

had he been there? Why the sudden attack? With a bitter curse, Owen realized that the answer was there in the room—something the fellow had come for. It was still there, if his attacker had not destroyed the evidence.

But the devil of it was, Owen didn't know what that evidence was. There were lots of questions about the murder of Terry Reis—despite the doctor's verdict, Owen still insisted it was murder—that he couldn't answer. But of one thing he was sure. The person who had slugged him was the killer!

The room was exactly as he had first seen it when he entered some few minutes before—exactly as it had been left last night. Nothing was disturbed. Owen dismissed the watchman and went over the room with a fine-tooth comb. He found many things, but not the thing he looked for. Method for murder.

With a sullen growl he started for the door. A pair of boxing gloves was lying on the floor. He had liked Terry Reis—liked him a hell of a lot. And now the kid had made his last fight and lost—lost to the greatest champion of all, Death.

Owen was a sentimentalist at heart. Those leather gloves, the symbol of the champ's last fight, stirred something in his heart. He picked them up, tucked them under his arm. He would keep them as a souvenir. A souvenir of the fight against Death!

THEN a vague thought stirred in his mind. He pounced upon it, elaborated it. Those gloves—lying on the floor. They had been hanging high on the wall just before his assailant landed on him.

His eyes became preternaturally sharp, his brain hot, as he worked it at top speed. Then inspiration struck and something clicked in his

mind that sent him out of there on the run.

A half-hour later, Owen barged impetuously into the office of the Medical Examiner. Dr. Durant looked up from his desk, smiled and shoved a box of cigars across his desk toward the detective. "You still think Reis was murdered?"

"I do that!" growled Owen. "More than before."

He selected a cigar with great care, bit off the end.

"Listen, Doc," he began. "I want you to do me a favor. I know the doctor up at the ringside said it was heart failure; and I know you agreed with that. But, as a pal, perform an autopsy for me?"

Dr. Durant looked puzzled. "You're serious. You've got something?"

OWEN pursed his lips.

"I got an idea. If I'm right—somebody will burn for the job!"

Dr. Durant had worked with Owen before. He knew the futility of asking questions.

"What do you want me to test the body for first?" he asked.

"Poison!"

Durant rose from his chair, nodded crisply towards his desk. "There's a box of cigars. Sit down. Wait!"

Owen waited an impatient hour. Then the door opened. He jumped to his feet.

"So what?" he snapped.

Dr. Durant's face was sober.

"You were right." He nodded his head. "There was poison. Murder!"

"What kind of poison?"

"The most swift, sure and deadly—cyanide."

Owen's face was a grim, implacable mask as he started for the door. Durant caught him by the arm. "But, gosh, Owen, how could anyone administer cyanide to him in the ring before fifty thousand

people? It acts instantaneously. It could not have been administered to him before the fight started. Why—why—it's impossible!"

"Yeah?" flung back Owen. "That's what everybody thought."

"But how was it done?"

"I don't know, but I'm going to damn soon find out. What's the test for cyanide."

"A simple one." Durant scrawled rapidly on a sheet of paper. "Here's all the information you will need."

"Thanks, Doc," said Owen as he stuffed the paper into his pocket. "It looks like you're going to be a witness at a murder trial."

AT PRECISELY eleven o'clock the following morning, Detective Owen strolled casually into Billy Hillman's gymnasium on 42nd St. A bulky, unimportant looking package, wrapped in newspaper, was carried carelessly under one arm.

A cigar cocked jauntily out of one corner of his mouth, he looked genially about him. At the far end of the room, gathered around a ring, was a little knot of men.

They shifted uncomfortably at the detective's approach.

Owen greeted them affably.

"Hi, Kilbain—hi, Martin, nice of you to come."

"Nice, eh?" Kilbain sneered. "Don't hand me that line. We've been tailed ever since you streeeted us last night. When are you going to take the 'eyes' off us?"

Owen laughed but didn't answer. Battling Hart, the new champion, was punching a bag in the ring. Owen turned to him, waved a friendly greeting, walked over to where Rapp and Pinelli were talking.

They looked up.

"Well, Rapp, anything to say about that insurance policy?"

Rapp ran the point of a dry tongue over drier lips. "Honest to God, Bill—"

"Save it." Owen turned to Hart, who was now skipping rope, jerked his head. "Come here a minute."

Hart dropped the rope, crossed over, and climbed through the ropes. "Still in training, eh?" asked the detective.

The other smiled, nodded his head. "Sure, why not? I'm the champ now."

"Yeah," said Owen. "I'm going to do a little training myself."

He took the package from under his arm, shook off the paper, revealing a pair of boxing gloves.

"You better do some training with your brains," Kilbain sneered.

"Yeah," mocked Martin. "You're all right on the muscle work, but when it comes to the bean—"

Owen laughed.

"Razing me because I thought one of you bumped Reis? Well, my brainwork might not be as good as my footwork, but it isn't so bad. All I need now is a couple of rounds to stimulate it."

He held up the gloves.

"Recognize these. They were used last night in the fight. I'm keeping 'em for a souvenir. You're first, Kilbain—how about going a couple of rounds with me."

"Why don't you pick on somebody your size?" Kilbain sneered. Owen sized him up. He did have the edge on the gambler.

"But hell," continued the other. "I ought to be able to last one round with you."

Owen nodded.

"No; you'd be a set-up for me." He turned to Martin. "How about you?"

Martin tensed his bulging biceps.

"And how!" he accepted readily. "Nothing would please me better than to take a sock at you. Only I wish I could put a horseshoe into the glove."

Rapp stepped forward. "What about me, Owen?" he offered. "I

wouldn't mind taking a rap at you."

Pinelli, a short, squat Italian, sized up the detective.

"And I think I could take you, myself," he decided. "What do you think of that?"

Owen grinned tolerantly. "I'll give you all a chance later."

Then his eyes became cold. He whirled on the new champ.

"How about you, Hart? These mugs are too easy for me." He shoved the gloves in his hands before the other's nose. "Just a couple of rounds with these gloves. What do you say?"

Hart never said it with words. He lashed out suddenly with his fist. Owen rolled under the blow, ducked, side-stepped—closed. Sudden commotion—chaos!

In two swift, savage blows, Hart gave Owen another cauliflower ear. The detective took it, bored in. His iron fist sank deep into the champion's stomach.

HART grunted, his knee came up in a foul blow, caught the detective in the groin. Owen slumped. Hart wrestled him, mauled him, smashed his fist to the detective's jaw. Then with a sudden movement he wrenched at the gun on Owen's hip. Owen was groggy, but he was just beginning to fight. That savage jerk on the gun in his holster lashed him to furious life. His left hand froze to Hart's wrist, clung there desperately. His right slashed forward in a sledgehammer blow.

Hart's knees buckled.

Owen's fist moved with the speed of a rapier and with the kick of a mule. It landed flush on the point of the champion's chin. He went down slowly, joint by joint. His eyes glazed over. The detective stood panting over him.

"That was the punch Reis was going to give you—just before you murdered him!" he gritted.

He whirled furiously on the others. "Anybody else?"

But no one accepted the challenge. They were too shocked, too dumbfounded by the startling declaration that had followed it.

"**M**URDERED Reis, you said?" whispered Rapp.

"Right!" grated Owen.

"But how? There were a million people there. Coppers, dicks—you were sitting at the ringside."

Owen nodded.

"But he murdered him just the same. Right before our eyes. Hart was foxy, clever. He had plans of his own. Most of all he wanted to be champ. Well, he was, for a day. This is how he did it. He knew that Reis had it all over him like a tent. So before going into the ring he put some cyanide flakes on his shoes. He rubbed those deadly crystals into the resin in his corner.

"Then, in that last round, when he was groggy and Reis knocked him down, he rubbed his gloves in that resin—in that deadly cyanide. One tiny speck of it is deadly!"

"My God!" whispered Pinelli.

"Yes," growled Owen. "Hart's blows never killed Terry Reis. It was the cyanide on his gloves. He brushed them against Terry's lips. There was an open bruise there. And it killed him instantly."

"How did you tumble to all that?" asked Pinelli.

"I wouldn't have tumbled at all if Hart hadn't tried to get rid of the gloves. From then on it was a cinch. That is, to figure out how Reis was killed. But I still didn't know which of you did it.

"So I staged that little training session of mine. Hart was the only one who didn't want to take a crack at me—if I used these gloves."

"Hell!" said Martin with reluctant admiration. "Your brain is as good as your sock."