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"HOSPITAL CASE"
By
ROGER TORREY



**"DARK
DEATH"**

By

**RAOUL
WHITFIELD**

**FREDERICK NEBEL
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JOSEPH T. SHAW, Editor

VOL. XVI No. 6

AUG., 1933

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Cover painting by J. W. Schlaikjer

Headings by Arthur Rodman Bowker

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Issued Monthly by PRO-DISTRIBUTORS PUBLISHING COMPANY, Inc., 578 Madison Avenue, New York, New York

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION \$2.00

SINGLE COPIES 20 CENTS

IN CANADA, 25 CENTS

Entered as second class mail matter, March 1, 1920, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y.
under act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A.

Title registered as Trade Mark in U. S. Patent Office.

Member Newsstand Group. For advertising rates address The Newsstand Group,
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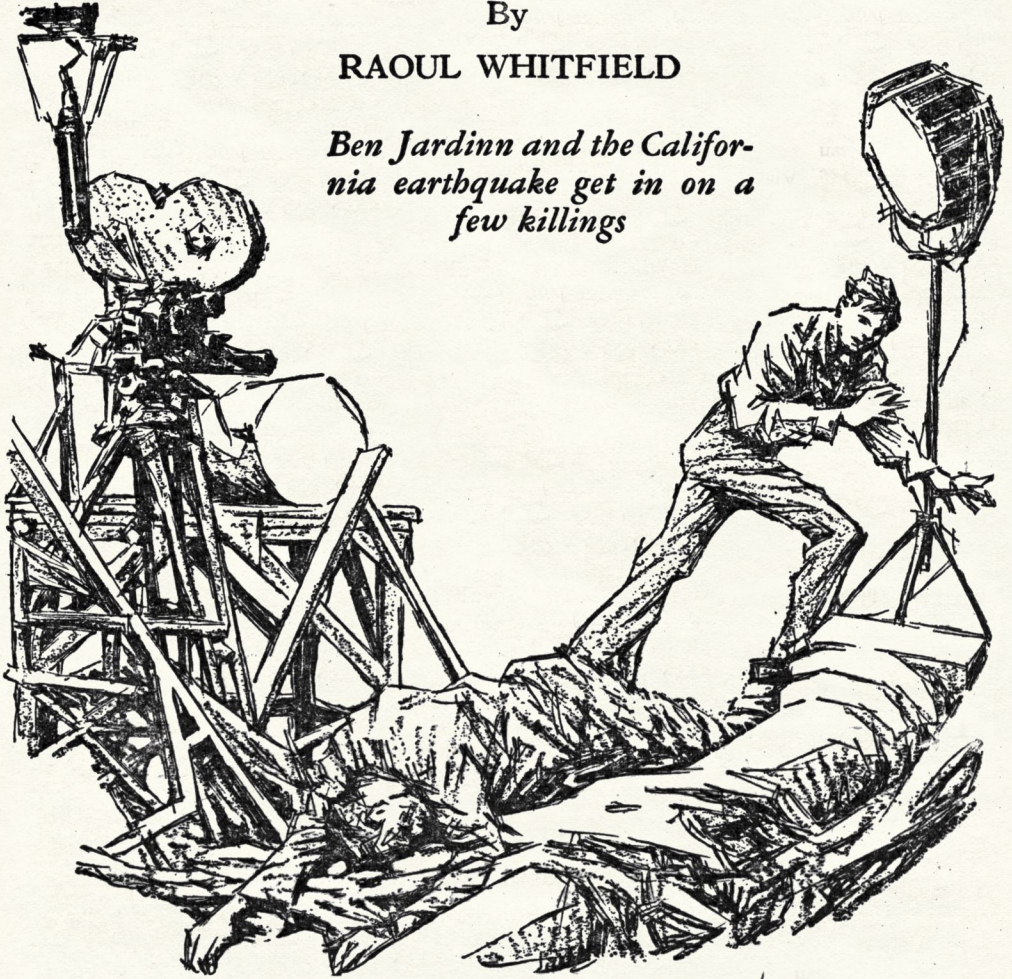
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Dark Death

By

RAOUL WHITFIELD

Ben Jardinn and the California earthquake get in on a few killings



WHEN Ben Jardinn came into the outer office there were a half dozen roses angling from a tall glass on Bridget Callahan's desk. The small clock showed five thirty-two and Bridget had left for the day. Jardinn frowned from the clock to the roses. His right-hand fingers slowly lifted a slip of white paper; Bridget's firm, small handwriting covered some space. He read softly, thoughtfully: "Collis phoned

and said never mind San Diego. Byron Jones came in—Willis will plead guilty and you won't be needed downtown. Hanneford has changed his mind; says to let his wife go ahead and play. I bought the roses for you to give to me. Thanks for remembering my birthday."

Jardinn said: "Damn—it *was* the mick's birthday, at that."

He broke the stem of a rose and stuck it in the button-hole of his gray suit coat, went into his office. He was looking down at the flower, frowning at the odor of it, as he passed the file case that stood



just inside the door. A voice said: "Hello, Jardinn."

Jardinn stopped and looked up. He kept his right-hand fingers on the stem of the rose. After a few seconds he coughed nervously. His dark eyes were narrowed and his tall, lean body was motionless.

Carrow said, shifting the automatic just a little:

"I hope to — you roll over on your back for the finish. The camera boys'll get a break on that cute thing in your button-hole."

Carrow's voice was low and colorless. Jardinn let his right, browned hand drop away from the rose. Carrow raised the gun muzzle a little.

"Hold the pose," he said in the same toneless voice. "I never seen a louse with a flower before."

Jardinn said quietly: "Don't be a fool, Carrow. I just left my stenographer downstairs. She wanted to tell me something, but I said you were waiting up here."

Carrow had a wide face and a good jaw. His blue eyes held a cold expression.

"You're a bad liar—even with a gun on you, Jardinn. I've been waiting here twenty minutes, and that note was on the desk out there when I came in."

Jardinn's thin lips showed a faint smile. "She was coming back to talk business with me—when I met her."

Carrow shook his head. "No good. I watched you parking your car across the street. While you were doing that I called her house. She didn't know it was me because I did things with my voice. She'd just got home—and her little nest is three miles from here."

Jardinn kept his eyes on the gun. "You think of a lot of things, Carrow," he said quietly.

Carrow leaned back in the straight chair. His back was to the window of the office, two stories above Hollywood Boulevard, and the automatic was held low.

"I told you to lay off the Rainey accident, Jardinn. You didn't do it. You been digging around."

Jardinn sighed. "I guess it was an accident, after all," he said. "I didn't find a thing wrong."

Carrow made a sucking sound. "Number Three lie isn't any better than the other two, Mr. Louse. You think that Phil ran her car into the wall with one big idea ahead of him. That was to beat

her over the head with a wrench and make it look like a crash job. Phil likes the way the beer thing stands. He thinks what happened to that gal was his business. So he sent me up to say so long to you."

Jardinn tapped trouser cloth with his long fingers. He took his eyes away from the automatic and looked thoughtfully at Carrow.

"If Phil likes the beer business, and doesn't want to hang for murder—what's he turning you loose on me for? I'm in this racket for money—and Rainey knows it."

Carrow shook his big head slowly. "We offered you enough to lay off. If you know anything important enough, spill it, Jardinn. Or—stick your chin up—and take it!"

Jardinn said sharply: "Wait!"

He watched Carrow's trigger finger on the Colt. Carrow's blue eyes were half closed; his gun arm was stiff from the elbow out.

Jardinn spoke very softly and slowly. "I'll admit I'm on the floor of this office now, Carrow. You're on the way out. Maybe you can get away—maybe not. I'll give it to you straight. I got the goods on your boss early. Some time after that, a certain cop was found shot to death downtown, in a vacant lot.

"That was the cop who was first to reach Ruth McLean's car, after the murder you call an accident. He was first to reach the car because Phil Rainey had it fixed. He took care of anything that looked like murder—and maybe he helped things look more like an accident. But he had a rotten record—enough to make me suspicious. I got him in a corner and worked the truth out of him. Maybe he told Rainey I'd better be paid off. Anyway, he was."

There was a little silence, except for the traffic sounds on the boulevard. Then Carrow said grimly:

"So what?"

Jardinn said: "At four-thirty I went inside of the *International Pictures Studio*."

Carrow repeated steadily and coldly: "So what?"

A STREET car rumbled by, on the boulevard. The sun was getting low and the day had been cloudy. When Jardinn didn't speak at once Carrow stood up and reached out with his left hand. The indirect light from the bulbs above flooded the office. Carrow kept his back to the window and the gun low, close to his stomach. Jardinn said:

"I *talked* to somebody in the studio."

Carrow's eyes were very blue and very small. He nodded his big head.

"We can handle that," he said tonelessly. "It isn't important enough. Stick your chin up, Jardinn!"

The Colt's blackness caught the electric light as it shifted a bit. Jardinn said sharply, desperately:

"Listen, Carrow—"

Carrow cut in thinly: "*You* listen, Jardinn. —knows it'll be the last sound you'll ever hear on this —"

The indirect lighting suddenly was less brilliant. Sound beat into the room. Crackling sound. The light died completely. Outside glass was crashing. There was an explosion. The office was swaying now. Jardinn staggered and then let his body fall sidewise and downward. Carrow shouted hoarsely:

"——! Earthquake—"

His gun crashed and Jardinn felt stinging pain just above the right elbow. The gun made only sharp, faint sound against the greater sound of falling material. There were screams in the boulevard, and the shaking was more violent now. Jardinn jerked at the grip of his own automatic, ripped it from his right hip pocket. He rolled desperately on the swaying floor of the office as Carrow shot the second time. Jardinn felt no pain.

A great shadow seemed to swing downward, near the window, as Jardinn, on his stomach, lifted his head to look at Carrow. And as he looked he saw the big-headed man go down beneath the swinging shadow. There was a terrible

crash as the ten-foot high, heavy bookcase battered to the floor. The chair on which Carrow had been seated was splintered under the weight of it. Glass stabbed against the walls.

The corners of the room made grinding sound, and plaster fallen from walls and ceiling made a fine dust. Jardinn blinked hurting eyes at the one limp hand extending from beneath the bookcase. Then he pillowed his face in his arms. The streets were filled with sound.

The motion now was more gentle—from side to side. After a few seconds there was barely any motion. Jardinn lifted his head. When he rose to his knees he crawled around wreckage and looked at the splinters of glass in Carrow's head. There was no pulse in the outflung wrist.

Jardinn stood up and got to the window. He looked down at the crowds in the boulevard. A fire was starting, across the street. Cars were crashed, directly in front of the old building in which he had his office.

He turned from the window, fumbled around Carrow's body and got the Colt that lay near dead fingers. On the way down damaged stairs he looked at his right arm. The bullet from Carrow's gun had only ripped skin.

Jardinn reached the street and listened to the distant wail of sirens. A man pawed at him and said hoarsely:

"Good ——! that was a—bad one! Just think—what *might* have happened!

Jardinn said grimly: "I'm *thinking*, brother."

2



RIDGET CALLAHAN kept Irish eyes on her shorthand book and her pencil made scratching sound. Ben Jardinn looked at the battered office walls.

—Phil Rainey's partner died. Rainey tried to buy out the half interest in the two new beer palaces from widow

Ruth McLean. She thought he wanted them too cheaply. She was afraid of him—she came to me. I took a five-hundred-dollar retaining fee, for protection of Ruth McLean. Rainey murdered her under cover of a machine accident. I got that from a cop he had fixed, and the cop was killed a few hours later.

"Rainey's gunman, Carrow, practically admitted the murder when he was getting set to finish me off. The earthquake got him. Ruth McLean had left her share in Rainey's beer business to her brother, Alan McLean, assistant director at *International Pictures*. I'd told him that I'd learned Rainey had murdered his sister—a few hours before the quake. Alan McLean was one of three men killed by the quake in the studio."

Bridget Callahan whistled softly. "Husband dies—widow murdered—brother killed in earthquake," she said slowly. "What's that half interest in the beer palaces' worth, Ben?"

Jardinn smiled. "The two biggest spots in Los Angeles—doing capacity business. At least two hundred thousand."

Bridget frowned. "Who gets the half interest—now?"

Jardinn lighted a cigarette and flicked the match towards a pile of plaster in a corner.

"Fate spins a tenuous web," he stated mockingly. "Alan McLean was crazy about a girl named Jen Lee. Does bits in pictures. My guess is—*she* gets the half."

Bridget widened her eyes. "Beauty and the beast, eh?" she breathed. "What'll Phil Rainey do to her?"

Jardinn grunted. "Let's hope it won't be a fate worse than death," he said with irony.

He inspected the glow of his cigarette. "Trouble is, the quake messed up a lot of things. The police have their hands full, with several hundred dead or hurt and all that sort of thing. A cop whined to me that Rainey was a murderer. The cop's dead. Carrow, here to kill me,

practically admitted Rainey was a murderer. Carrow's dead, fortunately for me. I had told Alan McLean about his sister's murder. We were going to the D. A. together, with the story. Now McLean's dead."

Bridget Callahan half closed her greenish-blue eyes.

"And a gal named Jen Lee gets the other half of Rainey's beer palaces."

Jardinn nodded. "My guess, and it's a good one. We'll work it that way. But Rainey has so much money that my story to the D. A. isn't worth a damn. Little Jen sits in the spot."

Bridget said: "Well, Ben—you got five hundred from Ruth McLean. And almost a couple of bullets. Is the case closed?"

Jardinn smiled coldly. "Closed? Even if I can't *prove* it—Rainey's a killer. He doesn't want me moving around too much. I know something—*someday* I might be able to prove it. Even if Alan McLean is dead, and can't back me up."

Bridget said: "So what?"

Jardinn scowled at her. "The last time I heard that phrase Carrow was sitting in here with a gun on me—and saying it. Don't do it again."

Bridget sniffled. "Getting reminiscent, eh?" she muttered.

Jardinn swore at her. "Stick the notes in a safe place and—"

He broke off. Bridget swore. The office swayed gently from side to side. Doors swung in both offices and loose things rattled. After a few seconds the motion stopped.

Bridget said nervously: "That's the fifteenth—in four days. Or maybe I missed a couple."

Jardinn stood up. "Seventeenth," he corrected, "and we'll have more of 'em. Dig up Jen Lee's phone number for me, and shake it up."

Bridget moved her well-formed body towards the outer office.

"If you get between Phil Rainey and this Lee girl—it may be worse than a quake," she said over a shoulder.

Jardinn kicked a wall and watched loose plaster fall. His lean, browned face was turned towards the outer office.

"She's probably good looking," he stated. "Rainey won't mind that. I probably know too much. Rainey *will* mind that. But if she's worth half those two beer spots—that means money—"

Bridget called: "And *you* mind *that*."

Jardinn said coldly: "You're a mind reader."

The outside, private phone rang and he walked over to the desk, lifted the receiver. Bridget came into the office and wrote Jen Lee's number down on his desk pad, under the letters J. L. Jardinn said into the phone:

"Who—Ramsey Bennett?"

Bridget Callahan went to the window and stood with her back to Jardinn until he hung up. When she turned he smiled grimly at her.

"A little murder job at *International Pictures*," he said slowly. "A cutter by the name of Ramsey Bennett. They just found the body, in the cutting room."

Bridget said calmly: "So what?"

Jardinn swore at her. He took his felt hat from an end of the desk.

"So I go down and get the murderer."

Bridget smiled. "Wouldn't it be fun if you did," she breathed. "While you're down there you might look up Jen Lee. She works at that studio."

Jardinn narrowed his eyes. "Sure," he said after a few seconds. "Everything happens over there—they even had the earthquake."

Bridget Callahan made clicking sound and Jardinn went outside and down stairs that were being repaired. On Hollywood Boulevard, a heavy-set man, not badly dressed, came up to him and said thickly:

"I lost about everything in the big shake. Brother, can you spare a dime?"

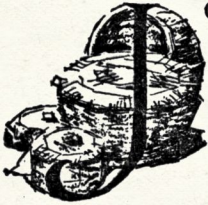
Jardinn said coldly: "Did you say a dime or a dame?"

The heavy-set man looked puzzled. Jardinn sniffed the odor of beer from the man's breath.

"Never mind the answer—I can't spare either."

He crossed Hollywood Boulevard, got into his car and drove rapidly towards the studio of *International Pictures*.

3



OE BEDFORD stood aside and let Jardinn look at the floor of the cutting room. Ramsey Bennett was sprawled near a chair, most of the back of his head crushed in. The chair was near a six-foot bench that held the apparatus, lighted from below, over which the film was run. There were racks in the room holding cylinders of film. Bennett was wearing a soft, loudly striped shirt, and his sleeves were rolled up.

Jardinn looked around the room. "That a new uniform you're wearing, Sergeant?" he asked.

The Hollywood police sergeant smiled with his thick lips.

"The wife made me do it. I hear a guy got himself killed in your office, during the big shake."

Jardinn nodded, stepped inside the cutting room and looked down at the body.

"Some bookshelves fell over. One of the few good things the quake did. The name of the louse was Carrow."

Bedford said, slowly: "Yeah—we've been trying to get something on him for a long time. The shake did it."

Jardinn took the cigarette from between his lips and tapped ashes on the floor. He pointed at them.

"Those are mine—not the murderer's. How long ago did it happen?"

Bedford shrugged. "It's about three. He had lunch at the studio cafeteria at one, and talked to Gary Lord near the line of cutting rooms at one thirty. At two fifteen a messenger came in with a notice that the studio was previewing a picture tomorrow night. He found the body. The doctor from the studio hos-

pital came along and figured he'd been dead around thirty minutes, maybe not that long. Skull smashed in. They called the station and I got here about two thirty. Things were just this way. I haven't learned a thing."

Jardinn said: "Thanks. I did some work for Howard Gracie, and he called me in. Bennett was one of his pet cutters."

Bedford scratched his left ear noisily. "Bennett was the friend of everybody," he said in a toneless voice. "I been asking questions."

Jardinn smiled faintly. "Maybe someone made a mistake," he said. "Got the wrong man."

Bedford grinned. "That would be a help, wouldn't it?"

Jardinn walked around the body, looked at the hands. Miss Somerville stood near the opened door, looking pale.

"Mr. Gracie asked me to come over and tell you anything that might help, Mr. Jardinn," she said.

Jardinn walked out of the cutting room and stood beside Gracie's secretary and Sergeant Bedford.

"No enemies, Miss Somerville—Bennett, I mean?"

She shook her head. "Not that we knew of. Everyone liked him."

Jardinn nodded. "How about the adjoining cutting rooms. Who uses them?"

"They're closed. The earthquake stopped production until yesterday. We had a lot of repairing to do. Only three cutters are working. The other two are in the old cutters' building, on the other side of the lot."

Bedford said: "He didn't go much for the ladies, Miss Somerville?"

She shook her head. "Not that I'd ever heard. He was a quiet man, didn't talk much."

Jardinn looked at Bedford. "It's a police case, of course?"

Bedford said: "Sure—but we don't mind a master mind like yourself doing his bit."

Jardinn laughed hollowly. "You're so good, Sergeant. I suppose the machinery of the police is grinding?"

Bedford frowned. "Working smoothly, not grinding. Smoothly doing the usual stupid, police things."

Jardinn said: "Sergeant—I hate to tell you you're the smartest police human in or out of uniform, in Hollywood. What do you think?"

Bedford shook his head. "It might have been a hunk of lead pipe. A woman might have swung it, if it was heavy enough. Me—I don't think a woman did it. Whoever did, did it quietly and took the weapon away with him or her. Just one slam, maybe with both hands getting a grip. The motive? I couldn't even guess."

Jardinn said to Miss Somerville: "How many employees in the studio, around lunch time?"

She was thoughtful. "Probably fifteen hundred. And eight or ten visitors, on pass. We're getting the names of those who came in on pass."

Jardinn said: "Fine—I'll just poke around. I'll see Mr. Gracie before I leave."

Gracie's secretary went away. Bedford brushed a knee of his trousers.

"Funny, Carrow getting knocked off in your office," he said casually.

Jardinn got a cigarette pack from a pocket. "I laughed myself sick," he said.

Bedford said: "You weren't covering anything up, were you, Jardinn?"

Jardinn offered the sergeant a cigarette, and they lighted up.

"By the quake?" Jardinn said. "My timing wasn't that good. Did you see the remains?"

Bedford nodded. "Yeah—the idea of a gun like Carrow getting kicked out in *your* office interested me. But he was all busted up, so I guess it was a natural."

Jardinn drew a deep breath. "Thank — you won't pull me in." He turned and looked at Ramsey Bennett's body. "Nothing much has been shoved around in here?"

The sergeant shook his head. "It's just the way it was when I got here, except for those ashes you let hit the floor."

Jardinn inhaled deeply, let his dark eyes smile at the sergeant's.

"Fingerprint stuff done yet?" he asked.

Bedford said: "I'm waiting for Jeff now. But I don't figure he'll turn up a print."

Jardinn walked a few feet from the doorway of the cutter's room, one of a line of ten office-like affairs built of concrete. He narrowed his dark eyes.

"See you later," he said and moved away.

The sergeant called after him. "I still owe you that ten, Jardinn."

Jardinn said without turning: "Don't worry about that—I'm not."



He walked along the macadam studio street to a wider cross street. To the left were a line of sound stages. His eyes looked at a jagged crack on one of them, then went to a bulletin-board at one side of the wide street. He went to the bulletin-board and read a list of the productions that were being shot, the names of the directors and players.

There was one called *Lovely Lady*. After the names of stars and more important players he read, half to himself: "Jen Lee."

Stage Four was down the wide street and to the right. When he reached it the red light was on, above the outside sound door, and the warning bell was ringing. After a few seconds the red light went out and the bell stopped ringing. Jardinn went through both sound doors and immediately was on a dining-room set. A hoarse voice said loudly:

"Okey here— over to Stage Eight for the Twenty-third Street subway station. In half an hour—not ready until then."

There was a general movement away from the set. Al Sneedon waved a hand

at Jardinn, who called over to him: "Miss Lee on the set?"

The chief electrician looked around and pointed towards one end of the elaborately set table.

"In white—with the red hair," he called to Jardinn, and left the set.

Jardinn dropped his cigarette and squashed it with a new heel. He walked slowly towards the end of the table and Jen Lee. Her back was towards him and her figure was nice. Tall and slender and straight. She was talking with a short actor in dinner clothes and as Jardinn came up she said in a throaty voice:

"It was terrible—and imagine, little me in the bathtub. If the apartment had tumbled over—just think!"

Jardinn halted just behind her and said: "Miss Lee?"

She turned slowly. She was beautiful in a cold, precise way. Her eyes were blue and her features small. Her hair was very red and smartly arranged. She said:

"Yes?"

Jardinn smiled gently. "I'm Ben Jardinn, from the detective agency of my own name. I'd like to have a short chat."

Jen Lee's blue eyes widened a little. The man in dinner clothes said:

"You got a half hour, Jen—I'll trot along."

She nodded and he went away. Jardinn looked at a divan at one end of the dining-room set.

"Let's squat," he suggested, and moved towards the divan. When he reached it he stood up until she arrived and sat down. He sat fairly close to her and watched her long fingers as she crossed her legs, adjusted the severe and thin evening dress she was wearing.

"I've heard of you, Mr. Jardinn," she said.

He smiled. "I'm flattered. I've heard of you."

She didn't say that *she* was flattered. Jardinn offered her a cigarette, which she refused. Her right-hand fingers

played with imitation pearls and she kept her blue eyes on Jardinn's dark ones.

"A man named Phil Rainey, who didn't have too good a reputation before it was legal to drink beer, owns the two largest beer drinking spots in Los Angeles," Jardinn said thoughtfully. "I'm telling you this just in case."

Jen Lee raised her eyebrows. "Just in case of what?"

Jardinn smiled cheerfully. "Just in case you don't already know it."

The actress laughed lightly. It had a forced quality.

"I've heard of Phil Rainey, of course," she said. "He was a gambler, I think."

Jardinn said: "Yeah—he still is. Now I'll get along with this. He had a partner in these two spots. The partner died. Phil tried to buy his partner's share, which had been left to his partner's wife, Ruth McLean. He tried to get the share cheap. It didn't work. He kept at it. He didn't exactly threaten, but Ruth McLean began to get frightened. That's where I came in. She came to me and paid me to sort of see that things didn't get too tough."

Jardinn was smiling very tightly. Jen Lee was attentive, but her blue eyes were cool and almost expressionless.

"A week or so after she had come to me—she was killed in an automobile accident," Jardinn said slowly. "Her car crashed into a wall. By one of those strange twists—Phil Rainey happened to be driving the car that forced hers into the wall. He was unconscious for a short time—a cop nearby got to Ruth McLean first. He reported she was dead when he reached her. Head crushed. He reported Rainey was unconscious. Rainey recovered."

Jen Lee said: "Terrible, wasn't it? I remember reading about it."

Jardinn looked at his fingernails. "Terrible," he agreed. "Her will left everything to her brother, Alan McLean. I suppose you know him?"

Her blue eyes were wider now, held more expression.

"Slightly," she said. "He was—an assistant director here, in the studio."

Jardinn said: "Listen, Jen—let's not play that way." His voice was suddenly cold. "Let's play we'll be on the level with each other."

The actress stiffened. "I don't understand—"

Jardinn said: "Alan McLean was one of three men killed in the earthquake, here on the lot. You knew him pretty well, pretty damned well. He left all his property to you. Everything he had."

Jen Lee drew a sharp breath. Her eyes were very narrow on Jardinn's. Slowly she relaxed. She wiped her red lips with a small handkerchief.

"Well—what if I *did* know him well?" she asked defiantly.

Jardinn smiled with his thin lips curving downward. He rolled the cigarette between his browned fingers.

"It helps me to know we're getting along," he said simply.

There was a little silence. Working lights above switched out. The dining-room set was almost dark. Jardinn spoke with the cigarette between his lips.

"As things stand, when the will of Alan McLean is probated—you're a half owner, with Phil Rainey, in the two beer spots."

Jen Lee said coldly: "Yes, I suppose so."

Jardinn nodded. "Okay. Now we come to something else. Some time between one-thirty and two-fifteen, this afternoon, a cutter named Ramsey Bennett was murdered—in his cutting coop."

The actress rested her head against the back of the divan and closed her eyes. She was breathing quickly and was pale.

"All these terrible things," she murmured. "The accident to Ruth McLean, then the earthquake—and Alan dead. And now a murder—"

Jardinn said steadily: "And between the accident to Ruth McLean and the earthquake—something else happened."

Jen Lee opened her eyes slightly. Jardinn was smiling a little.

"Phil Rainey sent a killer named Carrow to my office to shoot me silent. Know why?"

The actress closed her eyes and shivered. She shook her head slightly.

"Because I'd made a crooked cop come through with the truth. Ruth McLean didn't die in an accident. She was murdered. So when Rainey found the cop had talked—the cop was finished off in a vacant lot soon after. And Carrow came for me. He would have got me, but the earthquake got him instead."

Jen Lee leaned forward, touched her lips again with the tiny handkerchief. Jardinn said:

"That half interest he wants passed from Ruth to Alan to you. What I'm getting at is that—did Ramsey Bennett figure in this in any way?"

Jen Lee opened her eyes slowly. She said in a weak voice: "It's all terrible—Bennett. I'm sure I don't know. He was just a film cutter. I don't think I'd ever met him."

JARDINN drew a deep breath. "Okay. I'm not trying to hang *every* murder in the city on Phil Rainey. But I wanted to talk to you about him—"

The actress said more steadily: "Are you sure Phil—Mr. Rainey did the things you—"

Jardinn stood up and looked down at Jen Lee.

"You're lying," he said coldly. "You haven't just *heard* of Phil Rainey. You *know* him—"

She rose and stood erect, her hands clenched at her sides. There were spots of red in her cheeks and her eyes held rage.

"Damn you, Jardinn!" Her voice was low and fierce. "You can't drag me into this! I'm just getting a start in pictures. Because Alan McLean loved me, even though I didn't love him—because he wanted to leave me every—"

thing he owned—I won't be dragged down! I won't be—"

Jardinn said: "Never mind the acting. If you don't want to help me—sit on the spot alone."

The rage died slowly from her eyes. She dropped on the divan, leaned back, her hands at her sides, unclenching. After a few seconds she spoke softly.

"What do you mean—I'm on—the spot?"

Jardinn stood looking down at her. "Did Phil Rainey know Al McLean was crazy about you, had left you everything?"

She looked at him for several seconds. Then, slowly, she nodded her head.

"I've been out with Rainey three times," she said in a dull voice. "I'd been warned against him, but there was something about him—"

Jardinn cut in: "I know what he does to women. And you told him McLean had made a will leaving things to you?"

She nodded. "I didn't mean to. Alan had just told me. I thought it was funny. That night I was out late with Phil Rainey. I didn't know there was any connection between Alan and Phil—any financial connection. After a few drinks I told him what McLean had told me—that he was naming me in his will. Phil just laughed."

Jardinn said: "Sure—it was funny all right." His voice was very grim. "I can't *prove* a thing on Rainey—not yet. He hates me, and he'd fight me to the finish, and win. But he murdered Ruth McLean because he couldn't buy her. Maybe he thought he could buy Alan McLean, or do something else. And then he heard that McLean was leaving everything to you, because he'd fallen for you. And while he was thinking that over the quake got McLean—and left you sitting on a nice warm spot."

Jen Lee said in a firmer voice: "I don't want that half interest—I don't want anything of McLean's. I didn't love him. I can tell the court that."

Jardinn shook his head. "Don't be a

fool," he said. "You're not even featured in pictures yet. You might flop."

She shivered. "But you tell me that Rainey is a murderer—"

Jardinn smiled coldly. "You've got looks. You're a little scared now, but you're not so dumb as you're acting. Sit on the warm spot and wait. If things get *too* tough—sell out cheap. But wait until you see how tough they get."

She spoke anxiously. "Do you think I need—a bodyguard?"

Jardinn tapped ashes from his cigarette. "What for?" he asked. "Rainey has a couple of them—and they shoot straight as hell."

The girl covered her face with her hands and made smothered sound.

Jardinn stood looking down at her, his dark eyes almost closed. Fingers of his left hand tapped the gray of his trouser material.

She took her hands away from her face, and looked up at him. Her make-up was smeared a little; she was very pale.

"I'd feel better—if I were a client of yours, Mr. Jardinn—"

Jardinn shook his head. "That would only make things worse. Rainey knows how much I know. He knows I can't prove anything—not yet. But he doesn't feel comfortable. He'd know I was sticking close to you. And that might make him move faster."

She rose unsteadily, and Jardinn got fingers around her right arm, just below the elbow.

"Listen, Jen," he said very coldly, "you wouldn't be running to Rainey and opening and closing your mouth, would you?"

She pushed him away. "Take your hands off me!" she snapped. "I'm going to my lawyers—"

Jardinn smiled grimly. "Be terribly careful," he advised. "Careful what you tell them. Even a law firm with four names can't stop a killer's choppers—"

Jen Lee moaned and her knees buckled under her. As she slipped

downward Jardinn caught her roughly in his arms. He stood motionless, holding her and smelling too much perfume.

The studio floor started to move slowly—to shiver gently from side to side. Things overhead made creaking sound. Jardinn muttered: "Another one of those — damn' shakes!"

Men were shouting to each other. Something somewhere beyond crashed to the floor. Jardinn turned his head and watched water in a glass on the long table swing from side to side. The actress was a dead weight in his arms, so he let her slip gently to the polished floor of the set. After a few seconds the swaying and creaking stopped.

Jardinn leaned over and lifted Jen Lee to the divan. A tall man with horn-rimmed glasses came along and widened his eyes on the actress' figure. His lips made clicking sound as he looked at Jardinn.

"It's Miss Lee," he stated in a deep voice. "The earthquake shock cause the faint?"

Jardinn said: "Sure—women are like that. Grab some water for her, will you?"

While the tall man was moving towards the elaborately set table to get the water, Jardinn walked rapidly off the set. Outside the sound stage, in the hot sunlight, two gaily uniformed soldiers of some king were talking. Jardinn passed near the shorter of the two, who was saying:

"I've always figured she was a better liar than actress."

Jardinn smiled narrowly. "It's an idea," he breathed softly and moved away.

4



MACK COSDEN frowned down at his polished shoes. He tapped a pencil on his desk, frowned up at Jardinn.

"Three dead in the earthquake—and now this murder. Po-

lice all over the place. Learn anything, Ben?"

Jardinn shook his head. "Not a thing," he replied. "You got off lucky, Cosden. If the studio had been in Long Beach there would have been hell to pay."

Cosden grunted. "Bennett was one of my best cutters. He was a quiet chap. We gave him our most difficult and important negatives. He did developing once in a while, too. If it was a very special job."

Jardinn said very quietly: "I've been talking to some of the camera crew on the *Lost Metropolis* set. They tell me that when the first—the big shake came—they were shooting. The lights went out and everyone headed for the sound doors. There was a lot of excitement in the darkness. The cameramen ran for it, too—but the camera kept on working until a bulb blew. They discovered that when they looked the camera over, after coming back to the stage again. Boyd, the director, figured they must have photographed some of the excitement, as there was a dim light for about ten seconds until everything went out. The footage register showed the camera had turned over for about fifteen seconds."

The camera department boss looked narrowly at Jardinn.

"Yeah—we thought maybe we had something. A shot of things falling and the boys running for it. The set was a tricky one—a lot of structural stuff, some of it heavy. It smashed all over the place. Just chance that it didn't crack the camera."

Jardinn said tonelessly: "Alan McLean was killed on that set, wasn't he?"

Cosden nodded. "That was one of the things we figured the camera must have shot," he replied. "We wanted to see how it happened, though it would have been pretty gruesome stuff to run in the projection room. But he was found lying about six feet from the camera, in front of it. Head battered in. A heavy column near him and some

other stuff off to one side. I turned that film over to Ramsey Bennett—for developing and cutting. Not that it needed to be cut, but he could have trimmed it off of the few scenes that had been shot before."

Jardinn yawned. "No good?"

Cosden shook his head and looked at the chewed tip of his cigar.

"Too dark—didn't show a thing. I asked Ramsey about it personally. We were all interested. He said he didn't get a thing. Threw the stuff away. It was a tough break."

Jardinn said: "How about the stuff shot just before?"

Cosden nodded. "That was okey—Ramsey just cut the dark stuff off. We're using the other shots."

Jardinn looked at a still of Greta Harpa that hung behind and above the camera department head's desk.

"You couldn't use the scene they had started to shoot—just before the shiver came along, could you?" he asked.

Cosden looked puzzled. "You getting at something? The scene had run only about five seconds. It wasn't anything much—just a meeting between a couple of characters. They had discovered each other, and one of them was saying: 'You, Steponson!' Then the shock came. Everything stopped. Bill Cary, who was playing Steponson, yells: 'Good——! it's a quake——!' We hear a couple of other shouts and the sound of things crackling. Then it went dark. That's where Ramsey Bennett cut out the dead stuff."

Jardinn said thoughtfully. "Okey—he was a good man. Quiet and efficient. He developed this film, because you thought it was important. He let you have all that was any good."

Cosden frowned. "Sure."

Jardinn spoke slowly. "Even if the stage was so dark that the camera didn't photograph after a certain second—how about the *sound*? The mechanism must have picked that up. Wouldn't that have been worth *hearing*, even if you couldn't see anything?"

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Cosden whistled softly. "Sure it would have," he muttered. "I wonder why in hell Bennett—"

He broke off, stood up. Then he shook his head.

"The sound must have gone bad, too. Though the sound truck wasn't damaged much. But then, Bennett was a good man, Jardinn. He knew his film stuff. He said the camera didn't get anything—maybe the sound was all a jumble. And not enough light for the camera. So he scrapped it."

Jardinn said: "Where would he scrap it?"

Cosden stood up. "What are you after, Jardinn? That film is inflammable—the stuff not wanted is tossed in special metal boxes and burned in the big incinerator, every night."

Jardinn swore softly. "You didn't know Ramsey Bennett very well, personally?"

The camera department boss frowned at the detective.

"Don't think anyone did. He was a quiet man, lived alone. No relatives around here. I think he told me his parents were dead. Only one thing besides pictures was on his mind. He wanted a small boat—one big enough to cruise along the Pacific Coast in. South America, and that sort of thing. He was saving his money for that, but he figured he'd be working another ten years or so. He wanted to retire, you see?"

Jardinn nodded. "Okey and thanks. Wouldn't mind doing the cruise stuff myself, until these damned shocks get over."

He smiled and moved towards the door of Cosden's office. The camera boss said:

"What was the point of the questions, Ben?"

Jardinn shrugged, reached the door that led to a camera department corridor.

"Just questions. Bennett was murdered—I'd like to know all I can about him. Sometimes murderers have reasons for killing."

HE opened the door and went outside. Closing the door behind him he stood for several seconds, thinking. Then he went along the corridor and outside of the camera building. At the nearest booth phone he called his office.

Bridget Callahan said: "Hello, Ben—that last shake seems to have cracked the pint flask—the one in your lower drawer."

Jardinn said: "Yeah—how'd you find that out?"

Bridget chuckled. "I got scared and needed stimulation. The stuff's leaking through the crack so I guess I'll have to drink what's left."

Jardinn said grimly: "If you do I'll brain you. Anything new?"

Bridget's voice was calm. "A Mr. Phil Rainey came in to see you. He said he'd try again."

Jardinn was silent for several seconds. "He didn't say anything else?"

"That was all he said," Bridget replied. "He was smiling when he said it."

Jardinn tapped a finger against the phone mouthpiece.

"Must have been in a good humor," he replied. "Did you say I might be in this afternoon?"

"Told him you might be along around six. He grinned and said *he* might be along, too."

Jardinn stopped tapping the phone. "Nothing else happened?"

Bridget said in a serious voice. "He's a cold-looking man, Ben—please be careful."

"It's a habit I accumulated," he replied. "Call the Hollywood Ticket Agency and get a couple of good seats for *Dinner at Ten*. Birthday party for you, tomorrow night. We'll have dinner at eight somewhere."

Bridget said: "But my birthday is over—and I got flowers for you to give to me."

Jardinn chuckled. "We'll catch up with it, and there may be a full moon. After the theater we'll drive into the big

pine country, and —! will *that* be romance!"

Bridget snorted. "Romance would have to hit you over the head with a blackjack and announce itself three times—before you got the name, Ben."

He said: "You won't go with me?"

"Sure," she replied. "It'll be a free show, anyway."

Jardinn hung up and went from the booth. He walked up the studio street, turned to the left and reached the line of cutters' rooms. Sergeant Bedford stood near the opened door, and Jeff Lane, the fingerprint expert, stood beside him.

"Get anything?" Jardinn asked.

Lane shook his head. "The only prints in there are Bennett's. I'd say whoever smashed his skull in got him from behind with one wallop, and then walked out."

Sergeant Bedford nodded. "And he didn't have an enemy," he said cheerfully.

The body of Bennett had been removed. Jardinn looked at Bedford.

"You through in there?"

Bedford nodded again. "All finished. The lieutenant and me—we gave it a good going over. Got some photographs and all that. Jeff did the print stuff. The room is yours, Jardinn."

The fingerprint expert said: "I'm going along—you coming my way, Sergeant—or sticking around?"

Bedford said: "I'm going out to the front office, anyway." He looked at Jardinn. "If you get anything—let me know, will you?"

Jardinn smiled faintly. "Sure. I'm getting too old to make pinches of killers myself."

Bedford sniffled. "I'm going on vacation in ten days—so it'll have to be before then."

Jardinn said: "How late will you be on duty tonight?"

The sergeant narrowed his eyes. "I'm through at seven, but I can stick around until quarter after if you think you can turn up the murderer by then."

Jardinn nodded. "I think so—I'll call you before seven."

Bedford looked at Jeff Lane, and both of them looked at Jardinn. Bedford's eyebrows were raised.

"If you got any ideas—maybe I can help," he suggested.

Jardinn shook his head. "I've got ideas, but you can't help," he said simply and went into the cutting room of the murdered Bennett.

5



It was ten minutes of five when Brayden Gracie, Al Sneedon and Ben Jardinn went into Number Four projection room. Jardinn said:

"You spoke to the operator, Mr. Gracie?"

Gracie was short and thickset. His eyes were keen, gray.

"He understands perfectly," he answered crisply.

They sat in comfortable leather chairs at the rear of the small, narrow room, facing the screen at the far end. The lights dimmed as Gracie pressed a button. Jardinn said:

"I wanted you here, Al, because you know about everyone in the studio—working here, I mean. And you were on the *Lost Metropolis* set when the quake hit. I found this strip of developed film in Bennett's room. It was rolled inside of a cigarette tin—one of the kind that hold fifty cigarettes standing on end. The tin was behind the film can rack, pretty well hidden. It was over a half hour before I got to it. The film shows that Alan McLean was murdered—and how."

Brayden Gracie said sharply: "I'm ready." He leaned forward and pressed a button that buzzed in the operator's room, above and behind them.

The screen showed the camera shooting on a slate with a number on it. The words *Lost Metropolis* appeared. There

were sounds of voices and a man not photographed said:

"All right—let's make this meeting a good one now. Both of you are surprised. It's a weird setting. You haven't seen each other for years. Okey."

The slate was jerked away and the camera was shooting on some sort of an excavation. There were ornamental pillars around, masks hanging from them. The camera was shooting on the empty scene as the voice not seen said:

"Quiet please, everybody! All right—camera!"

Gracie said, his head close to Jardinn's but his eyes on the screen at the end of the projection room:

"That's the director speaking."

Jardinn nodded. The lighting of the scene was not sharp, bright. Two figures came into view, from behind the tall pillars. They discovered each other and one said in a tone of surprise: "You, Steponson?"

Al Sneedon whispered: "Here's where the quake hit!"

The sound coming from the screen was suddenly the sound of material creaking. There was a rumbling noise. One of the two characters turned towards the camera, fear in his eyes. He said hoarsely: "Good ——! ——it's a quake!"

Sneedon breathed: "That's Bill Cary."

The sound track of the film was making a terrible racket now. Jardinn said, above the screen noise:

"Watch—now!"

Men were running past the camera. The two actors hurried out of the scene. A script girl ran past. A column fell with a crash. The lighting of the scene was suddenly very poor. Material was falling all around, and there was still enough light to distinguish the set. Two more figures hurried past the camera. Jardinn said:

"The camera crew had quit—but the camera was still shooting. Now——"

A figure came into the camera's range, limping. For a brief second the man's face was turned towards the camera.

Gracie said: "Alan McLean!"

Jardinn said: "He's limping—hit by something—"

The lighting of the screen became dimmer. There were the sounds of things crashing all around. In the faint light McLean came towards the camera, stepping over some wreckage. And then another figure was in the scene. The man's back was to the camera; he was beside McLean. His hands suddenly were lifted high above his head. Something was gripped in them. They came down forward, swiftly. His body swung aside, moved from the scene. Faintly the body of Alan McLean could be seen sprawled amid wreckage. Then the screen in the projection room was nothing but a black blur. Sound died—yellow color flooded the screen.

Gracie said huskily: "Good——! He struck down McLean—"

Jardinn said grimly: "He *murdered* Alan McLean. With a brick or some piece of wreckage he picked up. You thought McLean's head was crushed by something that fell. But it was murder."

Al Sneedon muttered: "Murder! The others had got clear, but McLean had been hurt. I remember; he was standing out of the scene to the left. When things started to sway—I ran for the sound doors, behind the camera. He was trying for the other doors."

Gracie said: "Who killed him, Sneedon?"

Jardinn spoke softly: "We can run it more slowly. You get only a flash of his face, and the light is very bad. We can run it a lot of times. I want to know who that man is."

Al Sneedon breathed: "I couldn't recognize him—that time."

Gracie said slowly: "Before we run this again—why was McLean struck down? And if you found this film in Bennett's cutting room—why didn't he come to me with it? Why did he hide it?"

Jardinn flared a match to a cigarette tip. "You're shooting the questions too

fast, Mr. Gracie. One thing seems certain—your cutter, Bennett, was murdered *because* of this film. The murderer knew it existed."

Al Sneedon said excitedly: "Then it might have been the same one. The one who killed Alan McLean learned afterward that the camera had kept on turning—had got something. He found that Bennett had developed it, had it in the cutting room—the film. So he murdered Bennett, to get the film."

Jardinn said calmly: "It's an idea, Al."

Brayden Gracie was breathing heavily. "I've been a studio manager for ten years, but I've never—"

Jardinn cut in: "We'll run this film again and again. Try to recognize the killer's face—try that first. Then the body movement, the clothes. Al, you try to remember who was on the set. A visitor, watching—one of the mechanical crew. One of the actors."

Sneedon said: "Right—I'll burn my eyes out, trying."

The studio manager spoke more calmly: "Who would want to strike McLean down that way? And why?"

JARDINN inhaled deeply. "Whoever struck him down that way was a fast thinker. He was hating McLean. He wanted to kill him. But he couldn't *plan* an earthquake. He simply saw an opportunity. The others off the set, which was pretty dark, running in panic. McLean hurt, trying to get clear, limping. If he could slam McLean down—crush his head—the quake would be blamed. And this killer did it—not realizing the camera was turning over and being in at the death."

Gracie drew a deep breath. "The trouble is—it was a dark death," he muttered. "The scene wasn't lighted—most of the arcs and tin cans were out—"

Al Sneedon muttered: "The thing I can't figure is why Ramsey Bennett didn't speak up. He developed the film—he couldn't have missed the scene.

And why was it hidden in the cigarette box?"

Jardinn said simply: "Let *me* worry about that. I'm being paid for it. You try to recognize this killer. Then we'll be getting places."

He stood up. "I'm going out and look over the names of those who came into the studio on pass, and I've got some other things to do. I'll be back in fifteen minutes or so."

Gracie nodded, pressed a button. He spoke through a phone on the control desk to the operator in the booth.

"Run it more slowly and cut the sound effects down a little."

He hung up. Al Sneedon looked up at Jardinn.

"We don't actually *see* whatever that man has in his hands hit McLean's head. It looks like murder, but there might be a slip-up."

Jardinn smiled grimly. "The picture isn't evidence. It's more than circumstantial, but it isn't absolute evidence. That's why we've got to find the man who *seemed* to be murdering McLean. After we find him—"

He made a swift gesture with both hands, palms up. Gracie breathed:

"It was murder, all right. But *why* it was murder—"

He broke off. Jardinn said, as he moved towards the door of the projection room:

"It's easier to figure why Ramsey Bennett was killed. Murder breeds murder. Name me that killer on the screen, and I'll—" He broke off, smiled tightly. "I'll play detective in a way that may *mean* something."

Gracie grunted. "If we can spot that man—you won't *have* to play detective, Jardinn."

Jardinn leaned a shoulder against the sound door of the projection room.

"Wrong, Mr. Gracie—I may even have to change the rules of the game, and play faster and dirtier."

He shoved open the door and went out into the sun. He walked rapidly to the front office and looked over a list of

names ready for him. None of them meant anything. When he came out of the waiting room Bill Bright was leaning against the corridor wall and looking sleepy.

Jardinn walked slowly past the tall, sandy-haired operative, dropped a package of cigarettes near his feet and leaned over.

"Men's room, behind Stage One," he said softly.

He picked up the matches, went out a back door to the lot. Stage One was nearest the front office, which held the row of executive offices. When he got inside he made sure he was the only one present. After a few minutes Bright came in. When the door had shut Jardinn said:

"I phoned you over because things are looking like a break." His voice was low. "Ramsey Bennett was murdered because he had some footage shot by a runaway camera during the earthquake. A man murdered in front of the camera and found out after that the camera had been turning over. He didn't know whether the film was dark or not. McLean, the assistant director, was thought to have been killed by a falling pillar, on the set. The film makes it look different. The film's been developed for a couple of days, but Bennett didn't say anything about what he must have seen."

Bright said: "Uh-huh. Why didn't he?"

Jardinn softened a cigarette between his fingers by rolling it.

"Maybe he wasn't such a swell guy as everyone around here thought. Maybe he wanted a yacht, and didn't want to work ten more years in order to be able to get it. He had a strip of film that showed something. So instead of yelping about it to the world—he just sat tight. Or maybe he said something about it to someone it hurt."

Bright said: "Uh-huh—tried blackmail and got the works."

Jardinn shrugged. "Something like that, maybe. McLean had been left a half interest in Phil Rainey's beer lay-

outs. He got killed. A gal named Jen Lee, working here in the studio, gets the half interest now. She's scared."

Bright said: "Uh-huh. Maybe she figures the way you do."

Jardinn stuck the cigarette between his lips.

"How do I figure, Bill?" he asked softly.

Bright smiled a half smile. "Rainey wants the half interest without paying for it. Ruth McLean dies. Alan McLean dies. This cutter gets in the way and gets careless with his blackmail ask. He dies. And now this Lee gal rates the beer interest, when the will is okeyed. So she's scared."

Jardinn grinned. "I'll be turning the agency over to you pretty soon. You're learning. There's only one thing wrong with your thinking I figure that way."

"What's that?" Bright said.

Jardinn stopped smiling. "I *don't* figure that way," he replied.

Bright said nothing. Jardinn looked at his wrist-watch.

"It's quarter after five. This Jen Lee picture unit is winding up at six. She's scared and she wants to make some statements. I told her at first I wouldn't take her as a client, because Rainey hates my insides and that would only put her in a spot. A little later I got soft. She came at me again, begged me to protect her. I'll take her over to the office at six."

Bright said: "Bridget won't like that."

Jardinn grinned. "I want you outside—sitting in a car. I'll make sure that Rainey isn't there, before I take her up. When Rainey *does* come along—you come right up behind him, unless the girl and myself are out by the time he gets there. In that case just see how long he stays upstairs, and then call me at the apartment. Don't stick around after seven, if we get out before Rainey shows."

Bright said: "Uh-huh—and what makes you think Rainey'll show?"

"He told Bridget he'd drop back," Jardinn replied.

Bright grunted. "It's a dumb stunt—walking in on you and the girl he's got scared, isn't it?"

Jardinn smiled coldly. "If it is, Bill," he said gently, "it'll be the first dumb one Phil Rainey has pulled in a long, long time."

6



RAYDEN GRACIE shook his head and frowned. "It's no use," he stated emphatically. "We ran it ten times—I've had it over a cutter's light.

We can't recognize the features—the head was in a dark spot when he turned. He seems to be a fairly tall man, and not very big. But we might be wrong on that. We can get the movements of the arms and hands, when he raises them. It looks as though he was battering something on poor McLean's head. Then he's away—and McLean is on the floor. A figure is on the floor, anyway. It looks like murder, all right. But who did it—"

He broke off. Al Sneedon said: "From all I can see—it might have been one of a dozen men on that set. Or it might have been someone who just walked in. But the light just wasn't good enough to distinguish anything definitely. Nothing but the movement. That looks like murder."

Jardinn's face was expressionless. "All right," he said. "The projection man understands he's not to talk. You won't talk, Al. And Mr. Gracie—"

The business manager shrugged. "We called you in. My only doubt is whether the police shouldn't be informed."

Jardinn said: "I'd like until noon tomorrow, Mr. Gracie. If nothing turns up by that time—"

The business manager nodded. "You found the strip of film—I think you're entitled to run things as you wish, for a while. But—the studio wants this killer. McLean—and Bennett. Both murdered,

probably by the same man! Both with their heads crushed."

Jardinn said: "I've got to get moving. I'll report anything new, Mr. Gracie."

He smiled at Al Sneedon, moved along the studio street towards Stage Eight. Inside the stage there was a lot of confusion. The set was supposed to be a platform of the Twenty-third Street subway station, in New York. There were fifty or sixty extras moving around, and it took Jardinn almost ten minutes to find Jen Lee.

She was sitting in a corner of a room that had been shoved aside to make space for the subway platform set. When she saw Jardinn a faint smile showed on her face. He went to her side, smiled down at her upturned face.

"Feel better?" he asked. "No more faints?"

She shook her head. "I feel better now that you have changed your mind and will help me."

He grinned. "To tell the truth, I suspected you might be lying, when I first talked to you," he said. "But something's turned up that's made me change my mind."

Her eyes widened. "Something important?"

Jardinn nodded. "Pretty important," he replied. "Think you're going to be late here?"

She shook her head. "One more scene. We've had two takes of it already. I don't think it will be long, now. And I'm anxious to make a statement for you—about my friendship with Alan McLean. Then, if I'm dragged into this—"

She broke off, shaking her head slowly. Jardinn smiled down at her.

"We'll get it all typed and signed, and then I'll call the man I want to stay near you into the office. He's a nice chap. Tomorrow you can have your lawyers offer to sell out to Rainey, when the will has been probated, of course, and that half interest is really yours."

Jen Lee touched her hair with fingers that were shaking a little.

"I wish Alan hadn't left anything to me—I thought we were only good friends. I thought he'd get over acting so foolish, understand I didn't love him."

Jardinn said: "Some men are funny that way."

There was a little silence, then the girl spoke in a soft voice.

"Did you learn anything—about the killing of the cutter, Mr. Bennett?"

Jardinn shook his head. "Not a thing. But the police are on that, too. I'm more anxious to see that you don't get in too hot a spot."

She shivered slightly. "I can hardly believe that Rainey would want to—" Her voice broke. "He was—so nice to me—the few times I saw him. And he's an older man. I felt that I could talk to him. That was why I told him about Alan leaving me everything."

Jardinn said: "Yeah—I know."

A voice called loudly: "Everybody on the set—make it fast—last take. Miss Jarrett, Mr. Kirk—on the set, please. Miss Lee—"

Jen Lee rose, opened a square, black box and looked into the mirror on the inside. She did something with her lips, put powder on her face. An effeminate looking man came along. He had a large black box-like bag in his right hand.

"Hair all right, Jen?" he called, smiling beautifully.

She nodded. "All right, thanks."

He went along, almost skipping. Jen Lee closed the make-up bag, placed it on the chair on which she had been sitting. Jardinn said:

"I'll be around. If I go away, I'll be back in five minutes."

She nodded, and suddenly fear crept into her eyes.

"You think I'll be safe—on the set—"

Jardinn swore cheerfully. "Sure. The spot isn't that hot, and we can make it cool."

She flashed him a grateful smile, moved towards the subway platform and the camera that was on the crane. The extras were grouped on the platform,

and there was a fake but realistic train at one end of it.

Jardinn smoked a cigarette for a minute or so. The director called, somewhere near the camera, which was shut from his sight by the extras:

"Quiet, please. You people listen to me—"

Jardinn reached down and picked up Jen Lee's make-up box. He moved through a door of the room set, turned to the left. Leaning against the wall of another room he opened the box.

When he got below make-up stuff he found a dollar bill and a quarter. There was a slip of paper with a telephone number on it. Jardinn read the number and smiled. That particular bootlegger was very cheap and very tricky. Something was folded under a thin layer of powder that had escaped from a box. He unfolded it. It was a pawn ticket for a lady's watch. Five dollars had been loaned.

Jardinn got things back in the right spots, closed the box. Casually he went to the other room, placed it on the chair.

While the scene was being shot he went to a water cooler and got a drink. The cooler was at the far end of the stage and it took a few minutes. On his way back he heard someone call:

"That's all for today—tomorrow at eight. Exterior on the back lot—Edith's yacht. Got that, people? Edith's yacht!"

When Jen Lee reached his side he smiled at her.

"What kind of a picture is it?" he asked.

She stood very still and narrowed her blue eyes on his.

"Don't talk about it—there's a murder in it." Her lips trembled a little.

Jardinn grinned. "There's a murder in most of them," he said.

She drew a deep breath. "I don't see how you can smile that way. When you think—Alan McLean killed in the earthquake. Ramsey Bennett murdered—"

Jardinn said: "Sorry—I know how

you feel. But murder is a business with me."

Jen Lee lifted her make-up box and said unsteadily:

"I've got to change—will you come to the dressing-rooms?"

He nodded. "Sure."

They moved away from the set towards sliding doors that had been opened. In the fading sunlight Jen Lee didn't look as young or as nice as she had on the set. When they reached the dressing-room line Jardinn looked at his wrist-watch.

"Six-five. I'll wander around here."

She smiled wearily and left him. Jardinn went across to a telephone booth and called his office. Bridget's voice was business-like.

"Benjamin Jardinn Agency."

Jardinn said: "I hope so. Did you get the tickets?"

Bridget said: "Third row, right center."

Jardinn swore cheerfully. "Good. Phil Rainey turn up for the second time yet?"

Bridget's voice was suddenly changed. "No, but listen, Ben. Don't come over here tonight."

"Why?" he asked into the phone.

"I don't like the way he looked, when he said he'd try again." Her voice was low.

Jardinn looked out through the glass of the booth at the end of the dressing-room line. A Rolls went past with a beauty and a sheep dog in the rear seat.

"What was the matter with him? Wrong color in his tie?"

Bridget said: "For ——— sake, Ben—don't joke. He may know about—"

She stopped and Jardinn swore at her. "Don't get that habit of starting things and leaving them in the air. Rainey may know *what*?"

"That you're out to get him," she said in an unsteady voice.

Jardinn grunted. "He's known that for weeks. I'm all right, Mick. I've got to come over. Fixing something up for a client—a frightened client."

Bridget said: "Male or female?"

Jardinn chuckled. "Run along home so you won't know." His tone changed. "I mean it, Sweet—clear out. And lock the door this time."

Her voice was anxious. "Ben—you won't be foolish, will you?"

Jardinn said: "Only about you. You're so beautiful! If I could only kiss your lips, your eyes, your neck, your hair! And get the hell away from the office, right now, will you?"

He hung up, walked out of the booth. After ten minutes or so Jen Lee came from the dressing-room. He went to her. She was wearing a blue sport costume, with a small blue hat and blue gloves. She seemed softer.

"What's the matter—been crying?" he asked, looking at her eyes.

She nodded. "Scared, I guess. Nervous. I wish I'd never met Phil Rainey."

Jardinn took her by the arm and they walked towards the main gate of the studio.

"A lot of humans have wished that one," he said. "Trouble is—most of them start wishing too late. He's a tough gentleman to go up against. Smooth and genial, and particularly nice to the ladies."

He felt her body tremble a little. They reached the main gate and went outside the studio. Jardinn said:

"I've got a small car parked a half block away. How about yours?"

She said: "I'd rather ride with you—my chauffeur will wait."

Jardinn said: "Okey."



HE led her across the street. When they climbed into the car he reached in his right suit coat pocket and took out a cigarette tin. Jen Lee looked at it as he placed it on the car floor, near his feet.

"Bang against you, in my pocket," he said with a smile, and got the car moving.

"Like them that way—those round tins?" she asked.

Jardinn nodded. "Keeps them fresh," he replied.

They drove to Vine Street and turned right towards Hollywood Boulevard. The actress spoke in a steadier voice.

"I can't get over what you told me about Rainey. He murdered Ruth McLean, and had a policeman who had talked to you—had him murdered, too. Why, he might have murdered Alan McLean, if the earthquake—"

She broke off, shivered. Jardinn went to the left of a beer truck, passed it.

"Can't prove what I've told you," Jardinn reminded. "But I'm damned sure that's the way it happened. Rainey never paid for anything he wanted, if he could get it another way. Carrow had me a few seconds from death, when that big shake came. A bullet from his gun clipped me, at that."

Jen Lee shook her head slowly, and her eyes looked frightened.

"If we went to the police—"

Jardinn smiled grimly. "The police have their hands full, with this quake. I haven't any proof. Rainey has a lot of money. And he isn't frightened by third-degree threats. He'd never talk."

They reached Hollywood Boulevard, turned to the left. When they got near the office building of the agency Jardinn found a parking space, pulled the car to the curb. He slipped the cigarette tin into a pocket.

They walked a half block until they reached the frame and brick building of the office. Jardinn said:

"Place is pretty much of a wreck inside. But it's been examined. It won't tumble over."

He stopped and lighted a cigarette, looking along the curb near the office building. The car of Bill Bright wasn't around. He took Jen Lee by an arm and they went into the building entrance and started up the wooden stairs.

On the first floor she halted and looked around at the cracked and fallen plaster.

"It's a wonder the building stood up. What's on the floors above?"

Jardinn grinned. "No heavy machinery to fall through if we get another bad shake. Just empty offices. Building isn't very swanky. I'm the only occupant, except for a lawyer who never seems to be around."

They moved on to the office door. Jardinn used a key, shoved the door open. Jen Lee went in. There was a slip of paper on Bridget Callahan's desk and as the door swung closed behind them Jardinn lifted it and read:

"The other Eldridge is in the lower left drawer. For — sake be careful."

He tore the slip of paper into small bits, let them slip into the waste-paper basket. He smiled at Jen Lee.

"It's about Eldridge," he said. Walking to the door of the inner office, he opened it, stepped aside. The actress went in and Jardinn gestured towards the most comfortable of the chairs.

Jen Lee seated herself with her back to the boulevard window. Jardinn switched on the overhead lights, sat down behind his desk. He smiled at the girl.

"Like a touch of Scotch?"

She shook her head. "Thanks, no."

Jardinn's smile broadened. "Swell for the nerves."

She said: "No, please. I'll wait until I get home."

She looked around the room. Jardinn poured one stiff drink into a small glass and lifted it.

"To your career, Jen," he said in an amused tone and tossed off the drink.

Her eyes were narrowed on his. Jardinn chuckled and put the decanter and glass back in the lower left drawer. Eldridge gleamed a dull blue in the office light. He closed the drawer most of the way. The bell of the outside phone made sound and Jardinn lifted the receiver.

Bright's voice said: "Jardinn—you all right?"

Jardinn said: "Sure—why not?"

Bright spoke rapidly. "I was parked outside when two guys climbed in the car. One put a gun on me and told me to drive or take a load of lead. I drove out Hollywood, over to Sunset and out Sunset to Beverly. Then up into the hills. I'm about twelve miles from the office, and they've got the car. I got to a house to call you."

Jardinn said: "Ever see the men before?"

"I've got their descriptions, but you'd better get away from the office."

Jardinn said: "Why?"

Bright swore. "They knew I was working with you—and they pulled me away. You'd better get clear—"

Jardinn said: "Come on in as soon as you can—but don't rush a report of the stolen car. And don't kill yourself getting here."

Bright's tone was anxious. "Listen, Ben—you get the hell away from the office."

Jardinn smiled at Jen Lee. "Thanks for calling, Mr. Bright," he said cheerfully, and hung up. He lighted a cigarette, after the girl had refused one.

"A stolen car," he said. His right hand went into a pocket of his suit coat and he put the cigarette tin on the desk before him. "Now, I think the best thing for us to get down on paper is your statement—"

He broke off as the outer door opened. He glanced at Jen Lee. She was staring towards the outer office.

Jardinn lifted the receiver of the telephone and said quietly:

"Central—this is Ben Jardinn of the Jardinn Detective Agency. A Philip Rainey just came into my office. Remember that—"

Rainey's voice said from the other room: "Hang up that receiver, Jardinn!"

Jardinn hung up. Jen Lee's eyes were wide; her fingertips were trembling against her lips. Jardinn smiled at her.

"It's all right, Jen," he said softly. He spoke in a louder voice: "Come in, Phil."

7



RAINEY came into the room, closed the inner office door behind him. He stood with his back to the door and his left hand out of sight in the pocket of his coat, where it made a slight bulge.

"Rainey to you," he said in a hard voice.

He was medium in size and had sharp, gray eyes. He was dressed smartly and his gray felt hat was pulled low over his forehead. His lips were thin and long, and his right hand was slender.

Jardinn swung his desk chair so that he almost faced Rainey. He could see Jen Lee without turning his head. Rainey looked at the girl.

"What did he say on the phone?" he asked.

The girl said: "He told Central you had just come in."

Jardinn smiled coldly. "I figured she might remember it—after they found the body."

Rainey's lips bared even teeth in a sneering smile.

"And how much will that help *you*?" he asked in the same hard voice.

Jardinn shrugged. Jen Lee said: "For ——— sake, Phil—be careful what you do! Let me get out of here!"

She half raised, then slumped back.

Rainey narrowed his gray eyes on the girl. "What did you come *in* here for?"

She covered her face with her palms. Jardinn said:

"Miss Lee's nervous, Rainey. I'll tell you why she came in here. You told her to."

Jen Lee's hands came away from her face; she stared at Jardinn, who kept his dark eyes on the half-closed ones of Phil Rainey.

Rainey said: "Yeah? Any idea why I did it?"

Jardinn blew a thin stream of smoke to one side.

"Sure," he replied. "You wanted to

be sure I'd come in here tonight, and you wanted to know about what time."

Rainey smiled, showing his teeth again. "You can't get away with that, Jardinn. It comes down to this—you brought my girl up here."

Jardinn drew a deep breath. "So *that's* the way it's going to work. You found me here with your gal—and you shot me in self-defense."

Rainey nodded slowly. "That's the way it's going to work, Mr. Jardinn. With little Jen telling how she was fighting to get away from you, when I came in."

Jardinn looked at the girl. "That'll be swell for your picture career, won't it?"

The girl crossed her legs and smiled. "To hell with my picture career," she said very steadily.

Jardinn nodded. "The acting's off for the day, eh? Jennie Lee gets back to the old days in Columbus, when Phil Rainey was getting his start and she was working with him."

The girl laughed harshly. She looked at Rainey.

"Is everything right down below?"

Rainey said: "Yeah—Doll's down there with a building inspector's badge. He'll keep everybody from entering an unsafe building."

Jardinn shook his head. "Not everybody," he stated quietly.

Rainey looked at him sharply. "Why not?" he demanded.

Jardinn shrugged. "It didn't make any difference—you having Bright pulled away from here. He was just along to act up to Jen. I wanted her to think I was falling for her line. Bright was to be the bodyguard."

The girl said swiftly: "That's a lie, Phil—I had him fooled, all right."

Jardinn smiled coldly. "Not even for ten seconds," he said steadily. "Your face hasn't changed that much in ten years. And I've got a sweet file of clever faces in the outer office. Lady faces are easy."

Rainey said harshly: "You're finished,

Jardinn. You've been in my way too long. You're finished."

Jardinn looked at the left pocket of Rainey's coat.

"Okey—that makes two of us. If I were you—I'd make a deal."

Rainey sneered with his eyes slitted. "I don't *have* to make a deal," he said tightly.

Jardinn shrugged. "You did for Ruth McLean and a cop. I'll give you the outside on the two. The quake finished off your killer, Carrow. And then there was a slip-up, Rainey."

A street car brought sound into the office. The girl and Rainey kept their eyes on Jardinn.

Jen Lee said: "I think it's in the cigarette tin, Phil—"

Jardinn reached a hand towards the cigarette tin and Rainey said sharply: "Don't!"

Jardinn took his hand off the desk. Rainey said to the girl:

"Open it up."

Jen Lee got up and took the cigarette box from the table. She stood near the desk, took the top off. When she lifted the strip of rolled film from inside, Rainey sucked in a sharp breath.

"Nice," he said. "Nice!"

Jardinn said tonelessly: "Yeah, swell. It shows Alan McLean getting slammed out so that Jen got the half-interest and any other dollars McLean happened to have around. But you had to work him for that will leave, Jen."

The girl was unrolling the film. Rainey stood with his back to the door and his left hand in his coat pocket.

Jardinn spoke as though reciting a piece. "You finally wangled him around—and got what you wanted. Then it was advisable to get McLean dead. The quake was an opportunity. But there was a slip-up. The camera ran on and shot the scene. And a cutter named Bennett, who wanted a boat to cruise around in—he saw an opportunity."

Jardinn looked at Rainey. "How much did he want for that roll of film, Rainey?"

Rainey got the Colt from his left-hand pocket and shifted it to his right hand, held it low, on Jardinn.

"I don't get you, Jardinn," he said slowly and steadily.

Jardinn looked at the ceiling. "He had pictures of a murder. He wanted money for them. He wanted to quit his cutting job and drift around in water. So he held you up. Blackmail. And he was murdered."

Rainey said nothing. Jardinn narrowed his eyes on the Colt.

"If Bennett hadn't been murdered—I might never have known that McLean was murdered. A kill breeds a kill, Rainey."

The man with his back to the door said harshly:

"You're using words, Jardinn."

The girl was holding the unrolled film high. She had the overhead light above it.

Jardinn said quietly: "I'll use a few more, and then quit. Jen lied to me. She lied about you—said she'd only seen you a few times. But her big lie was something else. She told a story that she was taking a bath in her apartment, when the earthquake hit."

Jen Lee said in a rising tone: "Phil—this film doesn't mean a thing—"

Jardinn smiled. "It certainly doesn't," he agreed. "It's a cut from a horse opera—a horse running down a hill."

Phil Rainey's face showed two red spots. He said hoarsely:

"Listen, Jen—if you've sold out—"

Jardinn shook his head. "She didn't sell out, Rainey. But she wasn't clever enough. The day of the earthquake she wasn't working. But she came to the studio. She was wearing pants, slacks. She went in to watch Alan McLean work. She hated him. You hated him. That made her hate him. She wanted that half-interest because she wanted you. And she couldn't get it with McLean alive."

The girl was staring at him, breathing heavily. Rainey kept his Colt low and motionless. Jardinn said quietly:

"She lied about where she was during the earthquake. I caught her on that. She was seen at the studio, a half-hour before the quake. She needed money—to hold you. She wasn't making much. She bluffed, but I found a pawn ticket for her watch. And by that time I had her face out of my files."

Jardinn paused. "She saw a chance, and took it, Rainey," he said. "She battered McLean down. Then she learned the camera had run on. So she went to you. While you were figuring what to do—Bennett, the cutter, went to Jen and told her what he had on the film. A shot of Jen in the kill act. And Jen went to you."

There was silence in the office. Rainey broke it.

"It's a swell story, but it don't mean a thing to me," he said slowly.

Jardinn smiled. "The film that shows Jen's face is at the studio, inside of steel. Does *that* mean anything to you, Rainey?"

Rainey shrugged. "I don't see how," he said slowly. His face was suddenly very expressionless. "With you and Jen *both* out of things—Jardinn, you will shoot her, then commit suicide. I'll fix that."

The girl's eyes were staring at Rainey. She cried out bitterly.

"Phil—you can't do that! Throw me over, when they got the goods on me—shoot me out—"

Rainey said with contempt: "Shut up! You'd talk before they got you in a cell—"

Jardinn let his left hand drop towards the drawer that held his gun. His legs were drawn back under the chair on which he sat.

The girl screamed: "You killed Bennett, damn you! If you'd paid him off like I wanted—"

Rainey said: "You ——! shut up!"

Jardinn jerked the drawer open, groped for the gun. Rainey expelled his breath and his Colt jerked. The office filled with sound.

Jen Lee screamed. Pain streaked

through Jardinn's right shoulder. He slumped as if he was finished, and apparently Rainey saw it that way. Jardinn had the gun in his left hand as Rainey, swinging away from him, squeezed his Colt again.

The girl moaned and fell to her knees. Jardinn shot with his Colt braced against his left side.

Rainey's legs gave way and he fell as he tried to twist his body towards Jardinn. When he hit the floor Jen Lee was lying on her back. Rainey lay face downward.

Jardinn got the gun from Rainey's spread fingers, holding it by the barrel. He placed it on the desk and went over and looked at the girl. She was dead.

THERE were footfalls on the stairs, in the hallway. Jardinn faced the door with the gun in his left hand. The voice of Jake Bliss called:

"Jardinn—you in there?"

Jardinn said: "Yeah—come on in."

The plain-clothesman, followed by Eddie Grey, his partner, came in. Jardinn put his gun on the desk beside the other.

"How'd you happen to be around?" he asked.

"That gal of yours called us. We just got over. What's here?"

"The girl's dead," Jardinn said simply. "Look at Phil Rainey."

He lifted the receiver and called the Vine Street Emergency Hospital. Bliss said:

"Rainey's finished. Just below the heart. Who got him?"

Jardinn said: "I did, and I'm not sorry."

He sat down behind his desk and pressed a handkerchief against his shirt, at the right shoulder. Bliss said:

"We'll let you get patched up, and then you can give your story to the chief or the D. A. What'll it be?"

"I won't have to; you'll tell it—you and a couple of hunks of lead. The one in my shoulder and that in the girl. Check 'em with lead out of Rainey's gun

that has his prints. Mine are on the barrel where I picked it up. Then I couldn't have got my bullet *after* he got his—see?"

"Sure," said Bliss. "That's an easy one—if they check. This is a mess—what's it all about?"

Jardinn smiled wearily. "Rainey always was greedy. He tried to get something for nothing. He used the girl and then didn't back her up. We had the showdown in here. He killed her because he was afraid she would talk."

Bliss grunted. "You had something on the girl?"

Jardinn shook his head. "If she had denied it—I didn't have a thing. A strip of film that wasn't clear enough. But I didn't tell *her* that. And she squealed on him."

The plain-clothesman looked at the bodies and shook his head.

"Rainey was a tough gent," he muttered.

Jardinn nodded. "Better send Eddie down to look for a chap named Doll—with a building inspector's badge. Rainey said he'd posted him below to keep people out."

The two plain-clothesmen looked at each other.

"That's the guy was beating it," Grey said. He left hurriedly.

Jardinn lifted the receiver with his good hand and called Bridget Callahan. When he heard her voice he said:

"Listen, Mick—cancel those seats for

tomorrow night. I picked up a hunk of lead. You can sit at the bedside and tell me funny stories."

The wail of the ambulance outside hit his ears above Bridget's questions.

"Not at all serious," he interrupted. "But thanks for putting Eldridge in the drawer."

When he hung up, Bliss said: "Who in hell's Eldridge?"

Jardinn grinned, but didn't answer. A white-coated doctor came into the room and looked around. When he got through bending over Jen Lee and Rainey he stood up and swore.

"Who did all this?" he breathed.

Jardinn said: "*They* did—and one of them sprayed me in the shoulder with a piece of lead. Maybe you're more interested in the living than the dead."

The ambulance doctor grinned and went to work on Jardinn.

"Clean and simple," he announced. "I'm afraid you'll live."

"Is the bullet still in there?" Jardinn asked.

"Yes. You want it out now?"

Jardinn winced. "No, but be sure to save it for Jake. He wants it for a souvenir."

"I'll get it all right," Bliss growled.

Jardinn nodded. The doctor looked around the room.

"Looks like a movie," he announced.

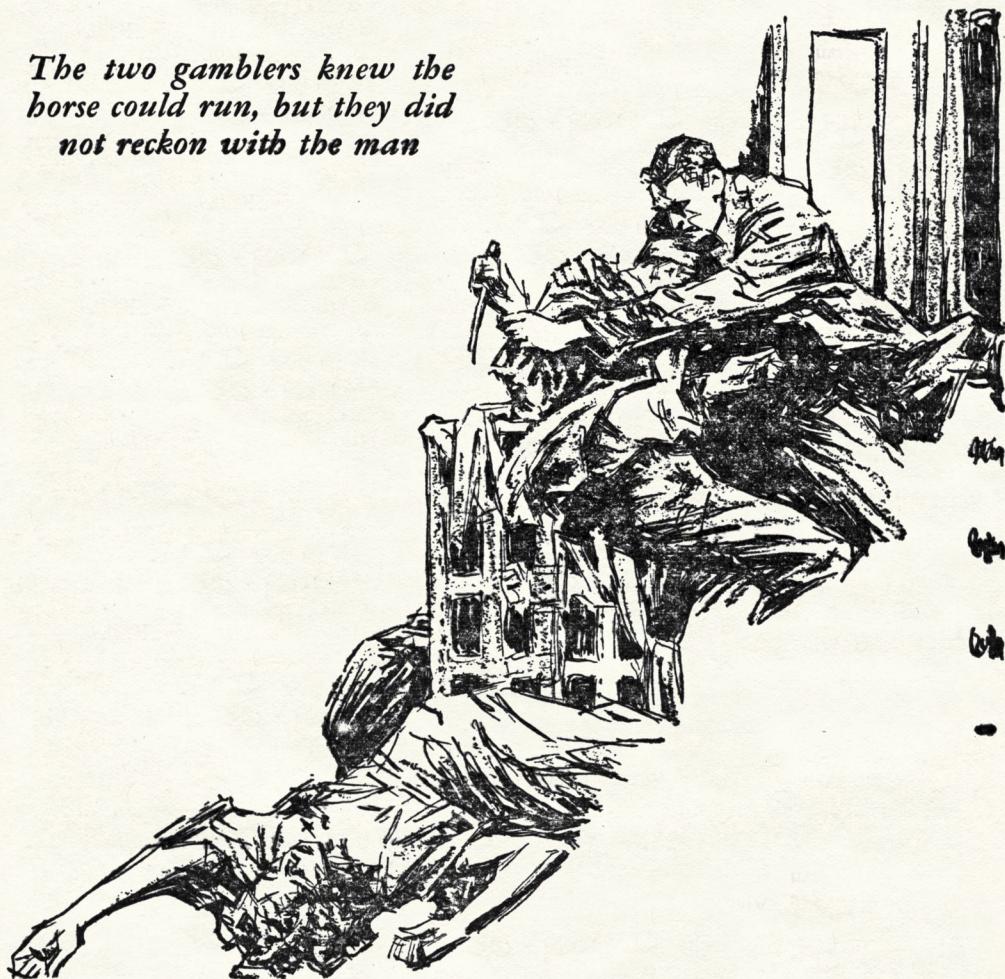
Jardinn fumbled for a cigarette with his left hand. "Yeah," he said. "And the love interest is lying on the floor."



Ham-Strung

By FRANCIS M. COCKRELL

*The two gamblers knew the
horse could run, but they did
not reckon with the man*



EXCEPT for an exercise boy scurrying from paddock to stall with a saddle, the two men walking along the line of stables were the only movement against a bleak background. The last race was an hour old, and the long grandstand was deserted now. It was cold for New Or-

leans, and low gray clouds deposited a chilling mist which was just one degree short of sleet.

Rain-coats tight-buttoned about their necks, they walked slowly, these men, for one of them limped a bit. But they made their way without hesitation, with the air of men who knew where they were going, and what they would do when they got there.

The little man who limped lagged a half step behind. His pale face, con-

trusted with the olive skin of his companion, took on the bluish white color of skim milk. His slight body, beside the tall, heavy frame-work of the other, seemed fragile, apologetic.

Midway in the third block of stalls they stopped. In the doorway, just out of the drizzle, a man was sitting. He sat on his heels.

"You're Clyde?" the heavy, dark man said. "Pete Clyde?" It was more statement than question.

"Then what?" Clyde stood up. He was a very tall man, lean and bony, with a skin like reddish leather and gray eyes that didn't blink.

"I'm Lee Sorella. This is my friend, Chalk Harvey."

"I've heard of you."

"We want to talk to you."

He didn't ask them in. "Then talk," he said.

Sorella hitched his coat a little higher. "Your horse won the fifth last Friday. Pretty fair horse, huh?"

"His first race," Clyde said. "Five lengths, going away. Not bad."

"That was six furlongs. You've got him entered in the Mooney Handicap tomorrow. Can he go the route?"

"He can run all day. And it's only his second start, so they haven't got much weight on him yet. One twelve."

"I'll tell you how it is," Sorella said agreeably. "We've been nursing a nag for this spot, and we've got the odds on him a mile long now. We've got money shipped all over the country to bet on him. Now we don't think your pony can beat him, but we don't want to take any chances, see? We've got too much up. But we want to be fair. So here's what we'll do. That purse is two grand. You scratch the horse and *we'll* give you the purse. Now." He pulled a flat packet of currency from his pocket.

Clyde did not reply, just stared at them calmly, uninterestedly.

"We'll buy the horse," Sorella said. "Four grand."

Clyde glanced down. His foot shifted, and his wheat-straw paper cigarette

dropped to the floor. The high heel of his boot settled on it, and he looked up.

"No sale."

Sorella gazed at him a moment. He smiled. "Five," he said, "and a cut on his winnings for a year."

"No sale."

Sorella shrugged. "All right," he said amiably. "You win. How much? We can't afford to take any chances."

"You can't buy him," Clyde said calmly.

"What's the matter?" Sorella was faintly annoyed.

"He's not for sale. Like I said. And if he was, I wouldn't sell him to a pair like you all."

Sorella moved a quick step towards the door. His black eyes had lost their smiling calm.

"Cowboy," he said, "I would not get too fresh. Some people say this is a very bad climate for fresh cowboys." His voice was cold. "We were nice to you when we offered to buy the nag. We were too nice. Well, we won't buy him now, see? But he does not win tomorrow. You understand?"

"He'll win," Clyde stated.

"We're *telling* you," Sorella said, "that he won't win. Because we are telling you not to run the horse. Do not run him. It will be very bad luck, to run him."

Clyde stared at them a moment. Then he stooped and his hand went beneath some dirty clothes, in a straw suitcase at one side of the door. His hand came out and there was a revolver in it. It looked very much at home, there in his hand.

With one move Sorella and Chalk Harvey had reached for their armpits.

"Keep your shirts on," Clyde said quietly.

Sorella was silent a moment. Then he shrugged. "Hah! You think we care for things like that? Besides," he added, "we were not thinking of what might happen to *you*." His eyes went past Clyde, to the stall behind him.

Clyde became rigid. His eyes were cold now, and his voice, still low and

calm, took on an edge, a little rasp.

"Lay off that horse. That's all. Lay off. You hear?"

"Oh, we wouldn't do anything to him," Sorella assured smoothly. "Of course not. But something *might* happen. It would be too bad."

A long arm reached out and fingers fastened in the front of Sorella's coat. Before he had time to think or act, he was yanked close and Clyde was talking to him.

"Get this. *You* had better be damn' careful nothing *does* happen to him. Because it won't matter who does it. I'm comin' for *you* first. There's no 'might' about it. I'm comin'. And when I find you——" He left the sentence unfinished. He relaxed his grip and shoved. Sorella was a big man, but he had to take two steps backward to keep from falling. "Now get goin'."

For one long moment Sorella stood there, quivering slightly. There was nothing pleasant in his face. Then he spoke.

"All right, chump." His voice was harsh, ugly. "You asked for it."

And he turned and walked away, with the little man that limped. The silent little man with the white face and the pale blue eyes like ice—Chalk Harvey. For a moment Pete Clyde watched them. They did not look back.

Clyde turned to the stall behind him. "Dondo!"

There was a little snuffling noise. The horse put his soft muzzle in Clyde's outstretched hand. Clyde laughed.

"So they'll tell us how to run, hey, boy? That's good. You'll be comin' back to the stand when their dog finishes. Sure you——"

He broke off, for on the other side of the manger something had appeared. At first glance it was no more than the whites of two eyes and a row of gleaming teeth.

Clyde only grinned. "You been there all the time?"

Plastic Jones hoisted his ninety-eight pounds, including overalls, to the man-

ger rail and grinned back. "Yassuh. I was right down 'eah all time."

"Still think you can bring him in tomorrow?"

Plastic cackled happily. "Bring *him* in! Heh! Dat hoss bring he *own* se'f in. On'y——"

"Only what?"

"On'y—well, I don' know, Mistuh Pete—them guys——"

"Forget 'em. Just think about that race. Keep clear, watch for pockets, and don't let anyone bluff you. That's all. We'll bring him in."

"Yassuh! Sho' will. We bring him in. Easy like."

Clyde tossed the gun back into the suitcase. "I gotta go back to the hotel tonight. There's the gun. Don't be afraid to use it, if anyone comes monkeyin' around."

Plastic's grin reached unbelievable proportions. "Nawsuh. Naw-suh! I won't."



LYDE sat up and swung his long legs out of bed. His watch on the chair said seven, and officially the sun was already up. Actually it would not be seen that day. It was still drizzling outside.

He shivered slightly as he pulled on his boots and hurried with his dressing. He took a bill-fold, from beneath his mattress and slipped it into his pocket. The purse Friday had been five hundred dollars, and the bill-fold was fat. Later he was glad of this.

He came out of the little hotel on to Canal Street and angled across the corner at Rampart. He glanced up at the dreary, leaden sky, and chuckled. "Wet or dry," he muttered, "it's all the same to that baby. He'd just as soon swim 'em for it."

He turned in at Thompson's on Canal for breakfast. That amounted to four eggs, two slabs of ham, six slices of toast and a pint or so of coffee. The

food warmed him, and as he came from the restaurant and walked out to the neutral ground in the center of the street he was whistling. A Jefferson Park car rounded the corner into Canal and he climbed into it.

Later that morning, Clyde was still whistling as he strode along near the grandstand. He passed the paddock, and continued down the line of stables which hugged the fence on part of the stretch, and around the turn. Only a few horses were on the track this morning.

He stopped before the open door of his own stall. Plastic lay there in the runway, dead to the world, his head pillowed on a saddle. Clyde chuckled and stepped up to nudge him with his foot.

"Hey there! Come out of it. Are you tryin' out for the long distance—" he broke off abruptly, and looked up.

From across the manger, in the stall, had come a sound. A little nicker of welcome. But strange, somehow. Plain-tive.

"Hello, boy." Clyde's voice was soft, affectionate. "Want a little attention, too, huh? What's the matter, huh?"

He put his hand forth to touch Dondo's nose. He never touched it.

He was looking into the horse's eyes.

"Dondo—boy—" His voice faltered.

His gaze swept down the horse's back, came to rest on his rump, and held there.

"What the—" Frantically he vaulted the manger and stooped to Dondo's right hind foot. He froze there.

Blood—blood by now becoming thick and gummy—was matted in the fetlock. Above it a gash. A neat gash, clean and deep—through the tendon.

For perhaps one full minute Pete Clyde did not move. He just sat there on one heel, his eyes on the ground.

Then he began to rise. He rose slowly, strangely, as though he moved without knowing it. The joint of his right knee made a little *pop*.

Gradually he turned. His hand sliding along the horse's back, he moved towards his head. Clyde's face was a

queer yellow color. His left hand came to rest on the horse's head, and he stopped.

He stared out through the door a moment, then turned and looked into the horse's eyes. His mouth opened once, as though to say something. But no sound came forth.

His left hand rose and fell in a feeble, hopeless little pat. Clyde turned away and climbed the manger into the runway. With his foot he roughly shifted the little apprentice jockey to one side, and his hand went into the straw suitcase.

He turned and climbed back into the stall. He moved like a sleep-walker. He stood there.

Little knots of muscle rose on his cheek as he clenched his teeth. But moisture appeared in his eyes anyhow. He swallowed once.

There was a shot.

He stepped on Plastic without realizing it, as he climbed back over the manger. He stood in the doorway, looking out. Behind him there was a stir. Plastic shifted, turned over, finally sat up.

"Mistuh Pete. What was 'at? I feel—" he rubbed his eyes.

There was no answer.

Plastic half rose, laboredly. "I feel awful funny," he said.

Clyde's shoulders twitched. "How," he said, "how funny?" There was an unnatural flatness in his words, as though they had come from a phonograph, rather than a throat.

"Sorta—dopey like. I—"

Clyde turned. "You were chloroformed," he said. "I guess."

Plastic's eyes took in the gun in his hand. "Mistuh Pete, what—?"

Clyde nodded towards the stall, and turned away again.

Plastic looked over the manger. When he turned around again he was crying.

"But—but Mistuh Pete, he—"

"Ham-strung," Clyde said.

The boy was silent a moment, sniffing. Then: "But—but you didn't

have to—jus' 'cause he was—you coulda—"

Clyde shook his head. "No. He could have lived, sure. Walked. But he'd never run again. And he'd rather be—dead. If a horse went by him, an' he couldn't take out after him it'd break his heart. I—didn't want that."

Plastic was quiet then. Clyde dropped his eyes. They fell on the revolver in his hand. He reached down and pulled up the right leg of his trousers and stuck the gun into the top of his boot. He shook the trouser leg down again. The bulge was not noticeable.

"You stay here," he said. "Tell 'em—" He stopped. "You know," he said.

Plastic saw his eyes. They were cold and expressionless. Like glass eyes. Plastic shuddered involuntarily.

"Mistuh Pete. Wheh you goin'? Mistuh Pete, don' you go get in no—"

A hand fell on Plastic's shoulder, gently. "Don't worry, kid. I'll be all right." He stepped down from the runway. "Just stick around."

Clyde turned and moved away along the stables, towards the paddock.

He passed the paddock, walked along near the grandstand. He looked neither to right nor left. He didn't see the man in the derby hat and the checked suit, who came out from the grandstand entrance. And the man had his coat collar shrugged about his shoulders, and his head down, in this drizzle. They collided.

The man in the derby looked up.

"Hello, cowboy! What's your hurry? Where you goin'?"

Clyde had moved on, without answering. A dozen steps away he stopped. He turned and came back.

"I've seen you before. You know Sorella?"

The man was adjusting his derby. "Sorella? Sure, I know him. Who don't? What about him?"

"Know where he stays?"

"Yeah, he—" The man paused and

looked at Clyde. "What do you want to know for?"

"I want to see him. On—business. He wanted to buy my horse."

"Oh. Well, I happen to know where he lives. Don't know him very good, but I played poker up there one night. Little apartment house out on St. Charles. Twenty-eight twenty. Apartment 221. You take the Tulane car at—"

"I know. Thanks," and Clyde was moving on.

He did not look over his shoulder.

A cab was discharging a passenger when Clyde came out of the Park. He walked to it and got in.

"Twenty-eight hundred block, St. Charles," he directed. "And *make it quick!*"

The driver turned and looked full into those gray eyes for a moment. He shifted a cigar butt from one corner of his mouth to the other. "Okey, buddy." The cab lunged forward, swung around, and sped for New Orleans.

The tires hummed a little song of speed. They swung into the road along the canal, and the fence posts added a rhythmic punctuation of *swishes*. They rolled swiftly past the *New Orleans Country Club*. On Carrollton Avenue the cab swerved through the light morning traffic, lurching now and then.

Clyde had not moved. Still as death, expressionless as a mummy, he sat there in the back seat, staring straight ahead.

The car caromed into Fountainbleu, down Broadway, into Freret and down Napoleon into St. Charles.

"Twenty-nine hundred," the driver said presently.

"The next corner."

The cab slewed to the curb. A slight smell of scorched rubber surrounded them. Clyde stepped out, his hand in his pocket.

"Here." He handed the driver a bill and walked away.

The driver glanced at the meter, then at the bill. Grinning, he drove off.



THE 2800 block on St. Charles is a mixture of outmoded residences, a few stores and small apartment houses. Once fashionable, it is now neither desirable nor undesirable. 2820 was a trim white and green affair of two stories. A modest black and gold glass plate labeled it *The Bellevue*.

There was no one in sight on the porch, nor as Clyde came into the hall. The number on the door at his right was 122.

There was a flight of stairs at the left. His feet made little sound on the carpet, as he mounted.

At the top of the steps he faced a narrow hall of perhaps sixty feet. He glanced at the numbers on doors and walked towards the front of the house. 221 was the last door on the right.

His eyes on this door, Clyde paused. He stooped, his right trouser leg came up, was shaken back into place. His revolver was in his hand. No one was in the hall.

He didn't knock. Gently he tried the knob. It turned. He pushed the door slowly open and stepped in. He was in a little entrance hall. Visible ahead was one side of a neat living-room. With his left hand he pushed the door shut behind him, felt for the chain, and slipped it into its groove. He moved forward to the living-room and stopped in the doorway.

A man lay on the floor, near the sofa. He was very quiet and limp, this man, and his legs were doubled under him as though he had wilted there. The furniture was all in neat arrangement. Nothing was out of the way except the man on the floor. The inert man on the floor who lay askew, his head under one arm, the handle of an ice-pick projecting from his back.

Quickly, his brow furrowed, Clyde took a step forward and bent to the form at his feet. A still spreading blotch of blood surrounded the tine of the ice-

pick. Blood which was thin and free. Instinctively Clyde grasped the handle, pulled. The ice-pick came free.

Gently Clyde moved the arm from the face it covered.

A long breath sighed through his lips, and he sank back on his heels. The man on the floor was Sorella! Sorella was lying there and he was dead.

Clyde's eyes caught the ice-pick, where he had dropped it.

"Chump!" He looked around sharply at the sound of his own voice. Quickly, then, he took his handkerchief from his pocket, wiped the handle of the ice-pick, and dropped it to the floor.

He stood. He spoke, then, to the thing on the floor. "So somebody beat me to you? Well, I guess that's just as good. They did a better job than I'da done. But you prob'ly had it comin'."

He looked up then, abruptly, and glanced about the room. He tucked his revolver back into the top of his boot, pulled the trouser leg back down over it.

He moved to the door. With his handkerchief he wiped the knob and chain, thoroughly. Then, still with the handkerchief, he turned the knob and pulled the door towards him.

He stepped into the hall to face three men.

One was a policeman in uniform; one was a hard-faced man in plain-clothes, and one was Chalk Harvey.

"That's the one," Harvey said excitedly, "that's it. Where he just came out of."

"Wait a minute, buddy!" It was the hard-faced man. His voice was hard, too. Nasal, grating.

Clyde stopped, turned around. He had been nearly past them. He saw the revolver in the hand of the hard-faced man.

"Put up your hands."

Slowly Clyde raised his arms.

"Frisk him."

The man in uniform patted Clyde's hips, his coat pockets, and under his arms.

"Nothing," he said.

"Okey," was the answer. He produced a shield from his pocket, showed it to Clyde. "I'm Dalton. What's your name?"

"Clyde. Peter Clyde."

"Where you going?"

"No place. Now."

"Don't get flip." He turned to the policeman. "Bring him in."

They filed into the room, Clyde second in line, Harvey fourth.

Dalton took in the room at a glance. The body on the floor, the ice-pick. "Don't touch anything. Anybody." He turned his narrow stare on Clyde. "Too bad, farmer. Just too bad."

A step sounded in the doorway.

"Well and a well and a *well*! As I live and respirate, what have we here? Why, it's Danger-Loving Dalton, or my name's not Percy Potts."

The four turned to eye this note of levity which had appeared in the shape of a gloomy, nondescript specimen with horn-rimmed spectacles. In a quick glance his eyes swept the body on the floor, the ice-pick, and Clyde with his arms upraised.

"Soo-o-o," he said. "Lee Sorella. Murder. The weapon. The culprit." He looked at Dalton. "Right? Of course. Rather neat, Dalty. A feather in your cap, mayhap. What's the story?"

Dalton eyed him without welcome. "How'd you get in here?" he asked.

"On my way to work, not over an hour late. Hopped off the street-car when I saw you all coming in here, and here I am. And very happy to be present, too, I may add. Looks like a story."

Dalton grunted. "What I'd give," he said, "to finish up just *one* case without some of you monkeys stickin' his beak in! Do you—"

"Why, Mr. Dalton! Is this gratitude? And after all I've done for you, too. Listen, dick, the luckiest thing you can have happen to you is for me to get in first on your story. Come on now,

spill it, and if you don't leave out something salient I'll stick your name on page one eight times. Come on. Eight column head. Your name in the sub-head. Let's have it."

Dalton shrugged. "Okey," he said. "Only I don't care about my name," he added quickly. "All I'm interested in is my job."

"Story, please," the sad young man said. "Facts, not fiction."

Dalton gritted his teeth. "Funny, ain't you? Well, here it is. When the dope came through on the radio we came right over, and as—"

"What dope, please?"

"This guy calls in and says he hears a fight goin' on across the hall. Loud voices." Dalton had gestured at Harvey.

"This guy!" the reporter said, shaking his head sadly. "This guy! Chalk Harvey, and you call him this guy. What a dick!"

"Well," Dalton shifted his feet, "I wasn't noticin'. I *was* busy. I know him. 'Course I know him, but I *was* busy."

"Oh, of course. Incidentally, how did *you* happen to turn up so quick, anyhow? Thought cops answered those calls."

"I'm on a cruiser. We was right near, so we came on over. So when the patrol car come up a minute later, and this Harvey was out there lookin' so agitated, I let them go on, and we came up."

"Okey. Go ahead."

"We came up the stairs, and just as we get to the door it opens, and this farmer," his eyes caught Clyde's boots, "I mean this cowboy comes out stickin' a handkerchief in his pocket. So I brings him back in, and there's Sorella rubbed out, and there's the boy that did it." He thumbed at Clyde.

The reporter looked at Clyde. "Right?"

Clyde shook his head.

"Denies it." He turned to Dalton. "I guess you've got the dope on

him. Fingerprints on the—uh—lethal weapon?"

"Just got here," Dalton said, "but I expect they're there." He was picking up the ice-pick gingerly. He laid it on the soft cloth of the table cover. "Gimme your glasses," and he reached for the reporter's thick-lensed spectacles. Using them to magnify, he inspected the ice-pick.

He looked up. "Wiped off," he said. He looked at Clyde, stepped quickly to the door and inspected the knob, the chain, and the edge of the door. He came back. "Let's see your handkerchief," he said.

He took Clyde's handkerchief from his pocket, scrutinized it.

"There you are," he said, holding it out to the reporter. "Blood on the corner. He wiped the doorknob, too."

The reporter whirled on Clyde. "I'm Jimmy Bates, of the *Sentinel*," he said. "Don't be afraid to talk to me, I'll only spill it all over the first page. Why did you do it?" he barked.

Clyde was silent a moment. Then: "I didn't."

"That's your story. Now let's see you stick to it. You didn't kill him, but you were up here. What for?"

"I came to see Sorella."

"Why?"

"To beat him up."

Bates reached a hand towards Dalton, took back his spectacles. He put them on and looked at Clyde carefully. For the first time. His voice was slower now. Musing.

"To beat him up. Just for fun, or did you have a reason?"

"He had my horse ham-strung," Clyde said.

"How—"

"That's it!" Harvey broke in. "I heard him. Yesterday. Lee just tried to buy his horse and he wouldn't sell. And he told Lee if anything happened to the horse he was coming for Lee. He threatened him. I heard him. Said he'd kill Lee."

Bates turned to Clyde. "So you thought Sorella did it?"

Clyde's voice was toneless. "I knew he didn't."

"But then—why did you—"

"He had it done," Clyde said. "I told him I'd see him first."

"And so," Bates said, "you came to beat him up. And you brought an ice-pick with you just for luck, I guess."

"I never saw the ice-pick before," Clyde said.

"Listen here!" Dalton broke in. "This ain't no movie. If you wanta talk to this baby, come over to Headquarters, and maybe the chief'll let you, and maybe not. But me, now, I'm takin' him in. Come on, cowboy, let's—"

Clyde's eyes had been darting about the room. Now he interrupted. "Wait," he said. "You think I'd have to use an *ice-pick*." He threw a contemptuous look at the form on the floor. "On *that*."

He turned suddenly towards the table. "Look," he said. His tone was arresting. On the table was a bowl with three oranges, an apple, and some grapes in it. Clyde slowly lowered his arms, picked up an orange in each hand.

He held his hands out, backs up, facing Dalton and the policeman. The large oranges were almost obscured by those bony, long-fingered hands. The fingers began to contract.

The policeman moved closer to Dalton, to see better. The smell of orange came into the air. Oil appeared between those fingers, then juice. It dripped to the floor.

The fingers kept on closing. Steadily. Surely. The uniformed policeman and Dalton stood close together, their eyes on Clyde's hands. Pulp oozed through. A seed popped off at a tangent.

Bates stood to their left, Harvey between Bates and the door to the little hallway.

Suddenly Clyde's hands opened and came together. Dalton's head and that

of his assistant thumped together. Hard. They sat down.

An ungentle fist caught Bates in the chest, and he lurched back into Harvey, tumbling with him across the entrance to the hallway.

A foot lit in Bates' stomach, and the door slammed.



N the outer hall Clyde threw a look in either direction. Then he took one long step directly across the hallway, and twisted at the knob of the door to 222. It turned, the door opened, and Clyde disappeared within.

His back against the door, Clyde looked before him. The apartment seemed identical to the one he had just left. Stepping through the little entrance hall he came into the living-room. The same sofa, chairs, table; the in-a-door bed with the curtained closet beside it.

Two steps and he was behind the curtain. His eyes on the doorway to the little entrance hall, he stooped, got his gun from his boot-top.

He stood still. From the hall now there came the sound of voices. Then footsteps clattered. Some went down the steps, some on along the hall towards the rear.

Then silence.

Slowly Clyde let his breath out. He relaxed a little, leaning against the closet wall. For perhaps two minutes he stood thus, peering through a little slit between the curtains.

Then he reached for the curtain with his left hand. Abruptly the hand stopped, an inch from the curtain.

There had been a sound at the door. Clyde froze. His right hand came up with the revolver, rested solidly against his side. Rigid, he waited.

There was the creak of the door opening. Then it clicked shut. A man appeared in the door to the little hallway. It was the reporter.

His arms hung limp at his sides. He fastened his gaze on something at the other side of the room and held it there.

Then he spoke: "Maybe I'm a chump. Maybe not. Anyhow, I think you're in here. In the closet. And I believe you. I don't think you bumped Sorella. I want to talk to you. Have words. How about it?"

He was silent for a moment. Clyde did not move or speak.

"Okey. I'm not going to look for you. I might be able to help you. Maybe I'm wrong, and you did bump him. Either way, it's a swell story. But if you don't want to play, you don't want to. So long."

Bates turned. For a moment, Clyde didn't move.

Then: "Wait."

Bates came back. Clyde stepped from the closet, gun still in his hand.

"You won't need that, now," Bates said.

Clyde dropped it in his coat pocket.

"Now look," Bates was speaking quickly, "we've got to get you out of here. Before we can do anything we've got to do that."

"I'll stick here a while," Clyde said. "Harvey'll be back."

"Listen, umpchay, sure he'll be back, and that dick'll be with him, too. Don't you realize you're hotter than a six-alarm fire? Motive, caught practically in the act, everything. Why, you can hang so quick it'll make your head swim. I understand it generally does. Hanging."

"Maybe that's right," Clyde said. "But I want the guy that got my horse."

"All right. You can get him, but first you've gotta get out of here. I want the story, too, but I ain't gonna try to get it here. Now listen, here's what you do—"

For perhaps two minutes he gave directions. Quickly, succinctly. He paused. "Got 'em?"

"How do I know you won't double-cross me?" Clyde said.

"You don't," Bates said flatly.

Clyde stared at him a moment. "Okey," he said, "I'll be there. You look like a white man."

"Many thanks," Bates said. "If you didn't look fairly blond yourself, I'd never have done this. So long. Got everything?"

Clyde nodded. Bates wheeled and was gone out the door.

For a second Clyde gazed after him. Then he took his watch from his pocket. It was ten-thirty.

Rapidly he began to move. "Sounded like he meant it," he muttered. "If he didn't . . . but what the hell?"

From the closet he took a pair of shoes. Removing his boots he tried them. Far too small. With a knife he ripped the counters, tucked the knife back into his pocket. He managed to cram his feet into the shoes, the counters bent down. He loosened his belt, so his trousers dropped lower. They hid his sock-clad heels, in the back. He was over an inch shorter now. He took two steps. The shoes altered his walk.

From the closet he got a laundry bag. Into it he dropped his boots, his coat, his hat. He filled it then with crumpled newspaper.

A hat from the closet he rolled between his hands until its shape was gone. A little small, he still managed to cram it on his head securely.

He burned a piece of newspaper, and with the ashes smeared his face slightly. He dabbed his shirt here and there.

He looked at his watch. It was ten-thirty-six. He stepped into the closet.

At ten-forty Clyde came from the door of 222 in the *Bellevue*. On his right shoulder he carried a laundry bag. The left arm, reaching up to the bag on one side, and the bag on the other side almost hid his face. He was stooped, and as he moved off towards the rear of the hall he shuffled, rather than walked. He did not resemble Pete Clyde.

At the end of the hall he turned and descended steps which let him out at the side of the house. Here he turned and

slouched along between the house and the high bushes at his right.

He walked slowly, looking only at the ground before him. He came past the front of the house, and continued along the edge of the yard.

"All right! All right! Come on, you think we got all day?"

Clyde looked up. The voice had come from a man at the wheel of a ramshackle flivver at the curb. The windows were gone in the back of this car, and had been replaced by sheets of tin on which slipshod letters spelled: *One Day Cleaners*.

A policeman strolled past, and on down the walk.

"Okey, okey," Clyde said nasally. "Keep your shirt on."

He stepped into the front of the car, tossing the bag into the rear. The flivver moved off, turning right, towards the river, at its first opportunity.

Once around the corner, Clyde got into the back, looked out the rear window. A taxi followed them.

The flivver turned on Magazine, went out a few blocks, and headed again for the river. The taxi still followed. Then the taxi stopped.

Bates got from it, and it came on. It was gaining on the flivver now. Clyde looked about on the street they were on. It was nearly deserted. He reached forward, tapped the driver on the shoulder.

"All right," he said, "this will do."

The man's right hand rose above the level of his shoulder. Clyde put a twenty-dollar bill in it. The flivver pulled to the curb. Clyde got out with the bag, and the flivver pulled away. The taxi, its door open, swung into the flivver's place, and Clyde stepped in. Almost immediately this car was moving again.

Clyde slid down into the seat until he was not visible from the outside. Swinging around a corner the car headed back to Magazine.

It was eleven o'clock. Along Magazine, then into Audubon Park. Lazily

the cab cruised through the park, past the tennis courts, the golf course, and out on to St. Charles Avenue, in front of Tulane University. Along St. Charles a few blocks to Broadway, and cross-town on Broadway.

As they came into City Park, on the other side of town, it was noon. For an hour the cab leisurely drifted in and around through the park.

Then out, and over to Esplanade. Down Esplanade to Royal. Right on Royal, towards Canal Street. The streets were narrow here, unclean. Drab, ancient, miscellaneous buildings were cramped together on either side. Not many people were on the streets now. It was the French quarter of New Orleans.

THE French quarter—that curious mixture of decayed aristocracy, first generation Italians, ladies of the night, and the sallow, furtive-eyed men who live off them. Incongruous combination of markets, antique stores, cheap and expensive night-clubs, famous old restaurants, dives, poolrooms, gymnasiums and “establishments.”

At Ursuline Street the taxi stopped. “Okey,” the driver said.

Clyde had not spoken. He did not speak now. He got from the cab, handed the driver twenty dollars. The cab moved away.

Clyde put the bag on his shoulder. His head down, he moved along Ursuline, towards the river.

Halfway in the block he slowed. A high board fence was at his right. It once had been painted green. There was a door at one end.

Under lowered lids, Clyde threw a quick glance in each direction.

He tried the door. The knob turned and he stepped in. He was in a large, dirty courtyard, paved with irregular flagstones.

Except for the board fence, high brick walls with shuttered windows surrounded him. A mangy palm tree grew in one corner. At the back, under a shed

which jutted from one wall, several cars were parked, with room for several more. Clyde moved over the flagstones.

By the front fender of the car in the corner, he stopped. He stood there. Waiting.

Presently the slats moved in a shutter near him. He did not look up. The slats closed in the shutter. A door, farther down the wall opened a crack.

“Come in.”

Clyde walked to the door, went in. A squat man with a chest like a beer keg crooked a finger at him.

“Theesa way.”

Clyde followed him around a corner. The hall was dingy and narrow and musty. It reeked of garlic. In a rectangle of light at its end Clyde made out a short bar, with one man leaning on it. They stopped. The squat man opened a door, gestured to Clyde to enter.

Clyde stepped in, his guide behind him. It was a small room, with four rough chairs and a table as its sole furnishings. In one of the chairs was Jimmy Bates.

“It worked all right?” Bates said.

“Like a charm.”

“Good. Sit down. That cleaner’s truck was just plain fate. I couldn’t have found a better one in six months. And he popped around the corner at me like somebody had sent him special delivery. When I said twenty dollars to him he looked like he was gonna kiss me. Oh—” his glance turned to the squat man in the door. “Tony, this is Pete Clyde. Tony Rumero, Clyde.”

Rumero held out his hand. “Ima pleased to meet,” he said, a grin flashing beneath his ferocious black mustache. “You have a drink?”

“Sure,” Bates said. “Rye for me.”

“I could use one,” Clyde said. “Rye’s fine.”

“And Tony,” Bates said, “Mr. Clyde here—he’s a little, er, hot right now, if you get the idea. So he isn’t here, you see. And I’m not either, of course.”

“Nobody here,” Rumero said. “I un-nastan’. Two the rye.” He was gone.

Clyde had dropped the bag and was pulling his boots from it.

"Sit down," Bates said. "We can talk now. All right, first: Any idea who could have killed Sorella? Or who would want to?"

Clyde pulled on a boot, looked up. "No," he said. "Where does Harvey hang out?"

"You think Harvey did it?"

"I don't know. But I want him. He ham-strung my horse." His words came in a monotone, but Bates shivered.

"But we can't think about that now. Until we get the man that killed Sorella we can't think about the other. It's more important than the horse."

Clyde was silent a moment, pulling on the other boot. "That horse," he said then. Suddenly he rose, began pacing. "Listen," he said savagely, "there ain't anything more important than that horse. That horse—look, out in Redondo Valley, sometimes in the winter, the snow drives the wild horses down from the mountains. We don't bother with them much. Just cayuses. Sometimes we corral a bunch, though, just for something to do. Dondo was three days old when I got him. I raised that horse, like a baby. There's Arabian in those horses, way back, somewhere. Has to be, for a horse like Dondo to come out of 'em. I found out he was faster than a sandstorm. He'd run till his heart popped out. So I brought him down here to see how he'd stack up with some of these fancy runnin' horses. Well—it got him killed." He paused a moment, facing away from Bates.

"But don't you see," Bates told him, "this other. You've got to do something about—"

Clyde whirled. "To hell with who killed Sorella!" he said. "I don't care. I didn't do it. I want the guy that got my horse. Don't you understand? There ain't any more horses like him. He was—" Clyde paused, stepped to the table. His fist came down on it. "I'm gonna get him. You hear? And when I do—" He subsided. "The

other," he added, "don't matter. If it wasn't for the guy that got my horse I'd blow out of here tonight. I could. Catch a freight. Work back to Arizona, easy like. Then, back in Redondo Valley. I'd be all right down there. That's big, and I know the people that live there. But—"

"Okey," Bates said. He was looking at Clyde curiously now, respect mingling with real sympathy. "We'll let her stand like that. But I want the story, you see. I don't think you killed Sorella, but I want to know who did."

The door opened and Rumero came in and put their drinks on the table. Clyde reached for his pocket, but Rumero had backed out.

"You don't pay him," Bates said, "when you're with me. He got in a jam with his immigration papers, and I straightened it out for him. He'd cut a throat for me now."

"I see. Makes it nice." Clyde tossed his drink down.

"Listen," Bates said. "How did you happen to be up there, and have that blood on your handkerchief, and all? Will you tell me that?"

Clyde shrugged. "Just tough luck, I guess. I went up there to see Sorella, like I said. The blood—well, I pulled the ice-pick out of his back, and then I saw what I'd done, so I wiped my fingerprints off the handle. Just tough luck."

"How did you happen to go up there looking for Sorella?"

"That's where he lived," Clyde said simply.

"Huh?" Bates looked at him sharply, "How did you know?"

"I asked a guy."

Bates was silent a moment. Frowning. Then: "He didn't live there."

"What?" This time Clyde showed surprise. "You're sure?"

"Positive. I wondered how you happened to go there, because I didn't think he lived there. So while you were riding around I looked it up. He lived out

on Alvarado, in a house. With a dame," Bates added.

Clyde sat staring at his glass a moment. He got up, took a pace back and forth. He rolled a cigarette.

Then he turned to Bates. "Let's have another drink," he said. "We're both after the same guy."

Bates looked at Clyde. He thumped the floor with his foot. "What?" he said.

"Harvey killed Sorella."

Bates turned the little whiskey glass in his hand, idly. Then he looked up at Clyde. "Go on," he said.

Clyde took a couple of steps back and forth. Then he moved to the table, sat down. He leaned across towards Bates.

"Look," he said rapidly, "it wasn't luck. There wasn't any luck about it. I didn't get in there by luck. And that ice-pick was there waiting for me to be chump enough to leave my fingerprints on it. I didn't, but the blood on my handkerchief is just as good. Or bad. Harvey killed Sorella, because he was the only one who knew my horse had been ham-strung, and he was the only one, besides Sorella, that knew I'd be comin' for him. And Harvey had me sent up there."

"How do you know he ham-strung the horse?" Bates asked. "How can you be so sure?"

"Tracks," Clyde said. "In the stable."

"But couldn't they be—"

"Not a chance. I know tracks. Those were clean and neat. Harvey's. You see, he limped a little, and he was a small man. They were his."

Bates digested this. Rumero, in answer to Bates' thump on the floor, appeared in the door with two drinks. He set them on the table and backed out. Bates looked up at Clyde.

"How did he send you up there?"

"As I was comin' by the grandstand," Clyde said, "on my way out, a guy bumped into me. I started to go on, and he asked where I was goin'. I asked him where Sorella lived. He told me that apartment."

"I get it," Bates said. "He tells you that place, then he watches you leave. Take a cab?"

"Yeah," Clyde said, "and when he saw me get in the cab, he calls Harvey, and—"

"Uh-huh," Bates broke in, "and Harvey figures out how long it'll take you in a cab. Some way he's got Sorella up there in his place, or across the hall. If he's in his apartment, he gets him across the hall some way. About two minutes before you could possibly get there in a cab, when Sorella's not watchin' he inserts the lethal weapon. Very neatly. The blood will be fresh when you get there."

"Yeah. Then he goes to his window, with the phone in his hand. When he sees me come down the walk he gives a hurry call for the radio cops. After he hears me go in, he beats it down front to meet them."

"That's it," Bates said. "Pretty neat. And pretty lucky."

Clyde was silent a moment. Then: "Not so lucky. He knew I'd do what I said, come for Sorella. And he could wait until he was sure I was comin' to the right place before he bumped Sorella. And even then, he could wait until he actually saw me comin' in before he called the cops."

"Yep. That's right." Bates sipped his drink. "This guy," he said, "this guy that told you the address, what did he look like?"

Clyde's brow furrowed. "Had on a derby," he said slowly. "And a checked suit. About—about your height. Dark skin. He had—he had a stubby little nose."

"Thick lips?" Bates asked.

"Yeah, pretty thick."

"Monk Santone," Bates said. Then: "Well, we know who did it, and how. Which leaves us only the little details of workin' out why, and how to prove it. Just little details. Yeah, details! You being there, having threatened Sorella, and the blood on your handkerchief—those'd probably convict you,

right there. So whatever we do, we've got to do alone, before we ring the cops in. Any ideas?"

"I'm gonna get Harvey," Clyde said. "That's the only one."

"Get him?"

Clyde nodded. "Turn him over to the police," he said. "Before—" his long hands opened and closed suggestively, "—before, I don't know what I'd have done. I think, if I'd got my hands on him—but this is better, now, I guess. I'll get him."

"How?" Bates said: "You can't just go around looking for him on the streets. And with you loose he's not going to be hanging around his apartment, alone. You know that. He'll be doing everything he can to get you picked up again."

"Yeah," Clyde said, "and so will the police." He paused a moment. "Sorella," he said then, "what was he like? And Harvey? What do you know about 'em?"

Bates thumped the floor for a drink. "Not natives," he said. "From the East some place. Racketeers, I think, that decided not to buck legal beer. Figured racing was easier and more profitable. Just been here since a little before they started running at Jefferson."

"The dame," Clyde said. "The one Sorella lived with. What was she like?"

"A pretty tasty article," Bates said. "Blonde, with brown eyes. Very seductive looking." He considered this. "Yep. *Very*."

"Some awful damn' fool things," Clyde said, "have been done on account of women."

"That and money," Bates said. "The filthy lucre."

"Say," Clyde said, "they had a horse spotted for the Mooney Handicap. Today. That musta been why Harvey killed Sorella. If—if Harvey—"

"He won't," Bates said. "Too smart. This other guy. Santone. He'll be at the mutuel window, if they win."

"They'll have other bets," Clyde said, "spotted around the country. Have someone place 'em for them, too late to be wired in to the mutuels. So it won't affect the odds."

"Harvey can collect them by mail," Bates said. "From anywhere."

Rumero came in with two drinks, set them on the table, and retired.

"Then," Clyde said slowly, "then Harvey—he could skip out. Now. Any time."

"He could."

Clyde rose. His mouth set. "He won't," he said. "Any boats out of here tonight?"

"One for Havana. Seven o'clock."

"Airplanes? Trains?"

"Plenty of both."

"Yeah. Of course." He was pacing back and forth. "Look, can this guy give me a coat and hat?"

Bates thumped the floor. "Sure. But you can't go now. It's too light. You'll have to wait."

"Can't wait. Can't risk it. Got to go now. I'll be okay."

"Where you going?"

"I think I'll go calling on a lady. What is that address on Alvarado?"

"Twelve forty. But wait. Wait till dark. We can get Harvey, even if he skips. Anything you're gonna do, you can do later. They can check all the trains. Boats, airplanes, anything. If we give 'em some reason. This way you're—"

"I can't wait. I might need Harvey—might hell, I'm sure to need him for any kind of proof. And anyhow," his voice dropped, "I'm sick of all this. I want to get it over, and go on back—home. Where—you can have a horse, and let him run, and have fun, without—"

He petered out, as the door opened. Rumero set two drinks on the table.

"Thanks, Tony," Bates said. "Can you get Mr. Clyde here a coat and a hat? Old ones?"

Rumero smiled brightly. "Betcha your life. Old ones. I know whatcha

want. You betcha." He backed out, with a knowing look.

Clyde turned to Bates. "Here," he said, "can you do this? Some way, I don't care how, a frame-up or anything, but some way can you get them to pick up this Santone? Just so he won't get loose, too?"

"You think he—"

"I don't know. I don't know how much he knows, but he must know something. He sent me up there. The less he knows the better. The more likely he is to try to save his own skin by tellin' the truth. If you can get him—"

"I might be able to. I can try."

"All right. Do it. Do it, somehow. And me—" He stopped. He picked up his drink, tossed it down.

"And you—?" Bates said.

"I'm gonna get Harvey." His voice was low when he said that. But it was cold, and there was something in it that made Bates shudder. "I'm gonna go see that lady. And I'm gonna get Harvey. Some way. I'll do it. You just get this Santone."

"I'll do my best. You don't think you'd better wait a—"

"I'm goin' now," Clyde said. "I'm goin' just as soon—"

He broke off abruptly, and stood rigid where he was. Looking at the door. Listening. And Bates, too, was motionless.



OR suddenly sounds had come from the hall outside. Voices, too loud for ordinary conversation, and a thump or so.

And then the door swung in, and Dalton was standing there. Standing there behind the ugly muzzle of a revolver.

"One funny move," he said grimly. "That's all I want. Just one funny move outta either one of you."

He moved into the room. Clyde and Bates said nothing.

Dalton looked at Bates. "So I was

right," he said. "I thought I was. You came out of there after the rest of us. And Harvey's room showed someone had been in it. I figured if I found you I'd find this baby. He couldn't have got out without help."

"Come on in, Dalty," Bates said. "We're just having tea. Won't you join us?"

"I wouldn't be funny," Dalton said. "Accessory after the act ain't gonna sound so funny, dope. You'd better be—"

"That's nothing," Bates said. "It doesn't even sound funny right now." Rumero's head showed in the door behind Dalton, and Bates raised his eyes, to the light. "In fact, Dalty, it sounds plain serious. But there you go being ungrateful again. Where you would be without me is more than I can say. This fellow would have got away, you would have been a chump. Everything. Except for me. I was just gettin' my story, Dalty, you oughtta know that. I was just about to call you up and tell you to come—"

"Baloney," Dalton said. He motioned to the cop, standing behind him now. "Put the bracelets on him," gesturing to Clyde. "Both of 'em," he added. The uniformed policeman edged past him.

"Now wait a minute," Bates said quickly, heatedly. "You can't get away with that, dick. If you put those things on me I'm gonna make it so hot for you that you'll never—"

"Go on," Dalton told the policeman. "Don't pay any attention to that monkey. When we get through with him he ain't gonna make anything hot for any—"

He stopped. For the room was dark. Suddenly the lights had gone out. And there was no illumination from the window. It seems to be a rule in the French quarter that all shutters remain closed, all blinds down, all curtains drawn. Tony Rumero observed this rule.

"Don't move!" Dalton called grimly. "Don't anyone move. I'm gonna shoot

at the sound of anything. Light!" he called then. "Lights back here before I—"

He didn't finish his sentence, because he had pitched forward on his face. People usually do pitch forward on their faces when something solid catches them hard across the knees, unexpectedly.

Clyde's dive had carried him completely under Dalton.

Immediately he was on his feet in the hall. As quietly as he could, in the dark, he made his way towards the door he had come in. He clung to the wall.

There was a flash of flame, the sound of a shot behind him. He heard the bullet bury itself in the wall, at the end, and crouched lower, clung closer to the wall.

"Stop!" There was another shot.

Clyde was around the corner.

He touched a body! He backed away, drew back his fist.

"Hees-ta! Meesta Clyde."

Clyde felt something soft shoved at him. He snatched it, and ducked on out the door, at the end of this short ell of the hall.

Outside he looked quickly about. There was no one in sight. Dalton must not have known about this entrance.

In his hands he held an old coat, a battered, broad-brimmed straw hat. Hastily, as he made his way along the wall towards the fence, he donned these.

As much as he could, he slouched as he walked. His own boots made it more difficult, but by the time he had reached the fence his movements seemed fairly natural.

He stuck his head out the door, peered quickly in either direction, and stepped through. Two blocks to his right was the French Market. There would be people, a confusion of stalls, hucksters' wagons, trucks, and many little stores one could dodge into.

Keeping close to the building, Clyde shuffled along the walk. There was no hue and cry behind him, as yet. He rounded the corner into a robust aroma

of fish, oysters and shrimp. He moved across the street, up on to the block that housed the market.

Through men in rubber boots, handling sea-food with scoops, he moved on down the walk, under the shed of the market.

At the corner ahead of him, through the still-falling drizzle, he saw a policeman appear, and look about.

Quickly Clyde ducked in behind a truck of chicken coops. He went on, in and out among crates and trucks. He came out on the other side of the market. Hucksters' wagons, with vegetables and fruit, lined the curb here, most of them nearly empty. It was late in the day for hucksters.

Clyde picked out the meanest, ricketyest in the line, and stopped by it.

"Your wagon?" To the sour-looking man standing near it.

The man nodded.

"How much?"

"Two buncha nickel."

"I don't mean the carrots. The wagon. How much for it? And the horse?"

"No sell."

Clyde pulled money from his pocket. "Fifty dollars."

"No sell."

"A hundred, quick."

The man's eyes bulged. Up the line another huckster moved in their direction, greedily. The man saw him.

"All right," he said, reaching for the money.

Quickly Clyde climbed to the driver's seat, stirred the spiritless horse to motion.

If you want to hide something, don't put it where people can't find it. Put it where they won't look.

Hunched over on the seat of the huckster's wagon, the wide-brimmed straw hat pulled over his eyes, Clyde drove slowly away from the French Market. Towards Canal Street.

A car whizzed past. There was the sound of police whistles, a block away. Policemen appeared at corners, vigilant,

searching. There was hue and cry now. Interest showed among the people around the market, on the streets.

And through it all, lazily, calmly, an old horse pulled an old wagon, on the seat of which there slumped a man, seemingly half-asleep.

Up along the meat stalls this wagon moved. It waited for a signal light at Dauphine. Then drowsily rolled on its casual way.

BACK in Tony Rumero's there was much confusion. At the door, the front door, on Royal Street, were Bates, Dalton and Rumero.

Rumero was apologetic. Profusely apologetic.

"I am so sor'," he was saying. "So sor'. It is *most* unfortune. The light, there she is. Then she go—*blooey!*" He waved his arms in an expansive gesture.

"Yeah," Dalton said sourly. "Yeah, I know about how sorry you are. I know it was just an accident. Yeah!"

"Listen," Bates said, "you can't take me in. What for?"

"Just for fun," Dalton said irritably, "and how do you like that?"

"Okey," Bates said. "Go ahead. I'd just as soon be there as here. Better. I'd kind of like to talk to the Inspector. Come on, why don't you take me? Afraid?"

"I'm takin' you," Dalton said, "don't worry. And you," he looked at Rumero, "you better be careful, wop, you better be careful. It don't pay to turn the lights out on the cops. You get me?"

"But the light," Tony said, waving his arms some more, "she go out. All of her own idea. I do nothing. She just go—*blooey!*"

"Yeah," Dalton said. "I know. Come on," and he took Bates by the arm.

Tony Rumero returned to his establishment. In the long hall he opened a little door in the wall, removed a burnt-out fuse. With a good one, which happened to be in his pocket, he re-

placed it. Lights blazed on. Whistling, Rumero went about his duties, having tucked the burnt-out fuse inside the little door. It was handy there.



N Camp Street, just the other side of Canal, an old huckster's wagon rattled along. Not hurriedly, not obtrusively, but steadily.

The man on the seat looked neither to right nor left. He was thinking. He had plenty of time to think. He could abandon the wagon, and take a cab, but no place could he find a better disguise than the wagon offered.

So he sat there. Now and then the picture of a horse who could run forever, and liked it, would flash through his mind. His face would go grim, then, and ugly, and he would cluck his steed back into his shambling trot.

It was four o'clock, then. Out Camp Street the wagon made its snail-like way. From Camp over to Lee Circle, and out St. Charles.

The steady drizzle went on. St. Charles was crowded with cars. Brakes screeched. Horns tooted. The wagon kept its steady pace, near the curb.

The other side of Napoleon the lawns widened, the houses were bigger, better tended. Even the street cars, here, seemed to run with less clatter, in the green, tree-lined neutral ground in the center of the wide avenue.

On out St. Charles the wagon went. Past Audubon Place, with its dignified mansions behind the grilled iron fence which shut it in. Across Broadway, and on towards Carrollton.

Three blocks and it turned to the left. The man on the seat sat up a little now. Not much, but a little.

This was Alvarado Street. The 1200 block.

The wagon pulled to the curb. The man got down. He took several bunches of carrots from the wagon, turned, and

slouched off around the spacious bungalow. The number on the front of this house was 1240.

Halfway around the house, the man paused and bent down to his right leg. Presently he rose, and moved on. At the back door he knocked.

A negro maid appeared.

"We don't want nothin'."

"Carrots. Nice, fresh carrots. Tender—"

"We don't want no carrots. We're—"

The man was insistent. His voice raised. "Carrots," he said. "Carrots! You want some carrots. I know—"

"Go'n away," the maid said. "Go'n away, now, 'fore I call Miss Laury."

"Call her. Go on. Call her. She'll want some carrots." He was almost shouting now, directing his voice into the house.

"What's going on out there?" came from inside. The voice was followed by a woman.

She came to the door, stood behind the maid.

"Go away. I'll call the police."

She was a tall woman, who looked younger than she was, except for her eyes. Her dark eyes, striking contrast to her yellow hair, were tired. Her face, too, when you looked closely, wasn't young. It had the lines, the contours of youth, but they were not there of their own accord. They had been put there.

She brushed a strand of the hair from her face. "Go on, now," she said. "We don't want anything. We're going away and—"

Clyde let the carrots fall to the ground. The woman looked into the muzzle of his revolver.

"Ask me in," Clyde said. "I'm comin' anyhow."

The woman was backing away. Her eyes on the gun. The negro maid fled to the bathroom and bolted herself in. No further sound was heard from her.

"I'll scream," the blonde woman said. "The police. You can't do—"

"You won't scream," Clyde said

evenly, and she looked up then, from the gun, and saw his eyes.

Her mouth opened then. No sound came forth. She backed into the house. Her lips closed. Her eyes were on Clyde as he followed.

They were in the kitchen. "Go on," he said. "Some other room. I want to talk to you."

She backed on away, through a dining-room, a living-room, into a bedroom. Clothes, suit-cases were on the bed, about the room.

"You—" she said, "it was you. You killed Lee. I—Chalk—told me you looked like—had eyes like that."

"So Chalk told you, did he?" Clyde gritted. "That sounds natural." His eyes took in the room. "And you were gonna skip. Skip with the guy that killed Sorella. You make a fine pair," he said.

"No!" she breathed. "You—you killed him. You killed Lee. You—"

"Harvey killed Sorella," Clyde said stonily. "You knew it."

"No—no, he didn't. I don't believe it. He—you did it. You found him, over there, some way, and—"

"Yeah, I found him, all right. Found him dead, with an ice-pick stickin' out of his back. And Harvey did it, because he wanted Sorella's share, and Monk and Santone told him I was comin'! And you—you were in on it. Gonna beat it with that skunk, huh?"

"No—" her lips trembled a little. "No—I was—but your horse. He was all right—they didn't get him. I know, I heard them—"

"The horse is dead," Clyde said flatly. "He was ham-strung, last night."

"What—is ham-strung?" Her voice was almost a whisper.

"You cut the tendon," Clyde said, touching above his ankle, "here. He couldn't run no more. Ever. So I had to—destroy him."

"Chalk—he did that?" Her voice was full of loathing or she was the best actress Clyde had ever seen.

"He did it. Then he killed Sorella.

He wanted all the money himself. Where is Santone?" he shot at her suddenly.

"He's—" she stopped. She moved to the bed, sat down. She brushed her hand across her eyes, looked up at Clyde. "Why?"

"He sent me up there, where Sorella was." Clyde moved a step closer. "You won't leave tonight," he said. "You won't leave for a long time. You, and Harvey and Santone—you'll be stayin' here for—"

He stopped. She was rocking back and forth on the bed. She wasn't looking at Clyde, at anything. Her eyes were glazed. Suddenly she looked up.

"You fool!" Her voice was bitter. "I loved him—I—" She stopped, subsided. "I must have been crazy—not to see—but how could I tell, then? I—"

Footsteps sounded on the front porch.

Clyde looked about him, backed into a closet, shoved the gun into his pocket.

"Don't make a funny move," he said. "Don't say a word, don't make a sign. You get me? Don't move from where you are."

Then the door closed almost shut, and his eye at the crack was not visible from the room. The girl had not moved.

The footsteps were in the living-room now. Uneven footsteps. Light ones.

"Laura!"

The girl did not raise her head. "In here," she said.

Chalk Harvey came into the room. His blue eyes took in the half-packed bags, the girl sitting on the bed, in negligee.

"Come on, babe, come on. We ain't got all day. That plane leaves in an hour. Come on, snap into it. What's the matter?"

The girl looked up at him. "Why should we rush so?" she said. "What's the hurry? Tomorrow—"

Harvey made a gesture of impatience. "Listen, honey, now come on. We've been over all that. Lee's been bumped. It's tough but he has. And the guy that did it's got away. And when they get him, or even if they don't, there's gonna

be a lot of questions asked. You know that. And you know we can't stand too much questioning."

"You," she said, "you're the one that wants to go. I'm in no hurry. It's you."

"Babe," Harvey said, "can't you see, it's only for your own good? I don't want you to get in a jam. I just—"

"I know. You just think if you can get me to go off with you, why then later maybe you'll get somewhere with those passes you been making. You think maybe—"

"Listen," Harvey broke in, "I just want to keep you out of a jam. The other—well, I did hope—some time. You know how I am about you. But I wasn't going to say anything now. So soon. Now come on, get to packing."

"Where's Monk?"

"He'll meet us at the airport. Come on, we've got to hurry."

The girl rose, now, and turned a level hateful stare on Chalk Harvey.

"Yeh! We've got to hurry. You mean *you've* got to hurry. Why didn't that horse run today?"

"I told you! I guess the mugg musta got scared, scratched him. Last night, after we left."

"He was ham-strung. You did it."

Harvey wet his lips. Then: "All right. What about it?"

She moved a step closer to Harvey. Her eyes were venomous. "And you killed Lee. You—*you* killed him, you stinking yellow rat! You killed him, and then tried to get *me* to go off with you. Tried to get me—"

"I didn't. I tell you, babe, I didn't. You got me wrong somewhere. Listen. I—Lee was my pal, Lee was, why I don't know—"

"I know," she said ominously. "You! You did it!"

She seemed to be screaming now, but somehow her voice carried only a few feet. It was harsh, that voice, and full of hate, and the words tumbled out after each other helter-skelter.

"You got him up there, and you had

Monk tell that cowboy that he lived up there. I guess you didn't know I heard you. Look there," and she gestured quickly towards the telephone on the little table by her bed, "I guess you didn't know I listened in when you talked to Lee this morning. Didn't hear you tell him you hadn't been able to do anything about the horse. Didn't hear you tell him you had bunged things up a little, and that the horse might run, and that also this cowboy might be looking for Lee, and he'd better come on over there. Didn't hear you tell him you'd got the apartment across the hall, from you, and to go in there and wait for you. You didn't think about an extension on the phone, did you? Well, you better begin thinking about it now, rat, because—" she paused, out of breath.

She brushed back a strand of hair from her cheek. Tears were in her eyes.

"Because," she said, "you killed him, and you're gonna burn for it, Chalk, you're gonna burn in hell for that, if it's the last thing I ever do. And if it is—I don't care. You—and Monk. Wait till Monk gets a chance to save his own hide, by turning State's evidence, just wait until—"

But she said no more. Her voice ended in a little sigh. Through the crack between the door and the jamb, Clyde saw the whole thing.

As the girl talked he saw Harvey's face working. He saw those thin, pale lips twitch, and those pale blue eyes dilate a little. He saw him move a step closer to the girl, until they stood face to face. He saw his pale skin become paler, then a faintly livid tinge. He saw those lips curl in an ugly snarl.

And he saw—before he had time to move, even to think—he saw the man's right hand flash from his pocket, saw steel glint in the light, and saw Harvey plunge his knife into soft white flesh.

And, as he leaped from the closet, saw the girl wilt to the floor.

At the sound Harvey whirled. He

stepped back. Very quickly for a lame man. Clyde was on him.

His knife flashed again, and Clyde felt a stinging burn in his shoulder as he ducked, caught the hand with the knife, and twisted.

With all his strength he twisted. The knife clattered to the floor. A bone popped in Harvey's arm. Clyde relaxed his grip, drew back his fist. But Harvey had ducked to the floor, come up with the knife in his left hand.

Clyde swung his foot. In time. Or the knife would have disemboweled him. His heavy boot caught Harvey's hand. The blood-wet knife spun across the room, lit in a corner.

Clyde's left hand shot out, caught Harvey's vest in front. His right hand came up. Harvey dropped limp to the floor.

Clyde whirled. Stooped to the girl. She was breathing. But blood flowed swiftly from a wound close—too close—to her heart. Just above. Barely above.

Clyde jammed a corner of her negligee into the wound. It still leaked blood. He started to pick her up. Then his eyes swung to Harvey, still limp on the floor.

There he was. Harvey, the guy who had got his horse. The man who had killed Sorella, tried to kill Sorella's girl. The man who had almost hung the murder on him, Clyde. There he lay, and there was nothing to do about it.

The girl was losing too much blood to risk waiting a second. No time to tie him, no time to call the police, no time for anything. Before he could get the girl to a hospital—this was no case for a neighboring doctor—Harvey would have come to. He would be out the door, and away from here. Catch him then? Maybe, but only by luck. The proof, everything right in his hands. And he had to lose it, leave it.

All this flashed through Clyde's mind in one explosion of thought. His lips set. Regretfully he took another look at Harvey. Then his eyes blazed, and rapidly he moved over to the little killer

and bent close. Harvey was still out. When Clyde straightened he was satisfied.



ticked encouragingly by his ear.

Suddenly he sat erect.

"Open the door!" had come a shout.

And the driver opened it, looking towards the house. And now, in the vague light from a corner street lamp, he saw something coming down the steps.

The skin tightened along the back of his neck. It wasn't the little man. It was a tall man. A very tall man, who moved with tremendous steps. And in his arms he held a limp figure. Soft, light garments waved back from them, like little pennants, and then the tall man was stepping into the car with his burden, and his voice, a toneless, cold, unreal voice, was saying:

"The nearest hospital. And *step on it!*"

The driver had already had the car in gear. It lurched from the curb, lunged down the street.

Around a corner, teetering precariously on two wheels, and six blocks straight ahead. Another lurch to the right, and out on to St. Charles Avenue. Along St. Charles it bolted wildly. The motor was whining a little song of speed. The tires hummed.

Past Audubon Park and Tulane. Bouncing over crossings at Napoleon and Jefferson. Once through a signal light, against the red. The horn screaming all the way.

The driver manipulated his car like a man gone mad, but with the sure, uncanny precision of insanity. That voice. It had chilled him when he heard it. From then on he had not thought—only acted.

The car lurched off St. Charles, to the right. Two blocks it shot, and

screeched to the curb at the dead-end of the street.

The door was already open, and the man and his burden were gone, up the walk to the red brick building, drab in the never-ending drizzle.

The driver relaxed, slumped over on the wheel. Presently he sat up. It was cold. But sweat dripped from his brow. The palms of his hands were clammy.

The nurse at the receiving desk looked up to see a tall man with a girl in his arms. Blood splotted the filmy garments of the girl. The man's eyes were like a dead man's eyes, and his voice was weird with a lack of tone.

"The emergency ward," he said, and the girl left her desk and hurried to guide him.

An interne saw them, summoned a doctor, and followed them into the room the girl from the desk had led them to.

The man laid his burden gently on the bed, stepped back. The interne bent over her, touched the wad of negligee stuffed into the wound. He reached for the tray the nurse had brought.

The doctor stepped in. Examined. Sterilized, bandaged, and looked up.

The tall man with the blood on his front was standing there. Still.

"She's—she'll be all right?"

"As it happens, yes." The doctor looked at him. "You weren't a second too soon. Here, your shoulder—" he turned back Clyde's coat, ripped the shirt.

"Just a flesh wound," he said. Rapidly he bandaged it. Clyde stood looking down at the girl on the bed. Her rouge, against her now pale face, stood out in striking outline.

Clyde moved closer. The girl's eyes opened.

"Cowboy," her voice was low, faint. "I'm sorry—'bout your horse—I mean it—Lee, he didn't want that—he told Chalk last night—no rough stuff—I know—I heard him. . . . I'm sorry. . . . It's awful tough. . . . You're a good mugg."

She sighed. Her eyes closed again.

Clyde bent over her. The nurse standing near, by straining her ears, caught the words, but didn't know what they meant.

"You're all right, ma'am—you just got in the wrong—pasture. . . . When you come out of here—I'd get me some—different kind of—playmates."

The girl's eyes stayed shut, but her lips moved slightly. "I will."

"So long."

Clyde turned, moved towards the door.

"Wait a minute," the doctor whispered. He led him into the hall. "You can't leave, you know. All of this. We have to report."

"Sure," Clyde said. "Sure. I know. I'm just gonna step out for a cigarette." He drew papers and tobacco from his pocket. "And to pay the taxi. He's waiting. Be right back."

"Of course." The doctor nodded indulgently.

Clyde went out the door. He was not seen there again.

THE taxi driver looked up when a tall shape showed at the side of his cab, and took the bill which was held out.

And when he saw it was a twenty, and heard the man say: "Take off," he took off. Immediately.

And Jimmy Bates, back at Headquarters, still arguing, answered the phone when the Inspector handed it to him.

"You've got to believe me," Bates had been saying for the hundredth and something time. "You've got to. I'm tellin' you this guy is right. Harvey did it, and you'd better get out and pick up Santone 'cause he's in on it. I'm tellin' you the truth, and—"

That was when the phone had rung. And after the Inspector had listened a moment, he handed it to Jimmy.

"Get that call," he snapped to Dalton, standing near. Dalton picked up another phone.

But Bates paid no attention. He just said: "Hello." Then he listened.

The voice which came over the line

seemed far-away, but that may have been because of tone, rather than distance.

"Bates? Clyde. Get this. Go to 1240 Alvarado. You'll find Harvey there. We were right. He did it. And get someone out to the airport to pick up Santone. He's there to meet Harvey and the dame. And later you can go to Touro Infirmary and see the girl. She's there. Be easy on her. She's all right. Between her and Santone you won't have no trouble nailin' Harvey. That's all. So long. Thanks."

"But wait," Bates shouted. "Wait. How do you know—what if Harvey—"

"He'll be there," the voice said, and then the receiver clicked.

Bates looked up. "I told you," he said. "Let's go. Get someone—"

"Never mind," the Inspector said, hanging up a receiver. "I heard it. Extension. Come on."

Dalton hung up his phone. "From a drug-store pay station, across the street from Touro," he said.

Rapidly, succinctly the Inspector barked directions. "Get it on the radio. Pick up Monk Santone at the airport. Send the patrol car for that district to 1240 Alvarado. Hold and wait till we get there. Send the patrol car for that district to the drug-store across from Touro. Pick up Clyde and bring him in. Come on," and he turned to Bates. "You want the story. You've earned it. Let's go."

They clattered down the stairs.

The Inspector's driver, in the garage, saw them coming. As they stepped into the car, he had the motor running.

The car lunged from the garage. Once on Canal, the siren wailing, they hit seventy, and rocketed to their left into Claiborne.

It is a tribute to the Inspector's driver, that trip. They got there before the patrol car did, and they traveled four times as far.

The touring car skidded to the curb, and the Inspector and Bates were out and running up the steps.

They burst through the door, and stopped.

They stood there, looking.

All the lights were on.

And there, on the floor, before them, pulling himself along by his hands, on the floor, was a little man.

A little man with a white face. A white face with drawn, trembling lips. A little man who was whimpering. Plaintively.

Chalk Harvey.

"But—" Bates said, "how—he's still here. I don't—"

The Inspector had bent close to the little man, had seen the blood. He pointed.

Bates looked. Understood.

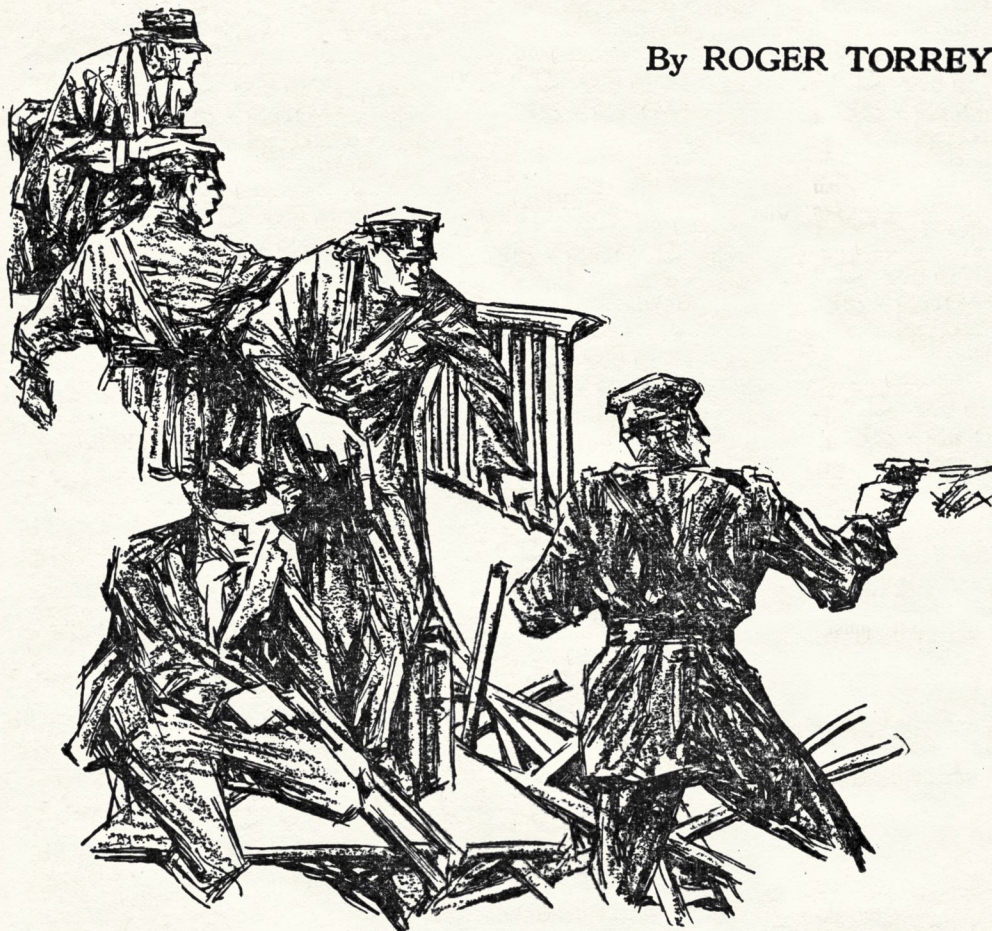
"He couldn't walk," the Inspector said. "The tendons are cut."

Bates nodded. "Ham-strung," he said.



Hospital Case

By ROGER TORREY



DAL PRENTICE stood at the top of wide hospital steps, an interne half supporting him. He stared down at the police car and growled at the man in the white coat beside him: "I'm all right! Go back and peddle your papers, butcher."

The interne grinned widely. "Now, Lieutenant, is that nice? If you fell on these steps, I'd have to listen to you cry for another month. That leg isn't so strong yet." He helped the burly detective down to the car and said: "Be seeing you."

Prentice shook hands.

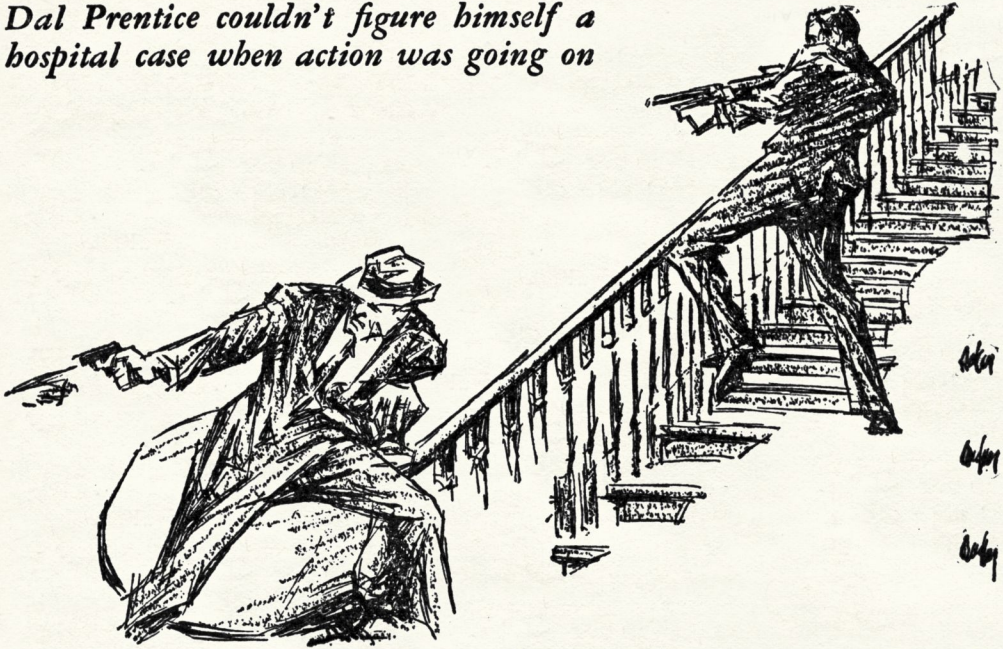
"Like hell you will. I'll have you down to the station for killing a patient before you get me up here as one. Be good." He turned to the dark, lean-faced man driving the car: "'Lo, Al. Get a good look at Doc here. There'll be a general alarm out for him any time."

The dark man grinned: "Sure! Get in the car an' shut up." He raced the motor with a heavy foot.

The surgeon leaned in the front seat. "You remember that case of Scotch you promised, Lieutenant. I can use it all right."

Prentice nodded, waved his hand as

Dal Prentice couldn't figure himself a hospital case when action was going on



the police Buick pulled away from the curb with a soft clash of gears. Allen, the driver, jeered: "You're free with Scotch whiskey, I'll say that. Why not buy a case for me?"

"Now, Al! He's a good guy. He used t' come in the room and talk to me a lot. — knows you didn't break your neck coming up."

Allen had averaged a call a day at the hospital during the time his partner had been there with a bullet in his leg, but he let the slur pass. Making conversation, he said idly: "There was a new one today. Some mugg caught his wife with another guy and the damn' fool killed him. I'd have made him a gift."

"You would!" Prentice waved a big hand. "How's my boy friend—Bruner, the b——? Quite a comedown for a guy that was riding the city a short while ago; now just a common mugg in a racket, working it like everyone else."

"Well, you pulled him out in the open, showed him up and he had to quit being the political shot, the big-hearted citizen that was taking his under cover."

"He shouldn't 'a had my side kick

killed," Prentice growled. "He could 've been payin' us our graft and ridin' nice himself. Well, what's he doing?"

"Hasn't done a thing. Layin' low. Say—What th' hell!"

The Buick was doing a smooth forty in the outside lane of travel, but a van, Magna City Furniture Co. painted on its looming side, was pulling even with the squad car and of necessity was well out past the middle of the road. Allen snarled: "Th' damn' fool! Trying t' pass a police car like that—" and stuck his head and one hand out the side, motioning the truck-driver back.

He snapped out of the corner of his mouth to Prentice: "Kick on that siren, Dal. I'll take this — down if—" He drew his head and arm back suddenly and weaved the Buick's snout towards the curb as the truck pulled ahead half a length and crowded them.

Prentice cried out: "Hey!" The Buick hit the curb on two wheels and tipped on its side and threw him half across the sidewalk. The truck stopped, turned a little sidewise.

Prentice saw the muzzle of a tommy gun stick out from the truck cab and jerked at the gun under his arm. As

the gun came clear he shouted to Allen who was caught under the wheel: "Stay there, Al!" and started to crawl towards the shelter of an entry way leading into a store. Half-way he knew he couldn't make it and as he saw the machine-gun tilt towards him he stopped creeping and fired at the head of the man holding it.

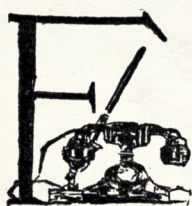
On his third shot he saw the head drop back, and the tommy gun just beginning its stutter, dropped to the street. Prentice resumed his crawl and gained the protection of the entry. The truck pulled away and Prentice emptied his gun at the back tires and the truck rear end, aided by Allen, who had managed to extricate himself. The tires weren't the puncturable sort and the truck careened around the corner. Allen ran to Prentice, who was cursing viciously. He asked: "How bad, Dal?"

Prentice stopped swearing long enough to say "The bum leg," and then went on cursing.

Allen ran into the street, commandeered a car that had stopped at sight of the wrecked Buick, helped Prentice into the car and ordered: "French Hospital! Back six blocks." He asked anxiously: "Hurt pretty bad, Dal?"

The driver swung the car in the middle of the block. Allen flashed his badge at the driver and told him; "Open it up. You're all right on traffic."

They made the six long blocks in half that many minutes. Helped by Allen and the commandeered driver, Prentice went up the steps—and met the interne who had seen him out. He said weakly: "You win," and slumped in a faint.



FROM the same room he had left, he welcomed Allen the next day. Propped up on pillows, he grinned sourly at his: "How'sit, Dal?" and grunted: "So

Bruner ain't doing nothing, huh? I'm back here for another bit. And that damned grinning ape of an interne I-told-you-soing me all over the place."

Allen attempted to cheer him. "The Doc says you ain't hurt, Dal. It just opened up the leg a little and you bled some."

"Oh I suppose I'll get over it. And get smacked down again." He returned to his complaint. "I thought you said Bruner was laying low. If he is, I'd hate like hell to see him get action. No one I know of but him is out for me, or would pull it that quick."

"We thought he was, Dal." Allen's voice sounded worried. "I don't get this last. I knew he was out for us but I didn't think he'd have guts enough to try a blast out on a main street. We found the truck five blocks away. That ought to make you feel better."

"Why should it? Fix this damn' pillow under my back, will you?"

"Well, there was a guy in the cab with his left eye shot out. And the back of his head. The mugg that had the ta-ta gun."

"What about the driver?"

"The finger's out for him." Allen pulled the pillow straight behind Prentice's heavy shoulders—shoulders covered with the cotton hospital dress. "We got a description from five or six witnesses that saw him lam out of the truck and we know who it is."

"Who?"

"Carlo Russo. You know him."

"Yeah! The hood they call Blackie. Sometimes they call him Wop."

"That's him. He's a hoppy. We'll get him easy."

The nurse came in, said: "Lieutenant, there's a Miss Madison to see you. I told her you had a visitor but she said you'd see her just the same."

"Sure!" He told Allen: "Dora's been up pretty often. Sent me stuff, too. She's nice peoples." He said to the woman who came in the door: "H'lo, Dora. Looks like here's where I spend the rest of my life."

"Squawk! Better here than on a slab."

Dora was small, dark, quick. She ran the *Commercial Club*, the unofficial seat

of the Magna City government—and did her share of the governing. Her voice was worried as she said: "I didn't come up here to pat you on the back, you damn' fool. I came up to do you some good. And me."

Allen said sardonically: "What'll it cost, Dora?"

Prentice grinned. "Now, Al. Dora wouldn't pick up a dollar if it cried and asked her to." He asked Dora: "Is this a rib? Or did you sneak a pint in or what? I'd go for that. Or is it a secret?"

Dora looked at Allen sharply, then back to Prentice. "If I tell you smart coppers something, something the whole force hasn't found out, will you work it out my way?"

Prentice said: "Sure!" He bent shrewd eyes on Dora, shook his head at Allen who started to speak. "Go ahead with the filth."

"Hold your breath then. I know where the greaseball you're looking for is. The mugg that drove the truck that put you to bed again."

Allen stood up, growled: "Nice work, keed. I'll get a squad and—"

"You'll raise hell." Dora faced him, her eyes snapping. "You told me that—"

"Sure! But, Dora. We get the mugg and we can—"

"You can go to hell." She turned her back on him, said to Prentice: "How bad was it this time, Dal?"

"I just landed crooked on the game leg when I fell and it opened up a bit. I could use it now if the Doc'd say so. As long 'as I was easy on it."

"That's fine." Still ignoring Allen, she sat on the bed. "When you get out come and see me." She flashed an ugly glance at Allen. "Leave the ape in the zoo."

Allen said apologetically: "Now Dora. Don't be that way. Play it out the way you want to. I'll be good."

"You sure?" She stared at him. "I don't want to get a friend of mine a funeral. Or if that don't mean any-

thing, I don't want to star in one myself."

"Okey, keed! I'll say and do nothing. How's that?"

"Well, then, listen. Is that door closed?"

Allen went to the door, threw it open and peered down the hall. "Okey!"

"Well, you know I used to—" She hesitated a moment and Prentice said helpfully: "Sure! We know."

"Well, then—I had a girl working for me and she took over the place when I quit the racket. She phoned me at the Club a while ago and I met her and she told me one of her girls had been getting a big play from this fellow Russo you're looking for. And that the girl goes out last night after she got a call and don't come back."

Prentice whistled softly. His eyes had a far-away look. "If we could spot the gal—"

"Will you shut that big Irish mouth? I know where the gal is. Peggy said that she saw a rent receipt from the *Miramar* apartments. Now does that make sense?"

"All we'll have to do is dynamite in and take him out."

"And have to kill him doing it."

"What of it? We ain't friendly. I wouldn't fret."

"I would. Wait a minute before you crack wise. He ties in with something else. Bruner rowed with his secretary but before this guy left town he cleaned up a few little odds and ends for himself. Along with Bruner's safe. He come to me with a bunch of stuff that'll fry his boss. He wanted ten grand but it was all clear profit and he took five C's after I pointed out that if he didn't get out of town quick, money wouldn't do him no good. Bruner missed the stuff and thought the secretary come to you instead of me and that was why the blow-off. This only happened yesterday morning. Does it make sense?"

"You high! You mean you really got the nuts on Bruner? It's no rib?"

"If you keep smart I have. But

Russo's got to be taken alive or we ain't got a thing. Wait'll you hear this."

"Go on."

"You remember when Graves, the contractor that used to do all the main street work, was found in his car?"

"Yeah! He had three holes in his belly, if I remember right."

"Well, Bruner killed him."

"Don't guess, Dora. This is important." Prentice was sitting straighter in bed, his eyes flaring in interest, and Allen was watching as closely. "There was a hell of a rumble on that and we never could turn up a thing."

"I'm not guessing. I know. It was all there—if you could read it. If you could figure it out."

"But proof! That's what it takes."

"There was a big manila envelope labeled Graves. Inside was a lot of letters he had written Bruner. There was a receipt for five grand from this same Russo you're looking for and another from a man named Bruckner for the same amount."

"I killed Bruckner when he shot a cop."

"I know. Bruner started that mess too. Well, besides the receipts there was a statement that they witnessed Graves' death. There was one from Bruner's butler too, but no receipt for dough. It was all written out pretty and sworn to, that Graves drew a gun on Bruner during an argument, that Bruner tried to take it away from him, and that in the struggle for the gun it had gone off and killed Graves."

"Why would he keep that stuff?"

"My gawd, Dal, use your head! It's a phoney, can't you see. During the struggle the gun wouldn't go off *three* times and shoot him, would it? I can see it as plain as if I was there. Graves and Bruner were alone, probably in Bruner's house, and Bruner went screwy and killed him. Instead of waiting and hiring it done he must have lost his head."

"I can see that. Go on."

"These two hoods probably walked in

right after it. I can't figure he'd be fool enough to send for them. They were smart enough to get some dough out of it. Probably they took the body out and drove it away in Graves' car."

"What about the butler?"

"He's still working for Bruner."

"And Bruckner's dead. I still can't see. What good's this stuff?"

"What if you pick up Russo with an attempted murder over him? What if you get the butler and sweat him? Would they stick with Bruner or save themselves? With you holding this stuff, Bruner hasn't a thing to back up his story. Now do you see why Russo can't be killed?"

"Yeah!" He thought a moment.

"What's the angle you got figured?"

"I'd give him the stuff back. I know you won't."

Prentice's face darkened. His lower lip clamped over the upper. His voice sounded nasty. "You're right there, baby. I won't." He looked down at his body, under the clothes. "You're—right—I—won't."

"You'd be better off. You've got to get to this Russo before he does. A dead man can't do it. If Bruner finds him first he'll be a stiff and a stiff can't talk."

"I can't figure why he hasn't got 'em out of the way already."

"I can. He's figured you'd be out of the picture. He's that sure."

"I can get out tomorrow all right. Doc says that I—"

"That might be too late. I've got a better stunt. Allen and some other copper could do it as well as you and Al, if it works out."



PRENTICE, on the bed, was facing the door. Dora, sitting on the side of the bed, was facing him, and Allen was standing by the window, turned partly towards Prentice and partly towards the door. Dora started: "I could get hold of—" and stopped,

staring curiously at Prentice's face.

She turned her head slowly towards the door, following Prentice's gaze, saw the knob move slightly, and asked: "What is it?" Allen gripped her shoulder, whispered: "Go ahead and talk. But don't say anything." She nodded, continued: "What is this guy that killed his wife going to get, Dal? Life or fried? I suppose you heard about it?" Her voice was still easy but her face was paling.

Allen slid a gun from under his arm as she spoke and took two noiseless strides to the side of the door. He stood there waiting, nodding encouragement to the frightened woman.

Prentice answered casually: "I read it. Life probably instead of the medal he's got coming. She was throwing a few curves and he caught one."

"But he had no business to go ahead and shoot," Dora argued. "It might not have been the man's fault at all."

"If it was some places he'd get by on this unwritten law stuff. But I don't know here. These Magna City juries are so damned narrow-minded. If I was on the jury I'd—"

The door swung open with a rush and two men stepped inside, past Allen, who was covered by the door when it opened. The last man in closed the door without looking behind him. Both men carried stubby automatics, the one held by the first swinging from Prentice to Dora while the second man replaced his in a coat pocket. The first snapped: "No noise or I blast. The window's on a fire-escape and a car's waiting below, so figure it out."

Dora shrank away from the bed and Prentice, her hand pressing her dress against her heart, and the second man snarled: "You, too, twist! Be smart! You're all right if you behave."

Prentice, staring into the gun muzzle, said calmly enough: "What is it then, you heel? You can't get away with this."

The second man stepped even with his partner, reached in his hip pocket and produced a blackjack. He balanced it tentatively, started to say: "This—"

Allen stepped behind the two and crashed his gun against the head of the man covering Prentice. The blow was struck with all his strength—the man slumped back against him as he fell instead of forward—and in the second it took him to get untangled the man with the blackjack took a running dive through the window and out.

Prentice was trying to free himself from the bed covering—Dora screamed shrilly once—and Allen pushed the unconscious gunman clear and plunged towards the window. He leaned out and shot once, there were two answering shots from outside, and the window splintered into fragments around him. He jerked back hastily and Prentice said: "Nice, Al, nice! There *was* a car."

Allen holstered the gun he held in his hand and bent over the man on the floor, but as he did the door opened and the interne dashed in followed by a nurse. He stared at Prentice, half out of bed, at Dora standing against the wall, white-faced, then at Allen and the man on the floor. He stammered: "I heard—heard—" then shoved Allen away and knelt by the man on the floor.

While he made his examination they heard more feet pound in the hall and a uniformed policeman pulled up short in the open door. He too stared at the man on the floor, gasped: "I heard shots and—"

"Got here in time to phone for me. I'm Prentice, Homicide Squad," Prentice interjected. "Call Homicide, get Captain Hallahan and tell him I said to send up a car. Tell him two men besides the driver. Got it?" He watched the uniformed man's salute, asked the doctor: "Is he dead?"

The doctor shook his head. "Can't tell yet. His skull is fractured for sure and I'll have to lift a piece of bone. He may not come out of it."

Allen said: "Don't waste your time, Doc. He'd hang anyway. I busted him as hard as I could. If he comes to I'll buy you that case of Scotch instead of Dal."

The nurse came to her feet from beside the doctor and without a word walked to Allen and slapped him in the face. There was a moment's silence, with the doctor staring up from the floor. Then Prentice said: "Brute!" and laughed, and the nurse said stormily: "The man is seriously hurt. Have you no decency?"

Allen said: "Sorry!" and felt his cheek. "You see, Miss, the man was planning on killing Lieutenant Prentice in cold blood and I didn't feel much sympathy at the time. Of course now—" He bowed.

Dora said: "Quit clowning. D'ya suppose that man who got away heard anything? If he did, I got to get back to the *Club* before Bruner does. He hasn't a thing to lose no matter what he does. He can fry only once."

Prentice said with decision: "Doc, let somebody else take care of that mugg and fix me up so's I can get out o' here."

"Lieutenant, you're in no shape to leave."

"No shape to stay here now."

The doctor pursed his lips. "It's your responsibility. If you're careful, I don't suppose it will kill you."

"I'm always careful." He winked at Dora. "Ain't I keed? Who saw the door open?"

The man on the floor was taken away on a stretcher and Prentice's leg was re-bandaged in such a way he could yet use it. The doctor warned: "Watch that leg. Another stunt like that of yesterday won't help."

"That's why I'm going now. To stop all this and that."



APTAIN HALLAHAN came with the squad car. Short, stocky, white-haired, he combined thirty years of police experience with a certain knowledge of every crook, every racket and racketeer, in Magna City. He scorned politics and politicians and

while forced to use them he did so grudgingly—so grudgingly that the Commissioner's job, his by all rights, was given to a man notoriously inefficient and incompetent. He had protected Prentice and Allen a score of times in the past and they had full confidence in his co-operation.

Prentice told him as he came in the door: "Hell to pay! You bring the car yourself?"

"Uh-huh! What's up?"

"Plenty!" He turned to Dora. "Any reason for not going to your bucket?"

"None that I know."

Hallahan asked again: "What's it all about?"

Prentice slid the crutch under his shoulder, took a pair of shaky steps. "Tell you at the *Club*. We want to get down there and quick."

He hobbled to the police car with the doctor's help. Allen and Hallahan keeping a watchful eye out for possible interference. They drove to Dora's *Commercial Club*, dropping Allen at the central station on the way.

Once inside the apartment Dora reserved for her own use, Prentice told her: "You get the dope and bring it here. I'll tell the Cap what the score is while you dig it up. Then you tell us what you got figured out."

He explained to Hallahan what Dora had discovered and Hallahan swore softly. "We had a shakeup in the department over that murder," he said. "Graves was big. And to think we might have had Bruner on the big charge all the time he was making us this grief."

"Might have had is right. You couldn't have proved it."

"If we could only prove it now. He's caused more sin, sorrow, and suffering than any ten men in town." Hallahan's tone was fiercely hopeful.

Dora came into the room with the envelope labeled "Graves," and they studied the statements and the receipts together.

Hallahan said heavily: "By —! —!"

Dora, I think you're right. I'll be eternally damned if I don't think a jury would too."

He reached for the papers to replace them in the envelope, but Prentice held them, said: "And then what?" He stared up at Dora's intent face. "I think I'd better call him up and tell him I've got them. That hood that got away at the hospital has got to him by now, that's a cinch, and told him you were up there with me. He might put two and two together and work on you next. I'd better keep 'em and tell him about it. That'll clear you. What do you think?"

She said doubtfully, "I don't know," but Hallahan broke in: "It's the only thing to do, Dora. If he thinks you got 'em he'll lay off Dal and you'll be it. Why should you take the rumble? I can keep 'em at the station till we need them—I got a box in the property safe that's okey."

"The only thing is, will he stick around or take a powder after he knows his number's up?" she questioned uncertainly.

Hallahan told her: "He'll probably stick until he finds out who gets to Russo first. He isn't just going to quit."

Prentice reached for the phone, paused undecidedly. "If we didn't do anything about it until we picked up Russo it'd be better. We could put a guard on Dora. He wouldn't really be sure she was in it. This gal you talked to wouldn't be advertising around that she tipped you, would she, Dora?"

"Not hardly."

He asked Hallahan: "What do you think? It'll be short and sweet. If we don't get Russo, Bruner will."

Hallahan shrugged, looked at Dora. He said slowly: "Leave it up to you, Dora. You can play it safe or take a chance. I'd never ask you to."

Dora hesitated a moment before answering. The memory of the two men breaking in the hospital room still whitened her face. "I'll take a chance once. It can't be more than a couple of days, one way or the other."

Prentice nodded and smiled at her, called Headquarters on the phone. He asked for the Homicide Department, then with his hand over the mouthpiece suggested: "What about picking up the butler now? They could go right up and get him and call us back here. What do you think?" He said into the phone: "Wait a minute."

Hallahan considered. "We could hold him as a material witness and see he don't get out on bail. It's a protection for him and we've got to have him and a chance to work on him anyway. Tell 'em to go ahead."

Prentice gave brief orders over the phone, hung up and turned back to them. "They'll go up right away. I sent Peterson because he knows the butler. McCready and Blair'll be down here inside of ten minutes. McCready's a good head and Blair's the best of the rest." He added modestly: "Except Al and myself, of course."

Hallahan snorted. "That's understood! What about yourself? You need a guard yourself, it seems to me. I'll have half the force playing guard to the other half if this keeps up."

Dora suggested: "He could stay here. He wouldn't be any good for the stunt that I thought out for Russo anyway."

"You thought out for Russo! Since when did you join the force?" Hallahan looked curious and Prentice explained: "We promised Dora that we'd make the pinch the way she wanted it. That is, if we can."

"You can all right." Her voice sounded confident. "It's a cinch."

"Sure! They all are," Hallahan growled.

"See if it isn't. The girl that's got my old spot will do anything I tell her to do. You get that part of it clear in your mind and you'll see why the stunt'll work. Take a couple of men and slide 'em into the *Miramar* without a lot of fuss. Then just have 'em keep out of sight but where they can watch Russo's apartment."

"That ought to be easy."

"Then Peggy'll go in and up to the apartment and knock on the door. Russo or the twist will ask who it is and she'll tell them and they'll let her in. The gal will know her voice so they won't think it's a bum play. The chances are though that either Russo will open the door with a gun in his hand or that the gal will with Russo covering her. If your men try to crash then they'd have to kill him. If Peggy goes in and makes a stall about wanting the kid to go back to the bucket why he won't think anything about it. Then when she gets a chance to, or gets ready to go, she'll open the door and your men will be waiting right outside and they can grab him cold before he's got a chance or time to make a play. How's that for a stunt?"

"It might work. What if he goes to the door with a gun when she leaves?"

"It'll be a rumble. You wouldn't be any worse off than if you tried to crash it. We've got to take that chance. If I've got that bird figured right, it's the only chance there is to take him alive. He'll know he'd get the works for trying to kill a copper and fight if he gets any break at all."

Hallahan asked thoughtfully: "Are you sure this friend of yours will go for the shot? She'll be all wet with the rest of the hustlers from there on."

"She'll do it for me," Dora said confidently. "She owes me more than that and besides, I got her out when she jammed once and she knows I could help her back into another one. I can still pull a little weight."

"We might be able to fix it so neither Russo or his girl friend would know she was in the play. McCready and Al here, could do the stunt and fix up an act for her to put on when they take the hood. Neither of them would talk and she could squawk a bit and they could take her along and then you could bail her out or something like that. I could have the case killed and your bail returned in a couple of days after that. We could make it look pretty good—book her in and everything."

"She'll go through with it one way or the other. If she could be squared I'd like it but she's got it made if it don't work. She could leave town now and not have to walk."

Prentice complained fretfully: "I wanted to be the one to get Bruner. Damn this leg of mine. I'm out of it just when we get action."

"What's the difference, Dal, as long as he's got?" Hallahan soothed him. "As soon as this hood's taken we'll run him in and try to keep it under cover until we get enough out of him to warrant picking Bruner up. It won't be any trouble to have him bound over if those two muggs talk." He added thoughtfully:

"They'll talk when they see they have to. McCready can go with Al just as well as not if you stay here. You can still shoot if there's trouble and you and Dora can tell dirty stories while you wait for somebody to shoot at."

The phone jangled and Dora picked it up, said: "Miss Madison speaking. Yes, just a minute." She handed the phone to Prentice, heard him say: "That's fine, Pete. Just wait." He muffled the mouthpiece, told Hallahan: "They got him all right. No beef at all. Pete says that when he rang the bell the bozo opened the door himself and they just reached out and took him. It was a cinch."

"That's a break." Hallahan's voice showed relief. "I was afraid Bruner might have got an idea and wrecked him."

"What about having him brought here? He's just a witness and we could talk to him here as well as not."

Hallahan vetoed this instantly. "Hell, no! What if he don't want to talk and we got to get rough. Tell Pete to sink him."

"That's right too." Prentice spoke into the phone. "Listen, Pete! Book him as a material witness and put him in the hole. There'll be no bail so don't worry about a beef. Hallahan will be up pretty soon." He looked sadly at Hallahan, asked: "If he's stubborn, d'ya

think you can make him talk, Cap? I know I could."

"Think you could?" Hallahan grinned.

Prentice stared down at his fist, absently closed it. "Oh, I could, all right. There's ways."

Hallahan told him: "And I know most of 'em. Those I don't, Al does." He stood up as an attendant knocked and told Dora two officers were waiting in the hall. "Al and I might as well get at it. Dora, you get this friend of yours here right away and frame it. I'd be careful where I went though and keep the boys with you."

"She can come down here as well as not. If she comes in the back, nobody'll see her."

"Fine! As soon as we get something out of the butler we'll be back. I'll leave Mac and Blair here but I'll bring somebody back to take Mac's place when he goes with Al. You'd better have this twist here so we can go over the stunt with her and make it as fool-proof as possible. She can wait."

"I will. She'll do what she's told, don't worry about that."

Hallahan smiled mirthlessly. "She's the only woman in the world that will, if she does." He grinned at Prentice. "I'll get the dope all right. Don't worry."

Prentice sighed. "I always found out a man would talk if he was damn' sure he'd be beat to death if he didn't. Don't miss, for — sake."

"I won't and I won't leave any marks on the mugg. But he'll talk." He swung out, and Prentice commented to Dora: "And you know I got a hunch he *will* talk." He sighed again. "Just when there's action I'm on the shelf. Always a break."



ALLAHAN and Allen went through the jail proper, clear to the last tier in the back cell-block. The cell itself was bright—light flashing from the ceiling to glaring white-washed walls,

scantily furnished, an iron bunk fastened to the wall, with no mattress for covering. Hallahan, followed by Allen, stepped inside, said to the jailer who had admitted them: "That's all, Sam. I'll sing when I want out. Close the corridor doors though and don't mind a little racket." He frowned at the prisoner, a dark, suave, slight man, snapped: "Your name's Collins, is it?"

"I've told your men it was." The man's voice was steady. "There's going to be trouble about this when Mr. Bruner finds out what has happened." He seemed entirely unafraid.

Hallahan jeered: "He's going to have more to find out than what's already happened. Did they print you?"

"No, of course not. They said I was to be held as a witness. They refused to say what I was supposed to have witnessed, however." He fumbled in his pockets, asked: "Have either of you men a cigarette? They took mine and put them in an envelope."

"Don't worry about that. You'll get 'em back. Were you ever in jail before?"

"Never."

"You sure?"

"I've told you. Why are you questioning me?"

Hallahan watched him narrowly as he said: "We picked up a man named Russo and he told us a lot of things."

"What has that to do with me?"

"Plenty. He talked about Graves."

"What about him?" Collins' voice was still steady, but Hallahan caught a flicker in his eyes.

"How was he killed?"

"Why ask me?"

"Because you know." Hallahan turned and nodded at Allen who stepped ahead.

Allen snarled: "Listen, wise guy! Graves was killed and you're in the soup because of it."

"Am I charged with murder? If I am, I'm entitled to an attorney and don't have to answer questions."

"You're not charged, but this boss of

yours is going to be. If you're charged it'll be for aiding and abetting."

"He's done nothing wrong and neither have I. You're making a mistake."

"You're sure of that?" Allen's voice was ugly. He was opening and closing his hands and his thin, dark face was murderous.

"Quite sure. I've worked for Mr. Bruner, who is an attorney, for five years and I know something about my rights."

"You're not in court, mugg, you're in jail. You thought of that?" He stepped ahead and gripped Collins by the coat, shook him slightly. "And the funny part of that is that this smart boss of yours is facing a murder rap. He won't rate if he does go to the bat for you but he won't. He'll pass the buck to you. You thought of that?" He glared into Collins' face.

Collins stared back at him. "I've done nothing."

"Then, talk. What about Graves? How was he killed?"

"I'll tell that on the stand."

"You'll tell it now." Allen picked him up with both hands and threw him on the iron cot. "You'll start now. I don't like this lip."

"This is third degree." Collins stared doggedly up from the bunk.

"It is now. It's going to be the thirty-second in about a minute. Did you see this — you work for kill Graves?"

Collins pursed his lips stubbornly, then thought a moment and admitted: "No harm in telling you that. Mr. Bruner killed Graves when he was attacked by him. There were two other witnesses."

"There aren't now. Bruckner's dead and Russo's told the truth. Listen, mugg, you're going up for an accomplice if this keeps up. We know that story's a phoney — know what happened."

"Then why ask me, if you know. I'll tell my story on the stand."

"If you're able," Allen gritted. He jerked the man up from the couch and

spun him until he faced away, jerked one arm up behind his back and caught him by the other elbow with his free hand. He sent skilful fingers probing into the hinge and Collins shrieked in sudden agony.

Allen nodded at Hallahan over his shoulder, faced Collins that way, and pressed again. He snarled: "Talk mugg, or I'll kill you with my bare hands. Tell the Captain what you *did* see." He pressed again into the elbow-joint and Collins screamed: "Stop it!" Allen released his grip and he sank to the floor moaning.

Hallahan said casually: "New one on me, Al. What is it?"

"It's a Jap stunt." Allen's voice was grim. "Don't leave a mark except maybe a little bruise. It's the nuts for a wise mugg like this that's *so* wise." He said to the man on the floor: "Might as well spit it out. I know a lot of stuff that's worse than that."

"I won't." Collins shuddered as Allen's big hands reached for him.

SOME time later Hallahan joined Prentice and Dora at the *Club*.

Hallahan said: "He was good, I'll say that. I damned near believed him. We printed him before we left and sent a wire to New York to verify what he said, but there's no doubt. Bruner's baby-faced butler is damn' near as bad an egg as Bruner is. No wonder Bruner didn't have to give him dough for a statement. He had enough on this Collins to hang him three times over."

Dora commented: "We live and learn. And you say he acted innocent?"

"Innocent as hell! Never even been in jail he said. And him a three time loser in New York State alone." Hallahan grinned at Prentice. "This partner of yours could make a mummy talk. We got the whole thing down with a stenographer and he signed it. Dora caught it on the first bounce. Then Al started to work on him again. We figured Bruner was holding something over him and sure enough, he gives us a

lead on this personal dirt. He'll fry along with Bruner."

Dora asked: "Has anyone called the hospital and asked about the fellow up there?"

"I sent a man up to print him is all. Why, what difference?"

"Just curious!" She gave a number into the phone and stared over it at Prentice. "This butler of Bruner's had two grand bounty on him. Who'll get that?"

Prentice looked sour. "We should, but no chance. It'll go to the department fund."

"Tough, ain't it," Hallahan jeered. "I suppose you and Al picked the mugg as a bad one. If anybody's entitled to it, Dora is."

"Well, see that she gets it then."

"And have her cut back with you and Al. No chance."

Dora made silencing motions, spoke into the phone. She hung up, said: "He never came out of the ether. Doc said that somebody from the station printed him and then took him to the morgue."

Hallahan said thoughtfully: "Seems damn' funny that neither you or Al knew neither one of those two hoods."

"We didn't. Never saw either one before. Bruner probably imported them for the job."

"You'll know 'em next time."

"We will. — I'm worried about this Russo. Al said he'd phone?"

"The minute it was over. I'll go up to the station and meet 'em when it's over." He asked Dora: "Sure the gal won't do a cross-up?"

"Positive."

Prentice fretted: "We should have heard by now," and Hallahan soothed him with: "Give them time. If the gal got inside all right—"

"Sure! If! You know Al. He's likely to go screwy and crash in if something went wrong and get a bullet in the gut."

"Oh hell! We'll hear. Don't be an old woman."

"Dora, why in hell don't you buy a drink while we wait?"

"Why don't you, ape? We sell it." She rang the service bell.



ALLEN, crouching by the closed door of Russo's apartment, McCready at his back, held up his hand warningly as they both heard voices nearing the door. He tensed his lean body and as the door opened slightly threw his full weight against it, forcing it wide. Peggy was standing by the side as arranged, but Russo, instead of being in the clear and under Allen's swinging gun, was caught by the door and forced behind it as it opened.

Allen caught this instantly, dropped his gun, pulled the door back and grappled with Russo who had a gun half out of his pocket. He caught Russo's wrist with both hands and shouted to McCready, but in the second it took the slower man to get in the room the gun discharged and Russo went limp, slumped to the floor.

Allen, according to plan, called out: "Watch the twists, Mac!" and bent over Russo in a quick examination to rise in relief. He said: "Caught him slanting down the leg and broke it. He may die but it won't be from that." He snapped at the girl standing at the back of the room and screaming: "Stop that, twist! He ain't hurt bad," then took off his belt and knelt by the moaning Russo.

Peggy flickered an eyelid at McCready, complained: "What you guys trying to pull? Come in here where nobody's bothering and start shooting. I'm going to call the cops."

McCready growled: "You're talking to 'em, sister. What in hell d'ya think we are? Boy scouts?"

"What's the idea of this then? You didn't show any warrant."

McCready grinned: "Shut up! If you're nice you can sit next to me in the wagon. You're pinched." He said

to the other girl. "You too, sister."

Peggy said: "What for? I ain't done anything. I just came up to see my friend."

"Make me believe it. This guy is wanted for attempted murder."

Allen said from the floor. "That'll hold you until the ambulance gets here. The belt will stop the bleeding." He asked the girl in back: "Where's your phone, sister?"

"No phone." She had stopped screaming at his order, stood looking sullenly ahead with tears streaming down her cheeks.

"What do you do? Lean out the window and shout?"

"There's one in the hall, heel."

"Thanks! Mac, you watch 'em. We'll take 'em both."

"Sure! I told 'em that."

Allen grinned widely at Peggy as he turned his back on the other girl, said under his breath: "Like shooting fish."

He strode through the crowd already collected outside the apartment door, recognized the manager and said cheerfully: "All okey! The wagon'll be here in ten minutes and you'll lose a couple of tenants," then called Hallahan at the *Commercial Club* and changed the meeting from the station to the hospital. When McCready started for the station with the two women, he rode up with Russo to the hospital in the ambulance.

GETTING a confession from the wounded Russo proved easy. Facing a charge of attempted murder, knowing he could expect no sympathy from a court or prosecutor who had been blackmailed in the past by the man who had hired him for the killing, he broke completely and backed up the butler's story and Dora's deductions in every detail.

By the time his leg had been set and patched, and his story told it was after midnight, however, and Hallahan, confident that Bruner did not know of Russo's arrest and subsequent confession, decided to delay Bruner's arrest until

the following morning. He returned to the station and released Peggy and Russo's companion, gave the last an order to leave town immediately and, after calling Dora and Prentice at the *Club* and telling them of the latest developments, gave Allen orders to arrest Bruner as soon as a warrant could be procured in the morning. He then went to bed, happy in the thought of a good day's work well done.

Allen, on his part, was as little expectant of trouble. With the morning half over, when the warrant was in his hand, accompanied by McCready, he went to the office of the *Magna City Record*, the yellow newspaper Bruner controlled, certain that Bruner would be in his office as usual. He was somewhat surprised, yet not perturbed, when told the wanted man had not as yet appeared. He then went immediately to his residence.

Even then, on being told that Mr. Bruner had left for his office, he had thought he had passed him on the way. A return call to the *Record* disabused his mind of that notion and for the first time he began to worry. A rapid check on all of Bruner's known haunts followed and when this failed, he resorted to the full power of the police, sent out a general alarm, closed all roads out of town and wired surrounding cities giving a full description of the wanted man.

This done, no action could be taken until one of the agencies set in motion reported progress, and he was forced to listen to the irate Prentice who blamed him equally with Hallahan.

Prentice, still guarded with Dora at the *Club* from possible attack, was furious. He failed to understand why Hallahan had waited until morning for the arrest and when that badgered man explained patiently that, due to Bruner's undoubted influence, he wanted a warrant so there would be no question as to the legality of the arrest, he flew off the handle completely.

He raged: "We had him cold and

you lose him. If I'd been on it we'd have him sunk. Oh, damn this leg. You ought to go before the board for retirement. You're getting childish. Warrant! Warrant, hell!"

Hallahan tried to calm him with: "But neither Al or I thought he'd—"

"That's the beef. You didn't think. And here I am stuck. I might have known you'd fumble it. You and your — damned warrants."

The outraged Hallahan left after more of this, and Prentice started in to drink—sullenly—alone. Allen tried in turn to make peace but after one attempt stayed away, and Dora, half afraid of him in this mood, left him entirely alone.

The situation did not change for three days. Prentice, red-rimmed eyes staring at his crippled leg, was drinking steadily in spite of the doctor ordering him to stop—Hallahan was worried over possible demotion for losing his man—and Allen, now in charge of the case, was constantly in the station in contact with the search. The break came suddenly—almost pure luck—and entirely police routine, routine unaffected by the ponderous police machinery searching for the fugitive.

At ten the fourth morning, Prentice, already half-drunk, was called to the phone and the excited Allen told him: "We're set, Dal, ol' boy, ol' boy! We got the dope."

Prentice, nerves on edge from liquor, answered bitterly: "Another rib! He's out of the state by this time."

"No, I tell you. He's at the *Silver Slipper*. Jack Roth's old place. He's there with about a dozen hoods."

"Sure he is. I suppose he wrote you a letter."

"— Dal, don't be that way. I tell you he's there."

"Did you dream this hooley?"

"Listen, Dal! I went to the line-up this morning. First time in a month. Who do you think I saw?"

"Why, Bruner, of course. I know all the answers, screw-ball."

"Stop it, Dal! Listen! The hood that made it out the window at the hospital. Big as life."

"Huh!"

"I'm telling you. I picked him out and worked him over with Mac, and we got the dope."

"Go on." Prentice had lost his jeering tone, was gripping the phone so hard his knuckles showed white.

"He was hiding out at the *Silver Slipper*. We thought it was closed, but Bruner's been using it all the time as a hideout for his red-hots. The other morning about five, the big shot showed up himself."

"Sounds screwy. How'd this mugg get picked up? Walk into the station?"

"He was a stranger and Bruner figured he could come in town and get the news. He figured that outside of you and me and Dora, nobody knew him. He happened to be in a clip joint down on Tenth and one of the boys didn't like his looks and picked him up. What a break!"

"You're not ribbing me." Prentice's usually quick brain was still clouded.

"Hell, no! It's straight. We'll get him tonight."

"Why not now? He'll get away again."

"The hell he will! I've got fifty men around the place now. If we tried to crash it in daylight we'd lose half the force. This hood says they got six tommy guns and all that goes with 'em. All same army."

"How'd Bruner get wise that the finger was out for him?"

"Hallahan, and don't think I didn't tell him. He let this twist that was with Russo go and tells her to scram, and she calls up Bruner on her way out of town and tries to put the bite on him for some dough. Bruner met her and just to be sure Russo hadn't told her about the hideout he took her along. She's there with Bruner and nine others if the heel's telling the truth and I think he is."

Prentice tittered: "What a break for a

hustlin' gal. Alone with a dozen men."

"Sober up, Dal!"

"I'm sober, you lug. Sober enough. When you going to go on it?"

"At dark. About nine. I've got it bottled and we can stop traffic."

"Come on down."

"Maybe an hour. I'll be busy that long." The phone clicked.

Prentice stared at it a moment, said: "Nailed, by ——!" in a curious tone. He stared down at his crutch for a moment, mumbled: "To the cross!" and shouted: "Dora! Hey, Dora!"

She came into the room, looked at him, said: "No more now, Dal."

His face was white, his hands were shaking, but his eyes had lost the dull look they carried and were glowing like hot coals. He said: "They got him, kid! He's sewed up and sacked."

She said: "Bruner!" but not hopefully.

"Just that!" He hobbled towards her on the crutch, held out his hand solemnly. "Shook me by the hand."

She evaded his lumbering advance, asked doubtfully: "Snakes?"

"Snakes, hell! He's holed up, I tell you. Al's got him cornered."

"Well, thank the Lord! I've been afraid to even take a bath with these coppers of yours watching me so close."

"Buy a drink then."

"Dal, you've had plenty. You're on the edge."

He insisted: "Buy a drink," then explained: "I kept tight so I wouldn't think about that —— getting away but now I've got a right to celebrate."

She assented doubtfully, rang the service bell, and they drank to the success of the raiding squad.



THE *Silver Slipper* was set in a grove of trees some four miles from the limits of Magna City, its overgrown two-story bulk crouching over a circular gravel driveway like a dog over a

bone. The trees surrounding it made an ideal protection for the raiders until they were a few feet from the house, but unfortunately were just too far away to permit effective use of tear bombs or grenades from their shelter.

Allen, in charge of arrangements, had formed four squads of ten men each and planned to rush all sides of the house at the same time, but knowing that they would be exposed to fire during the rush across the open strip, hesitated to give the order that would mean certain loss of life. Outside of a covering fire from the trees they would be entirely unprotected until they reached the shelter of the house itself. He went back to where Hallahan was talking to the worried police commissioner, said: "As near right as we can make it. Shall we go?"

Hallahan's voice was ugly, strained. "Might as well, I guess. Won't make a damn' thing by waiting. ——! I hate to send men into that."

Commissioner Richards said doubtfully: "Couldn't a man sneak up and throw a grenade through the windows? It's very dark."

"But not dark enough. We tried that and they spotted him before he got ten feet from cover. He got four bullets from a ta-ta gun in the legs and the man that got him back got one in the shoulder. You must have passed the ambulance on your way in."

"Maybe if we gave them a little more time to make up their minds they might give up. The place is like a fort."

Hallahan shrugged. "You're the boss."

"No harm in trying," Richards argued. "Give me that megaphone." He walked nearer to the house, bawled into the cone: "Bruner! Hey, Bruner! Jack Bruner!"

The house remained grim—silent.

"We'll give you half an hour to come out. Think it over!"

A machine-gun stuttered from inside the house, searching the wood in the direction of his voice, and he ducked hastily.

Hallahan said: "Hell, man! There ain't a hood in there that ain't got a price on his head for murder. You're wasting breath."

Richards, from the shelter of a tree trunk bawled out: "Send the girl out then. Give her a chance." An answering shout from the house said: "Come and get her," and the tommy gun loosed another burst.

Richards said hopelessly: "Give 'em the half hour!" and they settled down to wait, watching the dark house.

PRENTICE focused bloodshot eyes upon his watch with difficulty, glared across at Dora. "It's five after nine. D'ya suppose the brawl's started yet?"

She said: "How would I know? My —! you're drunk, Dal."

"Am I?" He stared at her owlshly. "What d'ya think?"

She shrugged. "Al said nine, didn't he? It's after that now."

"It is y' know." He reached for his crutch, stood to his feet with difficulty. "I'm goin' t' see."

"You are like hell. You stay here."

He said stubbornly: "I'm goin' t' see." His eyes were glassy and he swayed on the crutch, almost fell.

"Sit down, Dal! Don't act up! I thought you could carry your liquor better than that."

"You did, huh!" He spoke with difficulty, his tongue thick, but maintained his wobbling progress towards the door.

She slid in front of him and his erratic temper flared. "Get outta my way, —!" He reached her where she stood barring the exit.

"Now, Dal! You gone screwy?"

"Screwy hell!" Bracing himself against the side of the wall by the door he reached out and gripped her by the shoulder and, aided by the purchase his back against the wall gave him, threw her out in the room, half across it. He jerked open the door, mumbled thickly: "No damn' woman—" staggered out in the corridor and towards the front entrance.

She came to the door and stood watching him, smiling thinly and without humor and nursing her bruised shoulder. She said half to herself: "He can't do any harm—" shrugged and turned back in the room, heard the front door slam and after a moment went there, half-opened it and peered out in time to see Prentice flag down a wandering cab.

She hurried out, said to the driver who had pulled into the curb: "Listen, Jack! This man's drunk. Don't take him." She reached for Prentice's shoulder as he half fell in the cab but he shook her off, muttering to himself.

She pleaded: "Listen, Dal, come back with me."

"Like hell." She could barely hear the mumbled words.

She told the driver again: "He's drunk. Let him out. He's no fare," and the driver half-turned on his seat, said to Prentice: "Get out, sport! The lady's right."

Prentice seemed to sober a little. He snarled: "Drive, mugg!" fished in his pocket and with difficulty brought out his badge. He flashed this, said: "I'm law! Get this hack outta here."

The driver flashed a glance at Dora. "Listen, copper, you're pretty tight. Why not go with the lady and—"

Prentice slipped the badge into his vest pocket and his hand came out from his coat with a gun in it. He said: "Jack Roth's old place on the Market road. Th' *Silver Slipper*. You movin'?" The lock clicked as he eased the hammer back.

The hack-man stammered: "—! y-yes." White-faced, he turned back to the wheel and the cab lurched away from the curb. Dora watched it go, said: "The drunken —!" slowly. She went back to the *Club*, still nursing her shoulder.

HALLAHAN looked at his watch, muttered: "Time's up!" but as he got to his feet, Prentice, helped by a uniformed policeman came up behind him. The man saluted, said: "Lieutenant

Prentice came in a taxi, sir. We stopped him at the deadline but he said he had to see you." His teeth flashed in the dusk as he grinned: "He wants action."

Richards sniffed the whiskey odor that clung to Prentice, blurted out: "He's been drinking."

"He's not on duty, Commissioner," Allen volunteered. "He's still a hospital case."

The ride had practically sobered Prentice but had not improved his temper in the slightest. If any, it was more vicious. He glared at Richards, shook himself free of the policeman. "What's the matter? I thought it was nine o'clock."

Allen told him, more with the idea of distracting Richards than with any hope Prentice could help: "It's the space around the house, Dal. It's open as hell and they got it covered plenty. We been trying to figure some way to crack it." He explained the plan of attack they had decided to use.

Prentice hobbled to where he could see the house, studied it a moment and came back. He said: "I know a way. It'll beat that all to hell."

Richards snapped: "Why waste time? I tell you the man's been drinking."

"Yeah!" Prentice turned, stared him up and down. "Yeah! Well listen! I still know a better way."

Richards shrugged disgustedly and walked away and Prentice said: "Heel!" loud enough for him to hear. He told Allen rapidly: "Send a car and get one of the big fire trucks. One with the high sides that carry ladders."

Allen stared and Hallahan looked bewildered. Allen asked: "Why?"

"I'll drive it into the bucket, that's why. You can put some men in back with riot guns. The high sides'll protect them from the smash."

"You're drunk, Dal!"

"Like hell! Well, maybe a little. It'll still work."

Allen said slowly: "By —! it would. I can drive it and if we open it up she'll crash clear in. It's a wooden building

and flimsy as hell, with no foundation at all." He turned to Hallahan and asked: "Why not?"

Hallahan objected: "But it won't—" and Prentice interrupted him. "You can start the boys from the sides just like you figured and at the worst it won't do any harm. It'll give 'em something to think about. Why the hell not?"

Allen leaned over suddenly and clapped Prentice on the back. "And you half tight. What a man you'd be if you'd go on the wagon." He dashed off and hurried to the men waiting to attack, changing orders.

Hallahan said: "Oh hell! God hates a coward," told the uniformed man with Prentice: "Hustle to a phone and call Cap. Mills at fire station 24. Tell him I said for him to get here with the big ladder truck as soon as —'ll let him." He sighed resignedly, told Prentice: "If this fool stunt don't click, you're off the force, baby."

Prentice, still staring at the roadhouse, said: "And you lugs were going in without me." He grinned mirthlessly, patted the bulge under his armpit.



HE driver patted the shining red hood, said: "Bye, baby," regretfully. He called back: "All set?" and Prentice, in the back, told him: "Let 'er go!" The man grunted, tested the lashed wheel, raced the motor, then, crouched on the running-board, shoved in the clutch pedal with one hand and threw the gear shift lever in second.

He shouted: "Hold tight!" let the pedal come up easy, and as it reached full engagement and the truck picked up speed, rolled off the side and scuttled back into the shelter of the trees. The truck roared ahead, motor full on, smashed into the roadhouse within ten feet of the side entrance at which it was aimed and finally came to rest with more than half its body inside the main dining-room—a broken clutch allowing the

motor to race unhindered with the cut-out open.

There were four men with Prentice in the back of the truck. As he came to his feet, pulling himself up by the side of the truck, he saw two of the defenders, one crouched low and running towards the stairs leading to the upper story and the other swinging the ugly muzzle of a tommy gun towards the stalled truck. He shouted and fired once with the gun in his free hand at this last man, but as he did he heard the blast of a riot gun at his side and the man pitched headlong. He shouted: "One down!" saw the running man reach the foot of the stairs and crumple there.

The four men with him were out of the truck, one running towards the front door to open it according to plan, the other three searching through the rooms opening from the dining-room like a pack of hunting terriers. One man was brought screaming from the back, handcuffed and shoved out the side door after a warning shout.

The four men momentarily grouped by the side door and Prentice, still in the truck, screamed above the din of the motor: "Help me down!" This done, he leaned against the side of the truck, braced by his crutch, and ordered: "Kill that engine."

The motor silenced, they could hear the mad chatter of gunfire from the upper floor, and he said: "They'll be jumping off anytime. We got to get up there and the stairs'll be covered. See if you can heave an egg up there."

Disregarding his warning shout, one man ran three or four steps up, drew his arm back in the beginning of the over-arm throw that would lob the bomb up, but wilted, rolled back down, and Prentice screamed: "He pulled the pin! Low bridge!" He let go the supporting crutch and fell to the floor just as the grenade in the dead man's hand exploded.

A voice at the head of the stairs was screaming curses faintly heard through the din. Leaving his crutch and drag-

ging his crippled leg behind him, Prentice crawled to the machine-gun the dead gangster had dropped, got it and crept back towards the steps. He said: "I'll spray the top and keep them back and you guys try it again."

He sat back, wounded leg in front of him. The tommy rattled viciously as he swept the top of the stairs. The men with him started, but before they reached the foot, the front door opened and the burly man in the lead of the four or five that crowded through dashed ahead of them and tossed a bomb to the top of the stairs apparently as easy as if it were a baseball.

Prentice shouted: "Good boy, Mac!" had the last of this blotted out by the crash of the grenade, lowered the machine-gun and watched the pack surge up the steps.

The shooting above increased in intensity, if that were possible, during the ten seconds that followed, then there was a sudden lull and he sighed, said to himself: "All over!" and started to creep back to the truck and his crutch. He saw a shadow move in the cloak-room—saw the shadow resolve itself into a man—turned the Thompson gun he had, luckily held on to that way and said: "Hold it!"

He felt a blow in his bad leg as a flare of light blossomed towards him. He loosed a short burst from the tommy; then passed out—hazily feeling the hot gun barrel against his face—hazily hearing men coming through the side door.

THE interne sat on the bed and smiled cheerfully. "All's wrong with you, Lieutenant, is a hell of a hang-over as near as I can see. What's another hole in a bum leg between friends?"

"You go to hell!"

"Naughty, naughty!" The white-coated man shook his finger. "I'll not show you the paper with the nice write-up if you keep that up."

Prentice grinned weakly in spite of his pain.

"No kidding, Lieutenant, that was a nice piece of work. I've got this friend of yours, McCready, here."

"Mac hurt bad?"

"Plenty, but he'll come through all right we think. Bullet through his right lung. If he don't get pneumonia he's a cinch."

"Give me the paper. How many got it?"

The smile faded from the doctor's face. "Five all told. Two besides McCready hurt seriously."

Without the ceremony of knocking, Allen and Hallahan came in. Allen was decorated with a bandage around his head but Hallahan was uninjured. Prentice said: "Well?" and Hallahan shrugged: "Not as bad as it might have been. You're a hero again according to the reporters."

"I thought I'd get fired. Trying to pick a beef with the commissioner."

"Me too. The write-up saved you. Richards admitted that if it hadn't been

for the truck act we'd have come out worse."

"Bruner killed?"

"City hospital with three holes in him and two guards in the room. He'll live to fry. Didn't you know?"

"Know what?"

"He was hiding in the cloak-room, and when Mac made it up the stairs he came out." He nodded at Prentice's leg. "He gave you that and you gave him three back for change. I thought you knew at the time."

Prentice said piously: "Thank God for small favors. I broke even with the — this time."

Allen said: "He'll fry. Even if he could've beat the rap on the other, he's done on this."

Prentice looked thoughtful. "You know I wish—" He stopped, grinning at his partner.

"Wish what, Dal?"

"Nothing much. I'd like to throw the switch—when they burn him."

"MURDER IN JAIL"

BY

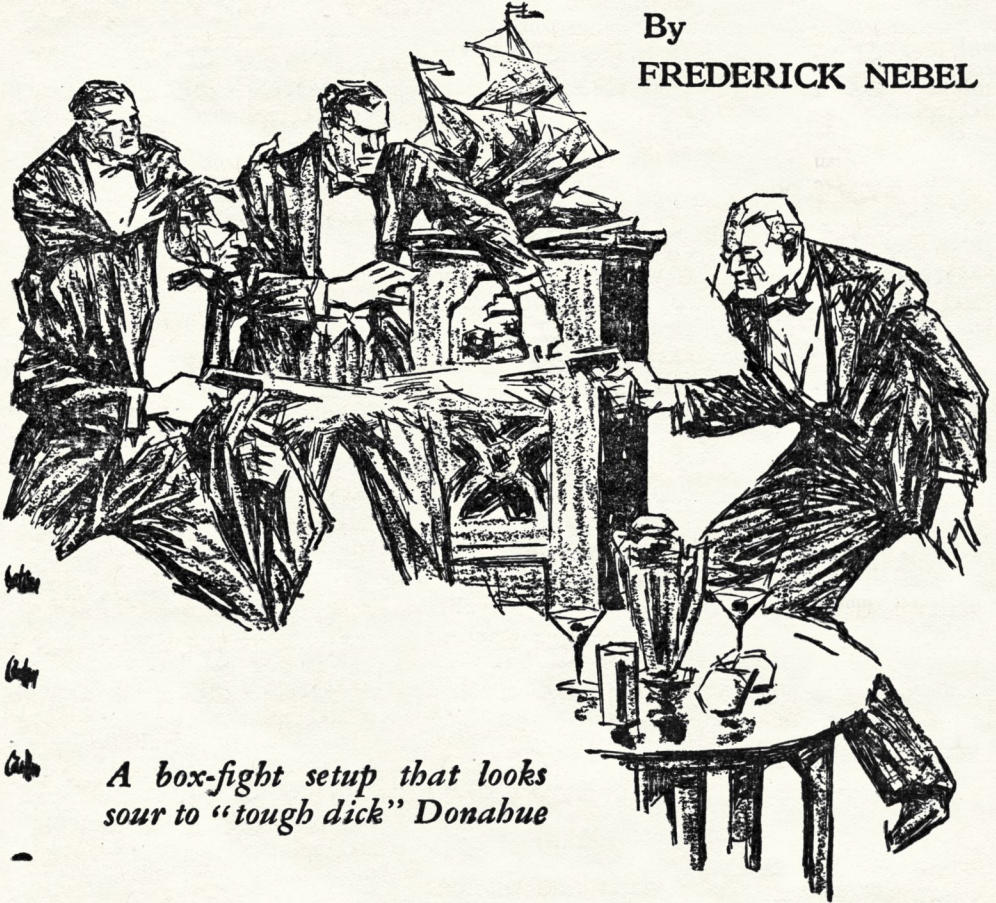
ROGER TORREY

DON'T MISS THIS ONE IN NEXT
MONTH'S BLACK MASK

They had Bruner, the racketeer-killer, right up to the jail. Dal Prentice wouldn't trust anyone else so he had Bruner handcuffed to himself on one side and to his partner, Allen, on the other. Then a long-bodied car slipped up to the curb; a huge truck weaving down the street, crashed into the building and—blooey! . . .

Champions Also Die

By
FREDERICK NEBEL



A box-fight setup that looks sour to "tough dick" Donahue

DONAHUE came into the lobby of the *Suwanee Club* with his black Chesterfield over his arm, his black velours hat aslant his forehead. The hat-check girl moved to take his things, but he shook his head, said: "I won't be staying," and went on down a corridor. He looked lean in his dinner suit, but the broad expanse of the white shirt, single-studded, made his face look very brown.

He slapped open the swing door, pushed into the noisy bar. The radio was on, and a dozen-odd men, standing at the bar, were listening intently. Don-

ahue leaned on the end, said offhand: "Scotch and Perrier," to the bartender.

Ken Teebolt, the new owner-manager of the club, came over, clicking a half dozen quarters together. He was a big man, blond and clean-looking, with flat but thick pink cheeks and large, good-humored eyes.

"How's she look, Donny?"

Donahue sent a glance roving casually about. "Nice."

Both men paused to turn an ear towards the radio loudspeaker. Half a dozen shouts rose in the bar and were followed by lusty laughter, hard back-slapping.

Ken Teebolt grinned: "Kid Lenox out in the fourth. Well, Harlem's getting it on the chin tonight! And me up fifty bucks. You betting?"

Donahue, drinking, looked at Ken above the rim of his glass, shook his head, said into the glass: "Uh-huh."

Ken sighed. "Well, I got a grand on the Emperor Brown."

"Sentiment?"

Ken frowned. "What do I look like?"

Donahue set his glass down, patted his lips with a handkerchief. He lit a cigarette and said out of the cup formed by his hands: "Got a hunch you'll lose it."

Ken smiled. "I've seen King Brown and I've seen Young Boston. It's a push-over for the Emperor."

"Okey," Donahue said lightly, and tossed a fifty-cent piece on the bar.

"Say—" Ken put a hand on Donahue's arm, searched Donahue's face candidly with his round blue eyes. "What's in the wind? You wouldn't lay dough on Young Boston, would you?"

"Uh-huh." Donahue took the cigarette from his mouth, added: "Or the Emperor." He replaced the cigarette in his mouth, took a deep inhale, looked with a direct but provocative gaze into Ken's eyes.

"Say, Donny—"

"I don't know a thing," Donahue said. "But if you can get that bet called off, put the dough in some bour-bon."

He turned from the bar, spurted a breath at the end of his cigarette, knocking the ash off. He made his way back to the lobby, walked down a wide corridor and entered an open elevator. Two men besides the operator were standing in it. One was Sam Beckert, King Brown's manager, and the other Pete Korn, a small, slight man with a dry-skinned hatchet face and wet, red-lidded eyes. Sam Beckert was rotund, jovial, with a voice like a fog-horn, cheeks like red cherries and with a bulblike chin to match. In the center of his massive face

was a small, pointed nose that seemed to have got there by mistake.

"Gonna see my Emperor clean up tonight, Donny?"

"Yeah."

"I hope you laid all you got on him, Donny. He'll take that Boston wildcat by the ears."

"By the ears," supplemented Pete Korn in a dry, cracked voice.

The car started upward.

Donahue looking at the ceiling, said: "He's the fastest lightweight we've seen in this town since Benny, and a real champion."

"You're telling me?" boomed Beckert.

Pete Korn cackled: "Telling me?"

The car was slowing. Beckert slapped Donahue on the back and rumbled: "Yessir, boy, I hope you laid all you got."

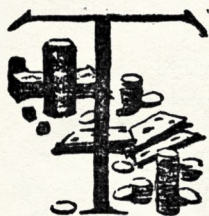
"I don't bet on fights, Sam."

The door opened and as they walked out Beckert laughed: "You oughtta, boy, when I'm telling you! Be seeing you, kid!"

"Seeing you, kid," Pete Korn said.

Donahue, making his way up the corridor, could hear the din of the Arena crowd. When he opened a heavy door, the din bellowed at him. Moving on, he came to the upper tiers, saw the massed crowd below, howling and roaring, waving arms, hats, handkerchiefs. Far down, he saw the white pool of the ring; saw King Brown, the ebon lightweight champ, taking his bows. Donahue went down through the roars and cheers, took a seat ten rows from the ringside and pinched out his cigarette beneath his heel.

A little group was in the ring, talking. Brown and Young Boston were looking at each other, smiling tight, insincere smiles; the black boy showing a mouthful of dazzling teeth, the white boy curling his upper lip. They went back to their corners, and the ring emptied, the fighters stretched arms, gripped the ropes, braced toes on the floor. Quiet descended upon the Arena.



HE bell shot them out. The black boy was not smiling now; he looked serious, with a scowl on his forehead, a catlike, stealthy look in his eyes. He struck. Young Boston landed on his back. Scattered shouts rose, uncertain. Boston got up, touched his nose with his left glove. He slid a blow up the Emperor's left arm; the blow was tossed off snakelike. They clinched, but the black boy broke, pranced on his toes, swung his head beneath a hard overhand shot and went up under Boston's guard. Boston tied him up. The referee broke them. Boston struck on the break and the black champ teetered, laughed aloud; the laugh was smothered by a crack on the mouth and Boston followed with hard body blows.

The champ took them, absorbed them, came into them with his shiny black arms driving. He began to beat Boston back across the ring. His neck was taut, the nape like a gleaming column of gun metal. Sweat flew from the wet gloves. The boys were exchanging blows furiously at the bell. The challenger could take it. Most people knew King Brown could.

They came out fast for the second. The crowd was settling down with an attitude of satisfaction. It was a fast, good fight. The fighters hammered each other through the second round, and the counts looked even. The Emperor had a split lip and Young Boston had a bad eye. Half of black Harlem was in the Arena rooting for the local boy who was lightweight champion of the world.

The Emperor came out for the third with an elastic bound. He grinned broadly, feinted, ducked, cut viciously into Boston's guard. He cut through Boston's guard, carried him to the ropes, hammered his blows in with terrific speed—a cross-fire of body blows and snapping shots to the face. His teeth were bared, his lips flattened back, his breath whistling and hissing out. The

crowd murmured. Cries rose here and there. It was as if the black boy had played tag during the first two rounds and was now getting down to business.

Pain contorted Boston's face. He writhed and squirmed against the ropes while the black boy grunted, crowded him with an endless fusillade of smashing blows. The scattered cries rose to shouts and the shouts welled in volume; the voice of the radio announcer was crackling into the microphone. The judges looked at one another. The black boy's seconds grinned.

Boston managed to clinch, to hold at last. The referee jumped in to break them, and the Emperor fell back, his mouth bursting open to suck in a great lungful of air. One leg sagged. His neck muscles bulged and his eyes rolled as he started in again. Boston, looking through eyes that were almost closed, swung mightily. The blow hit the black boy on the chest; it stopped him for an instant but then he was driving in again. But now Boston seemed to be taking the blows with ease, and he began fighting back. He began driving the Emperor back across the ring. The shouting wavered, became a low, distant hum.

The Emperor was covering up as he hit the ropes, and Boston, his lip curled, was hammering him. The black boy did not clinch. He struck back, but his arms lagged, his knees wobbled. Boston covered the black face with blows and with blood. He was still swinging blindly when King Brown fell to his knees. The referee jumped in. The Emperor fell on his face.

He was counted out.

"Ladi-e-e-e-s-s . . . Gen-tul-men-n-n . . . the new cham-p-e-e-e-n. . . ."

Young Boston fell down trying to help, in the established custom, his vanquished foe. The Emperor's seconds brushed him aside, picked up the black boy. Boston's seconds rushed him to the microphone.

"Hello, folks. I'm d' new champeen. Hello, Ma . . .!"

The Emperor was standing, looking very dazed and solemn. "Whut happened?" he muttered. Then he scowled, when they told him to shake hands with the new champion. "Wha' fo'? Dat boy's no champeen. He can't fight wo'th a damn."

"This way, King."

He shoved them off, climbed through the ropes, a glaze in his eyes. He trotted up the aisle, shaking his clasped hands above his head, grinning with his great white teeth.

Donahue made his way out of the madhouse, took the private elevator to the *Swanee Club*, strolled into the bar and ordered a Scotch and Perrier. The bar was boiling with the fight news.

Ken Teebolt touched Donahue's arm. "What happened, Donny?"

"Happened?" Donahue picked up his drink, looked over it at Ken, said: "The Emperor was decrowned."

He put the glass to his lips as a man rushed in shouting: "Hey! King Brown just died!"

Twenty-odd voices exclaimed: "What!"

The informer threw up his arms. "Died!"

Donahue kept the glass to his lips, but did not drink. After a moment, he drank.

2



ELLY McPARD, the plain-clothes sergeant, finished with his pearl-handled penknife, held up his left hand, with the fingers splayed, and eyed the pared fingernails critically. Then he looked through his splayed fingers at Donahue.

"Fifty," he said.

"Some day you're going to learn not to bet."

"The Emperor looked good to me."

Donahue turned and scowled at the floor. "Boston cut him down like hay."

"Listening on the radio, the beginning of that third round, I was counting my winnings already." He took his hand down, closed the fingers into his palm and laid the fist on his office desk. "What'd he die of, Donny?"

Donahue jerked a thumb to his chest.

"H'm," mused Kelly regretfully. "Heart." He sighed. "Too bad. The Emperor was a real champion."

Donahue stood up, stared down at Kelly and said firmly: "Get an autopsy, Kel."

"Huh?"

Kelly looked up quizzically, half-humorously. Donahue said nothing, but kept staring at the sergeant.

Kelly drummed with his fingers on the desk and stared vacantly at the desk's surface, chewing his lower lip reflectively. "What's the idea?"

"I may be bad-minded, but that fight ended, not too suddenly, but up the wrong alley. Get an autopsy. If you don't, I'll go over your head and make a squawk."

Kelly grinned, showing his neat white teeth beneath his neat, clipped mustache. "My old pal Donny again!"

"I'm serious," Donahue muttered. He began knocking with a knuckle on the desk, and spoke to fit the rhythm: "That—dinge—went—down—too—fast."

Kelly lit a cork-tipped cigarette. "I'll look into it, kid. But I wish to hell you'd break with the Boxing Commission. You're always imagining things."

"You just imagine I imagine."

Kelly polished the nails of one hand on the heel of the other. "Where d' you think things are crooked?"

Donahue put on his hat, went to the door. "Get that autopsy and maybe we'll see."

HE took a cab uptown, got off in one of the East Sixties and entered a tall, narrow apartment house. A

cream-colored elevator lifted him to the fourteenth floor, and getting out he swung his long legs leisurely down the corridor, drawing off gray capeskin gloves. He rapped on the door of 1412, and as it opened a babble of voices rushed out at him.

"Yeah?" said Pete Korn.

Donahue looked over his head, walked past him and, passing through the foyer, entered the large and ornate living-room of Sam Beckert's apartment. Six men besides Sam were in a noisy, talkative huddle: men in the fight game, well-dressed hangers-on. To one side, a medium-sized Negro wearing decent evening clothes and horn-rimmed spectacles, stood wiping his hands on a handkerchief.

"Hello, Donny!" Sam Beckert boomed.

"Sam," Donahue said offhand; and then: "Tough about the Emperor."

Beckert's big face got very mournful, his thick voice shook: "Donny, that boy—that boy—" He wagged his head dolefully. "I brought him up in the fight game, Donny. Need I tell you how I feel about all this here?" He spread his bough-like arms, his broad palms. "I'm kinda busted up, kid."

"Kinda busted up," Pete Korn said, his dry lips twitching.

Donahue said: "I just dropped in on my way home. I hear they're going to ask for an autopsy."

"Yeah?" Sam Beckert said; he looked around goggle-eyed at the men, then looked back at Donahue, nodded. "I guess that's their privilege. Sure. Why not? Unless"—he waved to the Negro—"George there objects. That's King's brother."

The Negro dipped his head. "Of course, if the police want to perform an autopsy"—he shrugged—"I shan't object. My brother's"—his lip shook—"death was sudden and unexpected, but in that sport—well, those things happen—"

"That was an awful sock to the heart Boston handed him in the third," Beck-

ert boomed in. "You seen that, Donny—huh?"

Donahue nodded. "Yeah."

Beckert stood back on his heels, threw out his stomach. "O' course, I ain't got nothin' to say about if they c'n or can't pull an autopsy. King's brother it's up to—him being the head of the heirs or something. Smart guy. Teaches school, huh, George?" He added: "O' course, take it was blood o' my blood, I'd kinda hate to see them autopsy him. But"—he shrugged hugely—"it ain't up to me here."

The Negro poked his handkerchief back into his breast pocket. "I have no objection. After all, King—King's dead and—well, what's the use?" He turned, picked up his hat.

A tall, slim man with white hair and black eyebrows came strolling in from an adjoining room. He was idly polishing a pair of rimless nose-glasses.

Beckert said loudly: "Oh, Les, meet a pal. Meet Donahue here."

"Hello," said the thin man absently, without looking up. Then he held his glasses up to the light, seemed satisfied and placed them on his nose.

"My lawyer, Lester Paisley," Beckert explained.

Paisley yawned: "Yes—Donahue; I know the name. How do you do." He went to a table, turning his back, and poured a drink.

Donahue said negligently: "Any truth, Sam, in the rumor the Emperor was going to change managers?" A match flamed off his thumbnail, rose to a cigarette in his mouth.

Beckert guffawed. "If there was, I sure ain't been around. Who gave you that hooley?"

Donahue deprecated his own statement with a frown, a shrug. "Speak-easy gossip. . . . Well, I'll roll along, Sam."

Beckert tossed up a big hand, yelled: "Glad to seen you!"

"I'll go along too," George Brown said. "Good night, Sam."

"'Night, George. Give the old woman my deepest sympathy."

"Thanks, Sam."

Donahue and the late Emperor's brother rode down in the elevator in silence, crossed the lobby and reached the street.

"I go uptown," George Brown said.

"Me down. . . . Say—" Donahue dropped his voice. "Don't squawk about the autopsy. Let 'em pull it."

George Brown looked quizzical. "You talk as if you think something's wrong."

"Listen. Did your kid brother ever say anything about changing managers?"

"No. You see, we never saw him much in Harlem. He stayed in midtown when he was here. He trained down South and on the West Coast. Who told you?"

Donahue said: "Well, I'll grab a cab and go home."

"You're connected with the Boxing Commission, aren't you?"

"They hired the agency."

"What makes you think—"

"Taxi! . . . S' long, Mr. Brown."

ALEX KARSSSEN was a small man, five feet four; he had a leathery, lopsided face, a bright, tyrannical eye, and crooked teeth in a crooked but engaging mouth. He had a habit of spurring words sharply out of a corner of his warped mouth. He weighed about a hundred pounds. He was head of the Boxing Commission.

"Sit down, Donny. Want a drink?"

"Not now, thanks." Donahue remained standing in the library of Karssen's Fifth Avenue mansion. He was drawing on a cigarette, holding it with his fingers, and gazing down with a rueful smile at the diminutive Boxing Commissioner.

Karssen bit him with a keen, windy look. "Champions come and champions go, eh?" He took a quick, snapping puff at his cigar. "And some champions die."

"In his dressing-room," Donahue said

in a low voice pregnant with implication. "Five minutes after he left the ring."

"Five minutes."

"Black Harlem went nuts. I heard it was a blow to the heart."

Karssen leaned back, put his cigar in his mouth, took three quick puffs while his keen, bright look hunted back and forth across Donahue's face.

"So what, Donny?"

"Kelly McPard's going to crab for an autopsy. I told Beckert. He seemed agreeable. Paisley was there—in Beckert's apartment, I mean."

Karssen leaned forward, took the cigar out of his mouth, kept his eyes fastened on Donahue's face. "What are the chances?"

"I bribed that bank clerk once. I guess I can again."

"What about the autopsy?"

"I hope to find something there. Beckert wasn't knocked over when I hinted—but you know that lug." He paused, reached down to grind out his cigarette in a tray. "Mike Dolan's in San Francisco. I'm going to get him on long distance tomorrow morning. If it's true that King Brown spent an hour on the phone with Mike in a Los Angeles hotel a month ago, there's only one reason why he should have."

A crooked, wily grin captured Karssen's face, and he nodded, puffed jerkily but made no comment.

Donahue brushed the dead ash from his fingertips. "If a stink is up Beckert's alley, it's going to mean murder. Which means that if we get hot, somebody's going to get hurt." He paused, dropped his voice, held Karssen's eye. "If it gets to that, I'll have to shoot first and go around asking bright questions afterwards."

Karssen nodded.

Donahue said: "Is that okey with you?"

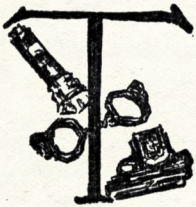
Karssen stood up, came around the desk, dug his bony fingers into Donahue's biceps. "I'm behind you, boy. I won't be Boxing Commissioner much longer, but while I am"—his crooked

jaw shot forward—"I'm going to see if I can't weed out a lot of this lousy double dealing."

Donahue picked up his hat. "Les Paisley first," he said.

Alex Karssen linked his arm in Donahue's and walked to the door with him. He clipped: "Okey, then, Donny. Get Mike Dolan on long distance tomorrow. If Mike comes through—and I'll bet my shirt he will—we'll have a motive to start on." He pressed Donahue's arm, said with sudden earnestness: "Watch yourself, boy. I'd feel lousy if you turned up some morning in the obituary column."

3



HE alarm clock woke Donahue at eight next morning. He phoned the lobby newsstand to send up the morning papers, went into the bathroom and showered hot, then cold. He walked in his underwear to the door, received three papers from the bellhop. He poured himself a glass of Canadian ale, sat on the edge of the bed and spread the paper.

The death of the Emperor Brown was news. The sports writers had liked him, had always gone for him in a big way. The Emperor had been an unusual Negro, with many of his kind's virtues and very few of its vices. He'd had the heart of a lion in his black body. He had been engaged, at the time of his death, to one Mary Hartley, a high-yellow Bronx school teacher. His death outshadowed the crowning of the new champion.

Donahue paused to reach for the phone. He said to the hotel operator: "I want to get Michael J. Dolan, at the Hotel St. Luke, in San Francisco. Person-to-person." He hung up, resumed reading, turned a page and then darted his head downward. His eyes snapped, his jaw hardened. He reached for the phone, said: "Listen,

never mind that call. . . . Yes, cancel it." The receiver smacked into the prong and Donahue stood up, still holding the newspaper.

He re-read the stick that had roused him:

San Francisco, February 8:

Michael J. Dolan, well-known boxing figure, manager of Jack Turck, was found dead late tonight in an overturned sedan, which he had been driving. The fact that none of the tires was blown, and that a cursory investigation showed nothing wrong with the brakes or steering gear, caused police to begin an investigation into the cause of the accident. The car left the road and crashed into a tree. Dolan's skull was fractured, according to police, when he was thrown against the windshield. The accident occurred on a lonely suburban highway, and there were no witnesses, according to the police. He was dead when found, apparently shortly after the accident, by a passing motorist, at 8:30.

Donahue tossed the paper across the bed. He dressed quickly, automatically, with his gaze fixed intently on space. He went downstairs, ate breakfast in the hotel restaurant, swung his long legs out to the street and hopped into a taxi.

Kelly McPard had all the morning papers spread before him on his desk when Donahue walked in.

Kelly McPard said: "The Emperor sure had a swell press, didn't he? . . . Tough. I see he was only twenty-three."

"Did you see anything else?"

"Huh?"

"Page two, right-hand column."

Kelly McPard turned the page. "Oh. Oh, you mean Dolan. Yeah. Apparently he wasn't drunk, either."

Donahue rasped: "He never touched a drop in his life, believe it or not."

"Pretty early to get steamed up, isn't it?"

Donahue sat on the desk. "Listen, Kel." He paused, waited until Kelly McPard looked up at him. "I was going to long distance Dolan this morning. A month ago a West Coast columnist ran a squib that ran something like this: 'What gentleman of color, sojourning in Hollywood these past two weeks, talked on the phone with what sporting tycoon at what hotel the other night for one solid hour?' Catch on?"

"Tell me."

Donahue shrugged. "The Emperor was in Hollywood at the time. So was Mike Dolan."

"Tell me more."

"I'll guess. Dolan and Brown talked over a contract. A week later the columnist ran an apology to the anonymous gentleman of color, saying he had been misinformed. I'll guess again. Dolan paid him to." He stood up, pointed. "If this death of Dolan was an accident, I'll be a moron. Dolan and Brown had to be cagey. So cagey that nobody but Dolan and Brown was to know that they'd talked. Brown's dead. So is Dolan. Who's to prove, now, that they talked for an hour?"

McPard fooled with his neat mustache. "But who would care—enough to murder? Don't forget, Donny, murder is a pretty big thing. Besides, they wouldn't have bumped off Dolan before the Emperor died. That wouldn't make sense even on your crazy idea."

"They didn't. That 8:30 in the paper is Pacific Coast time. It was 11:30 New York time, an hour after the Emperor died. There was a San Francisco radio hook-up." He pivoted off the desk, smacked fist into palm, ground the fist in. "This burns me up. If I'd phoned last night—" He shrugged, made a sour face. "But I knew if I phoned early I'd get him in. He wouldn't 've been up yet."

McPard grinned. His mouth was small, his teeth small and very white and even. "I'm beginning to wake up, Donny!" He grabbed a phone, called the Morgue. "Jake there? . . . Hello,

Jake. Kelly. That autopsy coming along? . . . Okey, kid; call me when, huh? . . . Swell." He hung up, looked at his fingernails.

He said: "What about that columnist?"

"I doubt it. If his dope was straight, he must have got it from a hotel telephone operator stooling for him. If he turns her up, it'll mean a penal offense against her and he'd lose his face and his job and go around hearing 'rat, rat' on all sides." He stared with hard intensity at the floor, chewed on a corner of his lower lip. Then he snapped out of it and said: "I'll run along, Kel. Be seeing you."

Kelly pointed to the newspaper. "Did you see that picture of Sam Beckert taken near the dead Emperor's body?"

Donahue said from the door: "The one where he's crying?"

"Yeah," McPard said, with a wry grin.

"The lousy crocodile," Donahue said.



LOMAR'S was a quiet chop house in East Fifty-fourth Street. It contained a few dark, secluded booths, and in one of these Donahue sat down at a few minutes to twelve and ordered Blue Points on the shell. He was impaling the sixth oyster when a young, pale, weak-chinned man approached the booth. Donahue nodded and the man slid on to the bench opposite.

"Chicken broth and an omelette," he said to the waiter.

The waiter went away and Donahue leaned his elbows on the table.

"How goes it, Trent?"

Trent kept his eyes lowered while he thrust a hand into an inside pocket of his coat. He withdrew a folded piece of paper, opened it, spread it on the table and put on a pair of glasses. He leaned forward, lowered his voice nervously.

He said: "This morning he deposited eight checks made out to himself. They totaled eighty-seven thousand dollars and were signed by eight different persons. All the checks were drawn against New York banks and bear dates as far back as two weeks ago."

Donahue grinned. His grin faded and he dropped his voice, bent a sharp eye on Trent. "If I could only find out who made out that check for a hundred grand he deposited three weeks ago."

"I'm sorry. We can't check that up."

"But you're sure before that his account was only ten thousand?"

"Yes. Of course, he may have had accounts in other banks, and it may have been a transfer."

"It might have been," Donahue mused, but his tone bore a negative implication. He sighed. He drew from his pocket a fifty-dollar bill, passed it across the table.

Trent colored. His fingers fumbled with the bill, thrust it away into his pocket.

Donahue was saying: "Watch that account. See what happens to it."

"I—I—" Trent moistened his lips. "I'm getting nervous—"

"What the hell for?" Donahue muttered, darkening. "You started it. Finish it."

"Y-yes, of course."

Donahue said quietly, but threateningly: "Bail out on me now and . . ."

The waiter brought chicken broth.

IT was almost two when Donahue walked in on Kelly McPard. The sergeant turned from a window. A slow grin made bright spots on his rosebud cheeks, put a tantalizing twinkle in his blue eyes. He shrugged, held his arms out, palms out, then shook his head.

"Poor old Donny," he sighed.

"Poor old Donny, why?"

McPard suddenly looked sad. "The autopsy is all washed up, pal. What do you think the Emperor died of?"

Donahue kept a sharp eye on McPard. "Go ahead."

"Heart failure."

"Quit kidding."

"I'm not kidding, Donny. They didn't find anything. He wasn't poisoned and he wasn't needled. The old heart just folded up."

Donahue snarled: "That's a lie!"

McPard was tranquil. "There were three doctors working on him. No two of them were close friends. But they all said the same things. It's open and shut, Donny. The Emperor was like a lot of high-priced thoroughbred horses. They suddenly blow up."

"I don't believe it."

"Hell, man, you can't go against the findings of three good doctors. An autopsy's the last court of appeal." He came over, took hold of Donahue's arm, shook it good-humoredly. "Trouble with you, Donny, you been working for the Box Commish so long that you see dirt in every corner. Drop it, kid. You can't go farther than an autopsy. That's a good kid—drop it."

Donahue shrugged off McPard's hand, walked to a window. He stuck a cigarette in his mouth, snapped a match on the nail of his thumb. He lit up, scowled down at the street. McPard crossed to stand beside him—a genial, scrubbed-looking fat man in well-made clothes, crisp, clean linen.

He said: "It was just a tough break for the Emperor, Donny. Don't be a sap. You can take it, I know you can. We got to admit we're wrong now and then; you know, take it on the chin—like the Emperor did—"

"Ah, lay off the stuff," Donahue rasped. He pivoted, strode across the office and went out. He slammed the door.

McPard looked pop-eyed at the door for a moment, then broke into a chuckle. Still chuckling, he sat down, poured liquor from a flask into his mouth. He chuckled again, capped the flask.

"Same old Donny," he mused. "Same old palsy-walsy."

4



HE Negress was tall, dusky tan rather than black. She had an unusually high forehead, a good chin, and there was nothing Negroid about her nose. Her eyes were intelligent. She wore a short brown jacket, a longish brown skirt that tapered from the hips smartly to well-shaped ankles. She wore smooth black hair over her ears; it was rolled in a loose doughnut on her nape.

"I'm Donahue," Donahue said, leaning in the doorway; he added: "I work for the Cosmos Detective Agency. The Boxing Commission's been using us for several months."

"Won't you come in?"

He nodded, walked past her to the center of a small, well-furnished living-room; stood twirling his hat slowly on his index finger and turned when he heard the door close. The customary nonchalance with which he went through life was gone now; there was a hard, shrewd depth in his eyes, and an innate stubbornness had found its way to his lips, tightening them at the right-hand corner.

"Won't you sit down?" she said.

He liked her voice. There was a drained look in her face, as though she had cried for many hours; but now her eyes were dry, gentle with a brown, deep warmth—and curious, expectant. He took a seat, hung his hat on one of his bony knees. She sat down near him, watchful, leaning forward, with her small brown hands in her lap.

He frowned at his hat. "I don't like to bring up an unpleasant subject, Miss Hartley . . . but it's about the Emperor."

She pursed her lips, nodded; after a moment she said: "Yes."

He suddenly looked at her with his round, candid eyes. "You were as close to him as anyone. Did he ever mention shifting to another manager?"

She shook her head. "He never said anything to me." She spoke like an educated white girl. She looked away vacantly across the room. "I'd have remembered," her voice said, trailing off.

"Did he seem dissatisfied with Sam Beckert?"

She nodded. "Yes, he did. But I suppose that was natural. The more money King made, the more he had to give to Beckert. King was a frugal man. He didn't want to fight Boston in the first place. He said it was a set-up. But Beckert wanted to make the money. It's ironic. Now—now Beckert's lost a lot."

He looked at her. He saw that she believed Beckert had lost a lot.

She sighed. "I like Sam Beckert. He's rough and all that, but he was always lots of fun. He used to make fun of King being so serious. Sam Beckert always took life as a big joke. And then when King died—Sam looked like—well, he looked like a man seeing ghosts." She clasped her hands together. "I don't know why—why I feel—feel— Oh, I'm silly," she broke off.

Donahue leaned forward. "Feel what?"

Her eyes turned on him. "I—I feel King didn't die naturally!"

"Why?"

"I don't know. I just *feel*!" She jumped up. "But I'm silly. George called and said they'd performed an autopsy and that nothing was wrong." She quieted down. "Maybe we were all wrong. Maybe King was done. A month ago Les Paisley, the lawyer, said so. He said: 'I may be your lawyer, Sam, but I'd lay my dough on anybody but King. He's cracking. Black boys are good so long, but they can't take it.' He said that in King's presence. It made King worry for days. But Sam knows fighters. He said King was better than he ever was. So did Dr. Helvig. But I remember—that blow to the heart—it was terrific."

Donahue said: "I remember that blow to the heart, too. You were all

for King, emotionally. You wouldn't have noticed the funny look that came into his eyes *before*—a few seconds *before*—that blow hit him."

She started. "You don't believe that blow did it?"

"I wouldn't want to be quoted—but I don't."

"But the autopsy proved—"

He was nodding. He sighed, stood up, said: "I know."

"Then why do you say—"

"I'm damned if I know. But once get an idea in a Mick's head and even an autopsy won't knock it out." He tossed up his hat, caught it deftly and walked to the door. With his hand on the knob he turned to say: "Forget it. Every now and then I get illusions of grandeur and think I'm St. Patrick driving the snakes out of Ireland."

She remained standing in the middle of the room, looking dumbly at him. He saw that her eyes were beginning to shine with tears. He said: "Well, good-day—and thanks," and left the apartment.

ON the way downtown he dropped off at his hotel and the clerk at the desk said: "A Mr. Trent phoned and left a number for you to call."

"When?"

"He phoned at about three-thirty—half an hour ago."

Donahue took the memorandum and went to a lobby booth. He dialed the number and in a moment heard the bank clerk's nervous, squeaky voice.

"Yes, this is Donahue. . . . I get you. . . . The Keystone Realty Company. . . . What's the address? . . . Never mind; I'll look it up myself. And I'll be seeing you. Keep your lip tight, Trent. I wouldn't let you down."

He hung up. He let his hand remain on the instrument, stared intently at it, while faint little lines appeared and disappeared at the corners of his eyes. He went out of the booth, bought a newspaper, sat down and read the latest news on the death of the Emperor. He

turned to the Keyhole Kid's daily column and the first item that struck his eyes was:

It's being noised around that a certain private detective told a certain uptown speak owner that the Emperor Brown was due for a fall. The dick told the speak boss this enlightenment twenty minutes before the Emperor's death, little children!

Donahue crumpled the paper savagely. His lower lip shot out and an angry, sullen look welled in his eyes. He tossed the sheet down, strode darkly across the lobby, rode in the elevator upward. He reached the door of his apartment, dangled keys, got the door open. He stumbled at sight of a small square of paper that had evidently been slipped beneath the door.

He bent down, picked it up. It was a newspaper clipping. It was the same item he had read a minute before in the lobby.

But across it was drawn, in black crayon, an X.



DONAHUE sloped into the foyer of the *Surwanee*. Ken Teebolt was standing talking with the hat-check girl and clicking a half dozen quarters in his hand. He grinned, said: "Hello there, Donny!"

Donahue went past him with a swift gait and a dead-ahead dark look in his eyes. He followed the corridor to the swing door, punched it open, went up to the bar and jammed his heel down on the rail. He leaned on his elbows, clasped his hands together and stared down at them.

"Whatcha have?" the bartender said.

"Scotch—straight," Donahue clipped, staring at his hands.

It was five. The dining-room was not yet open, and the bar was almost

empty. A radio, tuned low, brought in tea-dancing music from a midtown hotel. The bartender rolled back down the bar, planked down a bottle and a glass in front of Donahue, eyed him curiously through thick eyebrows. Then he hummed to himself and wandered back up the bar.

Ken Teebolt opened the swing door, let it swing back, and sauntered to the bar. He leaned sideways against it, on one elbow, crossing his legs and keeping them straight up and down. He looked grave, puzzled.

"What's eating you, Donny?"

Donahue downed his drink, poured another, held it up and eyed it with narrowed-down lids.

Ken Teebolt said: "Okey; sulk." He sauntered off into the darkened dining-room.

Donahue swallowed his drink, rasped his throat. He kept his gaze on the bottle as though it were a crystal ball. The bartender polished a glass and kept a sidelong gaze on him. Donahue poured another drink.

Ken Teebolt came back to the bar, stood alongside Donahue and said: "What's the idea of the looking-glass drinking?"

Donahue drank, slapped down the empty glass. He tossed a dollar and a half on the bar, buttoned his coat, pivoted and strode past Ken Teebolt. He kicked open the swing door and vanished. Ken Teebolt leaned back, said half-aloud: "The guy's nuts." The swing door slammed open again and Donahue came towards Ken Teebolt with a narrow, vicious look and a hard, fast walk.

He said coldly but viciously: "So you're stooling for that tabloid columnist."

"I'm what?"

"Go ahead; act the Boy Scout!"

"Look here, Donny—for crying out loud—"

"For crying out loud your sweet grandmother's neck!"

He turned violently on his heel, went

through the swing door like a blast of wind and was striding hard-heeled down the corridor when Ken Teebolt called: "Hey, you Irish tramp!" Donahue stopped and Ken Teebolt caught up with him.

"Well?" said Donahue.

Ken Teebolt was warming up, too. "Make it clear, Donny. For — sake, don't act like a ten-year-old. What the hell have I done?"

Donahue pulled the newspaper clipping from his pocket. "Pike this."

Ken read it. His jaw hardened; he reddened. "Who — what's this X mean?"

"What d' you think it means?" Donahue cut in. "I found it under my door."

Ken Teebolt looked up, and his face was very red. "I—I didn't spring that, Donny."

"A birdie did, I suppose."

"Listen, kid—" His voice became husky, his eyes stared into space, then suddenly clouded. "Jeeze!" he muttered hoarsely. "I must have—that jane I picked up— *Jeeze!*" he snarled, and lunged towards the checkroom.

Donahue grabbed him. "What are you going to do?"

"Break a jane's neck. Lemme go!"

Donahue wrestled him against the wall. "Use your head," he said.

"I'll cave in her face—"

"What good will it do?" He shook Ken, cracked a grin. His voice softened a bit. "I just thought you'd two-timed on me. A dame, huh? Talked in your sleep—"

"No. I was a little likkered—"

"Same thing."

Ken Teebolt was sincerely moved. "My — Donny, I'd bite off my hand rather than pull a squeal on you!"

"Listen. Paisley drops in here every day on his way from the office, doesn't he?"

"Yeah."

Donahue nodded to the bar. "Come on. I want to talk to you." He added: "And I want to ring Kelly."

5



HE bar was crowding up. The dining-room was still dimmed, but more lights had been turned on in the bar, a second bartender had joined the first.

The radio had been turned up a notch, bringing on the daily news flashes of a local newspaper. Men arrived in business suits with newspapers under their arms. They kept on their hats and coats. Cocktail shakers made a cool, icy sound. The cash register rang more frequently.

Lester Paisley came in at five past six. His white hair seemed whiter beneath the brim of his black hat. He wore a belted dark blue coat with raglan sleeves, carried a dark stick. He gave the impression of looking above the heads of all persons, but he rarely missed anything. He saw Donahue at the far end of the bar, but you would not have guessed it.

"Whiskey sour—plenty sour."

He unfolded a newspaper, took off his nose-glasses, polished them, held them to the light and then replaced them on his nose. He turned the newspaper over, folded it twice one way, once the other, took out a pencil and fixed his eyes on a cross-word puzzle. In three squares he wrote three letters that spelled *Yak*.

"Hello, Paisley."

Donahue had walked over, but Paisley did not even look up. He said abstractedly: "Hello, Donahue."

Somebody turned on the lights in the dining-room and Ken Teebolt stood in the broad entry-way, his hands behind his back. He was watching Donahue and Paisley.

Donahue said: "You picked a winner, didn't you?"

"Guess I did," Paisley said, filling in five vertical squares and getting the word *Yodel*.

Donahue said: "I'd like to have a lit-

tle talk with you. We can take it easy in a room upstairs."

"Sorry, Donahue. I've got to run along."

The radio boomed: "And a news flash from San Francisco. Central office detectives working on the death of Mike Dolan, nationally known boxfight solon who was killed in a motor accident last night, discovered a spent .38-calibre bullet imbedded in a tree near the spot where Dolan crashed. The theory is that someone may have fired at Dolan, missed, but that Dolan, ducking, might have lost control of his car and smashed up.

"Since all the windows in his sedan were shattered by the crash, a theory that one of these windows was broken by a bullet cannot be verified. No bullets were found in the body of the car. The police are seeking a motive, urged by the facts that the car was proved to have been in excellent mechanical condition, that Dolan had not been drinking, that the road was wide and, at the time, free of rain. Dolan also is reputed to have been an excellent driver. . . ."

"Idiom," said Paisley.

"Pardon?"

"I'm working this out."

Donahue lit a cigarette. "Knew Mike Dolan, didn't you?"

"Met him."

"I wonder who could have tried to bump him off—and why?"

Paisley finished his drink, paid up. "Well, see you some time, Donahue."

Donahue held on to his arm. "How about now?"

Paisley looked down at Donahue's hand reflectively. Then he took it off. "Some other time. Friends due at my hotel."

Donahue held his arm again, said in a low voice: "You'll regret it if you don't see me now, Paisley. I'm not kidding."

Paisley looked through his thin shell-like glasses. His face was hatchet-

thin, wooden. He said liplessly: "Come on, then."

They went up two flights of stairs, walked down a corridor. Donahue opened a door, stepped aside and let Paisley walk in past him. Then he closed the door. Paisley walked to the middle of the large, mannish living-room, sat down on the edge of a straight-backed chair, took off his glasses and, polishing them, looked up politely and wooden-faced at Donahue. With his white hair, his thick black eyebrows, he seemed a strange and provocative man.

Donahue said: "When did you work up an interest in real estate?"

"It's always a good investment if you get in on the ground."

Donahue nodded. "It sure is. It's like everything else, though. A guy wants to sink his money in a gilt-edge investment. For instance, you wouldn't think of buying bonds in a tank bank. If you had a lot of dough, you'd sink it in something with a solid foundation, some organization that has a reputation."

"I suppose. Now we're talking banking, eh?"

"No. Real estate. For instance, suppose you had between one and two hundred grand. You had the choice of several banks or corporations in which to sink this dough. You'd sink it in the best you could find, wouldn't you? I mean, in these times—when it's dangerous to speculate on a dark horse. You'd do that, wouldn't you?"

"I suppose I would."

"Just as an example. I'll take something offhand. Take the Keystone Realty Company. A small outfit with a dump of an office on Sixth Avenue—one man in the office and a ten-bucks-a-week typist. This outfit opened shop exactly twenty-eight days ago. It's not a member of the City Realty Board. It started with a cash deposit in a West Side bank of three thousand dollars. Its owner-manager used to run a roadhouse and tourist cabins on the Boston

Post Road until two years ago, when he was knocked off by the cops on a liquor charge. There's an example. Now you wouldn't sink your dough in an outfit like that, would you?"

Paisley's wooden face did not change its expression. "What is this, a new kind of game?"

"Yeah."

Paisley stood up. "Hell, I thought you wanted to talk to me about something sensible. I never thought you had a screw loose, Donahue. I've got to get along."

Donahue went and stood in front of the door, folded his arms, leaned against it. "You're not really in a hurry, Paisley." He wore a dark, mocking smile.

"I really am," said Paisley.

"I'm not. I'm not going to touch you. But before you get through this door you've got to get through me. I want to know why you sunk one hundred and eighty-seven thousand in the Keystone Realty Company."

"I believe that's my business, Donahue."

"Is it? When you never before had at one time more than ten grand to your name?"

Paisley made an impatient gesture. "You bore hell out of me. I tell you I've got to get along. Don't be a mugg."

"You'll talk first."

Paisley drew a small automatic pistol from his pocket. "I hate to do this, Donahue, but you're a bigger man than I am and I couldn't knock you down. Keep your hands up and move away from that door."

A closet door opened and Kelly McPard said: "Got a permit to carry that rod, Mr. Paisley?"

Paisley stiffened, looked over his shoulder. McPard was holding a gun in one hand, his badge in the other. The badge caught the light, gleamed.

Paisley lowered his gun. He said: "This man wouldn't let me out."

"He didn't try to stop you. He just

said he'd stand in your way. You pulled your gat on him."

Paisley's nose-glasses shimmered. His dry, cold voice said: "A frame, huh?"

"I wouldn't think of framing you, Mr. Paisley. The laws of this State—"

"I know the laws of this State!" Paisley snapped.

"Then I suppose you'll come along down to Headquarters with me." Kelly McPard came towards Paisley and with his left hand took the gun from Paisley. "I won't put cuffs on you, counselor. We'll walk out just like we were old friends."

Paisley said dryly: "Just a couple of rats," eying both men.

"That ought to make you feel at home," Donahue said.

"Tsk, ts!" McPard said. "Is that nice, Donny? . . . Let's go, Mr. Paisley."

They went on out of the room.

Donahue lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply, let the smoke idle from his nostrils. After a moment Ken Teebolt opened the door.

He breathed out: "Everything okey, Donny?"

Donahue grinned, nodded.

6



HE bolt clanged. Ken Teebolt let Donahue out into the alley, said: "You think it's wise?"

The tilt of Donahue's hatbrim made a diagonal dark shadow across his face and only half of his tight grin was visible.

"No," he said. "But I figure they'll come after me eventually. I hate suspense."

He turned and went rearward through the alley, cut around the wall of the Arena, hit a side street and followed it to a main drag. A taxi came along and he stepped into the street, held up a finger. Brakes squealed and

Donahue was inside before the cab stopped. He clipped out the address as he dropped into the puffy leather seat.

He did not smoke. He hummed absent-mindedly, but kept a dark, intent eye on space. The cab finally stopped and a few seconds passed before Donahue realized it had stopped. Thrusting a bill through the window, he climbed out and received the change through the front door. He tossed back a dime.

The lobby of the hotel was rectangular. There were many people in the lobby, sitting or moving about, but all talking; yet there was no din. Severe, unostentatious doorways led to arcades.

Donahue rose in a black enameled elevator studded with narrow beveled mirrors. When he got out, thick carpet absorbed his footfalls. He took his gun out of his pocket, took his hat off. He placed the gun in the crown of his hat, crumpled the hat and held it carelessly in his left hand. He stopped and knocked at a door, leaned indolently with his right shoulder against the right side of the doorframe.

Pete Korn opened the door. He was in evening clothes. Voices bubbled in the living-room beyond. Pete Korn was getting ready to say something when Donahue walked past him. The scene in the living-room was a gay one. Sam Beckert and a tall, gaunt man wore evening clothes. At a glance the tall, gaunt man looked distinguished; he had a shock of iron-gray hair, wore rimmed nose-glasses with a black ribbon attached. There were three girls present—none of them was over twenty-five. All were drinking cocktails.

Sam Beckert threw up a boughlike arm, boomed: "Hi there, Donny, old kid! Come on in, old pal! Have a cocktail! We're all waitin' for Les Paisley. All gonna see a show. . . . Meet the girls. Girls, meet Ben Donahue, a great guy! . . . And Donny, you ever met Doc Helvig? This is Doc Helvig, the Box Commish's doctor."

Fifty if a day, Helvig looked as if he had taken a lot of liquor on board. "It's

a pleasure, Mr. Donahue," he said with profound gravity. "Mr. Paisley will be home soon."

Beckert poured a cocktail. Donahue wandered across the room, laid his hat on top of the radio. The radio was making a lot of noise. Then he walked across and took the cocktail Beckert held out.

Beckert looked suddenly gloomy. "Thinkin' about King, Donny, I gotta drink myself outta the dumps. Y' know, even though your heart is bustin', laugh, clown, laugh. It was a play I seen or somethin', once. . . . Sit down, Donny. Les 'll be along any minute."

"Any minute," Pete Korn muttered.

Donahue finished the drink, set the glass down. Beckert started to pour another, but Donahue made a gesture, shook his head.

"No, Sam. I've had enough today." He stood wiping his lips and gazing idly about the room. Thrusting his handkerchief into his breast pocket, he said: "Send the janes out of the room a minute, will you, Sam?"

"Huh?"

Helvig swayed over. "I remember now, Mr. Donahue. I think I met you at the Arena once, a couple of years ago. When Bat Brady and Jo-Jo Link were weighing in."

Donahue nodded but looked at Beckert, and said: "Want to talk to you."

Beckert shrugged expansively. "Sure thing, Donny." He pivoted hugely, jerked a thumb. "Girls, scam into the other room a minute, will you? Me and Donny's gotta talk."

The girls rose, went into an adjoining room and closed the door. Pete Korn sat on the arm of a chair, put a match between his lips and began chewing it with his little peglike teeth. Helvig stood spread-legged, swaying like a tree in a gentle wind; his mouth and eyes hung open oafishly, and he did not look distinguished.

Beckert's eyes got round, very watchful and curious, and he took several gulps at his cocktail but did not take

his eyes off Donahue for a second.

Donahue's eyes had a dark up-from-under look. "Heard the latest from San Francisco, Sam?"

"Huh?"

"The cops out there think Mike Dolan was put on the spot. They found a bullet near where Mike crashed."

Helvig looked at Pete Korn. Pete Korn was nibbling the match to shreds and his eyelids were so narrowed that it was impossible to tell at whom he looked.

"It came over the radio," Donahue added.

"Yeah?" Sam Beckert droned, his eyes dull.

Donahue nodded. "I understand the Emperor had a long talk with Mike on the phone—out on the Coast, some time ago. The Emperor and Mike were going to hook up, weren't they?"

Pete Korn spat shreds of the match to the floor.

Beckert rolled out a laugh. "I ain't ever heard."

"I did," Donahue said. "Mike Dolan was killed an hour after the Emperor died."

Sam Beckert walked heavily across the room, set down his glass and came back heavily. His forehead was wrinkled, his heavy features began to sag dully.

"Look here, Donny. You makin' cracks or ain't you? Seems to me you're gettin' damned steamed up over nothin'."

Donahue said coldly: "I'm not half as steamed up as I ought to be. I don't like having X notes shoved under my door. They scare me and make me sore as hell."

Pete Korn put another match in his mouth. Helvig's eyes got rounder.

Sam Beckert's loose lips flopped as he said: "For — sake, what you talkin' about?"

"You know what I'm talking about, Sam. We're all thinking about the same thing—the Emperor Brown. Did he fall or was he pushed?"

Sam Beckert roared with laughter.

"Oh, that! Ho-ho! You can't kid me, Donny. Poor old King just smashed. You oughtta know that from the autopsy report."

"It's the first autopsy report I never believed."

Sam Beckert's face got heavy again and his brows shot together. "Boy, you're makin' them dirty cracks fast!"

Pete Korn got up, chewed faster on the match, flexed his little legs. Helvig's mouth hung agape, and he mopped sweat from his forehead, drew the handkerchief up under his chin. He crossed the room and took a long slug of whiskey straight.

Donahue said: "Sam, it's a long story—"

"Shut up!" Beckert growled. "I don't have to clown around with you and I ain't. Les Paisley 'll be here any minute and you can talk to him. I'm a plain man and I ain't up to sparrin' words with a wise Mick like you."

Donahue grinned. He grinned first at Sam Beckert, then at Pete Korn, then at Helvig. He said: "You'll be wasting time, Sam."

"Huh?"

"Paisley won't show up."

Sam Beckert took a loggy backward step. Helvig gulped down another strong shot of whiskey. Pete Korn stopped chewing and closed his dry lips. The stub of the match jutted like a fang. Bracing himself on his huge legs, Sam Beckert's eyes stared and a cloudy look overtook them.

Donahue said: "Paisley's down at Headquarters. Kelly McPard picked him up. I turned him over to Kelly. It's about money, Sam. About a lot of money that was juggled over the fight. And about the Keystone Realty Company—"

Helvig choked, took a drink of water. Sam Beckert turned to look at him, then looked back at Donahue with his wide, foggy eyes.

He roared: "I don't believe it!"

"Call Headquarters and see. I told Paisley I'd come up here and tell you to

come down. He's in a tough spot and he'll need you." He nodded. "We're going to find out that the Emperor was pushed—he didn't fall. Better make it snappy, Sam. Paisley's up against it and he's expecting you."

"Yeah?" roared Sam Beckert. "Okey. We'll all go down. Come on, boys, get your duds on. The janes can stay here." He stamped across the room, took a big overcoat out of a closet, heaved into it.

Pete Korn lifted an overcoat from the back of a chair, draped it over his left arm. He was chewing on a match again.

Helvig said: "I'll stay here." He was very drunk, his face loose and his mouth twisted, his eyes glazed. "I—I'll wait."

Sam Beckert was bluff: "Come on; you get your coat on. We'll go down and show them muggs. All of us."

Helvig sagged to a chair. "I'll stay here, Sam. I got to."

"You'd better come," Donahue said.

"You hear me!" Sam Beckert boomed.

Helvig's eyes flashed. He gripped the arms of the chair. "I'm not going down. You don't need me. I—I'll stay here and keep the girls company."

Sam Beckert thumped across the room, reached down and hauled Helvig to his feet. "We're all goin' down—you hear!"

Helvig broke away and ran across the room, crouched in a corner, his eyes blazing. "I'm not!" He made a bee-line back across the room, slopped whiskey into a glass.

Sam Beckert punched the glass off the table. Helvig sucked in a breath, rasped: "It's a trick! It's a trick this fellow's playing! I don't believe Paisley's down there! I won't go!"

"You're drunk," Sam Beckert said. "The air 'll do you good. I tell you we're all goin' down!"

A glassy, cunning look came into Helvig's eyes. He cackled. "You can go. But"—he shook his head—"not me. I tell you it's a trick! You don't know if Paisley's there, do you? It's

just this fellow's say-so. I tell you it's a trick! It's a frame!"

"Shut up!" Sam Beckert roared; he growled to Pete Korn: "Come on, Pete. We got to take Doc down. It's for his own good."

"Take Doc down," Pete Korn muttered.

They started for him. But Helvig reeled backward across the room, hit the wall hard. A slab of iron-gray hair jumped down over his forehead. A gun jumped into his hand.

"I'm not going," he said.

Beckert snarled: "You dope, put down that rod!"

"You heard me, Sam. You and Pete go. But not me. Go on!" he grated. "Get out of here!" And to Donahue: "And you, too!" His breath pumped hoarsely from his wide-open mouth. Sweat shone on his contorted face.

Donahue said: "You're going, too, Helvig."

"Am I? No, I'm not! For — sake, get out! Get out!"

Sam Beckert's face was white, grave. "Doc, pull yourself together. You *got* to go with us. You *got* to. Don't you understand you *got* to go?"

Helvig's eyes shimmered. "Sam, for the love o' gawd get out. Get out before I let you have it!"

There was a moment of silence, and then Sam Beckert said: "I guess we got to go. Come on, Pete."

But Pete was chewing viciously on the match, and his eyes looked almost shut. His dry voice crackled: "I know what that baby's up to! I know! And if you think I'm gonna stand for it—"

"Pete!" roared Sam. "You're all goin' nuts! *Pete!*"

Pete Korn drew fast. Helvig fired first, but missed. Pete's shot drilled him, crashed him to the floor. There were screams in the other room.

Pete Korn whirled on Donahue, snapped: "And you hold everything! . . . Sam, frisk him."

"I'm not heeled," Donahue said, holding up his hands.

"Frisk him, Sam."

Sam Beckert crossed to Donahue, went through his pockets. He said: "He ain't heeled, Pete."

The match bobbed in Pete Korn's mouth. He rasped: "Doc's croakin'. Donahue did it, Sam."

Sam Beckert gaped.

"Donahue did it," Pete Korn repeated, making the match bob. He snapped to Donahue: "Turn that radio louder, you!"

Donahue took three steps, looked at the dials. He turned one. The radio blared, screeched. Pete walked over to Helvig, toed him. Helvig was rolling to and fro on the floor, moaning; a wild, steady stare in his eyes. Donahue picked up his hat from the top of the radio, turned. With his left hand he switched off the radio. His hat dropped from his right, and he held his gun.

"Don't drop it, Pete," he said. "Hold it—and hold that pose, darling. There'll be no prints on the gun but yours. Stay where you are, Sam. Move, Pete, and you'll get jarred."

Donahue moved sidewise, three steps. With his left hand he picked up the Continental telephone. The hotel operator answered. Donahue said: "Send up a flock of cops to Lester Paisley's apartment. A lot of people went nuts up here."



ELLY McPARD stood behind his desk, with eight fingertips resting on it. The nails were pink, clipped, clean. Rosebuds bloomed on Kelly McPard's cheeks; his eyebrows were arched high, his blue eyes twinkling. A chuckle began deep in his throat, rose and flowed out liquidly.

"Good old Donny," he said.

Donahue was eating a banana, the skin peeled in four strips and draped down over his hand.

"Helvig started it," he said. "It was funny. You can't always tell about

liquor. Helvig kept taking slug after slug—to brace him up, I guess. Instead, it let him down. He became a raving maniac, raving with fear. He was afraid to come down here. He lost all his reason. Then Pete Korn figured Helvig was making to pull a fade-out and a double-cross—and so Pete lost his head. Sam Beckert never had any head to lose, so it remained where it was. Nice people.” He took a bite of banana, chewed.

The door opened and Alex Karssen came in, swinging a stick. “I heard briefly over the phone,” he said, “that fireworks broke out in an uptown hotel.”

Kelly McPard sat down, shook with chuckles. “Pinwheels, rockets, Roman candles. . . .”

“You see, Alex,” Donahue said. He paused to swallow a lump of banana, went on: “As far back as a month ago they planned to frame the Emperor into losing not only this fight but his life as well. I think I got an inkling then that something wrong was in the wind, because Paisley started going around town making cracks against the Emperor. Up until then, Paisley had always said good things about King Brown.

“The facts now are these: The Emperor was to chuck Sam Beckert and throw in with Mike Dolan. Sam and Paisley and your Commission’s doctor, Helvig, talked it over. They were going to needle the champ. Helvig was to get a cut of ten grand.

“When that Hollywood gossip column ran that item, Sam Beckert went to Mike Dolan and called him, but Mike admitted nothing. However, Sam was sure, and not without reason, that Mike Dolan was to get the champion. In a heated argument Sam said to Dolan: ‘You’re muscling in, Mike. If ever you get the champ away from me, you’ll get him dead. I won’t give him up.’ So when Sam confronted the Emperor, the Emperor beat about the bush, but Sam knew. The Emperor was a bum actor.

“And finally Sam managed to bribe the hotel telephone operator who had

overheard Mike’s and the Emperor’s conversation, and then he knew. Sam started out for revenge, and meanwhile he planned to rake in a lot of dough while getting his revenge. The trouble was, in order to do away with the Emperor he had to do away with Dolan—because he had promised Dolan the only way he’d get the Emperor would be dead.

“Of course, Sam Beckert couldn’t be caught openly betting against his man. So what? So he turned over a pile of dough to Paisley. Paisley would bet against the champ, clean up. But then it would be risky to turn the winnings back to Beckert through open banking channels. They got the idea of a front and so formed the Keystone Realty Company.

“When Paisley cleaned up on the fight, he wrote out a check to the Keystone Realty Company for the amount he had received from Beckert to bet with plus the amount he had won. Later, the money was to dribble back to Beckert. All this we got from Paisley’s lips. Down at the hospital, we got the rest from Helvig, your Commission’s honorable doctor who okeyed the Emperor just before he went into the ring.”

“But the autopsy,” broke in Karssen, “proved that nothing had been done to the Emperor.”

Donahue said: “Nothing had. All these plans I mentioned had been laid a month before the fight. Gunmen were hired to go West and camp on Dolan’s trail, to be ready for the go-signal. The Keystone Company was formed. Beckert was all primed to bring vengeance against Dolan and at the same time make a big winning. Then a week before the fight Helvig discovered something wrong with the Emperor’s heart. He didn’t tell the Emperor but he told Beckert. The Emperor was through training and had been ordered to rest. Helvig told Beckert that any exertion would kill the champ. He told Paisley. None of them told the Emperor.

“It was Beckert who said that there

was no need then to do away with Dolan. But Helvig was scared. He knew he would examine the Emperor before the champ entered the ring. He wanted not the slightest suspicion to fall on him. He figured that if Dolan lived he would come out with the news that Beckert had threatened to turn the Emperor over to him dead. This would bring down a lot of investigation and cross-examination, and the only examination Helvig wanted was an autopsy, which he knew would be safe. So Helvig refused to send the Emperor into the ring unless Dolan was taken care of. He was afraid of Black Harlem as well as the law. Beckert knew of only one way to take care of Dolan

and he gave the word. If Brown keeled over, that was to be the signal!"

"My ——!" said Alex Karssen.

"The Emperor was okeyed by your Commission's doctor and went into the ring to die. He fought like a madman. It got him."

Karssen rasped: "I'll see that those fellows get life!"

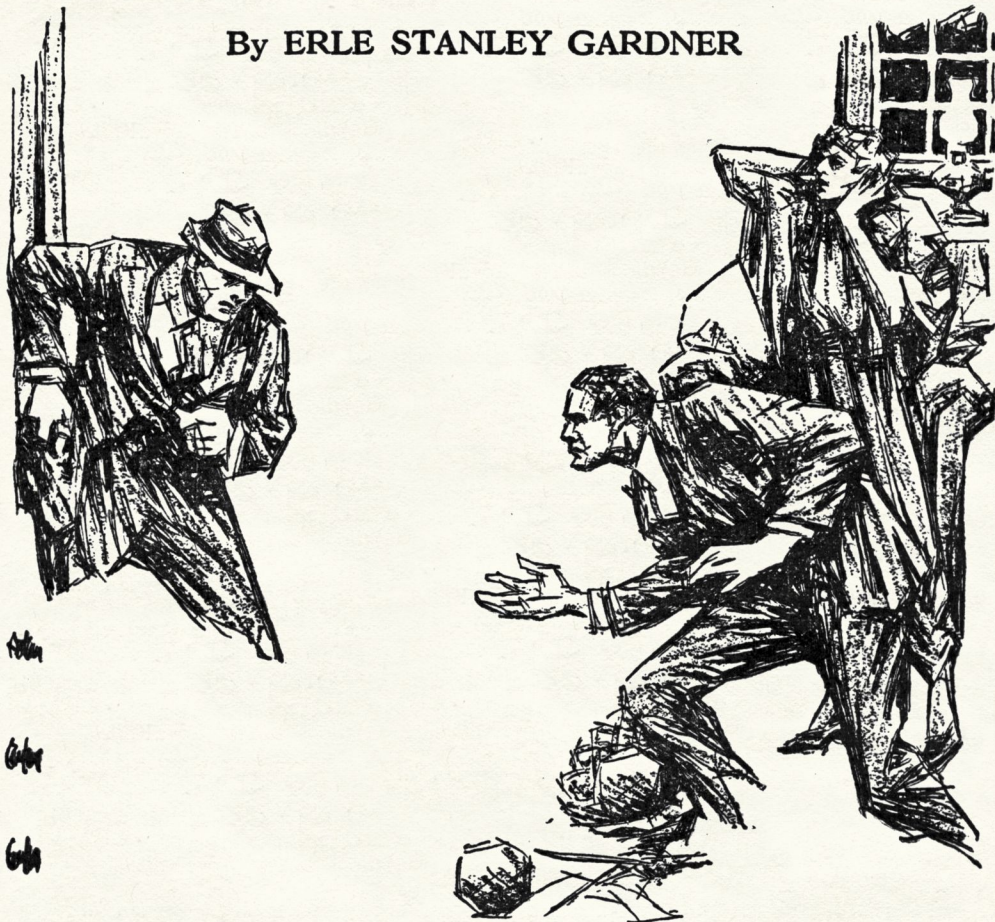
"They will," Kelly McPard said cheerfully.

"They'd better," Donahue said. He tossed the banana peel into a basket, added: "Black Harlem's honing its razors, Alex, and it's life or"—he was wiping his mouth—"else, Southern style."



Blackmail with Lead

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER



Ken Corning, fighting to break a murder frame, tangles with the killers

KEN CORNING stopped at the battered table, which ran the length of the jail room, and looked through the coarse wire screen into the face of Sam Driver; a face that was twitching nervously.

"If I'm going to be your lawyer," said Ken Corning, "I've got to have all there is to know about your case."

Sam Driver fidgeted uncomfortably in the chair on the other side of the screened partition. He acted as though he could already feel a current of electricity coursing through the chair, burning the life from his body.

"Listen," he said, "don't you s'pose you could cop a plea?"

Ken Corning shook his head.

"I sounded out the deputy D. A. They want first degree or nothing and they won't make any promises about the

death penalty. That's up to the judge."

"Jeeze," said Driver, "that's no break at all."

"You will have to give me the true facts if we're going to get anywhere," Corning told him.

Driver looked furtively around and then leaned forward and spoke rapidly, the words coming from the side of his lips.

"I wouldn't have killed Harry Green for a million dollars," he said. "We was buddies. We'd batted around together a lot. He'd give me the shirt off his back, and I'd give him my last dollar."

"We'd had a little run of luck. The cards had been breaking better for us, and we had this old flivver. We stayed at the auto camp and used the car together. I don't know where Harry went that night. He was out on a game somewhere, but he didn't have the car. I had the car. I drove it up to visit some relatives of mine on Hampshire Street."

"It was dark when I got there, and I stuck around and had a few drinks. Then I came out and got in the car and started out towards the automobile camp. I guess I was a little bit crooked. Anyway, a car drove up alongside, and a couple of dicks started to shake me down. They said my headlights was glaring, and I was driving funny. They looked the car over for booze, and found Harry Green's body in the back."

"How did it get there?" asked Corning.

"I wish I knew, boss, honest to gawd I do! It wasn't in there when I started out with the car, I know that."

"All right," said Corning, wearily, "what about the money?"

"That's another funny thing," said Driver, lowering his eyes and shifting about in his chair nervously. "I had about five thousand bucks on me. It was in crisp new bills. The bulls claim that I got that from Harry Green; that that's why I croaked him. Why, listen, I

wouldn't take any money from Harry. . . ."

"I've heard all that before," Corning said. "How did you get the money?"

"I won it fair and square, in a poker game."

"All right, you've got to produce the people who sat in that poker game."

Driver placed his hand to his face, started tugging nervously at his mouth with the tips of his fingers.

"I can't do that," he said. "They were friends of Harry's, but strangers to me. Harry introduced me to the club and I got in the game. They wouldn't admit sitting in a poker game; not with a murder rap."

Ken Corning drummed silently on the table, with the tips of his fingers. His steady eyes bored into the cowering optics of the man on the other side of the screen.

"Get this, Driver," he said slowly, "and get it straight. Unless you can give me the truth on that case, and I can make something out of it, you're going to get the death penalty."

Driver's lips quivered. He held them with his fingers for a moment. His eyes were shifty with panic.

"All right," he said, "give me a chance to think things over a bit. Maybe I can work out something."

"You've got to have something that you can tell a jury," said Ken Corning slowly. "Something that the jury will believe; something that is going to sound logical, in spite of all the cross-examination a District Attorney gives you. In short, Driver, the only thing that will work is the truth."

"But I told you the truth."

"It doesn't sound like it," said Ken Corning grimly.

"To you, or to a jury?" asked Driver.

"Neither to me nor a jury," Ken Corning said slowly.

Driver wet his lips nervously with the tip of his tongue, said nothing.

"Do you," asked Ken Corning, taking a notebook from his pocket, "know a

woman by the name of Ella Ambrose?"

Sam Driver nodded his head slowly.

"Yes," he said, "she lives out there near where the folks are, on Hampshire Street."

"What does she know about the case?" asked Corning.

The eyes of the prisoner sought his face, and, for the first time during the interview, became steady.

"Search me," he said. "She can't know anything about it."

Corning nodded.

"Yes, she knows something about it. I can't figure just what it is, but it's something that she thinks is important. She wants me to come down to the house, after dark tonight, and not to let anyone know I'm coming. She sent me a message."

Driver shook his head and made a simultaneous gesture with his shoulders and the palms of his hands.

"You better go see her," he said. "Maybe she knows something, but be sure it's something that's going to help me. If it ain't, get her out of the country."

Corning suddenly snapped a swift question at the prisoner.

"Driver," he said, "what did you do with the gun that killed Harry Green?"

For what seemed like three long seconds, Sam Driver sat with sagging jaw, and looked as though someone had slapped him in the face with a wet towel. His eyes bulged, and the muscles of his throat worked convulsively. Suddenly he said, all in one breath: "Jeeze, boss, I never saw any gun. For gawd's sake, don't you go getting an idea like that through your head. How would I know what happened to the gun?"

Ken Corning got to his feet.

"That," he said, "is just a mild sample of what the District Attorney is going to do to you on cross-examination. You've got to answer the questions better than that, or you'll get murder in the first."

WIND tugged at the skirts of Ken Corning's overcoat as he stood on the dark street corner and strained his eyes at the shadowy houses, trying to see the numbers above the doors.

He moved forward, out of the circle of illumination cast by the street lamp, and became conscious of motion in the darkness.

He whirled and stood tense.

A lad of about twelve years of age came out from behind a board fence. He was leaning against the wind, and his cap was pulled down low against the tug of the gale. The light from the corner showed a young-old face, with shrewd, peering eyes, and a much frayed coat that was originally several sizes too large.

"You're Ken Corning, the big lawyer?" the boy asked.

"Yes, I'm Corning."

"My mom, she was afraid you couldn't find the place, so she sent me to wait around," said the boy.

"Who is your mother, lad?"

"Mrs. Ambrose. She's the one you're goin' to see."

Ken Corning nodded his head. "All right, son," he said, "let's go."

The boy remarked in a swiftly nervous monotone, "We'd better cut through the alley. Mom's afraid somebody may be watching the place."

"Why should they watch the place?"

"I don't know. Mom told me not to talk nothing over with you, just to bring you to the house."

The boy slipped through the gate in the fence. "Watch your step when you get around here," he warned. "There's a bunch of tin cans over there on the side."

He moved unerringly, following some path which was invisible to the lawyer's eyes. All above was smelly darkness. Houses fronted on the narrow street; houses that were cheap and unpretentious, yet were palaces beside the hovels

which were scattered around the backs of the lots. All about were the sounds of human occupancy; low voices which carried through the flimsy walls of mean structures, the raucous blasts of a cheap radio which sounded from a living-room where comparative affluence announced its presence in strident tones.

The shadow grew deeper and Corning's guide was but a blotch of black moving against a dark background. Abruptly he paused.

"This is the place," said the boy, and started beating lightly with his knuckles on a door.

"Who is it?" asked thin, tired tones from the interior.

"It's me, mom."

"Did *he* come with you?"

"Yeah. Open up."

A bolt rasped back on the inside of the door, then, as the door swung open, an oblong of dim light from an oil lamp silhouetted the broad hips and shoulders of a heavy-set woman who hulked in the doorway.

"Come in," said the woman.

Ken Corning stepped into the dark room. The woman pushed the door shut.

"I couldn't understand," said Corning, cautiously, "why you didn't come to the office."

The woman placed a finger to her lips, looked over at the boy. "Frank," she said, "you run over and see if Jimmy won't let you stay with him for a while."

The boy turned the knob, held the door against the wind, slipped out into the night.

KEN CORNING stared at the woman. She was in the early fifties. Adversity had stamped its mark upon her, and her face had set in lines of whining defiance, as though she had learned to cope with the world by aggressively protesting her rights with shrill-voiced insistence. Her features were heavy, the eyes small and sharp. The lower jaw was full and determined, but the upper part of the mouth seemed pinched, with a high, narrow roof.

"You're defending Sam Driver?" she said.

Ken Corning nodded.

"Why didn't you come to the office?"

"Because they got the place watched."

"Who has?"

"I d'know. Maybe the police."

"Why have they got the place watched?"

"I spoke out of turn," she said.

"To whom?" Corning inquired.

"The cop on the beat. I told him that I didn't think Sam Driver was guilty, and that I knew some stuff that would give him a break. The cop told me I'd better keep out of things that didn't concern me. Right after that, men started to stand around in front of the house. They waited in automobiles, and poked around, as though they had business, but they didn't fool me any. They were dicks, watching me."

"All right," said Ken Corning, "what do you know?"

She leered at him shrewdly.

"There's got to be something in it for me," she told him.

Slowly, Ken Corning shook his head.

"All the money that Sam Driver has," he said, "is held by the law, on the theory that it belonged to Harry Green, the man he's charged with killing. If I can get him acquitted, naturally he gets that money back. I'm going to take most of it for my fee. There'll be some left for him and some for expenses. If he wants to make you a present after the case is over, that's up to him."

She twisted her fingers together and looked at Corning with avaricious eyes that took in every detail of his tailor-made clothes.

"Seems like it's going to be pretty soft for you, if you get him off. Seems like I'd oughtta have some cash."

"No," said Corning, "they'd ask you about that when you got on the witness stand. If you told them I'd given you a single nickel, they'd make it appear I'd bought your evidence."

"I wouldn't have to tell them," she suggested.

"You won't get anywhere with that line. And it doesn't listen well. If you know anything, go ahead and tell me."

She twisted her fingers for a moment, then suddenly broke into speech.

"All right," she said. "I know Sam Driver, and I know his sister-in-law well. They've got a place here on Hampshire Street. The man's got a job, and they've got a radio 'n everything."

"Yes," said Corning. "What of it?"

"Well, Driver used to come and visit them. Sometimes he'd bring Harry Green with him. More often he'd come alone. He drove a flivver, and kept it parked out in front of the place when he was inside. I got so I knowed the flivver."

"The night of the murder, I knew that Driver was inside, at his sister-in-law's, hoisting a few. I was going uptown, and I saw a man walking up and down the sidewalk, and I figured I'd wait until he got out of the way, before I came out into view."

"I seen a new model Cadillac car come down and stop side of Driver's flivver. Guys got out that had on evening clothes. You could see the white of them in the light that came from the street lamp. There were two of them. I saw them pull something from the Cadillac and put it in the flivver. It was something heavy."

"Could you see definitely what it was?" asked Corning slowly.

"No. But it was heavy."

"How do you know the car was a Cadillac?"

"It was a Cadillac," she said, doggedly enough, "a new model Cadillac. I keep up on automobiles because my boy talks about them all the time. He knows every new car that comes out."

Ken Corning looked at her searchingly.

"You don't look like the type of woman who would be interested in a Cadillac automobile."

"I knew that new model Cadillac."

"All right. Then what happened?"

"Then," she said, "they went around

to the headlights on Driver's automobile and started doing something to them with a monkey wrench or something. I thought they were car thieves that was stealing the headlights, but they were dressed too good for that."

"Go on," Corning told her.

"That's about all. I got to thinking things over, and I thought you'd ought to know."

"Got the license number on the Cadillac car?" he asked.

She shook her head rapidly.

"No," she said, "I . . ."

There was the sound of peremptory knuckles banging on the door.

"Open up!" said a gruff voice. "This is the law."

She looked in swift consternation at Ken Corning.

"You double-crossed me," she said.

Corning shook his head. He was on his feet, standing over in a corner of the room, shifting his eyes from the face of the woman to the door.

The door quivered, then banged open, shivering in the wind.

Three men pushed their way into the room. The last man shoved the door closed, and the oil light flickered and danced in the wind.

"Well," said Corning, "what's the trouble?"

The man who had been the first into the room looked at Corning.

"Nothing that concerns you, buddy," he said. "It's something that concerns the woman. She's been selling hooch."

"I have not!" said the woman.

The detective grinned.

"Got a warrant?" asked Ken Corning.

The man's voice was scornful. "Of course I have," he said.

"But I haven't been selling any booze. I haven't got any booze. I don't know anything about . . ."

"Look around, boys," said the man who was in charge.

"I think," said Ken Corning, "that I'll have to take a look at that warrant."

"Sure," said the officer, with elaborate

sarcasm. "Go right ahead and look at it all you want to. Read it and weep."

He took a folded paper from his pocket, passed it to Ken Corning with exaggerated courtesy.

Corning looked at the search warrant, which was duly issued and in regular form. One of the men had gone to the closet, and was bending over, sending the beam of a flashlight to the dark interior. Suddenly he called: "Okey, chief, here it is."

The woman started to cry.

"I didn't mean anything," she said. "Just some stuff that I kept there to take when I wasn't feeling good. I never sold any and I never gave any away. I'm a poor widow woman, with a little boy to support, and . . ."

The man in charge grinned at Ken Corning, then turned his eyes to the woman, and interrupted her wailing excuses.

"Get your coat on, sister," he said. "We've got a car waiting outside."

Ken Corning pulled his overcoat up around his neck.

"I'll be seeing you boys later," he said, and pushed his way out into the windy night.

IT was two hours later when Ken Corning arrived at the jail with a writ of *habeas corpus* and a fifteen thousand dollar bail bond, issued by a company that knew him and accepted his guarantee. Ella Ambrose was delivered into his custody.

She climbed into the car, sat at his side, and said to him: "Did you get me out?"

"Yes," he said.

"Did they dismiss the charge?"

"No, I had to get a writ of *habeas corpus* and get you out on bail."

"Thanks," she remarked, after a moment.

"I want you to go to my office and make a statement," he told her.

"Sure," she told him, with ready loquaciousness. "But I've got to get back and find out about my boy. Maybe he

came back and went to bed, or maybe he stayed over at his friend's house."

"All right," Corning told her. "I'll take you home first if you want."

"I wish you would."

He pushed the car into speed.

"Then you can come back to the office with me, and give me a statement," he said.

"Yes," she remarked in a colorless tone of mechanical acquiescence.

"About this Cadillac car," said Corning. "Do you suppose . . ."

"Of course," she said, "I couldn't be sure it was a Cadillac."

"Could you see what the men were carrying?"

"No, I couldn't really swear that they carried anything. I saw a car stop, and then the men got out."

"But you're certain they carried something over and put it in Sam Driver's automobile, is that right?"

"No, I'm not certain of it, I think they did."

"What makes you think they did? Didn't you see them?"

"No, I can't swear that I saw them. That is, I saw them moving around, and then, after I read about the case in the papers, I got to thinking that that's what they *might have done*."

"Two men?" asked Corning.

"Yes, there were two men."

"In evening clothes?"

"Well, they probably had on evening clothes. I can't be certain about that."

"I see," Corning told her, and lapsed into silence. He drove her to her house, held the door open for her.

"You're going to wait for me to go back and make a statement?" she asked.

"No," he said gravely, "I don't think I'll need a statement."

"Thanks a lot," she said, "for what you did in getting me out."

"Not at all," he told her.

When she had vanished into the shadows about the cheap houses, which clustered together in the lot like freight cars in a railroad yard, Corning savagely snapped his car into gear, and drove

furiously, until he came to an all-night drug-store where there was a telephone.

He put through two calls.

The first was to his office, telling Helen Vail to get a taxicab and go home. The second was to the office of the company that had written the bail bond at his request.

"On that Ella Ambrose bail on *habeas corpus*," he told the bonding company, "I've lost interest in the case. I wish you'd pick up the defendant and get a release of the bail bond."

The voice at the other end of the line chuckled.

"Sorry, old man," it said, "but there's been a note come through, that the case is to be dismissed and the complaint withdrawn."

"I see," said Ken Corning, and hung up the receiver.



JOE VARE, private detective, sat in Ken Corning's office, and looked across at the lawyer.

"I don't get you," he said.

"It's simple," Corning told him. "Go to the Cadillac agency, get the list of new car deliveries, check the people carefully, find out if one of them *might* be the sort to have had some connection either with Sam Driver, or with Harry Green."

Vare twisted a half-smoked cigar thoughtfully, rolling it with his thumb and forefinger.

"Driver and Green were bums?" he said.

"You might call them that."

"Think they'd have friends who drove new Cadillacs?"

Corning leaned forward.

"Get this, Vare," he said. "This is a murder case, and the Cadillac car is a lead. In a murder case I run down *all* leads, no matter how shaky they look." Vare got to his feet and grinned at the attorney.

"Okey," he said. "I'm on my way."

As the detective left the office, Helen Vail slipped through the door, closed it behind her, and said softly: "There's a Mrs. Brown out there, who wants to see you about the Driver case."

"All right," said Corning, "let's take a look at her."

Helen Vail held the door open and nodded. A woman of approximately thirty or thirty-one years of age, modishly attired, came into the office, and regarded the attorney from wide, brown eyes. She wore a brown, tight-fitting hat, brown dress, brown shoes and stockings. Her clothes gave the appearance of well-tailored wealth.

"Sit down," said Corning, as Helen Vail gently closed the door.

The woman dropped into a chair.

"What can I do for you, Mrs. Brown?"

"Nothing," she said. "I think I can do something for *you*."

He raised his eyebrows.

She opened her purse and took out a roll of currency, which she held in her gloved fingers.

"I'm going to be frank with you," she said.

"Yes," said Corning, "go ahead."

"You're representing a man by the name of Sam Driver, who is accused of murder?"

"Yes."

"I don't want Mr. Driver to know that I came to you."

"Does he know you, Mrs. Brown?"

"Yes," she said. "You see, I used to know Sam Driver in the old days—that was a long time ago. Our roads separated. We went different ways. He went his way and I went mine. He went down and I went up."

"All right," he said. "Go on."

"The District Attorney hasn't got much of a case against Driver. It's largely circumstantial evidence. You've beaten the prosecution once or twice in some spectacular cases. They're afraid of you. If you'll have Driver think up some good story about a fight and a killing in self-defense, the District At-

torney will let Driver plead guilty to manslaughter. But if the man stands trial, he's going to be railroaded."

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't know. I know there are powerful influences at work against him, that's all."

"Where do you get your information?" asked Corning, watching her closely.

"About what?"

"About the District Attorney's office, for instance, and the powerful influences."

She shook her head, and the brown eyes softened into a twinkle as she regarded him.

"You have your professional secrets," she said. "I have mine. I'm just telling you."

"Well, then," he said, "tell me some more."

She looked down at the tips of her gloved fingers, suddenly raised her eyes, and, with an expression of utter candor on her face, said: "If he doesn't plead guilty, they're going to give him the death penalty."

"Why?" he asked.

"For lots of reasons. There's politics mixed up in it, and you know what politics are in York City."

"Yes," he told her, "I know. But why should politics be mixed up in the killing of a hobo?"

"That's something else again," she replied. "You're frightfully inquisitive for a lawyer."

"Well, what am I supposed to do?"

"Take this money. Use it as an additional fee. I don't suppose you got much from Sam Driver. Go ahead and work out a good story with him. It's got to be a good story with a self-defense angle to it—something that the District Attorney's office can give to the newspapers to keep the people from making a very strong protest when they accept a plea of manslaughter."

"Who handles the publicity?" asked Corning, still watching her narrowly.

"You fix up the story," she said.

"Your client will spill it to a newspaper reporter or the District Attorney."

"Suppose he makes a statement that constitutes an admission to the killing, and then you're wrong about what the District Attorney is going to do?" Corning asked.

"I'm not wrong."

"That's what you say. I can't risk my client's life on the strength of your unsupported word."

She bit her lip for a moment.

"I hadn't thought of that," she said, slowly.

She looked down at the tip of her brown shoe for a few moments, then straightened and pushed the money across the desk towards Ken Corning.

"I think I can figure out a way so it will be all right," she said.

Ken Corning regarded the roll of bills.

"I can't take money from you," he said, "to do what *you* think is best for my client. I've got to do what *I* think is best."

"I understand that. But I know you wouldn't take the money from me, unless you were going to play fair."

Ken Corning reached out and took the money.

"Just a moment," he said, moving towards the outer office, "and I'll get you a receipt."

Ken Corning pushed his way through the door, closed it behind him, and nodded to his secretary.

"Helen," he said, in low, swift tones, "put on your hat, go down on the elevator and stand in the lobby of the building. When this woman comes out, tail her. See where she goes. Let me know as soon as you find out."

She slid back her chair from the desk, and was reaching for her hat as Corning turned back towards the private office. He had a blank receipt form in his hand.

"You'll have to give me your full name, in order to get a receipt," he said to the woman who called herself Mrs. Brown.

"I don't want a receipt," she said.

Ken Corning shrugged his shoulders.

The woman got to her feet, smoothed down her skirt, and smiled at him.

"I think we understand each other," she said.

"I'm not certain that I understand you," he told her.

"Oh, well," she said brightly, "I think I understand you—perfectly."

She was very trim and straight as she marched from the office, closing the door gently after her.



SEVERAL minutes passed, and Corning heard the door of the outer office open and close. He remembered that Helen Vail was out, and got to his feet, walked across his private office, and opened the door.

A tall, well-groomed man, with cold eyes and a smiling mouth, said: "You're Ken Corning?"

Corning nodded.

"I'm Jerry Bigelow," said the man, and shook hands.

As he saw there was no look of recognition on Corning's face, he added: "The man who runs the column entitled 'Inside Stuff' in *The Courier*."

Corning ushered him into the inner office, and the man sat down in a huge leather chair, crossed his knees, and tapped a cigarette on a polished thumb-nail.

"I've got orders to mention your name in my column," he said.

"All right," said Corning with a grin. "Are you going to pan me, or give me a boost?"

"That's up to you," said the columnist.

Corning raised his eyebrows.

"You know," said Bigelow, "I like to give the inside facts a little bit before the public gets them. I like to give it a touch of spice, and give the impression of being very much in the know."

Corning nodded once more, silently, warily, his eyes half slitted as they watched the man who had called on him.

"Now," Bigelow said, still smiling with his lips, but his cold eyes fastened on the smoke which curled upward from his cigarette, "there's been some talk going around town about you. They say that you have busted a lot of precedents, fought the political ring that's supposed to be running York City, and are making a lot of money."

Ken Corning said nothing.

"I just thought," remarked Bigelow, "that if I should write up a little sketch for my column that you had whipped the big boys into line, and they were going to give you a break from now on, it might do you some good."

"What are you getting at?" Corning asked.

"Well," Bigelow said, "you're representing a bum and a panhandler who's got a murder rap on him, Sam Driver. The prosecution has got a dead open-and-shut case on him, but there's been a rumor going around that you've got the D. A.'s office a little jumpy because you've managed to get some acquittals in cases they thought were dead open-and-shut."

"Well?" asked Corning.

"Well," said Bigelow, "there's talk that the District Attorney doesn't know exactly what to do in this Driver case. He's got some circumstantial evidence, but it doesn't show very much. If Driver should come out and change his story, and admit that he did the killing, but claim that it was done in self-defense, because he found out that Green had been mixed up in some pretty shady stuff that Driver didn't approve of, there's a pretty good chance the District Attorney would figure he didn't have enough evidence to go on with a murder case, and he might let Driver get a plea of manslaughter."

"What makes you think the D. A. would let Driver make a manslaughter plea?" asked Corning.

"Just a little inside stuff," Bigelow told him. "Of course I keep my ear pretty close to the ground."

"Okey," said Corning. "Then suppose

I *don't* have Driver put up a self-defense story, and take the rap for manslaughter. Then what's going to happen?"

The smile left Bigelow's lips, his cold eyes fastened directly on Ken Corning.

"I've got orders," he said, "to mention your name. If you did something that was pretty clever, I could write it up and give out the dope that you had been taken in on the inside. If you passed up a chance to make a clever play, and did something dumb, I'd probably have to write that you weren't such big-time stuff after all; that you'd let a fast one slip through your fingers because you couldn't use the old bean."

Corning got slowly to his feet.

"All right," he said, "I guess you've said all you were supposed to say, haven't you?"

Bigelow pinched out the end of his cigarette, dropped it into an ashtray, regarded Corning thoughtfully, and then said slowly: "Yes, I guess I have."

He started to walk from the office, but turned at the door.

"Let me know, will you?" he said. "Because I'm anxious to get your name in my column."

"Don't worry," Corning told him, "I'll let you know."

The telephone was ringing when Corning closed the door of his inner office, behind Bigelow's departing figure. He scooped the receiver to his ear, and heard Helen Vail's voice.

"Listen, chief," she said. "I followed her to a private automobile—a coupé. I picked up a taxi and tailed her. She got away, but I got the license number of the automobile before she gave me the slip."

"Did she know she was being followed?" asked Ken Corning.

"I don't think so, chief. It was just a bum break in the traffic."

"All right," said Corning, "what about the license number?"

"I telephoned in to the police registration department," Helen Vail said, "and got a friend of mine on the line. I

didn't tell him, of course, what I wanted to know for. He gave me the registration."

"All right," said Ken Corning, "what was it?"

"The car," said Helen Vail, "is registered in the name of Stella Bixel. She's the widow of the man who was killed by the burglar in the country cabin last fall. You may remember the case . . ."

"Okey," said Ken Corning, crisply, "that's good work, Helen. Come on back to the office."



CORNING looked across his desk, into the speculative eyes of Edward Millwright, the expert on handwriting, fingerprints and questioned

documents, whom he had asked to come in to see him.

"Can you," he asked, "get access to the police files, or to the Bureau of Criminal Identification records?"

The handwriting expert squinted his eyes thoughtfully.

"I *have* done so," he said, "on cases where I was working with the police, and once or twice on cases where I had uncovered some evidence which the police thought would be of value."

"Could you get somebody else to look up some information for you and pass it out?"

"I might."

"All right," said Corning, "here's another question. I understand that recently they're taking fingerprints of bodies that go through the morgue."

The expert nodded.

"I am representing," said Ken Corning, "a man named Sam Driver, who is accused of the murder of Harry Green, a gambler, panhandler, and general bum. I don't think anyone ever claimed the body of Green. I think it was finally buried, after an autopsy, at county expense. The body went through the morgue, and I think fingerprints were taken."

"All right," said Millwright, "what do you want me to do?"

"I want you," said Corning, slowly, "to find out what's funny about the case."

"How do you mean?"

"There's something funny about the case—something that I don't know anything about. I don't think it's anything connected with Sam Driver, so I think it's something connected with Harry Green, the murdered man. I want you to get those fingerprints and check them."

"I could get the fingerprints," said the expert, "the records of the morgue are open. But I'm not so certain about checking them; not the way you want them checked, anyway."

"Don't you know some peace officer who could wire the classification in to some of the central identification bureaus?"

"I might work that, yes."

"All right, do that; and furthermore, I wish you to check up the fingerprints with any police bulletins that may be floating around, on unsolved crimes."

"In other words, you think there's something fishy about this man, Green, is that it?"

"I don't know," Corning said slowly, "but I'm going to find out. There's something funny about the case, and pretty powerful influences are bringing pressure to bear on me, to make me handle it in a certain way."

"Why should powerful influences be mixed up in a case involving a hobo?" Millwright wanted to know.

"That's what I want to find out," said Corning.

Millwright nodded, got to his feet.

"With any kind of luck," he said, "I can let you know inside of twenty-four hours; otherwise, it'll just be a slow and tedious process, with the cards stacked against me."

He was shaking hands with Millwright, when Vare, the private detective, came into the room.

Vare waited until the door had closed

behind Millwright, then sat down and pulled a list from his pocket.

"Well," he said, "I got a list of all of the Cadillacs that have been purchased in the last year. That is, of course, those that were purchased from the agency here in the city, or those that were registered as being owned in the city."

"Does it give us anything?" asked Corning.

"Not a thing," Vare said. "It was a crazy proposition thinking that it would. As I understand it, you figure Sam Driver may be hooked up with somebody who bought a Cadillac. Driver's a hobo, a crook and a murderer. The list of the fellows who bought Cadillacs reads like a social directory. Everybody on this list has got some social position, except the three fellows who have stars opposite their names—they're bootleggers."

"Well," said Corning, "a bootlegger may have some connection with a murderer."

Vare grinned.

"Try to uncover it," he said. "Those birds work pretty fast and play 'em pretty close to their chest. Try to nose into their business, and see what happens."

Ken Corning's forefinger slid down the list. Abruptly it came to a stop and he looked at the detective.

"I notice," he said, "that Harrison Burman bought a Cadillac."

Vare nodded.

"Burman," he said, "is the owner of *The Courier*. That's the paper that stands in with the big shots. It comes pretty near running the town."

"Wait a minute—wait a minute!" said Corning. A strange light of excitement was growing in his eyes.

He grabbed a pad and wrote names on it, which Vare could not see—names set in the form of a circle with short lines leading from one to the next.

In order as he scribbled, they were:

Green — Driver — Mrs. Bixel — *The Courier* — Jerry Bigelow — George Bixel

—Harrison Burman. The name Burman completed the circle next to that of Green.

Ken Corning crumpled the sheet, looked at the private detective and grinned.

"Do you remember," he asked, "a murder case that took place last October, a chap by the name of George Bixel?"

"Sure," Vare said. "I remember something about the facts of the case. There was quite a bit of comment about it at the time. It was one of those lonely mountain cabins, and a crook pulling a hold-up, trying to get Mrs. Bixel's jewelry. Her husband came in and tried to hold the guy for the police. The guy shot him and escaped."

"Harrison Burman was up there in the cabin at the time, wasn't he?" Corning asked.

Vare looked at the attorney, and his forehead puckered into a frown.

"What the hell are you driving at?"

"Nothing," said Corning. "I'm just asking you about the case. You should remember it fairly well. It seems to me there's a reward out for the murderer, or there was at one time."

Vare nodded slowly.

"All right," said Corning, "what are the facts, as nearly as you can remember them?"

"Bixel and his wife went up to the cabin," said Vare. "It wasn't Bixel's cabin. It was a cabin they had secured from a friend somewhere. In fact, come to think of it, I think it was a cabin Burman had hired or owned, or something. Anyway, Bixel and his wife went up there and asked Burman to come up and join them for a week-end."

"While they were there," he went on, "a yegg got into the room one night when Mrs. Bixel was dressing, and tried to stick her up for her jewels. George Bixel happened to come into the room. He grappled with the yegg, and Mrs. Bixel screamed. Burman was outside somewhere. He came in on the run, just as the shot was fired that killed

Bixel, and the crook turned the gun on Mrs. Bixel. Burman struck at the crook and jiggled his arm so that the shot went wild. Then Burman tried to grab the man, but the man jumped to the window, took a shot at Burman, which missed, and jumped out and ran away. The police found the gun where he'd left it by the window."

"Fingerprints on the gun?" asked Corning.

"Yes, fingerprints on the gun, and the police were able to trace it by the numbers, and I think they managed to identify the man who had pulled the job. He was an ex-convict; one who had been paroled. I can look it up in just a few minutes and let you know."

"All right," Corning said. "Look it up and telephone me."

"Anything else?" asked Vare.

Corning shook his head.

"Go get that information," he said, "and let me know as soon as you can. That's what I'm after right now."

Vare nodded and left the office.

Ken Corning got up from behind his desk and started pacing the floor. He paced back and forth for almost twenty minutes, and then the telephone rang. Vare's voice came to him over the wire:

"Got all the dope on that case, Corning," he said. "The convict's name was Richard Post. He's got a long criminal record, most of it for petty stuff. He was paroled from the pen on a charge of forgery, and two weeks after his parole, pulled this hold-up in the mountain cabin."

"Have the police got out dodgers for him on this Bixel murder?" asked Corning.

"Oh, sure," said Vare. "I've got one of them here in the office."

"Gives fingerprints and everything?"

"Yes. Gives his criminal record and a photograph—front and side."

"Thanks," said Corning, "I think that's all," and hung up.

He put through a call to Millwright, the handwriting expert.

"Millwright," he said, "the police have

got a dodger out on a convict named Richard Post. He's wanted for murder. The dodger has got his fingerprints, taken from the jail records; also front and side photographs. I wish you'd hunt up that dodger and check it with the fingerprints of this man, Harry Green, who was murdered."

"I can do that for you in just about five minutes," Vare said. "I've got the fingerprints from the morgue records, and we keep a file of the police dodgers."

"Okey," said Corning, "I'll hold the phone."

He held the receiver to his ear, lit a cigarette, and had smoked less than one-third of it, when Millwright's excited voice came to his ears.

"Got it!" he said. "And it's a good hunch."

"The same man?" asked Corning.

"The same man. There can't be any doubt about it; the fingerprints check. The man that was murdered is the man the police have been looking for, under the name of Richard Post. He's the one who murdered George Bixel in a hold-up in a mountain cabin."

"All right," said Corning, "that's all I wanted to know."

"What do you want me to do with the information?" asked Millwright. "Pass it on to the police? They'll be interested to know that the Bixel murder case is cleared up."

Corning chuckled.

"The reason that I got you to work on this thing," he said, "instead of a man who had any police affiliations, is because I wanted to control the information, once I'd secured it."

"What do you want me to do with it?" asked Millwright.

"Lock it up tight in a safe and then forget it's there," Ken Corning said slowly. "When I want to use it, I'll ask you about it. Until then, sew it up in a sack."

Millwright's voice was dubious.

"That," he said, "is plain dynamite. It's going to get out sooner or later."

"All right," Corning said, "let's make

it later. Forget that you know a thing about it."

He hung up the receiver, and grinned triumphantly.



MORNING threaded his way through the narrow alleys where the little houses were crowded close together. He found the one where he had called on Mrs. Ambrose, and after searching in vain for a bell button, resorted to his knuckles.

There was no answer.

He pounded again. After a minute or two, the door of an adjoining shack opened, and a hatchet-faced woman, with sharp black eyes, stared at him.

"Are you in charge of these houses?" he asked.

"Yes, what do you want?"

"Is this the house occupied by Mrs. Ella Ambrose?"

"She's gone."

"Where did she go?"

"I don't know. She packed up all of a sudden, and got out inside of an hour. I thought maybe somebody was dead or something. She wouldn't tell any of us anything. But she paid her rent when she left."

"Is that unusual?" asked Corning.

"It was with her," she said. "She was away behind with her rent. She paid it all up."

Corning stood, thinking, for a moment, then said:

"I'd like to rent this house."

"All right," she said, "it's for rent if you've got the money. It's cash in advance, and no wild parties. This is a respectable place, tenanted by people that are trying to get along."

Corning pulled out his wallet. "I'll pay a month's rent in advance."

"You'll pay two months' rent in advance," she said, "I've had enough trouble with these houses."

Corning paid the small sum demanded as rent, pocketed the receipt, received

the keys to the place, and returned to open the door.

The place was furnished as he had seen it last. All that had been taken were the personal belongings of Mrs. Ambrose. The rooms still held that peculiar musty smell of stale cooking. There was the same rickety furniture with its faded upholstery, trying bravely to put up a bold front.

Corning prowled about for fifteen or twenty minutes, then locked the door, pocketed the key, returned to his car, and went to his office.

Helen Vail stared at him curiously.

"You're going to put on a one-act skit," he told her.

"What about?"

"You remember the Mrs. Ella Ambrose that we got out on *habeas corpus*?"

"Sure I do."

"All right. She's moved away."

"Suddenly?"

"Yes."

"I take it Santa Claus came down the chimney and gave her a big wad of coin and she moved away without leaving an address."

"That's exactly what happened," said Corning. "And it just occurred to me that the person who played Santa Claus for her doesn't know her personally."

He tossed the key to the little shack on the desk, and said: "Get some of the oldest clothes you can find. Get your hair all snarled up and let your face go to seed. Take a little grease paint and make lines around your eyes."

She grinned.

"Then," he said, "go down to the place on Hampshire Street, where there's a bunch of shacks clustered together in the back part of the block. It's way out in the sticks. I'll give you the address. It's on a rent receipt somewhere." He fished around in his pocket until he found the rent receipt, and tossed it over to her.

"Then what do I do?" she asked.

"Then," he said, "you pretend that you're Mrs. Ella Ambrose, and put on an act. I've got to write it out. Bring

your book, and I'll dictate the things I want you to say. The first thing we've got to do, however, is to make a decoy note."

"What do you mean?"

"Write," he said, "in an angular, feminine handwriting a note addressed to Harrison Burman. It will read as follows:

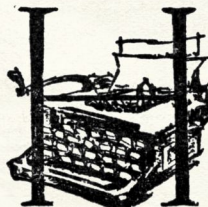
"I got to thinking things over, and I don't know where I stand. I know well enough who's back of the whole business. I'm going to talk with you before I go away and stay away. After I started away, I got to thinking things over. I've got a boy, and it ain't fair to him, so I figured I'd come back. You've got to come down to my place and talk with me personally. I'll be expecting you this evening. When you do that, I'll be satisfied, but I ain't going to do no wrong with a boy to bring up. Yours respectfully, Mrs. Ella Ambrose."

"Think he'll fall for that?" asked Helen Vail, looking at her shorthand notes with puckered eyes.

"I don't know," said Corning. "If he doesn't fall for that one, I'll think up another one. But I think this will do the work. Write it without any punctuation and don't use many capitals. Make it look illiterate—like the sort of letters we get from cranks."

Helen Vail set to work.

After the letter was finished and mailed, Corning spent some time giving careful instructions to his alert secretary and having her repeat them back to him until he was satisfied.



ELEN VAIL sat in a dilapidated overstuffed chair in Mrs. Ambrose's former home. She wore stockings that were shapeless, with runs in each stocking. Her dress was ill-fitting and had evidently been dyed by unskilled

hands. The color was a nondescript black which seemed to have been unequally spread over brown, with the brown peeping through in places. There were deep lines etched about her mouth and her eyes. In the dim light, she seemed twenty-five years older than her real age. She was patiently embroidering.

Knuckles sounded on the door.

"Come in," she called.

The door pushed open, and a big man with a curiously white face, stood on the threshold.

"Mrs. Ambrose?" he asked.

"Come in," she said, in a thin toneless voice of great weariness.

He closed the door behind him.

"I'm Harrison Burman," he said slowly. "I got your letter."

Helen Vail sighed. It sounded like a sigh of weariness, but it was of intense relief. The man did not know the real Ella Ambrose and had taken her at her word.

"All right," she said. "Come in and sit down. I want to talk with you."

Burman's tone was cautious. "You want money?" he asked.

"No. I just want to put my mind at rest."

"All right," he told her irritably, "go ahead and put it at rest. You probably know that you're double-crossing me. You're not living up to your bargain. You had promised to be in Colorado by this time, and to stay there."

Helen Vail acted her part perfectly.

"I can't help it," she said, in that same lifeless tone which is the unconscious badge of those who have given up the struggle. "I'm a mother with a boy to bring up and I want to bring him up right."

"Well," rasped Burman, "what is it you want?"

"I know a lot more than most people think I know," she said.

"Have you got to go into all that?"

"Yes," she said, "into all of it."

"Then go ahead and get it over with."

His hands were pushed down deep into his coat pockets.

Helen Vail kept her eyes downcast and spoke in the same weary monotone.

"I knew Sam Driver," she said, "and Driver talked to me, and I knew Harry Green, who wasn't Harry Green, but was Richard Post, a man wanted for murder."

"Sure," said Burman irritably, "we know all that. That's why you got the money to get out of the country. If it hadn't been for that, you wouldn't have had a cent."

"I know," she said, in that patient monotone of weariness. "And I know something else. Harry Green didn't kill George Bixel. You paid him to take the rap. You got caught with Mrs. Bixel. George Bixel, her husband, caught you, and you shot him."

"I guess you had to do it to keep him from shootin' you. Maybe you're to blame. Maybe you ain't. That's what bothers me. I got that on my conscience and I can't sleep. You didn't think I knew about it. You thought I just knew about planting Harry's body in Sam Driver's car. But I knew everything about what had happened. Sam Driver didn't know it, because Harry never told him. Harry told me all he knew and Sam told me all *he* knew. So I knew everything."

"There you was out with another man's wife and mixed up in a shooting. She and her husband hadn't taken that cottage at all and have you come up to join them. You and the woman had taken that cottage and the husband found you. You was a big publisher and you couldn't afford to get mixed in a scandal, even if you could prove that you had to kill him to keep him from killing you. So you paid Harry to take the rap for murder and get out. You made him do it. But Harry spent the money, and then he wanted to get more, so he came back and got more."

"First, you tried to scare him by saying you'd let him get tried for the murder and then he scared you by telling

you to go ahead and his lawyer would show up what happened. There was a lot of things, I guess, that had to be kinda shaded over. Things that you didn't want the authorities looking into too much, about how long you'd been up there and how long Mrs. Bixel had been up there and how long her husband had been up there.

"So Harry Green got to bleeding you for money. You couldn't stand it. You had an argument or a fight with him and shot him. But you knew where Sam Driver was, because Harry Green had told you where he was. Harry tried to make you think that Sam Driver could be a witness for him if you ever pinched him on the murder rap.

"Well, you had somebody that helped you and you put Harry's body in Sam's car and then you fixed the headlights so Sam would get pinched. You knew Sam was an ex-convict and nobody'd believe him. But you did a slick stunt. You put lots of money in Harry's pockets; then, if anybody did know the truth, it would look like Harry had been to your place and got the money and somebody had killed him afterwards. You figured either that Sam Driver would find the body and take out the money and try to beat it—as he did—or else, if he didn't find the body until after he'd got pinched, the money would make it look like Harry Green had been to your place and gone away, in case anybody suspected what the truth was."

Burman's face was the color of bread dough, pasty and lifeless. He stared at her with glassy eyes and a mouth that sagged.

"You're absolutely crazy," he said, "you can't prove a word of it!"

"Maybe not," she said, "but, with what I know, and what Sam Driver knows we could come pretty near proving it. And I could prove that you and somebody else took Harry Green's body and dumped it into Sam Driver's car, because I seen you. I seen your Cadillac car and I know it. And I seen you. You had on evening clothes when you did it."

Burman stood staring down at her with eyes that were cold and malevolent, lips that quivered.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I want to know that you acted right," she said. "If you did, I can shield you. But if you didn't I can't."

Burman spoke swiftly, persuasively.

"Look here," he said, "some of your facts are right and some of them are wrong. Green didn't tell you the whole truth. Green had broken into the place and tried to hold up Mrs. Bixel. I came into the room just in time and smashed Green over the head. It knocked him out and I put him in a closet.

"Then Bixel showed up and was going to shoot me. I had the gun that I'd taken from Harry Green and I shot first, that's all. When Green regained consciousness, I put it up to him that he could either take five thousand dollars in cash and dust out, or that I'd turn him in for murder and frame it on him anyway. I was desperate and I had to do it. You can understand that. The killing was in self-defense, but I had another man's wife with me and I'd killed her husband. A jury would have been hostile."

Helen Vail's voice maintained its tone of dreary weariness.

"You ain't justified yourself yet. It ain't right to have Sam Driver framed for this other murder. You had no right to kill Harry Green. You're a rich man. You could have kept on paying him money and it wouldn't have hurt you. You've got to let Sam Driver go free."

"I can't do that," he said irritably. "I've fixed it up so he can get a break. He can take a plea for manslaughter."

"Maybe the District Attorney wouldn't agree to that," said Helen Vail, in her assumed voice.

"Sure he will," said Burman. "I can get anything I want. I am a political power here and I can fix things up. I've already got word to his lawyer. All you've got to do is to get out and stay out, and things will be all right."

"Would Sam go to jail on that manslaughter charge?" asked Helen Vail in a slow, apathetic voice.

Burman cursed.

Helen Vail shook her head wearily.

"No," she said, "I've had this on my conscience and I guess I've got to tell Sam Driver's lawyer; it ain't right not to."

Burman's hand dug deeper into the right-hand pocket of his coat.

"All right," he said, "if that's the way you feel about it, it's your own fault. If you'd lived up to your bargain and done what you promised to do, you wouldn't have got into this."

"Into what?" she asked, looking up from her embroidering.

"Into this!" snapped Burman, and jerked an automatic from the pocket of his coat.

Helen Vail flung herself to one side with a stifled scream. The door from the kitchen exploded outward, and Ken Corning shot across the room in a low-flung football tackle. Burman wavered for an instant with indecision, and indecision was fatal. Ken Corning struck him with the force of a charging bull. Burman crashed to the floor.

The gun slipped from his fingers, skidded halfway across the room and slammed against the side of the wall. Corning felt the weight of the man rolling over on him, squirmed to free himself, heard a chair crash to the floor. His hands dug into the collar of the man's coat. He was conscious of a tugging strain at his arms, then the coat fell in folds over his face. He kicked the garment from him, rolled to his hands and knees, and was in time to see Burman plunge through the door, into the night.

Ken Corning retrieved the gun and dropped it into the pocket of the coat Burman had left behind.

"Good work, kid," he said.

Helen Vail stared at him with her eyes wide and round.

"What'll he do now?" she asked.

"God knows," he told her. "But the

situation has got to come to a head now. He knows that we know. He was afraid the woman knew too much, so he used his influence to get her pinched on a liquor charge. She was peddling it, and he must have had detectives watching her. Once he had her in jail, it was easy to get her not to talk in return for squaring the liquor case."

"How much did the woman really know?" asked Helen Vail.

"Perhaps not much," Corning said slowly. "I put two and two together, and doped out what must have happened."

Helen Vail was staring at the tip of her shoe, her face pensive.

"What's the matter, kid?" asked Ken Corning. "Was it asking too much of you?"

"No," she said, "I was thinking of that Mrs. Bixel and her laughing brown eyes. I hate to see her dragged through this."

Ken Corning's eyes narrowed.

"Let's go up to Burman's house," he said slowly, "and see if we can reach some kind of an agreement."



HE roadster slid to the curb in front of Harrison Burman's residence.

"You sit here," Corning told Helen Vail.

Her lips clamped in a firm line, her face still smeared with the make-up, her hair covered with the wig, the girl shook her head determinedly.

"Nothing doing," she said. "If he gets a chance, he'll kill us both, to silence us."

"Not now," Corning told her. "Down there at the shack, when he lost his head, he would have killed you. He's driven almost crazy. But he'll show some sense now."

"Just the same," she told him, "I'm going in there with you, or you're not going to go."

He stood for a moment, staring at her.

He started to say something, but a woman's scream knifed through the silence of the night.

"It came from the house," said Helen Vail.

Her lips had scarcely finished with the last word, when a pistol shot sounded from the house.

Ken Corning started to run towards the front steps.

"Don't!" screamed Helen Vail. "Don't go in there until you know what's happened! Keep out of it, chief, please."

Ken Corning continued to run, and Helen Vail flung herself from the automobile, gathered her ragged skirts about her, and sprinted after him.

The front door of Harrison Burman's residence opened. A woman rushed out of the house, leaving the door open. She headed down the steps, apparently running in blind panic, and without seeing the two figures who were coming up the granite stairs which led to the front porch.

Ken Corning flung out his arms and caught her in midflight, swinging her around and holding her, despite frantically beating hands and kicking feet.

Abruptly the woman ceased to struggle and stared at Ken Corning with eyes that were wide and round, a face that was white as chalk.

"You!" she exclaimed.

"Mrs. Bixel," Corning said, "tell me quickly—what happened?"

She stared at him for a moment in wordless tension, as though she had great difficulty in readjusting herself to the outer world. Then she said: "Harrison Burman shot himself."

"Any servants?" asked Corning.

She shook her head, tried to say something and, instead, made only a throaty noise.

Corning turned to Helen Vail. She answered his unspoken question with a nod. Together, they piloted the woman down the stairs and into the automobile.

"You're sure he's dead?" asked Corning.

She nodded, wordlessly.

"Did he leave any confession, or anything that would incriminate you, in connection with shooting your husband in that cabin?"

She stared at Corning with alarm manifest in her eyes.

"You're among friends," Corning told her.

"No," she said, in a low voice. "There was no confession; no writing."

Ken Corning drove her to his office. Together, he and Helen Vail quieted her and gave her coffee mixed with brandy. Later they drove her to her home.

IT was twenty-four hours later that Ken Corning called *The Courier* and got Jerry Bigelow on the line.

"You're always anxious for the real inside dope, Bigelow," he said, "and I just wanted to mention that if you thought the public would be interested in the real inside facts surrounding the suicide of Harrison Burman, they would be able to hear them when the evidence is brought out in Sam Driver's trial."

"Now just what does that mean?" asked the columnist, in a cool voice.

"It means just what I said," Corning remarked. "It means that I know the identity of the man called Green, who was murdered. It means that I know how he met his death. It means that I know what happened up in that cabin in the mountains when Bixel was killed."

"And you mean that will come out at the trial?" asked Bigelow.

"It will come out at the trial."

"If there isn't any trial will it come out?"

"If there is no trial," said Ken Corning, speaking slowly and distinctly, "the facts will never be known—that is, the real facts."

And he slid the receiver back on the hook.

Next morning, when he read his

paper, he noticed with satisfaction that Jerry Bigelow, in his column given to gossip of the town, and the inside facts back of many of the political moves, made a prediction that the case against Sam Driver, accused of the murder of Harry Green, would be dismissed; that the District Attorney had relied upon circumstantial evidence which had not worked out exactly as anticipated. The columnist predicted as "hot inside stuff" that a dismissal of the case was contemplated.

Ken Corning carried the newspaper to his office, slid it over to Helen Vail.

"I saw it already, chief," she said. "What does it mean?"

Ken Corning grinned at her.

"It means," he said, "that the widow of Harrison Burman is in charge of the

policies of the paper, and, therefore, has a great deal to say about the political activities of York City. It also means that we haven't, as yet, discovered who the gentleman was that helped Harrison Burman put the body of Harry Green in the automobile belonging to Sam Driver."

She looked at him with sudden consternation.

"You mean to say it was Jerry Bigelow. . . ."

Ken Corning shrugged his shoulders and walked on to his inside office. From the door he called back to her: "Never speculate about a closed case. There is always a live one coming along that will keep us busy."

And then the door softly closed and the latch clicked.



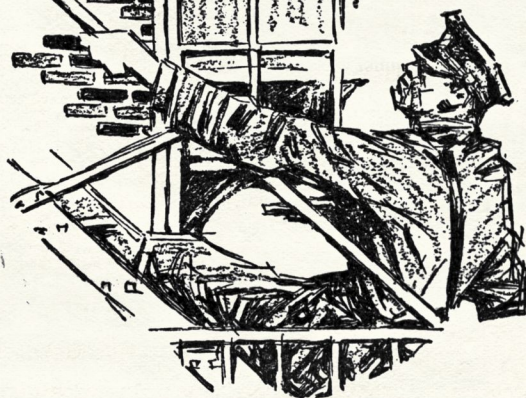
Plenty Tough



By

DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

*State Trooper Kinlay
finds a guy that is tough*



TATE TROOPER KINLAY had been just about to leave Headquarters station when the call came in. Something about the way the desk man grunted at the first words of the message caused Captain Kinlay to grab an instrument. The desk man, nodding, with big eyes, plugged him in. The voice over the wire was excited.

"... Matts speaking, sarge, at *The Pines*. Conroy's old place, you know. . . . Why, only this minute, practically . . . I called you right away. . . . Say, if Kinlay's—"

"Frank Tugwell, you said it was?" the desk man cut in for Kinlay's benefit. "Is he dead?"

"He's bleeding like a pig. Dunno whether he's dead or not. Some of the boys are trying to stop all the blood, but it looks pretty—"

Kinlay hung up, whispered to the desk man: "Stall him as long as you can."

He opened the door of his office and called to a trooper there: "Get Doc Weston. On the private wire, not through the switchboard. Tell him we'll pick him up inside of five minutes, and for him to be ready!"

Then to the door of the recreation room, which he flung open. There was

one kibitzer at the card game. "All you guys! And make it fast!"

On the way to the front door he stopped to whisper again to the man at the switchboard. "Dolan ought to be back any minute. Send him along." The desk man nodded, and growled into the mouthpiece another protest that he couldn't hear what was being said.

There was very little traffic on the highway, and Kinlay, who had taken the wheel, drove at a terrific pace. The big car swayed back and forth as it roared through the darkness. From time to time Mike Walsh, the fingerprint and ballistics man, who sat next to Kinlay, sounded the siren.

"What the hell did you have to throw your hand in for?" a Trooper in the back seat complained. "We might 've got a chance to play it out afterwards. I was holdin'—"

"Aw, I had a bust!"

"I know, but I was holdin'—"

They shrieked to a half-stop in front of a trim white bungalow, and Dr. Weston scrambled into the back seat. He toppled against a wall of knees as Kinlay snapped the car back into high speed. He sat in somebody's lap, and leaned forward, shouting against the side of Kinlay's head.

"What's the big rush, Captain? Murder?"

Kinlay shrugged.

"Whereabouts?"

Kinlay yelled out of the right corner of his mouth: "Conroy's dump."

"Where?"

"*The Pines*. Conroy's place out here."

"What was that?"

"Let it go," yelled Kinlay, and thereafter gave all of his attention to the road.

There actually was a small clump of pine trees in front of the roadhouse, in the center of a circle formed by the driveway. They were not very healthy-looking pines, and leaned away from one another in a discouraged manner,

as though ashamed of being seen in such a place.

Kinlay's car stopped with a rattle of gravel and a dry screech, and Kinlay sprang out, snapped: "One of you guys cover the back door. Nobody goes in or out, see?" He ran up the five wooden steps and crossed the rickety, old-fashioned porch.

Sam Matts opened the door before Kinlay reached it. Matts was the manager. He wore soiled, rather shabby dinner clothes, with a soft pleated shirt; and he looked scared. His right name wasn't Matts, but something much longer and much more difficult to pronounce; he was a Polish Jew.

"——! Cap, but you got here fast! I only hung up this minute!"

"Where's Conroy?"

"He's in the city. Had a date with a jane."

On the right of the entrance hall was a barroom and a tiny dance-floor. There was no orchestra, only a radio and a monstrous, complicated nickel-in-the-slot machine for playing records. On the left was what had once been the dining-room. On a large table covered with green oilcloth were poker chips, cards, ashtrays, glasses empty but wet. Six men stood around the table. They were silent, seemed stunned.

Kinlay snapped: "Whereabouts?"

The six pairs of eyes were turned towards the kitchen which opened off the dining-room directly in back. There was no door between the two rooms, but the doorway was narrow. The kitchen had a stone floor, and two stone steps led down into it from the dining-room. This was a very old house.

Kinlay went down into the kitchen. With the dining-room it comprised a one-story wing of the house, and the roof was low and sharply slanting. The walls were whitewashed stone, perfectly bare. Directly in front of Kinlay as he entered was the back door. On the right was a large, old-fashioned fireplace, bare and dismal, which extended a good three feet from the rest

of the wall. On the left was a pay telephone, unboothed; and directly below this lay Frank Tugwell, ex-State trooper. He lay on his left side, with bent knees. His eyes were closed, and his mouth was open. On the floor beside him were three handkerchiefs soaked with blood.

KINLAY stood on the second step, quietly surveying this. Dr. Weston pushed past him and knelt beside Tugwell; he felt the heart and pulse, and then pulled up the coat and began to tear the shirt.

"Help you, Doc?"

"No, thanks."

Sam Matts had come up behind Kinlay, and stood in the doorway. The others were loosely grouped behind him, everybody silent, everybody careful not to touch things.

"Who shot him?" Kinlay asked, without turning his head.

"We don't know!" quavered Matts. "Nobody knows! All we know is, we were sitting here playing, and the phone rang and I came in and answered it and it was somebody for Frank. So I called Frank, and he came in, and I went back to the game. And a second later we heard a shot. We couldn't see him from the table and we all rushed in here, and here he was lying on the floor. I know it prob'ly sounds fishy."

"It does," said Kinlay. "Is he dead, Doc?"

"No."

"Going to die?"

"Most likely. Hard to be sure, right now."

Kinlay turned his head slightly, speaking over his shoulder. "Fisher, you got your little pad and pencil? Good. Plant yourself next to this punk and don't you stir till you're relieved—or until he passes out of the picture. Can we move him, Doc?"

"I'll tell you that in a little while. Looks pretty bad."

Kinlay sighed. He walked slowly around the dim kitchen, peering at

things. There was a table in the middle, and two straight-backed chairs. The fireplace was empty. The stove and sink were greasy, empty, looked as though they had not been used for some time.

"We practic'ly never come in here any more, except to use the phone," Matts explained. "What cooking we got to do, we do on an electric stove in that little room behind the bar."

Kinlay nodded absently, and continued his stroll. The back door was locked and the key was in the lock. There were three windows, all locked. Kinlay examined them without touching them.

Mike Walsh came into the room with his little bag. "Want me to powder 'em for prints?"

Kinlay shook his head. "Anybody can tell they haven't been opened for weeks."

Dr. Weston said: "How 'bout some light?"

"That bulb in there's dead," said Matts. "I'll get you one." Presently he returned, screwed a new bulb into place. "It's the craziest thing I ever knew! The only way I can figure is that Frank must have shot himself. Nobody else could have got in or out of this room without us seeing them."

"A man can't shoot himself in the back between the shoulder blades," Dr. Weston said, from the floor. "Besides, he doesn't seem to have any pistol here. And there are no powder marks, anyway."

Kinlay looked very tired, perhaps a trifle bored. The wound, front and back, now was visible on the bared torso of Frank Tugwell, and Kinlay peered at it from a respectable distance.

"Then I just simply can't figure out how it could have happened," Matts wailed. "Every one of us are absolutely certain nobody went in or out of this room while Frank was here. And we didn't hear a thing except just the one shot. And if he—"

"Save it," said Kinlay, who was stroll-

ing around the kitchen still peering at things. "Who was it called Frank on the phone?"

"I dunno. It was a woman's voice, and she didn't say who it was. Just said tell Frank a red-hot mama wanted to talk to him."

"A red-hot mama, huh?"

"She sounded as if she might be tight," Matts added.

"What time was this?"

"Just about twenty minutes ago. Maybe twenty-five."

"In other words, just about midnight?"

"Just about, yeah."

Kinlay went to the phone and asked for the chief operator. He told her who he was, where she could check this information, and what he wished to learn. While he held the receiver, waiting for her report, he pointed listlessly to a splintered hole in the wood upon which the telephone was fixed.

"There's the slug, in there. You might work it out, Mike, and see what you can make of it—if it isn't too much smashed."

The chief operator spoke briefly, and Kinlay grunted and hung up.

"All right. All inside now, and let's see if we can find out what this's all about."



HE herded them into the dining-room, Sam and his five customers and his bartender. Troopers watched from the hallway.

"First of all, how many of you tin horns are ironed up?"

There was an embarrassed pause. Then a short, smooth fellow drew a large automatic and laid it on the table. "But you can see for yourself it ain't been fired. I got a permit for it, too, and if you—"

"Okay, Joe. I know you got a permit. How 'bout you, Sam?"

Matts, without a word, put a small blue automatic on the table.

"Any more? Don't all speak at once." Nobody moved; and Kinlay nodded to the troopers. "All right. Frisk 'em."

There were no more guns.

"Now," said Kinlay, "just who was here when this happened?"

"Only what you see," Matts said hastily. "There wasn't another soul came in or left the place since it happened."

"Uh-huh."

"It was just like I told you. We was all sitting here playing—"

"All of you?"

"Yeah. Well, at least, all but Nuts here."

Kinlay looked at Nuts McGrath. The bartender-bouncer was a short man, but powerful, a missing link type. His face was moon-like, impassive, and his watery blue eyes were blank. He'd been a chopping block for some of the best middleweights of his day; it was said of him that he could take anything and still stand on his feet. Both his ears were more or less cauliflower, and his cheeks were permanently puffed, making his eyes seem smaller than they were. His nose had been broken years ago, again and again. A hundred thousand punches had long since battered out of him whatever intelligence he might once have possessed, and he was commonly considered a half-wit, though some called this flattery.

"Where were you, Nuts?"

The bartender jerked his head back. "Getting drinks. I was just about to pick 'em up from the end of the bar there. They're there yet."

One of the poker players said: "That's right. I remember I'd ordered a round only a few minutes before. I'd just won a big pot."

"How were you sitting? Show me."

They took their places without hesitation, leaving one place significantly vacant.

Matts explained: "I sat here because it's handy to the door and the telephone both."

"You were playing too?"

"Yeah, but I wasn't banking the game. Harry Felter was doing that, I just cut a pot now and then, for the house."

"I see," said Kinlay. "That's very interesting. Now, who was the last in that kitchen before the phone rang?"

"I was, myself," Matts said. "I went in about ten minutes before, because I thought I felt a draught, and some of the other boys said the same thing. I went in to take a look at that fireplace. A couple of months ago, when it began to get cold, we had that screened up inside there, and a big thick piece of pasteboard put in, to keep the cold air from coming down the chimney. I thought that might have got loose."

"And had it?"

"No, it was okey. So I came back to the game, thinking maybe it was my imagination or something. So we played along a little while longer. Nobody was either winning much or getting much hurt, and nobody was sore or anything. Frank himself was a little ahead of the game, I think. There's his chips over there, and he bought three hundred to go in, so you can figure it out for yourself. And then came this phone call, and I answered it, and this dame's voice asked for Frank and when I asked who's calling she said never mind only just tell Frank it was a red-hot mama wanted to speak to him."

"And of course he went for that, right off?"

"Sure. You know the way he is! Me, I came back in here and sat down again, and I heard Frank say 'Hello' and then 'Hello, hello, hello,' about six or seven times. And then all of a sudden came this shot—and we all rushed in there to find him on the floor."

"Receiver off the hook?"

"Yeah. I picked it up and said hello, but the line was dead. Then right after that I called up you guys."

TO have asked who had anything against Frank Tugwell would be to invite sniffs and the retort: "Who

didn't?" Tugwell had been a State trooper for just one year, and had resigned barely in time to prevent his superiors from bringing charges against him. He'd been crooked, a shaker-down of roadhouses like this, an inveterate and consistently lucky gambler, a heavy drinker, determinedly a Lothario. But he'd made money; and since his resignation he had been making more money, at craps and poker.

Kinlay wasted no time in questions or a search for minor inconsequences. He merely nodded, and wandered back into the kitchen.

"Think it's safe to move him yet, Doc?"

"Move him all you want." Dr. Weston rose from his knees. "Move him to the morgue, would be the best place."

"So that's the way it is, huh? Can you fix it for an autopsy tomorrow morning?"

The physician nodded. Kinlay turned to Mike Walsh, who was busy with a tiny set of scales, a magnifying glass and some brass gauges.

"How 'bout it?"

Walsh wrapped the slug in cotton and put it into a shirt pocket.

"From a .38. Can't tell what kind till I see it under the microscope, but I think it was a revolver."

Kinlay nodded. The pistols on the dining-room table were both automatics, one a .22, the other a .45.

He examined the screen and pasteboard fastened into the lower part of the chimney: they were firmly in place. He sauntered around the room, examining again everything quickly, quietly. Then he went through the dining-room into the hall.

Lieutenant Dolan champed in, grinning. "Little excitement, huh? I came in the sidcar, with Anderson holding the handles."

"You were just born reckless," Kinlay muttered. He waved towards the dining-room. "Somebody gave Frank Tugwell what was coming to him at last, but nobody seems anxious to claim

the credit. They all tell the same story. See what you think."

While Dolan barked questions in the dining-room, Kinlay searched the bar-room and the room behind it. Then he went upstairs. He was up there for about ten minutes; and when he returned, Dolan was emerging, happily asweat, from the dining-room.

"Baloney, of course," Dolan announced. "Not even very good baloney, either. Sounds as if they didn't have much time to rehearse it. What I think, I think we ought to start on Harry Felter, in there. He's got the least drag, in case of a backfire later, and besides he's the most likely one to fall apart if we push him around."

Kinlay shook his head sadly. "I never use rough stuff, Danny, unless I have to. Listen I'm borrowing Anderson. See that my crate gets back to the station, will you?"

"Where 're you going?"

"What I want you to do in the meanwhile," Kinlay pursued, "is to find the gun first, and then take these punks to the station and get formal statements from them all. And be sure that kid puts in two pieces of carbon paper for each one, too! Then hold 'em on anything you want. Don't book 'em at all would be best. Let 'em think they're being held as material witnesses, but don't tell 'em that in so many words." He moved towards the door. "I'll be giving you a ring."

"Wait a minute! You mean, no roughhouse at all?"

"No roughhouse at all. Just get the gun and then take 'em to the station and get the statements."

"Okey, genius. Only maybe you better tell me first where to find the gun?"

"Sure." Kinlay made a vague gesture. "It might be on the ground somewhere within a hundred feet or so of this side of the house. But you'd probably save time by taking down that screen they got fastened inside the fireplace in the kitchen. It ought to be there."

Anderson grinned; and when Kinlay climbed into the sidecar and said "The city," Anderson asked eagerly: "Do I go fast, Captain?"

"No. You go faster than that."



CTING CAPTAIN MITCHELL, in charge of the detective bureau, told Kinlay over the telephone: "Andy George is the dick

you want. He's working now, somewhere. I ought to be able to get in touch with him in ten minutes or so."

"Thanks. Ask him to meet me at the *Western World*, huh?"

"He might be there now, for all I know. He hangs out there a lot. So somebody gave it to Frank Tugwell, huh? Ain't that just dandy!"

"Ain't it, though! Well, much obliged, Mitch."

It was about one-thirty when Kinlay reached the *Western World*. He left Anderson and the motorcycle outside.

Andy George, long and lugubrious, was at the bar staring at a straight ginger ale as though it had just betrayed a trust.

"Yeah, Conroy's been here since about ten-thirty," he said in answer to Kinlay's question. "Party of four." He nodded towards one of the ringside tables, in a far corner. "Bubble water, too. That's practic'ly Diamond Jim Brady stuff, for that guy."

"Who's that other girl with him? Stella McGrath I know. She's a sister of Nuts McGrath, that dumb-bell bartender out at Conroy's place."

"Yeah, she's been playing beanbags with Slats for some time now. The blonde's new. Just one of the hostesses that the house throws in their company for nothing, which is the only thing of that kind around here."

"Would Sam Matts be likely to know that blonde?"

"I don't know how. She just came to town this afternoon."

"Suppose I could speak to her? In the manager's office, maybe? Not calling her away from her charming and distinguished company, but just catching her some time she heads for the nose-powdering retreat, huh?"

"Sure." Andy George whispered briefly to a waiter, who nodded. The waiter seemed unhappy; he gazed with doleful eyes at Kinlay, who leaned both elbows on the bar and stared across the dance-floor.

"And who's the little guy?" asked Kinlay, when the waiter had gone. "Looks like a bodyguard or something."

"Understand that's what he is. Comes from Philly, and they do say he's very, very tough indeed. A very tough mugg."

"But why should Conroy need a bodyguard? He's supposed to be broke. In fact, he's supposed to be pretty deep in the soup to several guys. And bodyguards are expensive."

Andy George nodded gloomily. "Yeah. So's bubble water."

"I'd like to know more about this mugg from Philly."

"So would I," said Andy George. "In fact, that's what I'm hanging around this dump for tonight." He shook his head. "There's another thing . . . Slat Conroy's going to get himself in trouble some one of these days, tossing quoits with that McGrath dame."

"Brother Nuts doesn't know yet, then?"

"Nobody dares tell him. But he knows she's making mudpies with somebody, and when he finds out who it is he's going to be very disagreeable, Captain."

"So I hear tell."

"In fact, I shudder to think of it."

"Yes, I guess it would be pretty unfortunate."

"Stella's been scared of her brother ever since she was a kid, but at the same time she's been just dying to have a regular boy friend for herself and find out what life's all about. She certainly picked a honey when she picked on Slat Conroy! But you got to hand it to him,

at that. Lots of the other boys wanted to make a pass at her, but they didn't have the guts to do it. They all remembered that pan on her brother."

"Let's go into the manager's office," Kinlay suggested. "I don't like it out here."

The manager had a question of his own to ask.

"Say, what's all this about Tugwell getting the works?"

"Oh, you heard about that, huh?"

"A waiter just told me. I suppose you're tickled to death?"

"Maybe." Kinlay shrugged. He was delighted to learn that the story was out. Good old Anderson! He, undoubtedly, had told the doorman, the taxidivers outside, everybody else who would listen. And stories like that travel fast. "Of course, I always thought Conroy had been there too long," he admitted.

"But you're too—" The manager stopped suddenly.

Kinlay leaned forward. "You were about to say?"

"Well, if you don't know it, maybe I oughtn't to tell you."

"Maybe you ought, though."

"Yeah," said Andy George. "Maybe you ought, Ed."

The manager shrugged. "You'd find out pretty soon anyway. I was just going to say that you're too late for Conroy. He sold *The Pines* the other day. To Sam Matts. Cash money."

"Oh," said Kinlay, and looked at the floor. After a time he reached for a telephone. He called Headquarters, and got Dolan.

"Just blew in," Dolan panted. "Say, the gun was where you said, in the chimney. How'd it ever get in a place like that?"

"Did Mike test it?"

"Yeah. Oh, it's the gun Frank was killed with all right! A .38 revolver. An S. and W. But what I can't figure is, how they ever got it up there after the shot. Why, it took us a good ten minutes to tear that screen down, it was so solid."

"Did the gun have to be put in from underneath?"

"But you couldn't stand on that roof, Cap! It's too slanty."

"—! but you're dumb! The chimney comes up right next to the second story windows on that side, doesn't it? It comes out of the roof of the wing and close up alongside the house till it sticks up above the roof of the main part of the house. Well, there's two windows face out over the roof of the wing, aren't there? You try one of them, next time you're there, and you'll find it works easy—doesn't make a sound—which is more'n you can say for any other window there. It's the back one, that looks out over the roof above the kitchen part of the wing. Catching on, Irishman?"

"Oh. You mean a guy could—"

"And there's a loose brick in the chimney, right on the corner, that can be taken out and put back easy. You wouldn't even have to step out on to the little roof—all you'd have to do is just lean out that window. And not only that but there's two shingles loose in the roof there, also within easy reach, that can be slid back and forth. *Now* are you getting it?"

"But Frank was shot from behind, not from above!"

"He was shot from behind and above both. I suppose now you're going to tell me the bullet went horizontal through his body? Well, just remember that he was talking into the telephone at the time, and that telephone was put there with the idea of having a chair in front of it. Even I had to lean 'way over to talk into it, and Frank was a good five inches taller than me. Or if you still want proof, just measure the height of the place where that slug was stuck in the wood. I don't think even *you* could miss that one! Or maybe I ought to draw you a set of blueprints or something?"

"Oh," said Dolan.

"Now," said Kinlay, "what I want to do is get those statements as fast as

you can, and then tell all the tinhorns they'll have to find some other place to sleep tonight."

"What?"

"Uh-huh. Tell 'em we can't get a thing on 'em, and so we don't want 'em cluttering up Headquarters."

"But the guy that killed Frank must be one—"

"Catch up to me, Irishman! I'm not after the guy who shot Frank, any more. I'm after an accessory before the fact."

Kinlay hung up, and gazed with a frown at the manager.

"You didn't hear that at all."

"Sure," said the manager.

"And be damn' sure it *is* sure," said Kinlay.

The door opened after a pair of knocks, and a tall blonde came slowly into the office. She looked with hard suspicion at Kinlay and Andy George, then at the manager.

"You send for me?"

"No, I didn't send for you, Helen."

"I did," said Kinlay. He looked at the manager. "Blow, friend, and leave us alone with our thoughts. And incidentally, don't forget what I told you about keeping your trap shut!" The manager left.

The city detective was slumped deep in a chair, still holding his glass of straight ginger ale: the ice in it had melted, and it looked as weary, as discouraged as the man who sometimes sipped it. The girl Helen stared at Captain Kinlay, and Kinlay stared at her. She was a pretty thing, though altogether too emphatically blonde. She was young, tall, self-consciously hard-boiled.

"Well, so what?" she said at last.

"Helen, you made a phone call at about 12 o'clock."

Kinlay uttered a statement, not a question. Of course he was bluffing. But to his amazement, the girl seemed relieved.

"Somebody kick, did they? Well, how could I help it? The guy was tight as a tick, and he insisted on me calling those numbers."

"Which guy was this?"

"The guy that's giving the party where I am over there in the corner. Hell, he's buying champagne, and what's a girl going to do when you work here and he wants to get funny with some of his friends?"

"How many numbers did you call, Helen?"

"Three. He stood there with me all the time. Got a big kick outta me telling these guys this was a red-hot mama calling them an' that I bet they couldn't guess who it was. That was his idea of a joke."

"Did you talk to all three of these guys that way?"

"Two of 'em. The other one Conroy said let it go, before the guy came to the phone, and he hung up."

"Do you remember what the number of that one was?"

The girl shook her head, disgusted. Obviously she supposed that all this was the result of no more than a petty complaint to the management.

"I didn't know what any of the numbers was. As a matter of fact, I didn't even dial them myself. He did that."

"Why did he say to let the third one go, before he came on?"

"How should I know? He just seemed all of a sudden to think it wasn't so funny any more, so he put down the receiver hook an' said: 'The hell with this. Let's get back to the table.' So I went back with him. What the hell, he was buying champagne, wasn't he?"

"I guess he was, from what you say. Do you remember what the name of this third man was, the last one, the one you didn't get?"

The girl shook her head.

"Was it Frank, maybe?"

"Might have been. *One* of 'em was named Frank, I remember."

Kinlay rose. "Okey, Helen. You better hang around in the office here for a while."

"Say, wait a minute! I gotta get back to that party! What the hell, that guy's buying champagne an' . . ."

"You told us that about six times already."

"— an' I been sitting there laughing at his jokes for three hours. I got a nice sweet tip coming to me, an' now you gotta nerve to tell me to shake him and stick around here! Say, if you think . . ."

"Listen, Helen," Kinlay said softly, "I'm going to give you the nicest, sweetest tip you could get anywheres, and that is: stay away from those two bimbos, if you know what's good for you!"



As they walked back to the bar, Kinlay said: "Smart, isn't he? Look at him. He's no more drunk than I am. But he knows this kid Helen isn't long enough in the game to know the difference, and yet that she's trying to show everybody how hard she is that she'd never admit she didn't know real drunkenness from fake. What I can't figure out is why Slat's hanging around now. Unless maybe the news about Frank hasn't reached his table yet."

"You think he'll blow right away, when it does?"

"Sure. His alibi's established then and he doesn't have to make a big show so's everybody'll remember he was here."

Andy George asked the bartender to put a piece of ice into his ginger ale. He said: "I might have known there was something funny going on when Slat Conroy starts ordering bubble water. How'd you happen to figure it was him, anyway?"

Kinlay shrugged. "It was a cinch Nuts McGrath did it. Figure it out. If one of the players, we'd 'a' seen signs of a squeal; if an outsider, they'd 'a' all hollered. They all had the same story with-out time to rehearse it. Besides, the layout upstairs and where the gun was ditched prove it was inside, with McGrath the only candidate, with a grouch, like every-one else, against Tugwell."

"But Nuts didn't have brains enough to figure out how to do it without being seen. Anyway, he wouldn't shoot a guy, ordinarily, even if he thought the guy had been fooling around with his sister. What he'd do would be to smack the life out of the guy with his mitts. That's the way he is. He thinks with his mitts—if he thinks at all.

"Somebody must have planned the thing for him, and it must have been somebody who knew the upstairs of that house pretty well. Which means either Conroy or Sam Matts—because that's where they got the liquor stored. I couldn't see Sam Matts doing a thing like that, but it was just exactly the kind of thing Conroy *would* think of.

"It wasn't such a bright scheme, after all, but it seemed so to Nuts McGrath. All he had to do was slip up there about half an hour before and slide back those shingles—that accounts for the draft Matts and the others felt—and take that brick out of the chimney. Then when the phone rang at 12 o'clock sharp, he knew it was going to be for Frank, so he simply slips upstairs again, reaches through the window, sticks the barrel of the gun through the hole in the roof, and lets Frank have it.

"Then he drops the gun down the chimney, puts the brick back, slides the shingles back, and gets downstairs again—gets into that kitchen so fast behind the others that not a one of them suspects he'd ever been out of the barroom or the entrance hall. Yeah, it must have seemed like the perfect crime, to him.

"But the one I wanted was the rat who showed Nuts how to do it and who fixed up that phone call. Conroy knew Sam would answer the phone, and he knew Sam would know the voice of any of the regular janes in the business around here, so he springs a newcomer. You notice he never spoke over the phone, himself? He never even gave the girl a number she might remember. *He* dialed 'em. Sure. He was drunk, and just trying to be funny. But he wasn't so drunk he didn't know enough to

hang up before the shooting started, so's the jane wouldn't hear."

They were standing near the end of the bar, and Kinlay was watching the party in the corner.

Slats Conroy was making a lot of noise, as usual; he was thumping the table, bellowing with laughter, spilling drinks. He had very long legs, but a thick, heavy body; and a red face; and huge red hands; and a manner naturally boisterous. As a gambler he wasn't in the really big money, but he tried to pretend that he was. He slapped the back or shook the hand of everybody willing to tolerate his touch. He was talking continuously—booming rather—and spreading his forearms all over the table.

"I wonder if he's getting worried about that blonde not coming back," Kinlay murmured.

The mugg from Philly was a much smaller man, much younger too, and quieter. He had a thin, mean face, the chest of a consumptive, a twisted smile. His eyes, dark and very small, were nervous; and his manner too was nervous, jerky. Possibly a dope. He drank very little.

"No, he ain't dumb," Andy George said, meaning Conroy. "From all I hear, Frank Tugwell was one of the boys he owed a flock of jack to—and Frank had a nasty way of getting what was coming to him. Probably had something real on Conroy and was ready to spill it."

"It all works out," Kinlay said. "Conroy figured that Nuts was shooting himself right into a bughouse—or else into jail for a long stretch, or maybe even into the hot squat itself. Whatever it is, it would put him away before he could find out about Conroy playing with his sister. I suppose Conroy told the poor slob it was Frank who was the sister's heart trouble. He's a great one for working things against things."

Andy George was swishing the ice around in his glass, as though he hoped that the motion might somehow improve the taste of the ginger ale. He said:

"And of course there's no sense going to work on Nuts. I can see that. A rubber hose wouldn't mean a thing to that guy. I don't suppose he'd even pay much attention to a crowbar, a guy like that."

"Look," said Kinlay suddenly, "they're getting up! I guess they must have just heard about Frank's little mishap."

"Do we follow 'em?"

"Yeah. You in a cab, and I'll trail you in the sidecar."

Andy George finished his ginger ale, and made a face. He hung back. "If there's going to be a pinch," he said, "I think there ought to be two city cops in on it, if there's going to be two State troopers. Maybe I'm wrong, but that's the way it adds up to me."

"Sure," said Kinlay. "After all, it's really your district. You can call up your sidekick as soon as we get a chance."

"Is there going to be a pinch?" Andy George persisted.

"I don't know. I'd like to pick him up, but I haven't got enough on him. I'm hanging around hoping for something to break. That's one reason why I had Dolan release Nuts McGrath with the rest of 'em. It's perfectly safe, because you could pick up a guy like that anywheres, even if he had sense enough to lam, which he hasn't. And I'm curious to see where he goes. If he goes to Conroy's apartment right away, as I think he might—well, that'd be a little evidence."

"What if Conroy takes the jane there, and Nuts finds them?"

"Conroy wouldn't do that. He'd have better sense than to take her to his apartment. He'd have some hideaway Nuts wouldn't know about."

The pursuit led to a section of the city consisting of warehouses, small factories, shabby shops, and buildings which were called apartment houses by some, by others tenements. Anderson, at Kinlay's command, drove a mere forty-five miles an hour; for Kinlay only tried to keep Andy George's taxicab in sight,

not wishing Conroy to take alarm at the official motorcycle.

In the middle of a block, in front of one of the apartment houses, the Conroy taxi came to a stop. Kinlay saw it in time to order Anderson to drive around the block so as to avoid passing the building. The taxi had started away by the time they had encircled the block, but Andy George had stopped it around the corner and was questioning the driver. Andy George looked annoyed.

"It's just what I was afraid of. You remember when we turned from Hausman into North Avenue there? Well, I'd been staying fairly well behind Conroy's cab, but when we made that turn we almost smacked it in the rear. I could tell it'd stopped there for half a minute, and I was wondering whether anybody'd got out. I could see at least two people through the back window. Now this driver tells me he stopped there long enough to drop Conroy's boy friend."

"Hausman Street and North Avenue. . . . What's there?"

"An all-night garage that's a drive-it-yourself agency too."

"Looks like the mugg from Philly's taken a powder then, huh?"

"Looks like it." Andy George made a shooing motion with his hands to one of the drivers. "Run along, beautiful." To the other he said: "You stick around. And keep your engine running and your door open."

Anderson, who was in uniform, they left behind. They walked to the building in the middle of the block, a seven-story affair with a tawdry Italian Renaissance entrance, the front a mass of old-fashioned fire-escapes.

"This certainly isn't where Slat's lives?"

"No," said Andy George, "he's got a swell dump up at the *Tuscany Apartments*. This must be the hideaway, or else McGrath's."

Over one of the buttons the card read: "H. McGrath. S. McGrath. 7 Fl. Front." They went across the street.

There was a light in the seventh floor front apartment—the only light showing—and somebody there was pulling down the shades.

Andy George strolled around the corner to an all-night lunchroom and telephoned to his sidekick. Then he strolled back to join Kinlay.

"I sent Cassidy over to the *Tuscany Apartments*. Told him to watch for Nuts McGrath particularly. Not to pick him up, if he appears, but to let us know here. He can call back the lunchroom. The guy there said he'll run around and tell us if there's a call. I gave him your name too."

"Fine."

"Cassidy gets credit, of course, if there's a pinch here?"

"Sure," said Kinlay. "That's understood."

They waited almost an hour. Andy George smoked cigarettes and looked bored. Kinlay stood in a doorway and stared at the lighted windows, sometimes shaking his head in a puzzled manner.

"I don't altogether like this business of the Philly boy friend slipping away," he admitted once.

Andy George shrugged. "I suppose what happened is that Slat's just wanted to be alone with the dame."

"Another thing I can't understand is, why are they hanging around this apartment instead of his?"

"They figure it'd be safe enough. Nobody in the world'd think a captain of State police would fail to keep Nuts McGrath in the cooler overnight, after what happened." Andy George chuckled. "Be funny, at that, if Nuts was to come back and find those two duckie-birds up there, wouldn't it?"

"You got a great sense of humor," Kinlay growled. "Of course, if he should come, we got to stop him from going up."

"Oh, sure!"

"I suppose it'll end with us hanging around here all night and eventually arresting Nuts on a murder charge and letting that louse up there get away

with it." Kinlay's voice was bitter. "I hate that guy Conroy. For more'n a year I've been waiting for a chance to close his place up on him and make the country air a little cleaner out there. And now along comes a nice, convenient scandal—and Conroy's sold out and taken his dough."

"You can be damn' sure he wouldn't have had anybody erased in *The Pines* if there was any chance of *him* losing money by it!"

"Yeah. That was the one thing made me think my hunch might be wrong, at first, until I heard about the sale."



O they waited a little longer. It was chilly, Andy George leaned against a store front and half slept, but Kinlay lighted a cigar, all the time frowning at the seventh story windows.

"I'm still trying to figure why that mugg from Philly did a fade-out. . . . I can't help wondering whether it had anything to do with the fact that Hostess Helen was in the manager's office for a while and then didn't rejoin her party. We should have taken an affidavit from her on those phone calls."

"If you feel that way about it, why don't you send that motorcycle cop back to the *Western World* to ask a few questions. It's only half past two. They'd still be open."

"I think I'll do that," said Kinlay, and moved off.

A few minutes later he returned from the other end of the block. "I told him to call us at the lunchroom here if there was anything wrong."

"Uh-huh," murmured Andy George, and resumed his snoozing.

It wasn't long after that the lunchroom man scurried to the corner, squinting. "Which one of you guys is Kinlay? . . . Well, there's a call."

Kinlay looked grave when he came back. Andy George looked grave, too. Andy George was staring after a Ford

roadster with a "P. D." on the panel. "Sure, I know what it was," he said promptly. "They told the cop Blondie's been missing for three-quarters of an hour. Slipped away."

"That's a right guess."

"Wasn't hard. The Dolly Sisters"—he nodded in the direction the Ford had taken—"just gave me a suspicion stop, and when I showed 'em who I was they explained they'd just had a murder report on their radio set and they were questioning all dangerous-looking loafers—like me."

"Umph," said Kinlay. "But it wasn't around here?"

"Of course not. 'Way up in the West Park section. Thrown out of a car. A tall blonde in a blue and silver evening gown. Not identified yet. Abrasions of the throat and the skull pushed in by a blunt instrument. Our friend from Philadelphia's versatile, ain't he?"

"Umph," Kinlay said again. "I guess maybe we'd better pick up Slats after all?"

"I guess maybe we'd better," said Andy George. "I told the Sisters to put in a call at the nearest box—which is faster'n us calling from here—and to get somebody from the *Western World* to view the remains. I also told 'em to send reserves over here, so's we can—"

"*Judas Priest!*"

Andy George wheeled, gaping. And he saw what Kinlay saw.

A short man with enormous shoulders had come up the block, on the other side of the street, and had turned into the apartment house. He walked soundlessly, with a peculiar rolling gait, ape-like, awkward, but very fast. They caught a glimpse of his face at the entrance before he disappeared inside.

Kinlay started first, but Andy George was lighter and had longer legs; he was banging the inside door with his shoulder when Kinlay entered the hallway.

"My——! He worships that girl!"

Kinlay threw himself against the door. It was unexpectedly solid. Again and

again he threw himself against it. Andy George sprang to the index panel and pushed every button except that for the McGrath apartment. A moment later he was next to Kinlay again, lending his shoulder.

There were some blurred, hollow "who-is-it" noises from the speaking tubes—and then the lock rattled and the door swung open.



HIS time Kinlay was first. He had his pistol out before he reached the second floor. There was no elevator.

On the fourth floor Andy George passed him, only to collide with a woman on the fifth floor and lose his lead. The woman, in a greasy kimono, had stepped out into the hallway to learn the cause of all the bell-ringing. At sight of the two wild-eyed men and the two guns, she screamed—screaming she promptly slipped into a faint.

There were more screams before Kinlay reached the door of the McGrath apartment and smashed in a panel. They came from Slats Conroy.

Conroy was in pajamas, and the McGrath girl, standing bolt upright in the bedroom doorway, stiff with terror, was garbed in similar fashion. Conroy held an automatic. But Nuts McGrath was a madman.

Nuts McGrath had followed his instinct. He was using his fists. He didn't seem to be aware of anything at all except the face of Conroy. He didn't even seem to be aware of the fact that Conroy was slashing at him with the pistol barrel, hitting him again and again on the forehead, as Conroy backed away screaming.

"*You're crazy, man! Wait a minute! Let me tell you!*"

Then the girl, too, screamed.

"*He'll shoot you, Harold! Harold, wait!*"

So Nuts' right name was Harold? Kinlay, pistol raised, roared a command.

But nobody paid him the slightest attention.

"Keep away from me! I'll give it to you! I mean it, Nuts!"

Only McGrath was silent. Cat-like, his head low, his shoulders hunched high, he slid forward. Conroy sprang back, banged against a wall. He held the automatic straight in front of him.

"I'll give it to you! I mean it!"

But Nuts McGrath was on a single track. He moved forward. . . . The girl stopped screaming and ran in front of her brother, probably in an effort to quiet him. And at that instant Slat Conroy lost his head and fired. He fired seven shots, all the gun held. Seven shots at Stella McGrath's spine. Three of them ripped through her body and sank into that of her brother, where Conroy had intended them to go; but they didn't mean any more to the madman than three house flies.

The girl was thrown against Nuts as though she'd been kicked in the small of the back. She didn't topple Nuts, but she stopped him for a moment. He made an impatient gesture, like a man who brushes aside a cobweb he has walked into; and he stepped past her, probably without even being aware of her existence. But by that time Conroy was out on the fire-escape. Conroy had dropped his empty gun, had smashed the window with a chair, and had sprung through that window head-first, jagged glass and all.

Kinlay and Andy George finally got all the way through the door, and grabbed McGrath from behind. He swung completely around, stepping backwards. He was a heavy man, incalculably strong. They lost their grips and staggered away. And before they could reach Nuts again he had jumped through the shattered window after Conroy—jumped through it like a circus rider diving through a paper-covered hoop.

Andy George tried to raise the window, but it was stuck. Kinlay yanked two of the larger pieces of glass from

the frame and stepped through to the fire-escape.

The whole fire-escape was shivering and shaking. He looked up. On the platform above, the top one, Nuts McGrath had caught up with his late sister's boy friend. There was no room there for blows. McGrath was using a simpler, more primitive method of attack; he was choking Conroy to death in his enormous hands.

Then the apartment behind Kinlay seemed to explode. He whirled around, squatted.

In the hall doorway stood the mugg from Philly, panting, a gun in each hand. He was firing from the hips—firing wildly, both guns at once. Andy George was on his knees, trying to lift his own gun.

Kinlay fired twice through the broken window, and the mugg from Philly collapsed swiftly, jerkily. Kinlay fired twice more, carefully, into the body. No sense taking any chances.

Then he started up the fire-escape.

But he was too late. The platform railing on the eighth floor, rotten with rust, crumbled like wet cardboard.

Slat Conroy shrieked once, briefly. McGrath didn't make a sound. Kinlay looked at the sky for a second and wished he had a drink—either a drink or else the time and opportunity to go ahead and be sick. It was a horrible thing to hear.

HE kept as far as possible from the rotten railings, on the way down. People were appearing at windows, yelling, swearing. He dropped the last ten feet. What was left of Conroy took up a lot of pavement, and it wasn't pretty. But Nuts McGrath's eyes were wide open, and his lips were moving.

"My——! What a tough baby you are!" Kinlay grunted.

Nuts was lying on his back; one arm was out of sight underneath him. His face glistened with sweat and blood, and his eyes were taut, strained, expressionless, but his lips kept moving.

"Nuts! Don't you know me?"

The eyes returned from somewhere, straightened, focused. McGrath's fury was gone now. He looked almost sane.

"You—pinching me—Captain?" He ran his tongue over his lips. "Nobody to take care—Stella—Stella—if I go—jail."

The man was dying and didn't know it, or couldn't believe it.

"Captain, you—you watch her, huh? Watch Stella for me, huh?" He didn't seem to remember anything that had happened. The whites of his eyes trembling; but there was some expression there now; the eyes were pleading. "She—she's good girl, Captain, but—but somebody needs—watch her."

"Take it easy, Nuts. You're all right. Just take it easy."

Cops were coming now, droves of them, tumbling out of automobiles. An

ambulance clashed and clanged around the corner. The street, the sidewalks, were crowded and noisy.

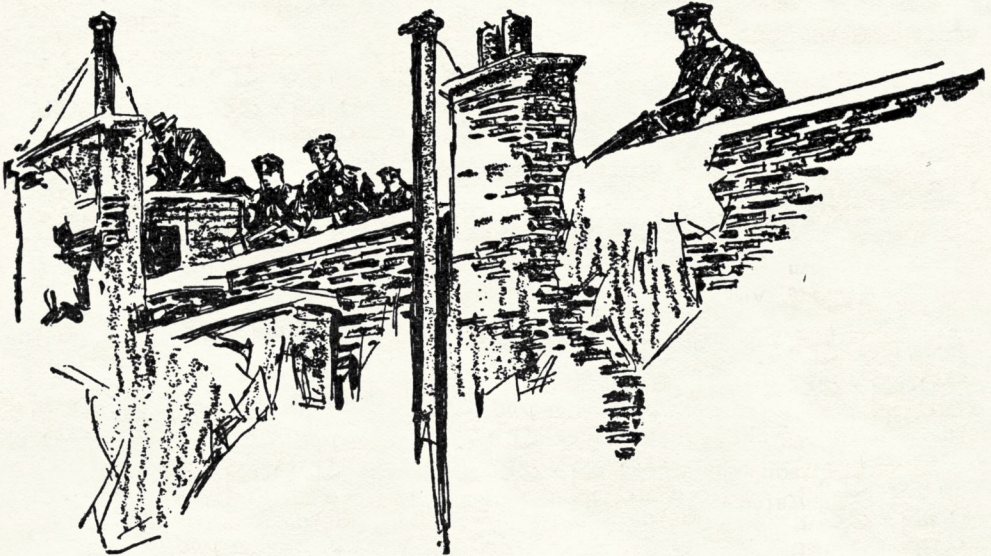
"But you watch—keep your eye on her—Captain, you kinda watch—for me, huh?"

Then he died.

Kinlay grunted, wiped his face, lighted a cigar, re-entered the building and climbed wearily to the seventh floor front, where he found them lifting Andy George on to a stretcher. The detective was pale and weak, but very much alive. He nodded in disgust at the body of the mugg from Philly. "Imagine that punk showing up to report just when he did!" They hoisted the stretcher, and at the door Andy George managed a good night grin.

"Well, you wanted something to break, Trooper, and it did."

"Yeah," said Kinlay. "Yeah, it certainly broke, all right."



BLACK MASK MYSTERY No. 4

Set-up this month—solution next month

Solution to last month's mystery—No. 3

The two reasons showing that Mrs. Keith-Gorham did not commit suicide are merged together. 1—Being an habitual user of spectacles, she could not read the fine print of the Bible without them, and they were elsewhere in the room. 2—The fact that a woman of obviously religious type who would elect to read the Bible while dying would be too devout to commit suicide under any circumstances.

THE MURDER IN THE TUNNEL

By NORVELL PAGE

JULES TREMAINE kicked a rock fragment and listened to the echoes clacking along the tunnel.

He said: "You pick out the damndest localities for your cases, Frank. This aqueduct is eleven hundred feet under the city."

Frank walked along with his rolling swagger and turned the beam of his flashlight up towards the ceiling.

"It's a nice tight aqueduct," he said. "There's not a drop of seepage water coming through here."

They turned a sweeping curve, and a huddle of men in a yellow circle of radiance came into view.

"There's your murder, I guess, Frank," said Jules.

Frank grunted: "Yeah."

They walked up to a group of six men in charge or a sergeant of police. On the floor of the aqueduct, a short way from the group, a man lay stretched out on his face, with the point of a pickaxe buried in his skull. The handle slanted backward over his body. The handle of the pick was wet. Unlike elsewhere in the aqueduct, water dripped slowly from the ceiling, and struck on it—splash—splash—splash—and left a brownish stain.

Frank turned to the sergeant. "Are these all the men who were in the tunnel," he asked, "at the time this man was murdered?"

The sergeant said: "Yes. I have verified it."

Jules stared at the corpse, while Frank went through some routine investigation work. Jules suddenly smiled.

"Sergeant," he asked, "have any of these men been near the body since it was discovered?"

"Naw," said the sergeant. "The foreman, there, who called me, saw it from a distance. The others wouldn't come this close until I made 'em. They're a sullen, dumb bunch. Can't get anything out of 'em."

Jules' smile widened. He said: "Frank, you can pick out the murderer very simply. If you don't know how, I'll show you."

How would you do it? You have all the facts Jules had.

Mail your solution on or before August 1st

A Great Wallop in September

"A WOMAN CAN KILL" - - - by Raoul Whitfield

Dion Davies, of the Dancer and Davies detective agency, is a regular guy. Who Dancer may be is more of a mystery. But there is a gal in the outfit, capable, hard as nails at times, a go-getter, not bad to look at, and in a pinch, a nifty handler of a gun. They have a case of extortion, blackmail and murder, and guns are very, very useful in the clean-up.

"WHISPERING JUSTICE" - - - by Erle Stanley Gardner

Ed Jenkins, The Phantom Crook, was once a crook, paid the penalty, reformed and tried to square himself with society. He learned the axiom—"once a crook, always a crook—in the eyes of the law." Every unsolved case was laid at his door. The Underworld and the crooked police declared war upon him—for he knew too much about both for their safety. In "Whispering Justice," he slides between the murder car of killers and their victim, plunges into the midst of a crime in the making, finds an innocent person caught in the meshes and matches his wits against killers' weapons to win freedom for both.

"MURDER IN JAIL" - - - by Roger Torrey

Imagine a long-sought criminal handcuffed between Dal Prentice and his equally hardboiled partner, further guarded by two armed stalwarts with the jail right at hand. Imagine the whole bunch of them scooped up and whirled away to be worked upon for the evidence which will give freedom to the killer-criminal. Can Dal Prentice take it? And how!

"GUNS DOWN" - - - by Frederick Nebel

No more popular appealing figure than Capt. Steve MacBride has appeared for years in this or any other magazine. Hard as flint, absolutely unswerving in his sense for right, no matter how powerful the wrong-doer, liking best to be in action where his men are endangered and bullets are apt to fly, he risks his life unhesitatingly for the lowliest sufferer in the interest of justice.

THESE ARE ONLY SOME OF THE STORIES
THAT PUT A GREAT WALLOP IN

September Black Mask

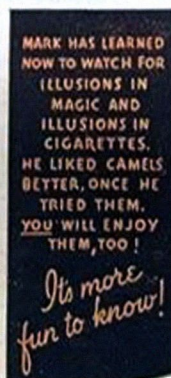
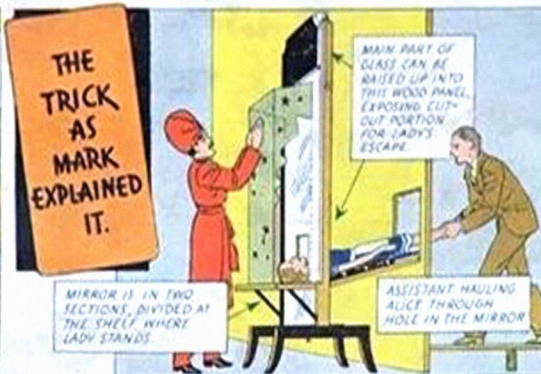
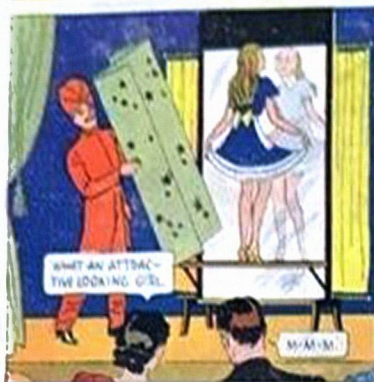
ON ALL NEWSSTANDS AUGUST 12th

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Inside back cover

IT'S FUN TO BE FOOLED

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LOOKING GLASS"



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