as I do—"

"Well, - just *asked* him," Corby grinned. "He made the play."

He turned towards the door. With his hand on the knob, he let his head swing around. Dan Wall was glaring at him. Corby grinned at him.

"*Hasta la vista*, Pat!" he said.



HE long room at the end of the hall was crowded with shelves. There was an ancient flat-topped desk crowding a window in a corner. Behind it a stooping, but muscular man sat, with a cigar in his mouth corner. He looked over rimless glasses, rather like a preacher eying his congregation, when Corby came in. The illusion was increased when he grinned and his small gray eyes squinted. He waved a huge, flat-knuckled and freckled hand.

"Hello, Cleve," he greeted Corby. "That Annis business, now, that was bad. I see Ramsdale chucked Cuchillo in the hold-over."

Corby came over to sit on a corner of the desk near the grizzled detective inspector. His eyes wandered to the shelving, then back to the old officer.

"I was going by—had a notion—stopped in," he said. "You used to know the Cleveland set-up, pretty well, Billy."

"I went back for them three Mex that bumped off the paymaster at the railroad shops. I was in Cleveland a month. Got to knowing a good deal before we cold-cuffed Mendez' bunch."

"Blackie Drake's from there?"

"*Who* was telling you that? I thought I was the only man in town knew it. Blackie don't know *I* know it. Yeh. He was dealin' stud in one of the cheap gambling houses. He's climbed since then. What made you ask?"

"Just checking. Billy, what are chances that Dago Dominick's in Alrio, under cover?"

"One in a thousand—nah! ten thousand!" Billy Jones said promptly.

"Dorris'll *love* that! She's *already*

spending the reward. She found his mug in one of those fact-story mags. And she identified somebody in the *Capitán* as Dominick."

"She never seen that torpedo!" the old inspector said, shaking his head. "Take it from me, he lammed for the Coast. A lot of 'em are holing up in Los, now. Dominick wants a town where he can have cover and play around, too. Alrio, now, that wouldn't suit him. Norte wouldn't either. He'd be scared, across the River. There's too much reward on him. Some of the Mexican dicks'd turn him over to us for a split on the money. It's eight thousand—half of it for him dead or alive. He bumped off a cop, you know. You ever see him? I got a flier on him here in the desk."

He pulled open the flat center drawer and fumbled among his papers. He found the reward dodger after a minute and handed it over. Corby studied the square, undistinctive face with its bristly pompadour of greasy-looking hair. He read the printed matter under the picture and handed the flier back.

"I never saw him in the *Capitán*. Probably, Dorris is up to her regular stunt. If you put a pair of amber glasses on that mug, I don't believe Dominick's own mother'd make him. He's too usual. He looks like half the Italian Colony in any town."

When he went downstairs he stood at the door frowning for a minute, then went up Coahuila Street to Ninth. He turned west and when he came to De Vaca stopped before the jewelry store on that corner. He stared at the cars sliding along the boulevard for a minute, then went into the Diamond Shop.

"Were you in the store when Annis was shot in the *Capitán*?" he asked the clerk, and that youngster nodded.

"Yes—sir! I heard the first shot. I thought it was a backfire on De Vaca. Then came the second and third. I trotted to the door and saw everybody beginning to go towards the alley. I—"

"Happen to see Blackie Drake and a

Mexican on the sidewalk, when you looked out?"

"N-no. But there was quite a bunch of people stopping, looking that way. I didn't think much about who was there."

"Happen to remember anybody who *was* there?"

"Yes, I do! The cigar stand fellow from next door. He'd come up from the bank. I remember he had a sack of change."

Corby thanked him and went next-door. The man behind the cigar counter in the building's lobby nodded instantly when Corby put the question about Drake.

"He was standing there with that chunky Mexican who drives his car, when I came along Ninth from the bank. He and the Mexican both turned with the first shot. Then the other shots came and—well, they had gone. I didn't think about it, then, but now I remember. Why?"

"Cuchillo owes you something—and *not* for cigarettes," Corby said dryly. "You'll save him a serious shock—the kind they hand out down at Huntsville."

He crossed to the hotel. The doorman told him the manager wanted to see him. He nodded, pushed through the door and climbed to the lobby. Hurd was not in his office. Corby looked at the clock, crossed the lobby to lean on the counter. Dorris faced him excitedly.

"You're a lot of help!" she said. "Here I've got Dago Dominick identified, and if he'd come in, I couldn't have done a thing!"

"I'm sorry! Do you think you'll feel better, when you've had dinner? I'll buy it. But—you're all wet about Dominick, darling. The Dago's out in L. A. under cover. You didn't see him; you wouldn't know him from anybody else, if you *did* see him. I just looked at his mug."

"It's Dago Dominick!" she said flatly, pounding his arm with her knuckles. "It's nobody else. You wait! And if he's not mixed up with Annis' killing—"

He reached for the phone while Dor-

ris watched with a disappointed air. "Police station, Gert," he told the operator. "Captain Ramsdale. Use my name."

Then, to Dorris:

"Dominick, or anybody else, would be a godsend to Ramsdale, right now. He certainly needs a candidate."

Gert announced his party. Corby grunted into the phone.

"Say, Pat, that cigar stand hairpin in the Gannet Building alibis Drake and Cuchillo. He saw 'em outside the Diamond Shop as the first shot was fired over there. I think he's on the level—absolutely. Is Wall checking Cuchillo's alibi?"

"I reckon. Well, that was just a notion, anyway. Cuchillo never did smell exactly right. If that monkey had gunned Annis, it'd been for Drake. An' Drake's too cute to let Cuchillo show like he done. Cleve—do me a favor, will you?"

"Of course," Corby promised promptly.

"Lay off Dan Wall! If you was nothin' but the *Capitán's* house dick, it'd be bad enough. But you bein' what you really are—a row with Dan's likely to bust up your whole scheme. S'pos'in' he happens on to what Austin's got you at? I can't keep him from talkin'! An' if somebody talks, it'll kill every chance you got o' cleanin' up what you aim to clean up!"

"I'm not going to pick him for a row," Corby said carefully. "But you know, and I know, that eventually I'm going to have to settle with Wall. He's got something in for me he's keeping under his hat. And now, he's making a play that I'm on Shonny's payroll. He's trying to uncover that hookup, right now. But—I won't *start* anything with him."

Frazier came at his brisk, military step across the lobby, as Corby hooked the receiver on its prongs. He said that Shonny was up in KXNE's studio, broadcasting. Hurd was tearing his hair, sending explanatory telegrams to the *Capitán's* directors in Atlanta.

"Let 'em work off their steam—

Shonny and Hurd," Corby said tolerantly. "Well, Dorris? Can you break training to the extent of a meal? Or does food affect the Camera Eye?"

"*That* wise crack will cost you exactly a *peso-media*! Just for that, I'm going to order 'the *Capitán's* Famous Dollar-and-a-Half Special Blue Plate Dinner'! Come on, you asked for it and you're going to find it on your bill!"



HE night sky was overcast. Mechanically, Corby watched the car ahead in the line of traffic coming home from Mexico.

He slowed his heavy roadster, hunching under the Auburn's wheel. A splash of wetness struck his cheek. He cocked an eye up at the blanket of nimbus cloud that stretched from the mountains across the town and the mesa. A gusty little wind shook the sultry air that pressed down upon Alrio.

"Funny," Corby said absently to himself. "Nobody on either side of the Rio knowing who cut Geoff out with Gwen Sayre. Usually, that sort of thing gets around. Gwen likes to parade her latest. I—wonder if it means anything. . . ."

The line of cars returning from Norte's saloons and restaurants, from the big *San Carlo Casino* of Vic' Ruiz, was thinning, block by block. Cars turned off De Vaca Avenue on to Sixth, Seventh, Eighth. The line was stopped by a red light at Ninth.

Corby slouched farther under the Auburn's wheel and looked across at the *Capitán*. Only the doorman, conspicuous in blue-and-gold *charro* uniform, showed under the marquee.

The green light flashed. Corby sent the roadster smoothly ahead, began to lift his hand to signal a left turn, but let it drop. He accelerated the car straight ahead on De Vaca. As he passed that alley in which Annis' murderer had stood, he looked into the dusky entrance and his face was savage.

"The Born Amateur, but a damn' nice kid . . ."

The illuminated dial of the clock on the instrument board showed ten-forty. He crossed De Soto Street, went on three blocks and turned east on Chestnut into a residential neighborhood that was tomb-quiet now. The street was lined with Arizona ash trees and Chinese elms in the grassed parking.

"Maybe this is a blind trail," he muttered. "But it's a notion, anyway. Gwen Sayre *might* tell a whole lot more, if I put it up to her right."

He passed a three-story yellow brick, cornering on Van Buren, and looked at the brass sign under its globe light that showed the legend *Conquistador Court—Apartment Hotel*. He accelerated quickly as a stocky man in the *Conquistador's* entry turned and looked at the roadster. At the sight he had of amber sun glasses the man was wearing, he spun the Auburn around the corner of Gwen Sayre's hotel, and went up Van Buren for two blocks.

In the heavy shadow of a Chinese elm he stopped the roadster, jerked the key from the ignition switch and slid out to the curb. He kept to the shadows of the trees in the parking as he went back towards the *Conquistador*.

There was a back yard guarded by a high picket fence on Van Buren and on the alley. He hesitated at the alley's mouth, but went on up the sidewalk and turned the corner. The entry was deserted, now. He found Gwen Sayre's name opposite apartment 314. He opened the unlocked door and stepped into a hallway that was also empty.

A radio, playing loud jazz, blared upstairs as he went up, and was then dialed down. In some room on the second floor, a woman's shrill voice was phoning Headquarters. The third floor hall was a dusky, empty tunnel as he came noiselessly along the padded runner and put his ear to the panel of 314's door. He heard the radio muttering inside.

He waited, listening, a little doubtful whether or not to press the bell button.

The radio suddenly altered tone. Loud marimba music swelled to a terrific volume that set the door vibrating, tickled Corby's ear. But somewhere in that mad welter of sound a woman's scream and a flat explosion seemed juggled about on marimba vibrations.

Corby stepped backward, lunged in and struck the door with his shoulder just above the brass disk of the lock. There was the splintering rasp of screws torn from wood and the door crashed back against an entry hall wall. Corby squatted, his Colt out, glaring into darkness. The radio made deafening sound—then suddenly the music stopped. But it was an accented voice, speaking thunderously, that replaced it:

"'Ave you tried a dinner in Norte, lately? At the *Luna Café* ees quiet refinement and the va-ree best in cuisine—"

Corby crept into the tiny hall and put a hand around the side of its arched opening. He found the light switch and clicked it with his left hand. Light from a glass box in the ceiling showed Gwen Sayre, sprawled before the console radio. One bare arm was crooked as if to protect the tumbled mass of her red hair. Under the round, white arm, a red spot widened on the rug.

Corby stood up, holding his gun at waist-level. Through an arched opening was a dining nook. He could not see the door of the kitchen, which he knew must open from the nook, but on his right a bedroom door was closed. He slid sideways, peering into the dining nook. An automatic's snub muzzle poked out towards him, around the side of the plastered arch. Mechanically, Corby dropped his single-action's hammer as the automatic roared. The shots blended in a heavy detonation that rocked the air in the low-ceilinged room.

Something breathed on Corby's cheek and thudded into the Tiffany plaster of the wall behind him. His own slug tore a chunk of plaster from the archway above the other's pistol. He thumbed back the hammer, let it fall, as a second

slug from the automatic smashed the light switch plate and brought darkness and a sudden end to the radio's noise. He had one glimpse of a square, dark face, a pair of amber glasses, before the shot that smashed the electric circuit.

Corby came to his knees, inched across the floor and stopped at the nook's entrance. A rasp of feet in the kitchen beyond brought him erect. He rushed to the door and saw a squat figure outlined in the window overlooking Van Buren. An orange flame spouted towards him from the figure. Corby fired, and fired again. The shape vanished from the window. Outside, there was the metallic clang of the fire-escape iron as a weight hit it.

Corby ran across the kitchen. He looked down the barrel of his Colt, across the sill. Nobody was on the fire-escape platform, nor could he make out movement below. He got out his small flashlight and clicked its narrow, powerful beam downward. On the second floor platform a man sprawled face up. Corby studied that face—now unguarded by the sun glasses.

"So Dorris was right!" he grunted. "Trail's end, Dominick!"

From somewhere close, on Chestnut, there sounded the wail of a police siren. Corby lifted a hard mouth corner in a sardonic grin. But a yell and a splatter of shots below him, down at the *Conquistador's* back-yard fence, jerked his head that way.

A dark shape was coming with the speed of a great ball rolling, vaguely silhouetted by the street lamp at the intersection. The savage yell came again—Captain Dan Wall's voice:

"Stop, you damn' monkey! Stop!"

The command was followed by a shot and another shot. Below Corby the fire-escape creaked under the runner's weight. Corby counted the shots he had fired and tallied four. He had one left. He settled himself comfortably, to wait.

Then headlights whirled around the corner, coming off Chestnut. Their

glare illuminated the fire-escape, showed a dark figure climbing. From Dan Wall's direction a shot came. The apish figure staggered on the second floor platform by Dominick's body, fell sidewise over the rail and turned in air like a falling sack.

"Got him!" Dan Wall yelled triumphantly. "Got Cuchillo!"

"What for?" Pat Ramsdale's answering yell came from the stopped car at the corner.

"Shooting at me! Trying to escape!"



ORBY had carried a floor-lamp over to the dining-nook's circuit and switched it on, when Ramsdale, Dan Wall, Billy Jones and Oll, the police surgeon, crowded into the apartment. He looked at them from where he stood over Gwen Sayre.

"Well!" Ramsdale said slowly, staring.

"Maybe!" Corby shrugged. His tone was dry. "If we can find out what the hell it's all about, it may be well."

"She dead?" Oll grunted, moving forward.

"Not yet. She was shot in the head. Don't know how badly hurt she is. I've been too busy since I got here, to check on anything. She was shot just before I got here."

"Shot just *before* you got here," Wall said draggingly. "What was you doing up here, anyway? Where's Blackie Drake?"

"We was all at my house," Ramsdale explained, watching Oll get down on his knees beside Gwen Sayre and open his bag. "Oll, Billy Jones an' me. Caught an alarm on my short wave set: Trouble at the *Conquistador*. We piled into my car. It's only four blocks. Landed in time to see Dan powderin' Cuchillo. How-come you was here, Dan?"

"Nosed around. Found out Blackie Drake was the new Number One, with

Gwen." Wall shrugged. He was watching Corby. "I thought I'd ask her some questions about Annis. When I come along past the back yard, there was Cuchillo going in. I called to him and he opened up on me. Then he bounced out of the gate. So you was calling on Gwen, too, Corby? *After* she got shot. . . ."

He crossed to the bedroom door with his hand on his gun.

"—damn!" he grunted, when he had opened it. The others stared past him, into the bedroom where Blackie Drake lay face-up on the floor. Blackie's eyes were open and in death his long face was no more masklike than it had been in life.

Every pocket of his dinner jacket and trousers hung out. The pleated shirt gaped where a stud had been torn from it. Ramsdale, Corby, gray old Billy Jones, moved nearer. Ramsdale's narrow eyes shuttled to Corby. Wall turned in the doorway. His heavy pink face was pleasant of expression.

"Didn't you know Blackie was in there, Corby?" he asked.

His tone was almost a purr. Corby turned from staring at the dead gambler. He ignored Wall, looked at Ramsdale.

"About time your cruiser got here, on the shooting alarm?" Corby suggested. Ramsdale's leathery face was expressionless but his eyes were very bright.

"It's been an' gone. I sent it off before we come upstairs. I thought it was just Dan an' Cuchillo. I never expected—all this."

Then he moved a step closer and his low voice went lower:

"If there's somethin' about this, Cleve, better tell me. . . ."

"The reason I asked about the cruiser," Corby said evenly, "is because Dago Dominick's dead on the second floor escape platform." He grinned tightly. "Weighing about four thousand dollars, isn't he, Billy? I knocked him off in the kitchen window before Wall

chased Cuchillo up the fire-escape."

"I heard the shots," Wall nodded. "That was why I looked into the back yard."

Corby ignored him. Briefly, talking to Ramsdale direct, he told what he had seen and heard and done. Wall's hazel eyes never wavered from Corby's still, brown face. His slightly opened mouth showed his concentration. At the end, he said:

"*Phooie!*" in a casual tone. "Even if you did gun Dominick, what does that prove—about Gwen, and Blackie?"

"You keep out of this!" Corby rapped at him. "I'll do my talking to Pat. My polite talking, that is!"

"*Hombre,*" Wall said in a pleased tone, "you're due to talk to just a hell-slew more'n Pat, before *this* kick is cleaned up! You'll talk to twelve guys in the courthouse. And if you ain't polite to 'em—well, it's no skin off my nose! Pat, when we get the slugs out of Blackie. I'll check 'em—plenty! Corby shoots a .45."

"I'm glad you came up, Pat," Corby drawled. "It would hurt my pride, if a cheap son could pull a frame on me. Here's my picture of what happened:

"Blackie knew Dago Dominick back in Ohio. So, when the Dago lammed out of Cleveland after that cop-killing, he got under cover here, with Blackie's help. Then KXNE got in Blackie's hair. So he hired Dominick to murder Annis—to scare hell out of Shonny, is my guess. The Dago knew how you'd given both Shonny and Annis a police-guard. He didn't want to work the kill without fingering the job first. So he prowled around the *Capitán* several times. Dorris spotted him and told me. I didn't think she could be right—she's always steamed up about some mugg she sees. But I checked all I could—"

"Uh-uh!" Wall interposed scornfully. "It still don't add up. How about Drake? The Dago kill *him*? Why would he? By your own story, Blackie was covering Dominick. Why would he shoot Gwen? How-come

Cuchillo was down there ready to pop me off when I come along? It don't make sense—*that* way of looking at it."

"Likely, Blackie tried his usual play on Dominick—tried to stall him on whatever he'd promised to pay for Annis' murder. Blackie had a name for welshing. You know that! But the Dago wasn't the man to try it on. He killed Blackie. I came to the door. He was afraid of Gwen talking. Probably, she and Blackie were the only ones who knew about the Dago. So he tried to shut her mouth, too. Then I crashed the door and he couldn't check whether he'd finished her. As for Cuchillo—hell! That little chimp' was usually *marijuana'd* by this time of night. He'd gun his own mother if she walked up on him from the back."

"But you won't mind me working on a theory I got?" Wall grinned with heavy politeness. "A different theory from that?"

"I don't give a good — damn about your theories! Well, Pat? Do you know a straight story, when you hear it?"

"Maybe Oll can get the gal in shape to talk," Ramsdale said without tone. Corby, staring, grinned twistedly.

"Oh!" he said unpleasantly. "I see!"



GOT her snapped out of it!" Oll called to them.

A bandage was on Gwen's head, so low around the forehead that it hooded her eyes. She was groaning. Her hands were out-flung, clawing at the rug. Oll grinned down like a satyr.

"With a bandage on," he said cryptically, "she'll be as good as she ever was!"

Ramsdale knelt beside her. He touched her bare arm.

"This is Cap'n Ramsdale," he said awkwardly. "You're all right, now. Tell us what happened."

"I don't know! An' I don't give a damn! My head's killin' me! I can't

stand it hurtin' like this! I never could stand to be hurt—Doc! Give me some-*thin'* to stop the hurtin'! Where's Blackie! He was in the bedroom. Did the louse run out on me?"

She writhed on the floor. Ramsdale got up, looked around, crossed to the apartment grand piano and tugged off its scarf. He came back, to spread it over her twisting body. Oll winked at Corby, heavy mouth drawn to one side. Dan Wall was now kneeling beside the girl. Corby watched grimly, sandy brows drawn down. Wall began to talk almost crooningly to her.

"Listen, hon'. Doc's going to fix you up okey. Pretty soon. Now, you take it easy. We'll fix you up so it won't hurt. Just tell me a couple things. You and Blackie was going places together. I know you was. And Blackie won't mind you talking to me. I'm going to help you out. Give me the inside on Corby—you know, the house dick at the *Capitán*. He was in here, you know. Did he made a play at Blackie? Shoot you?"

Corby saw how she stiffened, how under the fringe of the piano scarf the rounded swell of her breasts was suddenly motionless. He thought that he could almost see those long, cold, light-blue eyes wide open, pressing on the bandage, trying to see the road to take here—the best road for Gwen Sayre.

"I—don't know—can't remember—Where's Blackie? He never got hurt, did he?"

Ramsdale had gone noiselessly away. He came back, now. He held out a hand to Corby. On the palm were two shapeless bits of metal. Corby looked frowningly at them.

"Slugs that killed Blackie. Went right on through an' mushroomed in the wall. Cleve—nobody on earth could tell what gun they come out o'. An' the one that knocked Gwen over, it's in the wall yonder. Must be mushroomed, too. . . ."

"Ne' mind Blackie, right now. He

won't mind you tellin' me," Wall crooned to the girl. Beads of perspiration twinkled on his pink face. His hands were knotted fists. "Just one thing, now, hon': Was it Corby shot Blackie? Shot you?"

Corby looked from those useless slugs in Ramsdale's palm to his expressionless face. Then he stepped forward, caught Wall's shoulder and jerked him backward. He snarled at Ramsdale:

"Keep this son off me! He's not going to pull a damn' frame on me and live to tell about it! Gwen! You listen to me! Blackie's dead! So's Dago Dominick! And *you*—do you know what Blackie's chinchy stunt does for you? It makes a tramp out of you! It makes you a god-awful sight! That bullet scarred your forehead. It tore a hole in your cheek! It'll heal up in a big, red, puckery scar. Compliments of Blackie Drake! He tried to stall the Dago off. And you'll pay the bill. You'll walk the damn' streets—end up with a job slinging hash in some greasy spoon! That's what your darling Blackie did for you!"

"Me?" Her voice lifted to a hysterical scream under the pound of his snarling, furious voice. "Me? I'm goin' to be marked by that bullet? That louse done that—to me?"

She propped herself up on one hand. Pouting mouth hung half-open. She lunged her bandaged head towards Corby, as if she could see him. Then, abruptly, she began to scream—a high, shrill, agonized note that set the nerves jangling. Corby shook her, called her name savagely.

"Tell the truth! You won't cover Blackie—after that! He ruined your looks because he was too damn' chinchy to pay off!"

She fell back on the floor. The sound of her breath was a rasping, whistling noise between sagging lips.

"Ah, God! A big hole in my face—I wish to God Dago *had* killed me, like he thought he had. Like he killed Blackie!"

"What happened?" Corby brought her remorselessly back.

"Blackie tried to stall him off. Dago wouldn't take it. They was in the bedroom. Blackie counted on Cuchillo gettin' here to gun Dominick. But he never came—*marijuana'd*, I reckon. When they shut the door, I turned the radio way up, so's I wouldn't hear. I wasn't sure I heard shots. I didn't like the idea of tryin' to collect that reward on Dago—he was too touchy. I guess he smelled Blackie's frame. But he busted out of the bedroom and turned the radio up—I'd turned it down again to listen—shot at me—"

"What was the scheme, between Blackie and Dago?"

"Blackie hired him to kill Geoff Annis. I was in the back office at the *Manhattan Club* when Geoff came to peddle dope on Shonny, to Blackie. The poor sap didn't know that Vic' Ruiz an' Blackie *wanted* Shonny to pour it on to the *Club Capitán* an' all the other joints on this side the River. Ruiz, you know, *he* owned the *Manhattan*. Blackie just fronted the place for him. Geoff wanted five grand for his dope. Blackie kidded him—told him he'd pay him three grand. He said he'd do it just to keep some gorilla from poppin' off Shonny. He said if Shonny was killed it'd make a stink that'd close everything on the Alrio side. But that was just Blackie's line to Geoff, of course."

She drew a great, gasping breath. The men stared tensely.

"Blackie an' Ruiz was really afraid that Geoff'd find somebody, like Tom Embert of the *Star*, who'd buy the dope an' run Shonny out of town; stop KXNE. I listened in, on the extension phone, while Blackie was in the front office talkin' to somebody. I heard him say:

"'All right! Annis is on the spot! But your torpedoes are no good for this job. Corby would make 'em in a minute if they came around the *Capitán* to finger the job. *I* have got an outside man for the business. He knows his

stuff. An' five hundred—just the *promise* of five hundred!—will buy plenty of his heat. He'll do the job for us—an' he'll do it clean!"

Corby straightened. He found his back ached. Ramsdale tapped him on the shoulder, grinning. Wall, standing between Oll and Billy Jones, shrugged sullenly when Corby looked at him.

"All right! All right!" he rasped. "You're white as a damn' lily! You're pure as the lousy driven snow! And you're slick as a fox!"

Corby took a swift step forward and looked down at Wall. His eyes were hard, cold, almost void of expression.

"You missed again this time, Wall—just as you missed, this afternoon, when Ramsdale made it so's you'd be here at all. Maybe you got something against me—or think you have. I don't give a damn about that. Maybe you're just a careful peace officer, tryin' to do your best. I don't give a damn about *that*. But I'm telling you, *hombre*, don't try pickin' on me a *third* time, unless you can stand a comeback."

Pat Ramsdale shoved in between them.

"Lay off, Cleve," he said, in a low tone. "This thing's finished. You're in

the clear. Besides, you promised me." Corby gave Ramsdale a long, slow look.

"I promised you," he said finally, "that I wouldn't *start* anything. I didn't promise I wouldn't *finish* what somebody else might start."

Ramsdale swung towards his junior officer.

"If you've got a grudge against Corby, Dan," he drawled, "I'm tellin' you, you're lettin' it carry you a mite too far."

Wall shrugged.

"Aw, hell—this house dick runnin' out o' his quarters and tryin' to do our work gets in my hair." He turned to Corby. "You weren't so smart at that. You never figured that hookup between Blackie and Vic' Ruiz—that Blackie was just fronting the *Manhattan* for Ruiz. You was about half right, that was all!"

Corby smiled a little; then shrugged.

"Half right gives me a batting average of five hundred! And I collect four grand for Dago—with a hundred off to Dorris for an armload of those fact mags of hers. Seems to me that a five hundred average is pretty good, Wall. For just a—common House Dick!"



A Hectic Night

By CHARLES H. LUSIGNAN

**Fifth
Prize-
Winning
Story**



**In Our
"Narrowest
Escape"
Contest**

*"I swear and affirm that this story
is true in every particular."*

Signed CHARLES H. LUSIGNAN.

I SHALL always remember the hectic night I miraculously escaped death while attempting to protect thousands of dollars which, when the truth became known, turned out to be a plugged quarter and sixty-two cents in stamps. It happened during the fall of my last year in school and left vivid imprints upon my mind which the years shall forever fail to obliterate.

I was then an unusually husky youth of seventeen, with the chest of a wrestler and the arms of a professional heavyweight lifter. I was considered a fair boxer, could lift a hundred and fifty pounds above my head with either hand; I was the pitcher of the school's ball team and could throw a ball or a stone with great velocity and astounding accuracy.

To most, I was a perfect nuisance because my achievements had gone to my head. I was thoroughly in love with myself and didn't care who knew it.

Although I was never looking for a fight, I never ran away from one and trouble didn't have to beckon to me twice before I was into it with my heart and soul. With such hair-trigger temperament, I was all set to become a hero or make an ass of myself.

My uncle, who incidentally owned the village hotel, had just inaugurated a "500" Club and among some twenty-odd members, one could remark the doctor, the public notary, the bank manager, a Scotchman, owner of the toll bridge, and my own father. Of course, I did not belong to the club, although I sincerely thought I should; but I was tolerated on account of my relations. Once in a while, I would be allowed to play when there was room for one more partner, and as I behaved very well and could play with the best, I finally succeeded in winning their friendship and eventually became a regular member.

One Monday night, the bank manager

came to the club. It was very noticeable that he was absent-minded, deeply preoccupied. He played his cards in such a distracted manner that my uncle, who happened to be playing with me, couldn't help but notice it.

"What's the matter, Sam? Not feeling well?" my uncle remarked.

"Oh, I am all right," he answered. "Just tired. I had a strenuous day at the bank today."

"I'll bet he was passed a lead quarter," the owner of the bridge jested, "and he can't get over it."

This brought a general smile, but the bank manager retained his gloomy expression. There was something decidedly wrong with him. After a while he dropped his cards upon the table, got up and walked slowly about the room. He was patently trying to reach a decision on some very important matter. Suddenly he made up his mind.

"Can I trust you boys to keep a secret?" he said impulsively, scanning every face in the room. He was readily assured that anything he confided to us would not leak out.

"All right, boys, I have your words. Perhaps I shouldn't do it, but I have known you all a long time and I would hate like the dickens to see you lose your hard-earned money. The bank is in a tight place. Nothing very serious, I am sure, but anything is possible. My advice to you is to get your money out for the time being and when the storm has blown over and it is safe for you to return it, I'll let you know."

The news created quite a stir among the members present. Question upon question was fired at the manager. Suggestion after suggestion was advanced until it was finally decided, and much to the reluctance of the bridge owner, that every member would draw his money on the quiet and leave it with the Scotchman, who happened to own the only vault in the village outside of the bank.

One member remarked teasingly that it was safe enough with him since he couldn't very well abscond and take the

bridge away with him—which, by the way, was worth infinitely more than the money with which he was to be intrusted.

Three days later, there was a run on the bank and ninety-eight per cent of the depositors were paid off before the doors were closed. As there was no other bank within twenty-three miles, it naturally left a great deal of unprotected money in the village.

The Saturday following proved to be one of the stormiest I had seen for a long time. A cold autumnal rain came down continuously, driven by a strong northeast wind. As it held a promise to last all night, I decided to go to the Club. Few members were present. About ten p. m., the bridge owner left us, complaining about a nasty headache. My uncle, the doctor, another member and myself played until one a. m.

"It's more than time you were getting home," my uncle said when our hard-contested game was over.

"I know," I answered. "I am leaving right now."

I turned up the collar of my overcoat, pulled down the peak of my cap, thanked everybody for a pleasant evening and after wishing them good night I resolutely walked into the jet-black night. It was still raining, although the wind had died down. I was walking briskly, when something unusual caught my eye. It seemed to me that I had seen a lighted candle in the bridge owner's office which stood a hundred yards or so from the nearest habitation. I stopped, facing it from across the road, and was wondering if I had not been dreaming, when a hard voice said behind me:

"What are you looking at, kid?"

I whirled around.

"I saw a light in the office," I answered, trying to ascertain the identity of the man. He was a stocky man, dressed in black or dark blue. His coat collar was turned up and the brim of his hat pulled low over his face, leaving very little of it visible.

"You've seen no light. It was a mistake. Understand?" he snarled.

"I am telling you I have," I snarled back, beginning to feel uneasy and a little nervous. Some sixth sense seemed to warn me of impending danger.

"What have you got there?" a voice asked from across the road.

"Just a kid," the man sneered.

"Well the sap should be asleep," the voice rasped, putting the emphasis on *asleep*.

I foolishly turned around intending to bawl him out for calling me a sap, but before I could utter a word, I caught a sudden swift motion almost behind me. I ducked, but too late. I felt an excruciating pain on the right side of my head, my hands went behind me, instinctively groping for a non-existent support. I staggered a few steps sidewise; suddenly everything went black as I fell in the mud.

I WASN'T out for long, however. When I opened my eyes the first thing I saw was the hazy, blacker shadow of my assailant standing where he had been a moment before. Vaguely, I heard him say:

"Okay, Jim. The sap's gone to sleep."

"Not yet," I thought while I tried to understand why I had been so fiendishly attacked. With the force of a thunderbolt, it struck me. They were bandits and were after the money intrusted to the Scotchman. A sudden rage, dangerously bordering on madness, possessed me. "They shall not take my father's money," I kept repeating in my mind as my right hand groped around in the mud.

Suddenly, it closed on a stone. It was a little large for accuracy, but it would do. Intently, I watched the man's movements. Presently, he noiselessly walked away. I was up like a flash, the man was hardly visible enough for careful aim, so I ran swiftly three or four yards and as he whirled around, I threw the stone with the last ounce of my energy. I heard a hollow thud, a deep-chested grunt, something splashed in the mud—which later proved to be a .38-caliber

revolver—and I had the satisfaction of seeing him fold up and go down in a heap.

"What's going on there?" the voice across the road asked in sudden alarm. "Lefty! What's wrong?"

But Lefty didn't answer for the very good reason that he had momentarily lost all interest in the proceedings. I heard the man's footfalls as he started in my direction to investigate. My first mad impulse was to stand my ground, but I was suddenly seized with an overwhelming urge to get away, so I bolted for the hotel.

"Hey you!" the man bellowed. "Stop or I'll shoot."

Fear spurred me on.

"All right, you sap, take it," he snarled.

He stopped and emptied his gun in my direction. Something tugged at my left side and almost spun me around. I paid no attention to it at the time and kept running at top speed. It was only about two hundred yards to my uncle's place, but I can truthfully say they were the longest two hundred yards I ever ran. Just before I reached the hotel, I heard a terrific explosion. Somehow, I felt as though somebody was trying to pry the top of my head loose.

The barroom door was suddenly opened, framing my uncle, the doctor and two or three other heads. I ran in. I was covered with blood and mud. I gasped out the fact that bandits were blowing the bridge owner's vault. Bedlam broke loose.

I had more questions fired at me in two minutes than I could have hoped to answer properly in a week of Sundays. More or less foolish suggestions were frantically given and just as frantically dropped as impracticable. There was no gun in the place and the sheriff had no telephone. That much became clear. The coolest man there was the doctor.

"I'll go for the sheriff," he volunteered as he opened the door.

"Get back," a voice snarled, "and stay quiet or you'll get hurt . . . bad." And

to emphasize his threats, he fired above our heads. My uncle's barroom plate-glass mirror came down in a shower of broken glass, carrying numerous bottles of choice liquor to the floor. The doctor jumped behind the door and slammed it.

"I'll try the back door," he said as he resolutely made his way to the back of the hotel. He no sooner had it open than a bullet whizzed over his head.

"No use," he said disgustedly. "We're bottled up."

"What about the wine door in the cellar?" my uncle suggested hopefully.

"Right," the doctor snapped. "Who will volunteer to come with me? We will both make a dash through that door. One of us should get by." Everybody looked at one another, but nobody offered to go.

"I'll go," I said eagerly.

"Good kid," the doctor complimented me. "But," he continued, "you're wounded."

"Ah, that's nothing," I boasted. "I've got worse than that before."

"All right," he decided suddenly. "Here's the way we will work it. I'll open the wine door and wait for a chance. When it comes, we will both dash out at the same time and each of us go in a different direction. That will probably confuse anybody watching for such a move. Now then," he continued, addressing himself to my uncle, "get a broomstick or something and rattle the front latch, somebody do the same at the back door after you give us two minutes to get down."

Tensely we waited in the darkness of the cellar. The door was open, the rain was spattering in a small pool of water, everything was as quiet as a country graveyard.

Suddenly we heard one of the bandits snarl: "Stay inside, you saps." Then we heard a shot at the back of the house.

"Let's go," the doctor whispered hoarsely, "here's our chance."

We both made a bolt for it. The doc-

tor ran across the yard towards the back of the place away from the street. I turned right and made for the street. Somebody inside foolishly raised a blind, undoubtedly eager to find out if we had got safely by.

For a fleeting moment I was framed in the oblong reflection of the light upon the rain-soaked ground. There was a snarl. I saw a flash of orange flame, heard the shot. Something hit me in the chest with terrific impact. I gasped for breath as a wave of dizziness overwhelmed me. I felt myself going down, then everything went black again.

WHEN I opened my eyes at dawn, I was in a strange room. I felt very weak. My head was bandaged and throbbing, I could feel a slight burning sensation on the left side of my back and somewhere in my right shoulder was a red-hot coal. Then I saw my mother. She was kneeling upon the floor at the foot of the bed, her head was buried in the bed sheets; she was crying pitifully. My father was standing beside her with his left hand on her shoulder; his face was frozen into grim lines.

"Hello, Ma. Hello, Dad," I said weakly, making a strenuous effort to smile.

My mother was up like a flash. She became hysterical. The doctor rushed in followed by a score of members and villagers. After quieting my mother, he came to me, looked in my eyes, felt my pulse and smiled his satisfaction.

"How do you feel," he inquired paternally.

"Not too bad now," I smiled.

"It was a close call," he said to me as well as for the benefit of his audience, "but you will pull through all right. Don't worry."

"Did they get the money?" I asked.

"Please be quiet," the doctor admonished me.

"But I want to know," I insisted.

"Better ease his mind," my father suggested. "He'll rest better."

"Very well then," the doctor decided

suddenly, "but you must promise not to speak and above everything don't get excited."

"All right, doctor," I promised.

"After I left you," he proceeded, "I got to the sheriff safely, thanks to you. While I was gone, there was a second explosion. Apparently, they had failed to blow the door open with the first. When I finally returned with the sheriff and five other villagers, they were gone. We went into the office and found it in a terrible state. The vault door hung on one hinge, books and bills were scattered all over the floor, everything was smashed by the explosions. We all felt

like a bridegroom who has just been invited to commit suicide."

"Then they got it," I faltered.

"Shhhh, quiet," the doctor growled. "Now, Scotty," he smiled, "you'd better tell him the rest of it."

"Well, lad——" Scotty smiled. "Stop worrying. I had all this money buried deep in the cellar in an eight-gallon can and had left sealed instructions with the notary here. All the thieves got was a plugged quarter and sixty-two cents in stamps." He roared with laughter.

I don't know why this good news should have knocked me out, but for the third time a wave of blackness engulfed me.

BLACK MASK WRITERS WHO ARE MAKING THEIR MARK

FREDERICK NEBEL'S new novel, "Sleepers East," went into its fifth printing when less than four weeks old. American News rates it Triple A-1, which is the rating BLACK MASK fans have been giving Mr. Nebel's stories of "tough dick" Donahue and Captain Steve MacBride.

RAOUL WHITFIELD, already heralded among critics of his BLACK MASK stories in book form, as at the very top of present-day crime mystery writers, is being given equal praise by film reviewers. Recently his screen story, based on "Mankiller," which appeared in BLACK MASK some months ago, opened in Radio City Music Hall, in New York, and packed the huge hall with its 6,000 capacity.

The sale of the books of Erle Stanley Gardner, Carroll John Daly, Eugene Cunningham do not reflect the fact that there has been any depression. Which goes to prove that people like good reading and will not be without it.

In a New York bookshop, within two feet of shelf space, are displayed the works of at least a half-dozen BLACK MASK writers.

Well—read BLACK MASK and get stories for a few cents that thousands of people buy months later in book form at \$2.00 or more a throw.

BLACK MASK MYSTERY No. 5

Set-up this month—solution next month

Solution to last month's mystery—No. 4

When the men had turned their backs, Jules Tremaine picked out one who had a brownish stain on the back of his collar. "It's quite simple" Jules said in answer to Frank's question. "You notice that there's water dropping on the pick handle, and the rest of the aqueduct is tight, no seepage at all, so that this man who has brown water stains on the back of his collar must have got them while committing the murder."

THE PASTOR'S KILLER

By WILLIAM ROLLINS, JR.

IT'S such a grand full moon I ain't gone to bed all night; just wandered round, kind of dreaming of the mountains home, early spring like this; and then, soon after daybreak, I meets up with Sergeant Kelly, whizzing along the road.

"Hop in, K. O.!" he says; "got a dead pastor waiting for us down the line!" I hops in, beside the coroner, just as the sun sticks its nose over the meadows.

Ten minutes later we pull up at a white house square at the head of the road, a minute after passing a tramp with a big scar on the side of his face, shuffling in our direction. We go into the den, what's set between the hall and the dining-room, lighted by a single French window; and where we sees the owner, old Mr. Felix, sprawled on the floor, a bullet in his back. His pretty young wife and his fat-faced brother are standing there, and even in the full light of the newly risen sun their faces look pale. The coroner gets to work right away.

"Dead from three to four hours," he says at last, and passes the buck to Kelly, who jabs a finger at George Felix.

"Me?" says George, dazed-like. "I didn't know anything about it until about half an hour ago. I'm a little deaf and didn't hear any shot."

"Likely story," sniffs Kelly. Then he turns, polite, to Mrs. Felix.

"Yes," she says, in a quiet voice, "I do know something about it. I was coming downstairs to ask my husband to stop work and go to bed, when I heard the shot. I ran in just as the murderer was starting for the French window there. The moonlight struck him full then, and I could make out a scar on his cheek—he looked like a tramp to me. I—I must have fainted then, and when I came to half an hour ago, I aroused the household, and we telephoned you. That's all I know."

"And that's enough, ma'am," says Kelly, starting for the door on the run. But I blocks him.

"It sure is enough, Kelly," I says. I glances at the lady. "I suppose it must be kind of hard for a pretty girl to be a straight-laced minister's wife, ma'am," I says, soft, "but that ain't no reason you should murder him, is it?"

What made K. O. suspect the wife?

Mail your solution on or before September 1st

OCTOBER'S SMASHING NUMBER

One of the Greatest Issues of the Year—So Far

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Bill Lennox, Hollywood studio trouble-shooter, dreams, as a side business, of finding an unknown tramp and building her up to a million dollar star—with himself sharing the million. He finds the tramp all right, and the fact that she is dodging a murder rap doesn't bother Bill much—at first. However, when lead starts flying, Bill finds what sort of real trouble he has let himself in for. A bang-up story with a laugh or two and a great big thrill.

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