

12 of the toughest
murder stories
ever written.

THE

HARD-

BOILED

OMNIBUS



EDITED BY

JOSEPH T. SHAW

A GENUINE POCKET BOOK MYSTERY

25^c

Scenes from THE HARD-BOILED OMNIBUS

"I turned slowly. He was reaching for his hip. That should have warned me, but it didn't. I may have heard the swish of the blackjack. Certainly I must have felt it. There was a sudden pool of darkness at my feet. I dived into it and dropped . . . and dropped . . . and dropped. . . ."

**From *The Man Who Liked Dogs* by
Raymond Chandler.**

"The fat man came at Marjorie. 'Double-crossing little tramp,' he said levelly. Marjorie hid the acid bottle behind her. She watched the fat man. She waited until he put out a plump white hand, reaching for her, and then she said something to herself in a tight whisper and hurled the acid at him."

From *Red Goose* by Norbert Davis.

"I socked McCloor. It didn't seem to bother him. He swept me out of the way and pasted MacMan in the mouth. MacMan fell back, spit out a tooth, and came back for more. . . ."

From *Fly Paper* by Dashiell Hammett.

**The Hard-Boiled Omnibus was originally published by
Simon and Schuster, Inc.**

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THE
HARD-BOILED
OMNIBUS

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EARLY STORIES FROM
BLACK MASK

†††

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JOSEPH T. SHAW

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Introduction

We had recently returned from a five-year sojourn abroad during and following the First World War. Happening upon a sporting magazine, to which we had haphazardly contributed in years past, we were curious enough to investigate the remarkable change that had taken place in its format and appearance. We found the miracle man to be Ray Holland, a six-foot stalwart who, in addition to his familiarity with the birds and beasts, knew also the vital difference between the functions of an editor who knows his stuff and that of a publisher not so gifted. Ray also had the personality to enforce recognition of his knowledge and to keep the breach open. Hence, the success of the magazine.

In friendly conversation we were asked to edit another magazine in the same group: Black Mask, a detective story magazine. Before that, we had never seen a copy, had never even heard of the magazine. We had not even a bowing acquaintance with the "pulp." Yet we always held that a good story is where you find it regardless of author-fame or medium of publication. It has been said that with proper materials available, a good mouse trap can be built anywhere.

We meditated on the possibility of creating a new type of detective story differing from that accredited to the Chaldeans and employed more recently by Gaboriau, Poe, Conan Doyle—in fact, universally by detective story writers; that is, the deductive type, the cross-word puzzle sort, lacking—deliberately—all other human emotional values.

Obviously, the creation of a new pattern was a writer's rather than an editor's job. Consequently, search was made in the pages of the magazine for a writer with the requisite spark and originality, and we were amazingly encouraged by the promise evident in the work of one. Not that his pattern was different

from that of others, but he told his stories with a new kind of compulsion and authenticity.

So we wrote to Dashiell Hammett. His response was immediate and most enthusiastic: That is exactly what I've been thinking about and working toward. As I see it, the approach I have in mind has never been attempted. The field is unscratched and wide open.

It was apparent that Mr. Hammett shared our hope for a medium in which he could achieve his aim while developing his talent into a highly skillful instrument. We pointed out that this particular medium—the magazine mystery story—was both constrained and restrained. We felt obliged to stipulate our boundaries. We wanted simplicity for the sake of clarity, plausibility, and belief. We wanted action, but we held that action is meaningless unless it involves recognizable human character in three-dimensional form.

Dashiell Hammett had his own way of phrasing this: If you kill a symbol, no crime is committed and no effect is produced. To constitute a murder, the victim must be a real human being of flesh and blood.

Simple, logical, almost inevitable. Yet, amazingly, this principle had been completely ignored by crime writers—and still is, in the deductive type of mystery story.

In physics, an explosion sends out sound waves. But if there are no ears within their range, there is no sound. If you read of a thousand aborigines wiped out by earthquake or flood, you are abstractly interested, but you are not disturbed. But let a member of your own family be even remotely threatened and you are at once intensely concerned, emotionally aroused. This is true in real life. Why shouldn't it hold true in fiction, which must create the illusion of reality?

It was on this philosophic concept that we began to shape the magazine we wanted, the kind of story it would print.

The formula or pattern emphasizes character and the problems inherent in human behavior over crime solution. In other

words, in this new pattern, character conflict is the main theme; the ensuing crime, or its threat, is incidental.

*For a clear demonstration of this pattern, consider *The Thin Man* by Dashiell Hammett, and *The Big Sleep* by Raymond Chandler. In approach and structure, both are singularly alike, since both adhere closely to the pattern. Otherwise they are as dissimilar as any two novels, which demonstrates the infinite variety attainable under this pattern. Neither can be tagged "just another detective story."*

In both, characters, in full three dimensions, and character conflict are set up. The main crime and its victim are off-stage, and, while the solution of the crime is woven into the pattern of each story, it by no means constitutes the essence of the story. In fact, strip the crime from each book, and you still have a thrilling story, a test which the deductive type of mystery story could scarcely meet.

*A London publisher wrote us that he recognized in our magazine a new school in writing, differing from anything else American, and unlike anything English. He accredited the Black Mask group of writers with its inception and accomplishment. We believe it was Mr. McKeogh, writing in the *New York World-Telegram*, who stated that all plots and props in detective stories had been used and abused, and there could be nothing new except treatment; and he, too, gave credit to the Black Mask writers for this innovation.*

Such distinctive treatment comprises a hard, brittle style—which Raymond Chandler, one of its most brilliant exponents, declares belongs to everybody and to no one—a full employment of the functions of dialogue, and authenticity in characterization and action.

To this may be added a very fast tempo, attained in part by typical economy of expression which, probably, has had definite influence on writing in other fields. As Mrs. Harry Payne Burton said: "Hammett and his confrères have shown our authors how to attain the shortest distance between two points; and are we glad!"

The contributors of this brittle style were, notably, Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Raoul Whitfield, Roger Torrey, Paul Cain, Lester Dent, among others. It was rather extravagantly tagged as the "hard-boiled" school, and it was imitated throughout the "pulp" field. There is, however, this difference of distinction. While many Black Mask characters were admittedly "hard-boiled," the appellation belonged to the characters rather than to the school of writing. Style and treatment were something else again.

These writers observed the cardinal principle in creating the illusion of reality; they did not make their characters act and talk tough; they allowed them to. They gave the stories over to their characters, and kept themselves off the stage, as every writer of fiction should. Otherwise, as Raymond Chandler puts it, that most powerful factor, melodrama, becomes "used as a bludgeon and not as an art"—and loses ten-fold its effectiveness.

They did not themselves state that a situation was dangerous or exciting; they did not describe their characters as giants, dead-shots, or infallible men. They permitted the actors in the story to demonstrate all that to the extent of their particular and human capabilities. Moreover, as they attained their skill, they wrote with greater and greater restraint, careful of over-exaggeration in a word of their own where text demanded their descriptive contribution, adhering to the sound principle that whatever arouses the incredulity of a reader—no matter how true to life—has exactly the same effect as that which could not possibly happen. As a consequence, they wrote convincingly.

Long is the roster of the contributors to the magazine's individual type of crime fiction. Many who saw their first stories in print there have since risen to the heights in this and other fields of literature. It was often said, in that period, that their product, in its best examples, was several years ahead of its time. These writers were blazing new paths.

Most of the writers who together produced this magazine

have since contributed the most skilled and successful crime novels written in the past decade, and have also contributed enormously to the best Hollywood has to offer in the mystery field. Hammett and Chandler are outstanding examples. There are a score of other writers who contributed their share to make the Black Mask group outstanding, writers who favored us with their first work and have since come into national recognition. We would like to mention them all individually, as we so clearly remember them. We would like to include in this volume examples of each one's work, but in both cases space forbids.

We make only one final point. We do not, and we cannot, claim credit either for the original work of these Black Mask writers or for their success. It is our conviction that no one person can bring forth successful writing from another. A discerning editor may help toward skill and craftsmanship, but application of that skill and the thought behind it are the sole properties of the writer himself. And so, without any further introduction from me, meet the artists who made Black Mask what it was, a unique magazine and a new influence in American literature.

JOSEPH T. SHAW


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Sail*

LESTER DENT

 THE FISH SHOOK ITS TAIL AS THE KNIFE CUT OFF ITS head. Red ran out of the two parts and the fluid spread enough to cover the wet red marks where two human hands had failed to hold to the dock edge.

Oscar Sail wet the palm of his own left hand in the puddle.

The small policeman kept coming out on the dock, tramping in the rear edge of glare from his flashlight.

Sail split the fish belly, shook it over the edge of the yacht dock and there were some splashes below in the water. The stuff from the fish made the red stain in the water a little larger.

When the small policeman reached Sail, he stopped and gave his cap a cock. He looked down at Sail's feet and up at Sail's head.

The cop said, "Damned if you ain't a long drink of water." Sail said nothing.

The cop asked, "That you give that yell a minute ago?"

Sail showed plenty of teeth so that his grin would be seen in the moonlight. He picked up the fishhook and held it close to his red-wetted left palm.

"Little accident," he said.

When the cop put light on the hand, Sail tightened the thumb down and made a wrinkle in the palm. Red was squeezed out of the wrinkle and two or three drops fell on

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the dock. It was enough like seepage from a cut the fishhook might have torn that Sail went on breathing.

"Hook, eh?" the cop said vaguely.

He put the toe of his right shoe into the fish head's open mouthful of snake-fang teeth.

"Barracuda," he added, not sounding as if that was on his mind. "They don't eat 'em in Miami. Not when you catch the damn things in the harbor, anyhow."

Sail's laugh did not go off so well and he turned it into a throat clearing.

He said, "People get hot ideas."

The policeman did not say anything and began spearing around with his flashlight beam. He poked it over the edge of the dock at one of the fish organs floating on the stained water. He held it there for what seemed a year.

After he finally began pointing the beam at other places, the light located the bugeye. The bugeye was tied at the end of the dock with springlines. Sloping masts were shiny and black and black canvas covers were on the sails. The hull looked black, neat, new.

The cop dabbed his light up and down each of the two bugeye masts and asked, "Yours?"

Sail said, "Yep."

"What you call that kind of a boat?"

Sail began talking heartily about the boat.

He said, "Chesapeake Bay five-log bugeye. She is thirty-four feet long at the waterline and forty-five overall. Her bottom is made out of five logs drifted together with Swedish iron rods. She has twelve foot beam and only draws a little over two feet of water with the centerboard up. A bugeye has sloping masts. You tell 'em by that, and the clipper bow they always put on them. They're made—"

"Yeah," the cop said. "Uh-huh."

He splashed light on Sail.

Sail would have been all right if he had been a foot or two shorter. His face would never wear a serious look successfully. Too much mouth. Sun and salt water was on its way to ruining his hair. Some of the black had been scrubbed out

of his black polo shirt and black dungarees. Bare feet had long toes. Weather had gotten to all of the man a lot.

The policeman switched off his light.

"That was a hell of a funny yell," he said. "And damned if you aren't the tallest thing I ever saw."

He stamped his feet as he walked away.

Sail shut and opened his eyes slowly and by the time he got rid of the effects of the flashlight, the officer was out of sight on shore.

Sail held both hands out about a foot from his eyes. There was enough moonlight for him to see them. A slight breeze made coolness against one side of his face. Loud music came from the Take-a-Sail-in-the-Moonlight-for-a-Dollar-a-Couple boat at the far end of the City Yacht Basin, but a barker spoiled the effect of the music. Two slot machines chugged alongside the lunch stand at Pier Six.

After he had watched his hands tremble for a while, Sail picked up hook, line, fish, knife, and got aboard the bugeye.

Sail, name of the bugeye, was in white letters on the black life preservers tied to the main stays.

Sail grasped a line, took half hitches off a cleat, and pulled a live-box made of laths partly out of the water. Some crawfish, crabs and two more live barracuda were in the live-box. He cut the line close to the live-box and let the weighted box sink.

The tiny cabin of the bugeye had headroom below for a man of ordinary height. Sail had to stoop. The usual gear was neatly, in places cleverly, stowed in the cabin.

Sail popped the fish into a kettle in the galley, hurrying.

With the point of the fishhook, he gouged a small place in his left palm, making faces over the job.

He straightened out the stuff in the tackle locker enough to get rid of signs that a hook and line had been grabbed out in haste.

After he had washed and held the mouth of a mercuriochrome bottle against the gouge, he looked out of the hatch.

The young policeman was back where the fish had bled

and was using his flashlight. He squatted and picked up the fish head. He squeezed it and got fresh blood out of it. After a while, he stood up and approached the dock end. When his flashlight brightened the bugeye's dark sloping masts and black sail covers, Sail was at the galley, making enough noise cutting up the fish to let the cop know where he was and what he was doing.

Sail let four or five minutes pass before he put his head out of the hatch and looked. Perspiration had made the back of his polo shirt moist by then.

The cop had gone somewhere else.

Sail was still looking and listening for the policeman when he heard a man yell and a woman curse.

The woman said, "Dam' stinker!" and more that was worse.

The man's yell was just a yell.

The sounds came out of Bayfront Park, which lay between the yacht basin and Biscayne Boulevard.

Sail got out on deck and stretched his neck around. He saw a man run among the palms in the park. The man was alone.

Then the small policeman and his flashlight appeared among the palms. During the next five minutes, the policeman and his flashlight were not motionless long enough for him to have found anything.

Sail dropped into the bugeye cabin and stripped naked, working fast. His body looked better without clothes. The hair on it was golden and long, but not thick. He put on black jersey swim trunks.

Standing in the companion and looking around, his right hand absently scratched his chest. No one was in sight.

He got over the side without being conspicuous.

The water had odor and its normal quota of floating things. The tide was high slack, almost, but still coming in a little. Sail swam under the dock.

The dock had been built strongly because of the hurricanes. There was a net of cross timbers underneath, and any-

thing falling off the south side of the dock would be carried against them by the tide.

Sail counted pilings until he knew he was under the place on the dock where he had used the fish. He began diving and groping around underwater. He was quiet about that.

He found what he was seeking on the sixth or seventh dive. He kept in the dark places as he swam away with it.

One of the little islands in the harbor seemed to be the only place that offered privacy. He made for it.

The island—an artificial half acre put there when they dredged the City Yacht Basin—was a heap of dark silence when Sail swam tiredly to it. Pine trees on the island had been bent by the hurricanes, some uprooted. The weeds did not seem to have been affected.

Sail tried not to splash coming out of the shallows onto the sand beach. He towed the Greek under water as long as possible.

Two stubborn crabs and some seaweed hung to the Greek when Sail carried him into the pines and weeds. The knife sticking in the Greek, and what it had done, did not help. Weeds mashed under the body when Sail laid it down.

Pulpy skins in the Greek's billfold were probably greenbacks, and stiffer, smaller rectangles, business cards. Silver coins, a pocket knife, two clips for an automatic. The gun was in a clip holster under the left armpit of the corpse.

Inside the Greek's coat lining was a panel, four inches wide, five times as long, a quarter of an inch thick, hard and rigid.

The Greek's wristwatch ticked.

Sail put the business cards and the panel from the coat lining inside his swim trunks, and was down on his knees cleaning his hands with sand when the situation got the best of his stomach. By the time he finished with that, he had sweated profusely and had a headache over the eyes.

He left the Greek on the island.

The water felt cold as he swam back towards the bugeye,

keeping in what dark places he could find. The water chill helped the headache.

Having reached the bug-eye with the stuff still in his swim trunks, he clung to the bobstay, the chain brace which ran from the bow waterline to the end of the long bowsprit. He blew the brackish bay water off his lips quietly and listened.

There was no sign anywhere that he had been seen or heard.

He made himself sink and began feeling over the parts of the dock which would still be under water at low tide. Everything under water was inches thick with barnacles and oysters.

He found a niche that would do, took the stuff out of his trunks and wedged it there tightly enough so that there was not much danger of it working out.

Sail clung to the bug-eye's bobstay until all the water ran off him that wanted to run, then scrambled aboard and ducked into the cabin.

He had started to shed the bathing suit when the woman said, "Puh-lease!"

Sail came up straight and his head thumped a ceiling carling.

She swung her legs off the forward bunk. Even then, light from the kerosene gimbal lamp did not reach more than her legs. The feet were small in dark blue sandals which showed red enameled toenails. Her legs had not been shaved recently, and were nice.

Sail chewed an imaginary something between two eye-teeth while he squinted at the girl. He felt of his head where it had hit the ceiling. Two or three times, he seemed about to say something, but didn't and went forward into one of the pair of small single staterooms. The shadow-embedded rest of her did not look bad as he passed.

He shut the stateroom door and got out of the swim trunks. He tied a three-pound fish sinker to the trunks and dropped them through a porthole into the bay, which was dredged

three fathoms deep there. He put on his scrubbed dark polo and dungarees.

The girl had moved into the light when he opened the door and entered the cabin. The rest of her was interesting. Twenty something, he judged.

She smiled and said, "You don't act as if you remember me, Wesley."

Sail batted his eyes at her.

"Gosh," she said, "but you're tall!"

Sail scratched behind his right ear, changed his eyebrows around at her, gave the top of his head three hard rubs, then leaned back against the galley sink. This upset a round bottle. He caught it, looked at it, and seemed to get an idea.

He asked, "Drink?"

She had crossed her legs. Her skirt was split. "That would be nice," she smiled.

Sail, his back to her, made more noise than necessary in rattling bottles and glasses and pinking an opener into a can of condensed milk. He mixed two parts of gin, one of creme de cocoa, one of condensed milk. He put four drops from a small green bottle in one drink and gave that one to the girl, holding it out a full arm length, as if bashful.

They sipped.

"It's not bad without ice, Wesley," she murmured.

Sail said, "Thanks, lady," politely.

Her blue handbag started to slip out of the hollow of her crossed legs and she caught it quickly.

"For a husband, you're a darn polite cuss," she said.

Sail swallowed with a distinctly pigeon noise. "Eh?"

"My Gawd, don't you *remember?*"

"What?"

"If this isn't something! Two weeks ago Tuesday. Four o'clock in the morning. We were pretty tight, but we found a justice of the peace in Cocconut Grove. You had to hock the engagement ring with the jeep for his fee and twenty dollars, and we all went out and had some drinks, and I kind of lost track of things, including you."

"I'll be—" Sail said vaguely.

The girl put her head back and laughed. The mirth did not sound just right.

"I didn't know what to do," she said. "I remembered you said you were a jewelry drummer out of Cincinnati. I sat around the hotel. Then I began to get a mad up."

An unnaturalness was growing in her voice. She pinched her eyes shut and shook her head. Her blue purse slid to the floor.

"I'm here to tell you I had a time locating you," she said. "I might have known you would be a sailor. Gawd, imagine! Anyway, Mama is right on deck now, Mister, and I want something done about it. If you think you're not the man, you're going to have to prove it in a big way."

"You want me to prove my name, business and recent whereabouts? Is that it?"

"You bet."

Sail said, "That's what I figured."

She peered at him, winking both eyes. Then fright grabbed her face.

"You ain't so damn' smart!" she said through her teeth.

She started to get up, but something was wrong with her knee joints by now, and she slid off the bench and sat hard on the black battleship linoleum.

Sail moved fast and got his long fingers on the blue purse as she clawed it open. A small bright revolver fell out of the purse as they had a tug-o'-war over it.

"Blick!" the girl gasped.

Blick and a revolver came out of the oilskin locker. The gun was a small bright twin to the girl's. Blick's Panama fell off slick mahogany hair, and disarranged oilskins fell down in the locker behind him. Blick had his lips rolled in until he seemed to have no lips. He looked about old enough to have fought in the last war.

"Want it shot off?" he gritted.

Sail jerked his hand away from the girl's purse as if a bullet were already heading for it. He put his hands up as high as the cabin carlings and ceiling would allow. The up-

per part of his stomach jumped slightly with each beat of his heart, moving the polo shirt fabric.

The girl started to get up, couldn't. She said, "Blick!" weakly.

Blick, watching Sail, threw at her, "You hadda be a sucker and try that married-when-you-were-tight gag to find out who he is!"

The girl's lips worked with some words before they got out as sounds. ". . . was—I—know he—doped drink."

Blick gritted at Sail, "Bud, she's my sis, and if she don't come out of that, I wouldn't wanta be you!"

Sail watched the bright gun. Sweat had come out on his forehead enough to start running.

"She'll be all right," he said.

"What'd you give her?"

"Truth serum."

"You louse! Fat lot of good it'll do you."

Sail said nothing.

Blick ran his eyes up and down Sail, then said, "They sure left the faucet on too long when they poured you, didn't they, bud?"

Sail got his grin to operate. He said, "Let's see if some words will clear this any."

Blick said, "That's an idea, bud. I think I got you figured. You're some guy Andopolis rung in. It was like Andopolis to get himself some help."

"Andopolis was the one who got knifed?" Sail asked.

"You ain't that dumb."

"Was he?"

"Naw. That was Sam, my pal."

Sail rubbed the top of his head. "I'm sort of confused."

"You and us both," Blick said. "We're confused by you. We ain't seen you around before today. But me and Nola and Sam are watching Andopolis, and he starts out on this dock. You're the only boat out here, so it's a cinch he wanted to see you."

"He only made it about half way out the dock," Sail said dryly.

"Sure. Sam headed him off. Sam wanted to talk to Andopolis was all—"

"It wasn't all," Sail drawled. "What Sam really wanted was to make Andopolis tell him something. Andopolis had some information. Sam wanted it. Sam told Andopolis that if he didn't cough up on the spot he would get his entrails shot out, or words to such effect. Sam reached for his gun. But he had made the mistake of not unbuttoning his coat before he started the argument. Andopolis knew exactly where to put a knife. Sam went off the dock after he gave just one yell."

"And that brought the cop."

Sail squinted one eye. Perspiration was stinging it. He echoed, "And that brought the cop."

Blick was holding the gun steady. He said, "Andopolis ran before the cop got here. He hid in the park and Nola and I tried to get him later, but he broke away and ran."

"Then you came here."

Blick grinned thinly. "Let's get back to the time between the knifing of Sam and the arrival of the cop. You, bud, done some fast work. You were sweet, what I mean. You got a hook and line, grabbed a live fish out of your live-box, jumped on the dock and butchered the fish to hide the marks where Sam got it. You even got the insides of the fish into the water to hide any bloodstains where Sam sank. Then you fed the cop a line when he got there."

"You sure had your eyes open," Sail said.

"Did the cop go for your story?"

"I'm still wondering," Sail said thoughtfully.

Blick watched Sail. "How much do you know?"

Sail got rid of his made grin. "I'll bite. How much?"

"So you're going to start that," Blick said.

Nola was breathing noisily. Blick pointed at her, said, "Help me get her going!"

Sail grasped the girl and lifted her.

"Stay that way," Blick ordered, then searched Sail, found no weapon, and said, "Out."

Sail walked the girl up the companionway and on to the dock, then started to let go the girl and get back aboard.

"Along with us," Blick ordered. "It'd be swell if Andopolis has told you what we're trying to find out, wouldn't it?"

Sail said nothing. His breathing was as audible as the girl's. Blick got on the other side of the girl and helped hold her up. "We're tight," Blick said. "Stagger."

They staggered along the dock to the sidewalk, and along that.

Yacht sailors stood in a knot at the end of the Pier Six lunch stand, and out of the knot came the chug of the slot machines. Blick put his hand and small revolver into a coat pocket. They turned to the right, away from the lunch stand.

Sail said, "You might have the wrong idea about me."

"We'll go into that, bud," Blick said. "We'll go into that in a nice place I know about."

They scuffed over the sidewalk and Blick, walking as if he did not feel as if he weighed more than a ton, seemed to think of a possibility which pleased him.

"Hell, Nola! This guy covered up that knifing for Andopolis, so he's got to be with Andopolis all the way."

Nola did not answer. She was almost sound asleep. Blick pinched her, slapped her, and that awakened her somewhat.

A police radio car was parked at the corner of Biscayne Boulevard and the street they were traveling. Blick did not see it in time. When he did discover it, he took his breath in with a sharp noise.

"We're drunk," Blick warned. "Taking each other home."

Sail shoved a little to steer the girl to the side of the walk farthest from the prow car. Blick shoved back to straighten them up. He also got mad.

Blick's gun was in his coat pocket, and if shooting started, it was no time for a gun to be in a pocket. Blick started to take it out, probably intending to hold it at his side where it could not be seen from the police car.

Sail watched the gun start out of the pocket. It had a high front sight and there was an even chance of it hanging on the pocket lining. It did.

Sail shoved Blick and Nola as hard as he could. Force of the effort bounced him toward the police car. He grabbed the spare tire at the back of the machine and used it to help himself around.

A policeman in the car yelled, "What the hell's this?" He wasn't excited.

Blick did not shoot. He got Nola over a shoulder and ran. A taxicab was on its stand at the corner. Blick made it.

Sail shouted, "Kidnapers!"

One of the cops leaned out, looked at him, said, "Huh?"

Blick leaped into the taxi with his sister. An instant later, the hack driver fell out of his own machine, holding his head. The taxi took off.

"They stole my heap!" the taxi-driver shrieked.

The police car starter began whining. It whined and whined and nothing happened; one cop wailed, "It never done this before!"

"Try turning on the switch!" Sail yelled.

The motor started.

An officer stuck his head out of the car, said, "You stick around here, wise guy!" and the machine left in pursuit of the cab.

Sail, who had the legs for it, ran away from there very fast.

Sail, when he reached the Pier Six lunch stand, planted his hip against the counter, and caught up with his breathing. A young man who looked as youths in lunch stands somehow always look came over, swiped at the counter with his towel, got a look at Sail, blinked and wanted to know, "How's the weather up there?"

"Dry," Sail said. "What you got in cans?"

Sail drank the first and second cans of beer in gulps, but did some pondering over the third. When it was down, he absent-mindedly put three dimes on the counter.

"Forty-five," the youth corrected. "Cans is fifteen."

Sail substituted a half dollar and put the nickel change in one of the slot machines, still involved with his thoughts.

The one-armed bandit gave him a lemon and two bars, another bar just showing.

"Almost a jackpot," someone said.

"History," Sail said, "repeating itself."

A telephone booth was housed at the end of Pier Four. Sail dialed the O and asked for Police Headquarters.

The slot machines chugged at the lunch stand while he waited. A card on the phone box told how to report a fire, get the police or call an ambulance. He read part of it, and Headquarters answered.

Sail said, "I want to report an attempted robbery. This is Captain Oscar Sail of the yacht *Sail*. A few minutes ago, a man and a woman boarded my boat and marched me away at the point of a gun. I do not know why. I feel they intended to kill me. There was a police car parked at the corner of Biscayne, and I broke away. The man and woman fled in a taxi. The officers chased them. I do not know whether the officers have reported yet."

"They have."

"Did they catch the pair?"

"No."

Sail almost said that was what he had called to find out, but caught himself in time.

"It might help if you described the pair," the police voice said.

Sail described an imaginary couple that were not like Blick and Nola in any particular except that they were man and woman.

"Thanks," said the voice at Headquarters. "When you get aboard your boat, tell Patrolman Joey Cripp to give us a ring. I'm Captain Rader. You'll probably find Patrolman Cripp on your boat."

Sail was wearing a startled look as he hung up and felt for a nickel in the coin return cup of the telephone.

Three men were waiting in the cabin of *Sail* when Sail got there. Two wore police uniforms, the other had civilian clothes.

One policeman was using his tongue to lather a new cigar with saliva. The tongue was coated. His neck had some loose red skin on it. He was shaking, not very much, but shaking.

The second officer was the young small patrolman. He still had his flashlight.

The man in civilian clothes was putting bottles and test tubes in a scuffed leather bag which held more of the same stuff and a microscope off which much of the enamel had been worn. His suit was fuzzy gray, rimless spectacles were pinched tight on his nose, and he had chewed half of the cigar in his mouth without lighting it. The cigar was the same kind the policeman with the shakes was licking.

Sail said, "Captain Rader wants Patrolman Joey Cripp to call him."

"That's me," the young patrolman said, and started for the companionway.

"Wait a minute," Sail said. "You didn't happen to get a look at a man and a woman who left here with me a while ago?"

"I sure did. I was behind a bush in the park." The young officer went out.

The shaking policeman got up slowly, holding his damp cigar and looking miserable. He took a full breath and started words coming.

"Gracious but you're a tall man," he said. "I'm Captain Cripp and Joey is my son. This is Mister Waterman. You have a wonderful boat here. Some day I am going to get me a boat like this and go to the South Seas. I want to thank you for reporting your trouble to Captain Rader, which I presume you have just done. And I want to congratulate you on your narrow escape from those two. But next time, don't take such chances. Never fool with a man with a gun. We'll let you know as soon as we hear anything of your attacker and his companion. They got away from the radio car. I hope you have a good time in Miami, and no more trouble. We have a wonderful city, a wonderful climate." He shook with his chill.

Captain Cripp pulled out another cigar and a shiny cylindrical metal lighter. He took another breath.

"Smoke? Of course you do. Better light it yourself. I shake like a leaf. I've got the damned malaria, and every other day, I shake. That's an excellent cigar, if I do say so myself. One of our native products. Made right here in Miami, and as mild as an old maid's kiss. There! Didn't I tell you it was a good cigar?"

He took back his lighter. He did not touch the bright metal where Sail had held it and made fingerprints.

"Isn't admission charged to this?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, you are naturally puzzled by our presence here. Forget it. It means nothing at all. It's just an idea Captain Rader got after talking to Joey about a yell and a fish."

Patrolman Joey Cripp jumped aboard and came below.

"Captain Rader offers his apologies for sending us aboard your boat in your absence," Joey said. "And he wonders if you have anything you would like to say to us."

Sail, his scowl getting blacker and blacker, gritted, "I'm making an effort not to say it!"

Joey said, "Well, Mister Sail, if you will excuse me, we will be going."

The rabbit man, Waterman, finished putting things in his bag and picked up a camera with a photoflash attachment, pointed the camera at Sail. The outfit clicked and flashed.

"Thank you," he said, not very politely.

They left.

Sail threw the cigar overboard, then examined the cabin. Almost everything had been put back in place carefully. But in one spot, he found fingerprint powder enough to show they had printed the place.

Sail tried to sleep the rest of the night. He did get a little. The rest of the time he spent at the companion with a mirror which he had rigged on the tip joint of a fishing rod so as to look around without showing himself.

Boats at a slip do not usually have an anchor watch. But

on a big Matthews at the opposite slip, somebody seemed to be standing at anchor. The watcher did not smoke, did not otherwise allow any light to get to his features. He might have been tall or short, wide or narrow. The small things he did were what any man would do during a long tiresome job.

There was one exception. The watcher frequently put a finger deep in his mouth and felt around.

Sail took a shower with the dock hose. It gave him a chance to get a better look at the Matthews. The watcher of the night was not in evidence.

The *Sail's* dinghy rode in stern davits, bugeye fashion, at enough of a tilt not to hold spray. Sail lowered it. He got a brush and the dock hose and washed down the black topsides, taking off dried salt which sea water had deposited. He dropped his brush in the water at different times. In each case, it sank, and he had to reach under for it.

The fourth time he reached under for the brush, he retrieved the stuff which he had taken off the Greek. The articles had not worked out of the niche between the dock cross braces under water, where he had jammed them.

Sail finished washing down, hauled the dink up on the davits, and during the business of coiling the dock hose around its faucet, looked around. Any of a dozen persons in sight might have been the watcher off the Matthews. The others would be tourists down for a gawk at the yachts.

He spirited the Greek's stuff below with the scrub brush.

One of the cards said Captain Santorin Gura Andopolis of the yacht *Athens Girl* chartered for Gulf Stream fishing, nobody catching more fish. The address was Pier Five.

The other twenty-six cards said Captain Sam Dokomos owned the Lignum Vitae Towing Company. An address and a telephone number for day calls only.

There was also a piece of board four by twenty inches, a quarter of an inch thick, mahogany, with screw holes in four corners. The varnish was peeled, rather than worn, as was some of the gold leaf. The gold leaf formed a letter, four figures.

Sail burned everything in the galley Shipmate.

There was no one in the telephone booth at the end of the pier. He looked up the number of Pier Five, which was no more than two hundred feet distant, and dialed it.

"Captain Andopolis," he requested.

Through the window, he could see them go looking for Captain Andopolis. It took them almost five minutes to decide they couldn't find him.

"Maybe he went to the dentist, somebody thought," the one who had hunted suggested.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. He's been having a toothache, somebody said."

Sail went back to the bug-eye and put on a dark suit, tropical weight, a black polo shirt and black shoes. His shore cruising rig.

The cafeteria was overdone in chromium. The waiters who carried the trays were dressed in the same red as that on the walls. There were a score of customers and a boy who wandered among the tables selling newspapers and racing dope sheets. He sold more dope sheets than papers.

One man eating near the door did not put syrup on his pancakes or sugar in his coffee. When he finished, he put a finger in the back of his mouth to feel.

Sail finished his beer and doughnuts and strolled around the corner to a U-Drive-It.

The only car on which they did not want a deposit was a little six-cylinder sedan, not new. Sail drove it around, sticking his head out frequently to look for a tall building. He found it and parked in front of it.

He made a false start into the building, then came back to take another look at an upright dingus. Then he went inside.

He told the elevator operator loudly, "Five!" before they started up.

The fifth floor corridor was empty.

When the man who had felt of his tooth in the cafeteria came sneaking up the stairs, Sail was set. He had his belt strapped tight around his fist. The man got down on all fours

to mew his pain. Sail hit again, then unwrapped the belt, blew on his fist, worked the fingers.

He had the senseless man in his arms when the elevator answered his signal.

"Quick! I gotta rush my friend to a place for a treatment!" he explained.

He drove five or six miles on a side road off the Tamiami Trail before he found a lonesome spot and got out. He hauled the man out.

The man began big at the top and tapered. His small hands were calloused, dirt was ground into the callouses, the nails broken. His face was darker than his hair.

A leather envelope purse held three hundred in old and new bills. There was a dollar sixty-one in change and the cashier's slip for his cafeteria breakfast in his trousers.

A knife was in a holster against the small of his back. It was flat and supported by a high belt. Sail threw it in the canal at the roadside. It was not the one with which he had knifed Sam. He had left that one in his victim.

Handfuls of water from the canal did not speed his revival much. When he finally came around, he groaned, squirmed, and started feeling of his bad tooth.

Sail stood back and showed him a fat blue revolver. "Just try to be nonchalant, Andopolis," he advised.

Andopolis immediately stood up.

"Sit down!" Sail directed sharply.

Andopolis walked towards him.

Sail shoved the gun out, gritting desperately, "This thing is loaded, you fool!"

Andopolis leaped. Sail dodged, but hardly enough. Andopolis hit him with a shoulder. The impact spun him. Since he didn't want to shoot, the gun was a handicap. It tied up his fists. Andopolis hit him on the belt buckle. Numbness grabbed the whole front of his body. Something suddenly against his back was the ground.

"Yah!" Andopolis screeched. "Yah!"

He jumped, feet together, at Sail's middle. Sail was too numb to move clear. The feet hit his chest, everything seemed

to break, and red-hot pain knocked the numbness out. Sail got Andopolis' legs, jerked. Andopolis windmilled his arms, but fell.

Sail clamped on to one of the man's feet and began doing things to it and the leg. Andopolis, turning over and over, raised a dust cloud. He moaned and bellowed and made dog noises. When he judged Andopolis was dizzy enough, Sail pounced on the dust cloud. He hit, variously, an arm, the ground, a hip, and other places which he could not identify.

Andopolis, bewildered and with dirt in his eyes, failed to get his jaw out of the way.

Sail straightened, put back his head and started to take a full breath. He began coughing. Hacking, gagging, holding his chest, he sat down in the road. He began to sweat profusely. After a while, he unbuttoned his pants and pulled up his shirt. There was one purple print of the entire bottom of both of Andopolis' feet, and the chest was skinned, the loose skin mixed with the long golden hair. There was not much blood.

Andopolis got his eyes open and snarled, "Yah! I stomp you good if you don't lay off me!"

Sail coughed and got up. He kept his feet far apart, but did not teeter much.

He said thickly, "My Macedonian friend, you stood anchor watch on me all night and you were still trailing me this morning. Where do you get that lay off stuff?"

"Before that, I'm talk about," Andopolis growled.

"Eh?"

Andopolis took a breath and blew words out. "For two week now, you been follow me like dog. I go to Bimini two day, and you and that black bug-eye in Bimini before long. I make the run from Bimini here yesterday. You make him too. Vat you take me for? One blind owl, huh?"

Sail asked, "Do you think you're bulletproof, too?"

Andopolis snorted. "Me, I don't theenk you shoot."

"What gave you that idea?"

"Go jump in hell," Andopolis said.

Sail coughed some, deep and low, trying to keep it from moving his ribs.

He said, "All right, now that we're being honest with each other, I'll tell you a true story about a yacht named *Lady Luck*. That's just so there won't be any misunderstanding about who knows what."

Andopolis crowded his lips into a bunch and pushed the bunch out as far as he could, but didn't say anything.

Sail began:

"The *Lady Luck*, Department of Commerce registration number K 9420, was as neat a little yacht as ever kedged off Featherbed Bank. She belonged to Bill Lord of Tulsa. Oil. Out in Tulsa, they call Bill the Osage Ogre, on account of he's got what it seems to take to find oil. Missus Bill likes jewelry, and Bill likes her, so he buys her plenty. Because Missus Bill really likes her rocks, she carries them around with her. You following me?"

Andopolis was. He still had his lips pursed.

"Bill Lord had his *Lady Luck* anchored off the vet camp on Lower Matecumbe last November," Sail continued. "Bill and the Missus were ashore, looking over the camp. Bill was in the trenches himself, back when, and is some kind of a shot in the American Legion or the democrats, so he was interested in the camp. The Missus left her pretties on the yacht. Remember that. Everybody has read about the hurricane that hit that afternoon, and maybe some noticed that Bill and his Missus were among those who hung on behind that tank car. But the *Lady Luck* wasn't so lucky, and she dragged her picks off somewhere and sank. For a while, nobody knew where."

Sail stopped to cough. He had to lay down on his back before he could stop, and he was very careful about getting erect again. Perspiration had wet most of him.

He said, "A couple of weeks ago, a guy asked the Department of Commerce lads to check and give him the name of the boat, and the name of the owner, that carried the number K 9420. That was the mistake."

"Pooley," Andopolis said, "on your story."

"The word got to me," Sail continued. "Never mind how. And it was easy to find you were the lad asking for the dope on K 9420. Inquiry brought out that you had had a fishing party down around Matecumbe and Long Key a few days before you suddenly got curious about K 9420. It was a little harder to locate the parties who had your boat hired at the time. Two Pan-American pilots. They said you anchored off Lower Matecumbe to bottom fish, and your anchor fouled something, and you had a time, and finally, when you got the anchor up, you brought aboard some bow planking off a sunken boat. From the strain as it was torn loose, it was apparent the anchor had pulled the planking off the rest of the boat, which was still down there. You checked up as a matter of course to learn what boat you had found."

Andopolis looked as if something besides his tooth hurt him.

"Tough you didn't get in touch with the insurance people instead of contacting Captain Sam Dokomos, a countryman of yours who had a towing and salvage outfit, and a bad reputation."

Andopolis growled, "Damn! You said somethin' then!"

Sail kept his voice lower to decrease the motion of his ribs in expelling air for words. "You needed help to get the *Lady Luck*. But Captain Sam Dokomos tried to make you cough up the exact location. Then you smelled a doublecross, got scared and lit for Bimini.

"I had been hanging around all this time, and not doing a good job of it, so you got wise to me. That scared you back to Miami. You had decided on a showdown, and were headed for my boat when Captain Sam collared you on the dock. You took care of part of your troubles with a knife right there. But that left Captain Sam's girl friend and her brother, Blick, and Nola, or whatever their names are. They were in the know. They tried to grab you in the park after you fixed Sam up, but you outran them.

"Now, that's a very complete story, don't you think? Oh, yes. You got reckless and jumped me a minute ago because you figured I wouldn't shoot you because nobody but you

knows the exact location of the *Lady Luck*. The two Pan-American boys fishing down there with you when you found the ship forgot to take bearings and didn't have a smell of an idea where they were at the time."

Andopolis was a man who did his thinking with the help of his face, and there was more disgust than anything else on his features.

"You trying to cut in?" he snarled finally.

"Not trying. Have."

Andopolis thought that over. The sun was comfortable, but mosquitoes were coming out of the swamp around the road to investigate, hungrier than land sharks.

"Yeah," Andopolis muttered finally. "I guess you have, at that."

"Let's get this straight, Andy. You and I, and nobody else." Andopolis nodded. "Okay."

"Now just who is this Blick?"

"Nola's brother."

"Now, hell, Andy—"

"And Nola was married to that double-crosser, Sam."

Sail made a whistling mouth. "So it was Nola's husband you dirked. She'll like you for that."

"So what? She didn't go for him much."

"No?"

"Naw. That dame—"

"Skip it," Sail said suddenly. He put his shirt on, favoring his chest. "Dang, feller, you sure busted up my ribs. We've got to watch the insurance company. They paid off on Missus Bill's stuff. Over a hundred thousand. They'll have wires out."

Andopolis nodded. "What about stuff for diving?"

"There's sponger equipment aboard my bugeye," Sail said. "I tried that racket over in Tarpon Springs, but you can't compete with those Greeks over there."

"Let's go," Andopolis said.

He was feeling of his tooth when he got in the car. Sail drove slowly. The road, nothing more than a high dike built

up with material scooped out to make the drainage canal, was rough. It hurt his ribs.

Sail had driven no more than half a mile when both front tires let go their air. Maybe the car would still have remained on the road. But bullets also knocked holes in the windshield. The car was in the canal before anything could be done about it.

The car broke most of its windows going down the canal bank. The canal must have been six feet deep. Its tea-colored water filled the machine at once. Sail's middle hurt, and he had lost his air, and had to breathe in, and there was nothing but water.

After the water had filled the car, it seemed to rush around inside. Sail tried the doors, but they wouldn't open. He did not touch Andopolis in his struggles. Andopolis did not seem to be in the car. Sail couldn't remember him having been thrown out.

The first window Sail found was too small. He pummeled the car roof, but hardly had strength enough to knock himself away from what he was hitting. Then he was suddenly out of the car. He didn't know just how he had managed it. He reached the top, but sank twice before he clutched a weed on shore, after which an attack of the spasms kept him at first from hearing the shots.

Yells were mixed in the shot noise. Sail squeezed water off his eyeballs with the lids, looked, and saw Andopolis on the canal bank. Andopolis was some distance away and running madly.

Blick and his sister Nola were running after Andopolis. They were shooting at Andopolis' legs, it seemed.

They all three ran out of sight, but the sounds told Sail they had winged Andopolis and grabbed him.

Sail had wrenched some of the water out of his lungs by now. He swam to a bush which hung down into the water and got under it. He managed to get his coughing stopped.

Andopolis was sobbing at the top of his voice when Blick and Nola dragged him up.

"Shoot his other leg off if he acts up, Nola," Blick said. "I'll get our tall bud."

Sail began to want to cough. He desired the cough until it was almost worth getting shot for.

"He must be a submarine," Blick said. He got a stick and poked around. "Hell, Nola, this water is eight feet deep here anyhow."

Andopolis bubbled something in Greek.

"Shut up," Blick said, "or we'll put bullets into you like we put 'em into the tires of your car."

Andopolis went on bubbling.

"His leg is bleeding bad, Blick," Nola said.

"Hell I care! He knifed your husband, didn't he?"

Air kept coming up in big bubbles from the submerged car. Sail tried to keep his mind off the cough. Blick stood for a century on the bank with his bright little pistol.

"He musta drowned," Blick said.

Andopolis moaned.

"Didn't you know we had been shaggin' you all night and mornin'?" Blick asked him. "Hell, if you hadn't been so occupied with that long lean punk, you'd have got wise, maybe."

Nola said, "We better get his leg fixed."

"If he ain't free with his information, he won't need his leg any more," Blick said. "Let's get the hell away from here."

Andopolis whimpered as they hazed him away. They apparently had a car in the bushes beside the canal some distance down the road. Its noise went away. Sail crawled out and had a good cough.

Captain Cripp looked wide-eyed and hearty and without a sign of a chill as he exclaimed, "Well, well, good morning, good morning. You know, we began to think something had happened to you."

Sail looked at him with eyes that appeared to be drained of everything but the will to carry on, then stumbled down the remaining three steps into the main cabin of *Sail*. He let himself down on the starboard seat. Pads of cotton under gauze thickened his neck and wrists. He had discovered the car

windows had cut him. Iodine had run from under one of the pads and dried. He had just come from the hospital.

Young bony Patrolman Joey Cripp looked at Sail. His grin took the looseness out of the corner of his mouth.

"Tsk, tsk," he said. "Now that's terrible. You look a sight. By God, it's a wonder you're alive. I hope that didn't happen in Miami."

Sail gave them a look of bile. "This is a private boat, in case you forgot."

"Now, now, I hope we can keep things on an amiable footing," Captain Cripp murmured.

Sail said, "Drag it!" His face was more cream than any other color. He reached behind himself in the tackle locker and got a gaff hook. A four-foot shaft of varnished oak with a tempered bright steel hook of needle point. He showed them the hook and his front teeth. "I've got a six-aspirin headache, and things to go with it! You two polite public servants get out of here before I go fishing for kidneys!"

Patrolman Joey Cripp stood up. "I didn't think we'd have any trouble with you, Mister Sail. I hoped we wouldn't, on account of you acted like a gentleman last night."

"Sit the hell down, Joey," Captain Cripp put in. "Mister Sail, you're under arrest, I'm sorry to say."

Sail said, "Arrest?" He scowled. "Is this on the level?"

"It sure is."

"Pop said it," agreed young Joey.

Captain Cripp shook a finger at Sail. He said:

"Listen. Waterman found human blood in that fish mess on the dock last night. The harbor squad's diver went down this morning. He found a bathing suit with a sinker tied to it. He also found a live-box with some live barracuda in it. It was a barracuda you butchered on the dock. Your fishline you had in your hand when Joey got there was wet, but it don't take a minute to wet a line. You described a man and a woman that looked a lot different from the pair Joey saw you with. We been doing some arithmetic, and we figure you were covering up."

"Now," Sail said, "I guess I'm supposed to get scared?"

"I don't know," Captain Cripp said, "but a dead Greek was found over on the island this morning. And in your bathing suit which the diver got was some island sand, and some stickers off the pine trees like grows on the island."

"I guess," Joey said, "it does look kinda funny."

"I regret that it does," Captain Cripp agreed. "After all, evidence is evidence, and while Miami has a wonderful hospitality, we do draw lines, and when our visitors go so far as to use knives on—"

"Let's get this straight!" Sail put in. "Pine tree stickers and sand are just about alike here and in Key West, and points between."

"You may be assured—"

Sail sprang up gripping the hook. He began to yell.

"What's the idea of this clowning? I know two lug cops when I see 'em. If you got something to say, get it off your chests."

Joey sighed. "I guess courtesy is somethin' you can't acquire. Watcha say, Pop? Hell with the chief's courtesy campaign, huh?"

"Now that you mention it, Joey, okay." Captain Cripp pulled manacles out of his hip pocket. "We're gonna fan you into the can, and we're gonna work you over until we get the straight of this."

Sail slammed the gaff into a corner.

"That's more like. If you hadn't tried to fancy pants around last night, I'd have showed you something then."

Sail shuffled into the galley and got the rearmost can of beer out of the icebox. It gurgled when he shook it, but that was because of the small sealed jar of water which fitted inside it. Stuffed around the jar were some sheets of paper. He held the documents out to the two policemen.

Joey raked his eyes over the print and penned signatures, then spelled them out, lips moving.

"Aw, this don't make no difference," he said. "Or does it?"

Captain Cripp complained, "My glasses fell off yesterday when I was having one of my infernal chills. What does it say, Joey?"

"He's a private dick commissioned to locate some stuff that sank on a yacht called the *Lady Luck*. The insurance people hired him."

Captain Cripp buttoned his coat, squared it over his hips, set his cap with a pat on the top. "Who signed the papers, Joey?"

Joey said, "They're all right, Pop. From what it says, I guess this private op is the head of something called Marine Investigations. Reckon that's an agency, huh?"

Captain Cripp sighed and ambled over to the companion-way. "Beauty before age, Joey."

Joey bristled. "Shamus or no shamus, I say it don't make no difference!"

"Let the next guy have the honor, Joey."

"Look, Pop, damn it—"

"The last private op I worked over got me two years in the sticks. He said something about me chiseling in on the reward, and the skipper believed him. It was a damned lie, except—well—out, Joey."

"But Pop, this stinker—"

"Out!" Captain Cripp barked. "You're as big a fool as your maw!"

Joey licked his lips, raking Sail with malevolent eyes. Then he turned and climbed the companion steps.

Captain Cripp looked at Sail. He felt for the bottom step with one foot without looking down. As if he didn't expect it to do any good, he asked, "You wouldn't want to cooperate?"

"I wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"I've done it before."

Captain Cripp grinned slightly. "Just as you say. But if you get yourself in a sling, it'd be better if you had a reason for refusing to help the police."

"All I get out of this is ten per cent for recovering the stuff. I can't see a split. I need the dough."

"And you with a boat like this."

"Maybe I like boats and maybe it keeps me broke."

"The only reason you're not in the can right now is that any shyster could make this circumstantial evidence look funny as hell. Forget the split."

"Thanks," Sail said. "Now I'm going to sound off. It just might be that you lads think you can let me finish it out, then step in, and maybe find the location of that boat for yourselves. Then, while I was in your bastile, trying to explain things you could think to ask me, the stuff might disappear off the boat."

"That's kind of plain talk."

"I feel kind of plain right now."

Captain Cripp's ears moved up a little with the tightening of his jaw muscles. He took his foot off the companion step. He gave his cap an angry adjustment. Then he put the foot back again.

"This malaria is sure something. I feel like a lark today, only I keep thinking about the chills tomorrow."

"Try whiskey and quinine," Sail said.

"I think the whiskey part gave it to me."

The two cops went away with Joey kicking his feet down hard at the dock planks.

Sail took rye and aspirin for what ailed him, changed clothes, took a taxi uptown and entered what looked like the largest hardware store. He asked where they kept their marine charts.

The nervous old salesman in the chart department had a rip in his canvas apron. He mixed his talk in with waving gestures of a pipe off which most of the stem had been chewed.

"Mister, you must have some funny things happen to you, you being so tall," he said. "Right now, you look as if you had had an accident."

Sail steadied himself by holding to the counter edge. "Who sells government charts here, Dad?"

"Well, there's one other store besides us. Hopkins Carter. But if you're going down in the Keys, we got everything you need here. If you go inside, you'll want charts thirty-two-

sixty and sixty-one. They're the strip charts. But if you take Hawk Channel, you'll need harbor chart five-eighty-three, and charts twelve-forty-nine, fifty and fifty-one. Here, I'll show—"

Sail squinted his eyes, swallowed, and said, "I don't want to buy a chart. I want you to slip out and telephone me if either of a certain two persons comes in here and asks for chart twelve-fifty, the one which covers Lower Matecumbe."

"Huh?"

Sail said patiently, "It's easy, Dad. You just tell the party you got to get the chart, and go telephone me. Then stall around three or four minutes as if you were getting the chart out of the stock room. That will give me time to get over here and pick up their trail."

The nervous old man put his pipe in his mouth and immediately took it out again. "What kind of shenanygin is this?"

Sail showed him a license to operate in Florida.

"One of them fellers, huh?" The old man did not seem impressed.

Sail put a five-dollar bill on the counter. "That one's got a twin. How about it?"

The old man picked up the bill, squinted at it. "You mean this is a counterfeit or something. What—"

"No, no, control your imagination, Dad. The five is good, and it's yours, and another one like it, if you help me."

"You mean I keep this whether they show up or not?"

"That's the idea."

"Go ahead, Mister, and describe them people."

Sail made a word picture of Blick and Nola. Not trusting Dad's memory, he put the salient points down on a piece of paper. He added a telephone number. "That phone is a booth in a cigar store on the next corner. How far is this Hopkins Carter store?"

"'Bout two blocks, reckon."

"I'll be there for the next ten minutes. Then I'll be in the cigar store. Ask for Chief Steward Johnson, when you call."

"That you?"

"Uh-huh."

Sail, walking off, was not as pale as he had been on the boat. He had put on a serge suit with more black than blue and a new black polo. When he was standing in front of the elevator, taking a pull at a flat amber bottle which had a crown and a figure on the label, the old man yelled, "Mister!"

Sail lowered the bottle, started coughing.

"Lemme look at this again and see if you said anything about the way he talked," the old man said.

Sail moved back to where he could see the old fellow, peering at the paper which held the descriptions. The old man took his pipe out of his teeth. "Mister, what does that feller talk like?"

"Well, about like the rest of these crackers. No, wait. He'll call you bud two or three times."

The old man waved his pipe. "I already sold that man a twelve-fifty."

"The hell!"

"Around half an hour ago, I reckon."

"That's swell!" Sail pumped air out of his lungs in a short laugh which had no sound except such noise as the air made going past his teeth and out of his nostrils. "There was this one chance. They would probably want a late chart for their X-marks-the-spot. And now they've got it, so they'll be off to the wars." He kissed a palm sneeringly. "That for the whole works!"

He weaved around, a lot more unsteady than he had been a minute before. He put the flat flask between his teeth and looked at the spinning ceiling fan. By the time the bottle was empty, his head and eyes were screwing around in time with the fan blades. He got his feet tracking in the general direction of the door.

The old man said, "That there chart was delivered."

Sail maneuvered a turn and halt. "Eh?"

"He ordered it over the telephone, and we delivered. I got the address somewhere." The old man thumbed his order book, stopping to point at each name with his pipe stem.

"*Whileaway*," he said finally. "A houseboat on the Miami river below the Twelfth Street Causeway."

Sail cocked the empty bottle in a wastebasket, put five dollars in front of the old man and headed for the elevator. He was a lot steadier.

The houseboat *Whileaway* was built for rivers, and not very wide ones. Sixty feet or thereabouts waterline, she had three decks that put her up like a skyscraper. She was white, or had been. A man who loved boats would have said she should never have been built.

Scattered on shore near was a gravel pile, two trucks with nobody near them, a shed, junk from the hurricane, a trailer with both tires flat and windows broken, and two rowboats in as bad shape as the trailer.

Sail was behind most of the junk at one time or another on his way to the river bank. The river ran between wooden bulkheads at this point. Between Sail and *Whileaway*, two tugs, a yawl, a cruiser and another houseboat were tied to dolphins along the bulkhead. Nobody seemed to be on any of the boats.

Sail stripped to dark blue silk underwear shorts. He hid everything else under the junk. The water had a little more smell and floating things than in the harbor. After he had eased down into it, he kept behind the moored boats, next to the bulkhead. The tide carried him. He was just coming under the bow of *Whileaway* when one of the square window ports of the houseboat opened.

Sail sank suddenly. He thought somebody was going to shoot, or use a harpoon.

Something heavy—evidently it fell out of the porthole—hit the water. It sank quickly. Touching Sail, it pushed him aside. It went on sinking. Sail got the idea that a navy anchor was at the lowermost part of the sinking object.

He swam down after it. The river had only two fathoms here. He did not have much trouble finding it. When he clung to the object, the tide stretched his legs out behind.

Whoever had tied the knots was a sailor. Sailor knots, while they hold, are made to be easily untied. Sail got them

loose. He began to think he wouldn't make the top with his burden. He was out of air.

His head came out of the water with eyes open, fixed in the direction of the square port. Nobody's head was there. No weapon appeared.

Sail looked around, then threw an arm up. He missed the first springline which held the houseboat to the bulkhead. He grasped the next one. He held Nola's head out.

Water leaked from Nola's nose and mouth.

Some of the rope which had tied her to the heavy navy anchor was still wrapped around her. Sail used it to tie her to the springline, so that her head was out of the water.

Then he had to try twice before he could get up the springline to the houseboat deck. Nola began gagging and coughing. It made a racket.

Sail stumbled through the handiest door. Waves of pain jumped from his ribs to his toes, from ribs to hair. The bandages had turned red, and it was not from mercurochrome.

The houseboat furnishings must have been something fifteen years ago. Most of the varnish had alligatored. Sail got into the galley by accident. Rust, dirt, smell. He grabbed the only things in sight, a quart brass fire extinguisher and a rusted ice pick.

He found a dining salon beyond the galley. He was half across it when Andopolis came in the opposite door.

Andopolis had a rusty butcher knife in one hand. He was using the other hand to handle a chair for a crutch, riding it with the knee of the leg which Blick and Nola had put a bullet through.

Clustered around Andopolis' eyes—more on the lids than elsewhere—were puffy gray blisters. They were about the size burning cigarettes would make. Two fingernails were off one of his hands, the one which held the butcher knife. Red ran from the mutilated fingertips down over the rusty knife.

Sail threw the fire extinguisher. He was weaker even than

he had thought. The best he could do was bounce the extinguisher off the bulkhead behind Andopolis.

Andopolis said thickly, "I feex you up this time, fran!" and reversed the knife for throwing.

Sail threw his ice pick. It was a good shot. The pick stuck into Andopolis' chest over his heart. But it did not go in deep enough to trouble Andopolis. He never bothered to jerk it out. He already had enough pain elsewhere not to know it was there.

Feet banged through the boat behind Sail. They approached.

Andopolis threw. Sail dropped. His weakness seemed to help. The knife went over his head.

A uniformed cop had appeared in the door. Bad luck put him in the path of the knife. He made a bleating sound, took spraddling steps and leaned against a bulkhead, his hands trying to cover the handle of the butcher knife and his left shoulder. He made a poor job of it.

Sail got up and lurched around Andopolis. The chair crutch made Andopolis clumsy.

Once through the door behind Andopolis, Sail found himself in what had once been the main cabin, and pretended to be, still.

Blick sat on the cabin floor, his face a mess. His visage was smeared with blue ink. The ink bottle was upside down under a table on which a new marine chart was spread open. A common writing pen lay on the chart.

Andopolis came in after Sail, banging on the chair crutch. The ice pick still stuck in his chest by its point. He came at Sail, hopped on one leg, and swung his chair with the other.

Sail, coughing, hurting all over, tried to dodge. He made it, but fell down. Andopolis swung the chair, Sail rolled, and the chair went to pieces on the floor.

Nola was still screaming. Men were swearing outside. More men were running around on the houseboat, trying to find the way below. A police siren was whining.

Andopolis held a leg of his chair still. It was heavy enough to knock the brains out of an ox. He hopped for Sail.

Sail, looking about wildly, saw the fire extinguisher on the floor. It must have bounced in here. Maybe somebody had kicked it in accidentally. He rolled to it.

Andopolis lifted the chair leg.

The extinguisher made sickly noises as Sail pumped it. No tetrachloride came out. Nothing happened to indicate it ever would. Then a first squirt ran out about a foot. The second was longer. The third wet Andopolis' chest. Sail aimed and pumped. The tetrachloride got into Andopolis' eyes.

Andopolis made snarling sounds and couldn't see any more.

Sail got up and weaved to the table.

The chart on the table had two inked lines forming a V with arms that ran to landmarks on Lower Matecumbe island in the Florida keys. Compass bearings were printed beside each arm, and the point where the lines came together was ringed.

Several times, Sail's lips moved, repeating the bearings, the landmarks.

Then Sail picked up the pen. He made a NE into a NNE and a SSE out of an E.

His letters looked enough like the others that nobody would guess the difference. And the lines of the V were wavy. They had not been laid out with a protractor from the compass roses. Therefore, they did not indicate an exact spot. Probably they varied as much as a mile, for the *Lady Luck* seemed to lie well off Matecumbe. Nobody would locate any sunken boat from that chart now.

Sail was repeating the true bearings to fix them in his memory when Andopolis came hopping in. Andopolis was still blind, still had his chair leg.

Blick, on the floor, called, "Nola—kid—what's wrong?" He didn't seem to know where he was or what was happening.

Andopolis weaved for Blick's mumbling voice.

"Blick!" Sail yelled thickly. "Jump!"

Blick said foolishly, "Was that—you—Nola?"

Sail was stumbling towards him, fully aware he would not make it in time. He didn't. He woke up nights for quite a

while hearing the sound Andopolis' chair leg and Blick's head made.

Andopolis hopped around, still quite blind, and made for Sail. He had his chair leg raised. Hair, blood and brains stuck to the hickory chair leg. Sail got out of the way.

Andopolis stopped, stood perfectly still, and listened. Sail did not move. He was pale, swaying. He squatted, got his hands on the floor, sure he was going to fall if he didn't. He tried not to breathe loudly enough for Andopolis to hear.

Captain Cripp, Patrolman Joey Cripp and the old man from the hardware store came in together looking around.

The old man pointed at Sail and began, "There's the man who asked about the feller that got the chart. I told you I told him the chart was delivered here, and he probably had come right—"

Andopolis rushed the voice, holding his chair leg up.

"Look out!" Sail croaked.

Andopolis instantly veered for where he thought Sail's voice had come from. He was a little wrong. It was hard for him to maintain a direction hopping on one leg. He hopped against a wall. Hard.

Andopolis sighed, leaned over backward and hit the floor. He had a fit. A brief fit, ending by Andopolis straightening out and relaxing. Hitting the wall had driven the ice pick the rest of the way into his chest.

Sail remained on all fours on the floor. He felt, except for the pain, as if he were very drunk on bad liquor. He must have remained on his hands and knees a long time, for he was vaguely aware that Captain Cripp and Joey had walked around and around him, but without speaking. Then they went over to the table and found the chart.

They divided their looking between the chart and each other.

"It's it," Joey said.

"Yeah." Captain Cripp sounded thoughtful. "What about it, Joey?"

"You're the boss, Pop."

Captain Cripp turned the corners of his mouth down. He

folded the chart, stuck it inside his clothing, under his belt. Then he straightened his uniform.

A doctor came in at last. He seemed to be a very silent doctor. He picked up Andopolis' wrist, held it a while, then put it back on the floor carefully. The wrist and arm were more flexible than that much rubber would have been. The doctor did not speak.

Sail was still on all fours. The doctor upset him gently. Sail had his tongue between his teeth. The doctor explored with his hands; when he came to Sail's chest, a small amount of sound escaped between Sail's tongue and teeth.

"My God!" the doctor said.

Four men helped with the stretcher as far as the ambulance, but only two when it came to getting the stretcher into the ambulance. Two could manage it better, using a system which they had. The ambulance motor started.

Captain Cripp got into the ambulance with Sail. He was holding his right hand to his nose.

"About Joey," he said. "I been wondering if Joey believed in something on the side, when he could get it. You know, kinda the modern idea."


He took his hand from his nose and quickly put a handkerchief in its place. The handkerchief got red at once.

Then he put the folded marine chart under Sail's head.

"Joey," he chuckled, "is as old-fashioned as angels, only he about busted my beak before I could explain."

Taking His Time

REUBEN JENNINGS SHAY

 I'M LIKE THIS GUY ROGERS, WHO WRITES FUNNY CRACKS. All I know is what I read in the papers. And lately I have been reading a lot about the crookedness of the big town police departments.

These newspapers act like the cities are the only ones that have such grief. As a concession man in Cowley's Cyclonic Carnival, Inc., I know the little burgs. And how! And in these cow counties you just try to pinch one of the local crooks about election time and see how far you get.

Some time back I was down in one of the back woods cross-roads where our outfit was playing, and in the course of my business I engaged a local tinhorn in one of our friendly poker games. This one wore a pink shirt with no necktie and was called Whitey.

It was just the regular game. You know. Anyway when we finished I had fifteen dollars of this Reuben Rothstein's money which I figured was about all the traffic would stand. You know we got to be awful careful in our game so's there'll be no kick back. So I gently eased the game to a close and ushered this man Whitey out. He seemed to feel all right about it, which was different, as most of them get sore.

It wasn't fifteen minutes later though that I reached in my pocket and then I found that my watch had been lifted. And a thirty-eight dollar watch, too. No wonder Mr. Whitey felt all right.

Was I mad?

Say, I beat it right down to the local sheriff's office with blood in my eye. I found this alleged sheriff, his two

hundred pounds or more planted in an easy desk chair, fanning himself and looking over a pile of papers that he ought to have served weeks before. I got down to business at once.

"Say, I want to arrest a guy," I said.

The local guardian of the peace turned slowly around.

"Who the hell are you?" he demanded. Just as if that was any of his business.

"Never mind who I am," I snapped. "I came here to arrest a fellow, not to give my pedigree."

"Don't believe I ever saw you before," mumbled the sheriff just like he was mentally checking me with the local registration books. "Do you live here?"

"Haw," I snorted. "That's funny."

"Oh, you think it's funny, do you?" said the sheriff.

"Sure it's funny," I answered. "But what about arresting this bozo?"

"What bozo?" asked the sheriff.

"The one who stole my watch," I said. "I want him arrested."

"Oh, did somebody steal your watch?" asks the sheriff.

"Sure somebody stole my watch," I answered. "Picked it right out of my pocket."

"Was it some local boy?" asked the sheriff.

"Oh, does that make a difference?" I demands, sarcastic.

The sheriff looked at me for a minute, kind of calculating like.

"Say, where did you get this watch?" he finally demanded.

"Oh, hell," I said wearily.

"And who are you, anyway?" continued the cop.

"Now listen and put this down," I said. "I was born in Kansas City. I am thirty-eight years old and my parents are still alive. I am with Cowley's Cyclonic Carnival, Inc., which is now playing here, and I have never been convicted of any high crime or malfeasance in office. And furthermore I bought the watch at Chicago."

I paused to catch up on my breath, but he wasn't going to interrupt.

"Is there anything else you would like to know before we get down to business?" I asked.

"What do you do for a living?" asked the sheriff.

"What do you suppose I do," I answered. "I work."

"Who?" asked the sheriff. "You look like a tinhorn gambler to me."

"Never mind what I look like," I snorted. "What about my watch?"

"Did you say it was stolen?" he asked.

"Sure it was stolen," I answered.

"Have you any idea who did it?" he asked kind of slow, like he was afraid it was one of his flock.

"Sure, I know who stole it," I said. "It was a guy called Whitey who wore a pink shirt with no necktie."

"Oh, yes," said the sheriff cheerfully. "That was Whitey Barnson. He is one of our local boys. Quite a poker player, too."

"Oh, he's not so hot," I said.

"How do you know that?" asked the sheriff suspiciously.

"Anyway, what's that got to do with my watch?" I demands hurriedly.

"What kind of a watch was it?" asked the sheriff.

"It was an Elgin open-faced watch," I said. "It had my sweetie's picture on the crystal."

"Oh, you are a family man, then," guessed the sheriff.

That made me hot.

"Now, listen," I yells, "what's that got to do with it? What I want to know is whether you are going to arrest this guy or not."

The sheriff thought for a minute.

"You will have to see the County Attorney," he finally announced. "I can't arrest without the necessary papers."

"Well, let's get busy and see him then," I said.

The sheriff smiled in a kindly manner.

"Oh, you can't see him today," he said. "He's gone fishing."

"Gone fishing!" I exclaimed. "Well, how in hell am I going to get them papers?"

"You can get them tomorrow," he said consolingly.

"But I've got to leave tonight," I said. "I can't wait till tomorrow."

"Well, that's too bad," said the sheriff, acting relieved.

"Too bad!" I hollered. "Do you mean you ain't going to do nothing?"

"I can't do nothing without some papers," said the sheriff. "I might get into trouble."

"Let me tell you, Mr. Officer," I blustered, "you will sure get into trouble if you don't do something."

That didn't faze him a bit.

"Well, you see how it is," he said smoothly.

I began to feel kind of baffled. And I am a pretty good bluffer myself, too. But what could you do in a situation like this? And about this time I sees this Whitey walking down the other side of the street, big as Adam.

"Hey," I yells to the sheriff, "that's him now."

The sheriff looked over through the window.

"Sure enough," he said. "That's Whitey, all right. He's considered a pretty good poker player."

"What's his poker playing got to do with my watch?" I demands kind of frantic. "Ain't you going to arrest him?"

"I can't arrest him," said the sheriff. "You haven't made a complaint. Don't you see?"

"What do you think I am doing now?" I demands.

"There's no papers," said the sheriff. "But never mind, he'll be here tomorrow all right."

"But I won't," I cried. "I got to leave tonight."

I was pretty well buffaloed by now.

"Mr. Sheriff," I pleaded, "I got to leave tonight. I got to get something done today."

"Sorry," said the sheriff. "You see how it is."

Well, that's what I was up against. Finally I got an idea. If I could get that watch back that would be about all I could expect of these birds anyway.

"Sheriff," I said, "I got to leave tonight and I'd like to have my watch back at least."

"Well you see—"

"Hold on with that," I interrupted. "I heard it before. But it's worth just fifteen dollars to get my watch back today."

The sheriff came to attention.

"Do you mean you will give a fifteen dollar reward," he asked innocently, "if the watch is returned today?"

"Absolutely," I said desperately.

"Well," he said, "I might see what I could do."

He thought for a moment.

"Have you got the money?" he asked.

I pulled out the money I had taken off the local fish.

"I'll take charge of the—reward," he said, putting the money in the safe and locking it.

He got his hat and strolled over towards the door.

"I'll see what I can do," he said as he strolled out.

Well, I watched him through the window and say, do you know what he did? He walked over to this guy Whitey and they started slapping each other on the back and laughing and talking about some hick baseball game that was played the day before. I could just see where I had lost both my watch and my money, too. These guys was friends. Anybody could see that.

But they went on kidding each other for a while and then the sheriff waddled back to the office. I was all set to give him hell.

As he came in he held out his hand.

"This your watch?" he asked.

He held my watch all right. I took it from him while he went over to the safe, and started to open it.

"It's mine all right," I said. "But what did he say?"

"He don't know it yet," said the sheriff, putting my fifteen dollars in his pocket.

Death in the Pasig*

RAMON DECOLTA

(Raoul Whitfield)

THE CEILING FANS STIRRED HOT AIR AND MADE FAINT creaking sounds as they turned slowly. Shrill, native voices reached the café from the Escolta, Manila's main street. Jo Gar kept his blue-gray eyes on the tall glass of lemonade he was sipping at intervals. It was about as hot as he had ever remembered! Baguio would be better because of the altitude. Or perhaps an inter-Island trip would help.

He raised his eyes to the bulk of Ben Rannis, noted that the manager of the Manila Hotel was pale, very pale. As Rannis stood near the screened doors and searched the café with his dark eyes, Jo Gar raised his right hand slowly and moved it from side to side. It was a languid motion—that of one who has spent many years in the tropics and has learned to conserve energy.

Rannis saw him, moved swiftly towards the table. He weighed more than two hundred; he was a powerful man. There wasn't much stomach, but he had broad shoulders and a great chest. He was several inches over six feet. Perspiration streaked his heavy face; he pulled a chair from the table, set it down closer to the one Jo Gar occupied.

"You appear ill—and you hurry too much. What is it?"

The Island detective spoke almost tonelessly. His English was precise. He was small in size, and his gray hair contrasted his brown, young face strangely. His slightly almond-shaped eyes were only half opened.

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Rannis muttered something that sounded like a curse. He was breathing hard; it was almost as though he had been running along the Escolta.

"The *Cheyo Maru's* in," he said in his husky voice. "Got in two hours ago. Craise was aboard. He sent me a message. It was given to me over the phone by a Filipino who acted damned cheerful about it. He said 'Meester Craise has arrived. He wishes me to tell you that information has come to him. You are in great danger. It is better to leave the city at once.' Then he hung up."

Jo Gar frowned. "It was Craise's brother you killed, two months ago, I think," he said steadily.

Rannis groaned. "You know damned well it was, Jo," he replied. "And you know damned well Howard Craise is out to get me for it. One way or another. And it was an accident."

The Island detective shrugged his shoulders slightly. He smiled with his thin lips.

"You had been drinking," he reminded. "John Craise was not strong. You struck him very hard."

"He'd been drinking, too. He called me a nasty name. That all came out at the trial. Howard Craise knows all that, even if he was in England at the time."

Jo Gar sipped more of his lemonade. He turned his browned face slightly away from the hotel manager.

"That is so," he agreed. "And now he is not in England. He is in Manila. You have been called and told your life is endangered. Recently you have killed John Craise and have been acquitted of the charge of murder."

The hotel manager turned narrowed eyes towards Gar's. He said hoarsely:

"He'll kill me, Jo. I can't shoot. I want you to go to him, tell him how it was. You'd just come in on that transport—you worked the case. He knows you—he'll believe you."

The Island detective smiled with faint mockery in his eyes.

"You did not intend to murder his brother," he said slowly, tonelessly. "I feel certain of that."

Ben Rannis shoved back his chair and rose. His voice was shaken, uncertain. But he kept it fairly low.

"He's at his brother's place—fix it up, Jo. He'll get brooding—in this damned heat—"

His voice broke. Fear was gripping the big man, and Jo Gar hated to see fear in a man's eyes. He said slowly:

"I will go to him. Where will *you* go?"

Rannis swore. "Along the river—got to get a drink. Keep away from the hotel until you see him. The heat'll get him thinking—"

He turned, went slowly from the soft drink café. His fingers were twitching at his sides. Jo Gar shook his head very slowly. He finished his iced lemonade. His slitted eyes watched Rannis go through the screened doors, merge with the crowd on the Escolta; Filipinos, Chinese, Japanese, English, Spaniards—and a scattering of Americans, mostly Army men.

Jo Gar sighed. He was aware of the fact, now made definite, that Benjamin Rannis was a coward. He was afraid of death, and yet he had killed. And the Island detective had given him a promise.

There was difficulty in getting the connection; nothing was done hurriedly in the Islands. A Chinese servant answered the phone. He was not sure that his master would speak with Señor Gar. His master was sleeping. Yes, he knew it was past siesta hours, but his master was very weary. He would see about the matter.

Jo Gar held the receiver, waited. Several minutes passed. Then a voice came to him. It possessed a slightly English accent. It was a heavy-toned voice.

"Are you there? Howard Craise speaking."

The Island detective said slowly: "It is Señor Gar. You perhaps remember me in matters of the Island police. I would like to come to you, talk with you. It is the matter of your brother's death."

He paused. There was silence at the other end. Then the voice sounded again. It seemed colder in tone.

"At six, say? Here, at the house?"

Jo Gar watched a *carrromatta* pass, in the street. The pony was white. He said:

"At six, thank you. I will arrive."

He heard the click of the receiver at the other end. The Craise house was beyond the Walled City, perhaps a mile along the Bay. It was a fine old place. Spanish, built many years ago. The Craise brothers owned plantations, not on Luzon but further south.

The Island detective left the café. It was almost five, but the heat was still very severe. He turned off the Escolta, moved down a narrow, winding street towards the Pasig. Behind him there was the clatter of a pony's hoofs. A native voice shrilled at the animal, urging greater speed. Jo Gar stepped into an evil-smelling doorway, turned. The *carromatta* passed close to the broken curbing; he saw the driver clearly. Back of the little seat, in the interior of the small, two-wheeled carriage, he saw another figure. Then the *carromatta* was beyond him, going rapidly towards the river Pasig.

Jo Gar stepped from the doorway, looked for another conveyance. There was none in sight. He sighed heavily. One could not answer a telephone three miles from the Escolta—and yet arrive on a narrow street just off the Escolta two minutes later. For that reason Jo Gar was very anxious to keep track of the *carromatta* which had just passed him, bearing as a passenger Howard Craise.

In five minutes he obtained a *carromatta*, gave the driver instructions. But it was a useless drive. There was no sign of the two-wheeled conveyance in which he had seen Howard Craise. After a half hour tour of the narrow streets running towards the Pasig from the Escolta, Jo Gar descended and paid the driver. It was slightly cooler; he would sip another iced drink, hire another *carromatta* and go out to the Craise house. Filipinos could gossip; he did not wish to give his last driver the opportunity to talk—not with some servant in the vicinity of the Craise home.

He had his drink, hailed a native driving a good sized pony, and was driven at fair speed to the Craise house on the Bay. The Island of Cavite could be plainly seen; Jo stood on the wide porch and frowned at it. When the Chinese servant opened the door, however, he was smiling.

He waited less than five minutes in a large room that was almost cool. Howard Craise came downstairs rather noisily; he was medium in size with blond hair and blue eyes. He was dressed in a suit of white duck, but he did not look so cool.

"I awakened you?" The Island detective smiled at him.

Craise shook his head. He seemed a little nervous. He had a peculiar way of blinking his eyes, as though he were in bright sunlight rather than in a dark room.

"I was reading—lying around and reading," he said. "Good to be ashore—we had a rough passage."

Jo Gar nodded. "I will arrive directly at the object of my call," he said. "Mister Benjamin Rannis has been murdered."

He watched Craise's body jerk—watched the right hand come upward, then relax. He saw the blue eyes widen, narrow again. And then Howard Craise spoke.

"But it's only been—"

He checked himself. The Island detective nodded, smiling pleasantly.

"A very short time since you had your Filipino boy call and threaten him," he finished. "That is true."

Craise was staring at him. His fists clenched; there was sudden anger in his eyes. He spoke in a hard tone.

"You're accusing me of killing Rannis? You mean to tell me—"

Jo Gar looked hurt. He moved his head from side to side, slowly.

"He was murdered while you were sleeping, or reading," he pointed out. "But it was unwise of you to have your servant threaten him. He has probably told several people of the matter."

Howard Craise wet his lips with the tip of his tongue. He smiled nastily.

"Of course no servant of mine called him and threatened him. That's absurd. If it's circumstantial evidence you are counting on—"

He checked himself again. Rage was in his eyes. Jo Gar bowed slightly.

"I admire the way you think, Señor," he said quietly. "Circumstantial evidence is quite unsatisfactory—in the Islands, of course. I merely wanted to inform you—"

The bell tinkled. Silently the Chinese servant went to the door. He opened it, stepped aside. Juan Arragon, of the City police, his fat face a brown mask, came towards them. He nodded towards Jo Gar, bowed to Howard Craise.

"Will you be so kind as to come with me to the City?" he asked. "We have just taken the body of Mister Benjamin Rannis from the Pasig River. He is dead, perhaps murdered. You are implicated. My superiors are anxious that you—"

Craise smiled with his lips. "Frame-up, eh?" he muttered. "Of course I'll come—Wong, my helmet!"

He moved towards the square reception hall. Juan Arragon let his eyes meet Jo Gar's.

"You do not seem surprised—to learn of Mister Rannis' death," he said slowly.

Jo Gar smiled. "I had just informed Señor Craise accordingly," he said simply.

He watched Arragon's eyes narrow in surprise. The Manila police officer was no fool. He said very quietly:

"I came here very rapidly. In a machine. The body was just discovered. Yet you already knew?"

Jo Gar said slowly: "*Why* did you come here so quickly?"

The fat-faced officer smiled a little. His voice was very smooth as he replied.

"There was certain evidence."

The Island detective nodded. "That was my reason for coming here *without* knowing that Señor Rannis *had* been murdered," he said very slowly. "There was certain evidence."

Jo Gar sat in the fan-backed, wicker chair, made by prisoners in Bilibid, and smiled faintly into the eyes of Juan Arragon. It was much cooler—tropical night had dropped over Manila. He spoke in a soft, steady tone.

"Señor Rannis was a coward, plainly. He did, however, give me work at times. I had promised to help him. He came to me in the café, afraid of Howard Craise. He had reason to fear the brother of the man he had struck down so hard that

his fist caused death. I agreed to intercede. I called the Craise house, and I was answered by a servant who informed me he did not like to disturb his master. That was an untruth, you say. You tell me that Howard Craise did not speak to me at the time I mention—that you saw him in a *carromatta* only a few minutes later, driving towards the Pasig."

The Manila police officer nodded, showed white teeth in a smile.

"Perhaps you saw him, also," he said softly. "You went to his home, informed him that Señor Rannis had been murdered, *before* you knew that. There was a reason. You are clever, yes?"

Jo Gar chuckled. "We are *both* clever," he qualified. "And so is Howard Craise."

Juan Arragon shrugged his shoulders. "I do not see in what manner," he said. "He has a servant threaten a man he is bound to hate. He has another talk over the telephone for him. And he allows both you and me to see him riding towards the spot where the body of the man he threatened is dragged from the Pasig. Is that clever?"

The Island detective gestured with his hands spreading out, palms up.

"He *allows* us both to see him, you say," he observed slowly. "Perhaps it is very, very clever!"

He rose slowly, reached for his pith helmet. Arragon was watching him curiously. They were friends of old. Five years ago, before he had become a private investigator, Jo Gar had worked on the Manila police force.

"We are handling Mister Craise with what the Americans call the gloves," Arragon said slowly. "He is friendly with many important personages. He dines at Señor Carlisle's home. We must be careful, but sincere."

Jo Gar nodded. Arnold Carlisle was the American who headed the police force, an organization combining Americans and Filipinos. There were times when the solution of crime, in Manila, was a delicate affair.

"There were two knife wounds," Arragon went on. "One in the back, almost between the shoulder blades. The other

just over the heart. Chinos on the junk near the shore heard the splash. One of them went overboard for the body. Mister Rannis had taken drinks at Manuelo's—two or three. He had left, saying he was much in need of air. There are many river boats, junks and sampans, anchored side by side within a square of Manuelo's. I feel that Mister Craise could have reached the junk near which the splash was heard within three minutes after the time I saw him riding in the *carromatta*. I feel that murder was committed shortly after these three minutes. Señor Craise possessed a motive."

Jo Gar smiled faintly. It amused him to note the application of "señor" and "mister" to an Englishman. Arragon had Spanish blood in his veins, as did the Island detective. Forms of address were confusing.

He stood near the door of Arragon's office, facing the police officer. He said slowly:

"Señor Craise had much time, before he arrived in Manila, to cool his anger. He is a shrewd man. Circumstantial evidence is all against him. I will be honest with you. I, too, saw him riding towards the Pasig. Ben Rannis came to me in fear of him. He had a reason for his fear. I was answered from the house—but Señor Craise could not have been two places at once. Much of our evidence rests on what we saw with our own eyes. Perhaps others saw him, too. Supposing then, with one twist he could destroy this evidence—"

He paused. Arragon nodded his head and made clicking sounds with his tongue.

"It is difficult," he agreed. "I, too, believe he might have desired us to see him. And others to see him. He has been questioned, released. He has returned to his home. Silbino is strolling near the house. What next?"

Jo Gar placed his pith helmet over his gray hair. He smiled almost cheerfully.

"A poet once wrote: 'There is mystery in the black-watered Pasig,'" he said. "I shall go towards the river, because the poet is accurate. It is so."

Juan Arragon fanned himself slowly with a stained palm leaf, and rolled his little eyes towards the ceiling of the office.

"It is damn so!" he said softly.

Manuelo's was a shack not far from the river—perhaps a hundred feet up a narrow alley. It was frequented by coolies, half-breed Spaniards, low class Filipinos, and others of the river. Manuelo himself was a small, emaciated human. He had bad teeth and a scarred face. His fingers were long and bony.

He repeated a good many times that the Americano Rannis had come in for a drink. It had been *sake*, he thought. He could not remember. Many rivermen had crowded his place. He said that Rannis had looked very sick. He had not stayed long. Manuelo was not sure of the time. Señor Rannis had needed air. He had gone away. No, Manuelo did not know Señor Craise. He had never come to the place.

And that was about all. The Chinos on the junk had difficulty in talking with Gar. They were not sure where the body had struck the water. They pointed at the spot where Rannis' body had been seen—the one who had gone overboard said that he thought Rannis had moved his arms a little. But not after he had reached the Americano.

After two hours along the Pasig, Jo Gar sighed and muttered to himself.

"It is always so with the river Pasig. So little seen or heard. And it was not dark, even. Supposing, now, another than Howard Craise had been in that *carromatta*?"

It was a thought, but he did not care much about it. There would have to be a remarkable similarity of humans. He had been fooled. Juan Arragon had been fooled. No, he did not think that. They were both familiar with Craise.

He called Arragon's office from a little tobacco shop just off the Escolta. Juan's voice held an excited note.

"Come to me at once!" he urged. "Here in my office we have the murderer of Señor Rannis! He has confessed."

Ten minutes later Jo Gar entered the office. His eyes went from the khaki colored uniforms of the two Filipino police to the figure slumped over the desk. Juan Arragon said sharply:

"Donnell—up!"

The man raised his head, turned slightly, stared at the Island detective. Jo Gar sucked in his breath, muttered to himself.

"Marie! But they—are alike!"

This man's hair was a dirtier blond color. His eyes were blood-shot, larger than Señor Craise's. He was more stooped—and looked older. But there was similarity—great similarity. In the *carromatta*, seated erect, they could have been easily mistaken.

"He is—one Donnell. A sort of beachcomber," Arragon said slowly, a trace of excitement in his voice. "My men found him cowering across the Pasig from the scene of the crime. We have the knife—he tossed it away as they closed in. He has confessed. It was a terrible scheme—he knew of his resemblance to Howard Craise. For months he has awaited the señor's return. He has threatened Señor Rannis again and again. He got into the *carromatta* after siesta time today, drove towards Manuelo's. He knew that Señor Rannis went there. When Rannis came from the place he followed him to the river, knifed him, dragged him across the junks—threw him overboard. He made his escape. Later, when we were bringing Señor Craise to trial, he planned to give himself up, tell what he had done—for sufficient money. Many thousands of dollars. He would force Señor Craise to pay—and then he intended to get away with the money. And not to confess. A tremendous scheme!"

The man who resembled Howard Craise dropped his head in his arms. He cried out hoarsely:

"Let me go—into the Bay! The sharks—"

He had a broken, husky voice. His body looked thinner than Craise's. Collapsed across Juan Arragon's desk he was a pitiful figure of a beaten man.

"Do they not look alike?" Arragon asked grimly. "You see, after the murder his nerve deserted him. He went to pieces. Is it not fortunate we were careful with Señor Craise? You see, he *did* speak with you over the telephone."

Jo Gar nodded his head slowly. The phone bell rang. Arragon answered it. He smiled. His white teeth showed.

"I will come soon to your home, Señor Craise," he said into the mouthpiece. "I have news of importance. I will be there within the half hour."

He hung up the receiver, smiled faintly at Jo Gar.

"It was Señor Craise—asking for news," he said. His eyes fell on the collapsed figure. He spoke sharply to the Filipinos, telling them to take him to a cell.

They half dragged the man to the door. Jo Gar stood aside, frowning. Arragon was smiling broadly. He rubbed his browned hands together. There was the sound of clattering as the Filipinos dragged the prisoner down the narrow stairs that led to the corridor through which they would walk to the cells.

"It is well we were not too hasty with Señor—"

Arragon's voice died. A strangled scream sounded from below. There was a heavy thud—the sound of a body falling. Jo Gar jumped towards the door. The wooden stairs had a landing half way down—the remaining steps were slanted in the opposite direction, hidden from his sight. There was a low groan—another crash of a body going down. He could hear heavy breathing as he started down the stairs, Arragon at his heels. On the landing they turned, stared down.

One Filipino was on his knees, holding his head with both hands. Red stained the fingers. The other was lying motionless against the corridor wall, face downward. The screened door opening on the alley just off the Escolta was wide open. The prisoner who resembled Howard Craise was gone!

The *caleso*, pulled by a sturdy horse, moved swiftly towards the Bay. It was a dark night; there was no moon. A hot breeze blew in from the direction of Cavite. The Luneta, flanked by the Manila Hotel and the Army and Navy Club, was behind now.

Jo Gar sat in the open carriage and fingered the Army Colt. His lips were pressed tightly together; he was frowning with narrowed eyes. The police search was being carried out along the big boat waterfront, not along the Pasig. Juan

Arragon was thinking of the prisoner's words—"Let me go—into the Bay. The sharks—"

A broken man—a prisoner who had looked so much like an important citizen of Manila, had suddenly, savagely twisted himself from the grip of the two Filipinos supporting him along the corridor. With one blow he had knocked one Filipino unconscious. As the other had reached for his short club the prisoner had battered him against the wall of the corridor, had jerked the club from his grip—and had struck him heavily over the head with it. Then he had made his escape. He had possessed the strength of a madman, truly.

The *caleso* driver pulled up the horse, twisted his brown face. Jo Gar paid the man, slipped from the carriage, moved swiftly towards the Bay. He kept close to an old stone wall on his right.

There were lights in the Craise house on the Bay. But the Island detective did not enter through the scrolled iron gate. He went through a narrow passage in the wall, moved through the heavy, tropical growth of the garden.

He circled the big house at the rear, reached the Bay side. Stars gave faint light to the water. In the distance he heard the muffled exhaust of a power boat. He halted, listened. The boat was going away—but it was not so far distant. He smiled grimly, moved more rapidly around the house. And then, crouched low and moving swiftly, he saw the figure that had left the sand behind and was coming towards the growth near the house.

Jo Gar waited, the Colt gripped in his right hand fingers. He could see the figure now—the man was ten feet from him. The Island detective spoke quietly, sharply:

"Up—Donnell!"

The figure stiffened. Gar heard the quick intake of breath. And then the man leaped towards him.

Jo Gar stepped to one side. He struck outward and downward with the Colt. It battered heavily against the attacker's head, just over the left ear. The man dropped—rolled over on his back. He was motionless.

The Island detective drew a deep breath. He shifted the

weapon, got a small flashlight from his pocket. When he looked down upon the figure there was a hard smile in his blue-gray eyes.

"Like many tremendous schemes, Señor Craise," he said very slowly, "it has failed."

Jo Gar let his eyes move from the figure of Juan Arragon to that of Arnold Carlisle. He was smiling cheerfully in spite of the heat in the police head's office.

"Señor Craise was always shrewd, cold," he said slowly. "He was not one to forget that Ben Rannis had struck his brother down. I do not believe too much in the similarity of humans. But he did fool me, in Juan's office. Belladonna to enlarge the eye pupils, dirt-matted hair, no erectness like that of himself. And the changed voice. Neither Juan nor myself knew him too well, you see. And he'd been away for months. This English friend of his who has confessed to imitating Craise's voice—that was a clever touch. Calling up, pretending it was Craise—with Craise passing as a beachcomber, right in Juan's office at the time. And it was this Condon who answered my call to the house, of course."

Juan Arragon nodded his head slowly. "Had Craise got back to his house—we would have been beaten," he said. "He could have received me, immaculately attired. He would have been clean, changed. In a dark room I would not have noticed his eyes. But of course, after the escape, he realized I would be busy—and that would give him more time."

Jo Gar nodded. "He murdered Rannis, just as he—as Donnell—told us. He got back to the house from the murder in time to receive me. Your Filipino guard was not too good, Juan, though it is a large place for one man to watch. Craise went out again, after you released him. There was sufficient time. He went to the Pasig, crouched along the bank—and when your men found him he threw the knife away. Said he was Donnell—and looked—a beachcomber. After his escape he got to the big boat piers where he hid and waited. After dark Condon met him in a power boat. He brought him to the Bay house."

Arnold Carlyle smiled faintly. "But for you Señor Gar, we would have assumed that a man resembling Craise had tried a pretty plan and had failed. And had then preferred drowning—and the sharks."

Jo Gar said nothing. He wondered if Arnold Carlyle would not have preferred it that way. But it was not for him to say.

"I was suspicious," he said slowly. "Before I knew Rannis had been murdered, when I told Craise that—he was very startled. I was almost too soon for him. He hadn't expected it this fast. And then, very suddenly, he was too cool. He was thinking too much of the future, of the circumstantial evidence that he knew he could beat."

Arragon shrugged. "Death in the Pasig," he said slowly, "is always difficult." He smiled at Jo. "Not being a fool, I congratulate you."

Jo Gar fanned himself slowly with his pith helmet. He smiled in return.

"Perhaps I had the better opportunity," he said quietly. "But not being too modest—I am pleased. Señor Craise is not an inferior actor."

Carlyle frowned down at the polished floor of his office. Juan Arragon nodded agreement. Jo Gar closed his eyes, stopped fanning his browned face, and drowsed. He suddenly felt very weary.

The Man Who Liked Dogs*

RAYMOND CHANDLER

THERE WAS A BRAND NEW ALUMINUM-GRAY DESOTO Sedan in front of the door. I walked around that end, went up three white steps, through a glass door and up three more carpeted steps. I rang a bell on the wall.

Instantly a dozen dog voices began to shake the roof. While they bayed and howled and yapped I looked at a small alcove office with a rolltop desk and a waiting-room with mission leather chairs and three diplomas on the wall, at a mission table scattered with copies of the *Dog Fancier's Gazette*.

Somebody quieted the dogs out back, then an inner door opened and a small pretty-faced man in a tan smock came in on rubber soles, with a solicitous smile under a pencil-line mustache. He looked around and under me, didn't see a dog. His smile got more casual.

He said: "I'd like to break them of that, but I can't. Every time they hear the buzzer they start up. They get bored and they know the buzzer means visitors."

I said: "Yeah," and gave him my card. He read it, turned it over and looked at the back, turned it back and read the front again.

"A private detective," he said softly, licking his moist lips. "Well—I'm Doctor Sharp. What can I do for you?"

"I'm looking for a stolen dog."

His eyes flicked at me. His soft little mouth tightened. Very slowly his whole face flushed. I said:

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"I'm not suggesting *you* stole the dog, Doc. Almost anybody could plant an animal in a place like this and you wouldn't think about that chance they didn't own it, would you?"

"One doesn't just like the idea," he said stiffly. "What kind of dog?"

"Police dog."

He scuffed a toe on the thin carpet, looked at a corner of the ceiling. The flush went off his face, leaving it with a sort of shiny whiteness. After a long moment he said:

"I have only one police dog here, and I know the people he belongs to. So I'm afraid—"

"Then you won't mind my looking at him," I cut in, and started towards the inner door.

Doctor Sharp didn't move. He scuffed some more. "I'm not sure that's convenient," he said softly. "Perhaps later in the day."

"Now would be better for me," I said, and reached for the knob.

He scuttled across the waiting-room to his little rolltop desk. His small hand went around the telephone there.

"I'll—I'll just call the police if you want to get tough," he said hurriedly.

"That's jake," I said. "Ask for Chief Fulwider. Tell him Carmady's here. I just came from his office."

Doctor Sharp took his hand away from the phone. I grinned at him and rolled a cigarette around in my fingers.

"Come on, Doc," I said. "Shake the hair out of your eyes and let's go. Be nice and maybe I'll tell you the story."

He chewed both his lips in turn, stared at the brown blotter on his desk, fiddled with a corner of it, stood up and crossed the room in his white bucks, opened the door in front of me and we went along a narrow gray hallway. An operating table showed through an open door. We went through a door farther along, into a bare room with a concrete floor, a gas-heater in the corner with a bowl of water beside it, and all along one wall two tiers of stalls with heavy wire mesh doors.

Dogs and cats stared at us silently, expectantly, behind the

mesh. A tiny chihuahua snuffled under a big red Persian with a wide sheepskin collar around its neck. There was a sour-faced Scottie and a mutt with all the skin off one leg and a silky gray Angora and a Sealyham and two more mutts and a razor-sharp fox terrier with a barrel snout and just the right droop to the last two inches of it.

Their noses were wet and their eyes were bright and they wanted to know whose visitor I was.

I looked them over. "These are toys, Doc," I growled. "I'm talking police dog. Gray and black, no brown. A male. Nine years old. Swell points all around except that his tail is too short. Do I bore you?"

He stared at me, made an unhappy gesture. "Yes, but—," he mumbled. "Well, this way."

We went back out of the room. The animals looked disappointed, especially the chihuahua, which tried to climb through the wire mesh and almost made it. We went back out of a rear door into a cement yard with two garages fronting on it. One of them was empty. The other, with its door open a foot, was a box of gloom at the back of which a big dog clanked a chain and put his jaw down flat on the old comforter that was his bed.

"Be careful," Sharp said. "He's pretty savage at times. I had him inside, but he scared the others."

I went into the garage. The dog growled. I went towards him and he hit the end of his chain with a bang. I said:

"Hello there, Voss. Shake hands."

He put his head back down on the comforter. His ears came forward halfway. He was very still. His eyes were wolfish, black-rimmed. Then the curved, too-short tail began to thump the floor slowly. I said:

"Shake hands, boy," and put mine out. In the doorway behind me the little vet was telling me to be careful. The dog came up slowly on his big rough paws, swung his ears back to normal and lifted his left paw. I shook it.

The little vet complained: "This is a great surprise to me, Mister—Mister—"

"Carmady," I said—"Yeah, it would be."

I patted the dog's head and went back out of the garage.

We went into the house, into the waiting-room. I pushed magazines out of the way and sat on a corner of the mission table, looked the pretty little man over.

"Okay," I said. "Give. What's the name of his folks and where do they live?"

He thought it over sullenly. "Their name is Voss. They've moved East and they are to send for the dog when they're settled."

"Cute at that," I said. "The dog's named Voss after a German war flier. The folks are named after the dog."

"You think I'm lying," the little man said hotly.

"Uh-uh. You scare too easy for a crook. I think somebody wanted to ditch the dog. Here's my story. A girl named Isobel Snare disappeared from her home in San Angelo, two weeks ago. She lives with her great-aunt, a nice old lady in gray silk who isn't anybody's fool. The girl had been stepping out with some pretty shady company in the night spots and gambling joints. So the old lady smelled a scandal and didn't go to the law. She didn't get anywhere until a girl friend of the Snare girl happened to be down here visiting friends and happened to see the dog in your joint. She told the aunt. The aunt hired me—because when the niece drove off in her roadster and didn't come back she had the dog with her."

I mashed out my cigarette on my heel and lit another. Doctor Sharp's little face was as white as dough. Perspiration twinkled in his cute little mustache.

I added gently: "It's not a police job yet. I was kidding you about Chief Fulwider. How's for you and me to keep it under the hat?"

"What—what do you want me to do?" the little man stammered.

"Think you'll hear anything more about the dog?"

"Yes," he said quickly. "The man seemed very fond of him. A genuine dog lover. The dog was gentle with him."

"Then you'll hear from him," I said. "When you do I want to know. What's the guy look like?"

"He was tall and thin with very sharp black eyes. His wife is tall and thin like him. Well-dressed, quiet people."

"The Snare girl is a little runt," I said. "What made it so hush-hush?"

He stared at his foot and didn't say anything.

"Okay," I said. "Business is business. Play ball with me and you won't lose anything on the dog and you won't get any adverse publicity. Is it a deal?" I held my hand out.

"I'll play with you," he said softly, and put a moist fishy little paw in mine. I shook it carefully, so as not to bend it.

I told him where I was staying and went back out to the sunny street and walked a block down to where I had left my Chrysler. I got into it and poked it forward from around the corner, far enough so that I could see the DeSoto and the front of Sharp's place.

I sat like that for half an hour. Then Doctor Sharp came out of his place in street clothes and got into the DeSoto. He drove it off around the corner and swung into the alley that ran behind his yard.

I got the Chrysler going and shot up the block the other way, took a plant at the other end of the alley.

A third of the way down the block I heard growling, barking, snarling. This went on for some time. Then the DeSoto backed out of the concrete yard and came towards me. I ran away from it to the next corner.

The DeSoto went south to Arguello Boulevard, then east on that. A big police dog with a muzzle on his head was chained in the back of the sedan. I could just see his head straining at the chain.

I trailed the DeSoto.

† †

Carolina Street was away off at the edge of the little beach city. The end of it ran into a disused interurban right of way, beyond which stretched a waste of Japanese truck farms. There were just two houses in the last block, so I hid behind

the first, which was on the corner, with a weedy grass plot and a high dusty red and yellow lantana fighting with a honeysuckle vine against the front wall.

Beyond that two or three burned-over lots with a few weed stalks sticking up out of the charred grass and then a ramshackle mud-colored bungalow with a wire fence. The DeSoto stopped in front of that.

Its door slammed open and Doctor Sharp dragged the muzzled dog out of the back and fought him through a gate and up the walk. A big barrel-shaped palm-tree kept me from seeing him at the front door of the house. I backed my Chrysler and turned it in the shelter of the corner house, went three blocks over and turned along a street parallel to Carolina. This street also ended at the right of way. The rails were rusted in a forest of weeds and the trolley poles were bare of wire. I bumped over rails and weeds, came down the other side on to a dirt road, and started back towards Carolina.

The dirt road dropped until I couldn't see over the embankment. When I had gone what felt like three blocks I pulled up and got out, went up the side of the bank and sneaked a look over it.

The house with the wire gate was half a block from me. The DeSoto was still in front of it. Boomingly on the afternoon air came the deep toned woof-woofing of the police dog. I put my stomach down in the weeds and sighted on the bungalow and waited.

Nothing happened for about fifteen minutes except that the dog kept right on barking. Then the barking suddenly got harder and harsher. Then somebody shouted. Then a man screamed.

I picked myself up out of the weeds and sprinted across the right of way, down the other side to the street end. As I got near the house I heard the low furious growling of the dog worrying something, and behind it the staccato rattle of a woman's voice in anger, more than in fear.

Behind the wire gate was a patch of lawn mostly dandelions and devil grass. There was a shred of cardboard hang-

ing from the barrel-shaped palm, the remains of a sign. The roots of the tree had wrecked the walk, cracked it wide open and lifted the rough edges into steps.

I went through the gate and thumped up wooden steps to a sagging porch. I banged on the door.

The growling was still going on inside, but the scolding voice had stopped. Nobody came to the door.

I tried the knob, opened the door and went in. There was a heavy smell of chloroform.

In the middle of the floor, on a twisted rug, Doctor Sharp lay spread-eagled on his back, with blood pumping out of the side of his neck. The blood had made a thick glassy pool around his head. The dog leaned away from it, crouched on his forelegs, his ears flat to his head, fragments of a torn muzzle hanging about his neck. His throat bristled and the hair on his spine stood up and there was a low pulsing growl deep in his throat.

Behind the dog a closet door was smashed back against the wall and on the floor of the closet a big wad of cottonwool sent sickening waves of chloroform out on the air.

A dark handsome woman in a print house dress held a big automatic pointed at the dog and didn't fire it.

She threw a quick glance at me over her shoulder, started to turn. The dog watched her, with narrow, black-rimmed eyes. I took my Luger out and held it down at my side.

Something creaked and a tall black-eyed man in faded blue overalls and a blue workshirt came through the swing door at the back with a sawed-off double barrel shotgun in his hands. He pointed it at me.

"Hey, you! Drop that gat!" he said angrily.

I moved my jaw with the idea of saying something. The man's finger tightened on the front trigger. My gun went off—without my having much to do with it. The slug hit the stock of the shotgun, knocked it clean out of the man's hands. It pounded on the floor and the dog jumped sidewise about seven feet and crouched again.

With an utterly incredulous look on his face the man put his hands up in the air.

I couldn't lose. I said: "Down yours too, lady."

She worked her tongue along her lips and lowered the automatic to her side and walked away from the body on the floor.

The man said: "Hell, don't shoot him. I can handle him."

I blinked, then I got the idea. He had been afraid I was going to shoot the dog. He hadn't been worrying about himself.

I lowered the Luger a little. "What happened?"

"That punk tried to chloroform him—*him*, a fighting dog!"

I said: "Yeah. If you've got a phone you'd better call an ambulance. Sharp won't last long with that tear in his neck."

The woman said tonelessly: "I thought *you* were law."

I didn't say anything. She went along the wall to a window seat full of crumpled newspapers, reached down for a phone at one end of it.

I looked down at the little vet. The blood had stopped coming out of his neck. His face was the whitest face I had ever seen.

"Never mind the ambulance," I told the woman. "Just call Police Headquarters."

The man in the overalls put his hands down and dropped on one knee, began to pat the floor and talk soothingly to the dog.

"Steady, old timer. Steady. We're all friends now—all friends. Steady, Voss."

The dog growled and swung his hind end a little. The man kept on talking to him. The dog stopped growling and the hackles on his back went down. The man in the overalls kept on crooning to him.

The woman on the window seat put the phone aside and said:

"On the way. Think you can handle it, Jerry?"

"Sure," the man said, without taking his eyes off the dog.

The dog let his belly touch the floor now and opened his mouth and let his tongue hang out. The tongue dripped saliva, pink saliva with blood mixed in it. The hair at the side of the dog's mouth was stained with blood.

† † †

The man called Jerry said: "Hey, Voss. Hey, Voss old kid. You're fine now. You're fine."

The dog panted, didn't move. The man straightened up and went close to him, pulled one of the dog's ears. The dog turned his head sidewise and let his ear be pulled. The man stroked his head, unbuckled the chewed muzzle and got it off.

He stood up with the end of the broken chain and the dog came up on his feet obediently, went out through the swing door into the back part of the house, at the man's side.

I moved a little, out of line with the swing door. Jerry might have more shotguns. There was something about Jerry's face that worried me. As if I had seen him before, but not very lately, or in a newspaper photo.

I looked at the woman. She was a handsome brunette in her early thirties. Her print housedress didn't seem to belong with her finely arched eyebrows and her long soft hands.

"How did it happen?" I asked casually, as if it didn't matter very much.

Her voice snapped at me, as if she was aching to turn it loose. "We've been in the house about a week. Rented it furnished. I was in the kitchen, Jerry in the yard. The car stopped out front and the little guy marched in just as if he lived here. The door didn't happen to be locked, I guess. I opened the swing door a crack and saw him pushing the dog into the closet. Then I smelled the chloroform. Then things began to happen all at once and I went for a gun and called Jerry out of the window. I got back in here about the time you crashed in. Who are you?"

"It was all over then?" I said. "He had Sharp chewed up on the floor?"

"Yes—if Sharp is his name."

"You and Jerry didn't know him?"

"Never saw him before. Or the dog. But Jerry loves dogs."

"Better change a little of that," I said. "Jerry knew the dog's name. Voss."

Her eyes got tight and her mouth got stubborn. "I think you must be mistaken," she said in a sultry voice. "I asked you who you were, mister."

"Who's Jerry?" I asked. "I've seen him somewhere. Maybe on a reader. Where'd he get the sawed-off? You going to let the cops see that?"

She bit her lip, then stood up suddenly, went towards the fallen shotgun. I let her pick it up, saw she kept her hand away from the triggers. She went back to the window seat and pushed it under the pile of newspapers.

She faced me. "Okay, what's the pay-off?" she asked grimly.

I said slowly: "The dog is stolen. His owner, a girl, happens to be missing. I'm hired to find her. The people Sharp said he got the dog from sounded like you and Jerry. Their name was Voss. They moved East. Ever heard of a lady called Isobel Snare?"

The woman said: "No," tonelessly, and stared at the end of my chin.

The man in overalls came back through the swing door wiping his face on the sleeve of his blue workshirt. He didn't have any fresh guns with him. He looked me over without much concern.

I said: "I could do you a lot of good with the law, if you had any ideas about this Snare girl."

The woman stared at me, curled her lip. The man smiled, rather softly, as if he held all the cards. Tires squealed, taking a distant corner in a hurry.

"Aw, loosen up," I said quickly. "Sharp was scared. He brought the dog back to where he got him. He must have thought the house was empty. The chloroform idea wasn't so good, but the little guy was all rattled."

They didn't make a sound, either of them. They just stared at me.

"Okay," I said, and stepped over to the corner of the room. "I think you're a couple of lamisters. If whoever's coming isn't law, I'll start shooting. Don't ever think I won't."

The woman said very calmly: "Suit yourself, kibitzer."

Then a car rushed along the block and ground to a harsh stop before the house. I sneaked a quick glance out, saw the red spotlight on the windshield, the P.D. on the side. Two big

bruisers in plain-clothes tumbled out and slammed through the gate, up the steps.

A fist pounded the door. "It's open," I shouted.

The door swung wide and the two dicks charged in, with drawn guns.

They stopped dead, stared at what lay on the floor. Their guns jerked at Jerry and me. The one who covered me was a big red-faced man in a baggy gray suit.

"Reach—and reach empty!" he yelled in a large tough voice.

I reached, but held on to my Luger. "Easy," I said. "A dog killed him, not a gun. I'm a private dick from San Angelo. I'm on a case here."

"Yeah?" He closed in on me heavily, bored his gun into my stomach. "Maybe so, bud. We'll know all that later on."

He reached up and jerked my gun loose from my hand, sniffed at it, leaning his gun into me.

"Fired, huh? Sweet! Turn around."

"Listen—"

"Turn around, bud."

I turned slowly. Even as I turned he was dropping his gun into a side pocket and reaching for his hip.

That should have warned me, but it didn't. I may have heard the swish of the blackjack. Certainly I must have felt it. There was a sudden pool of darkness at my feet. I dived into it and dropped . . . and dropped . . . and dropped. . . .

† † † †

When I came to the room was full of smoke. The smoke hung in the air, in thin lines straight up and down, like a bead curtain. Two windows seemed to be open in an end wall, but the smoke didn't move. I had never seen the room before.

I lay a little while thinking, then I opened my mouth and yelled: "Fire!" at the top of my lungs.

Then I fell back on the bed and started laughing. I didn't like the sound I made laughing. It had a goofy ring, even to me.

Steps ran along somewhere and a key turned in the door

and the door opened. A man in a short white coat looked in at me, hard-eyed. I turned my head a little and said:

"Don't count that one, Jack. It slipped out."

He scowled sharply. He had a hard small face, beady eyes. I didn't know him.

"Maybe you want some more straitjacket," he sneered.

"I'm fine, Jack," I said. "Just fine. I'm going to have me a short nap now."

"Better be just that," he snarled.

The door shut, key turned, the steps went away.

I lay still and looked at the smoke. I knew now that there wasn't any smoke there really. It must have been night because a porcelain bowl hanging from the ceiling on three chains had light behind it. It had little colored lumps around the edge, orange and blue alternating. While I watched them they opened like tiny portholes and heads stuck out of them, tiny heads like the heads on dolls, but alive heads. There was a man in a yachting cap and a large fluffy blonde and a thin man with a crooked bow-tie who kept saying: "Would you like your steak rare or medium, sir?"

I took hold of the corner of the rough sheet and wiped the sweat off my face. I sat up, put my feet down on the floor. They were bare. I was wearing canton flannel pajamas. There was no feeling in my feet when I put them down. After a while they began to tingle and then got full of pins and needles.

Then I could feel the floor. I took hold of the side of the bed and stood up and walked.

A voice that was probably my own was saying to me: "You have the dt's . . . you have the dt's . . . you have the dt's . . ."

I saw a bottle of whiskey on a small white table between the two windows. I started towards it. It was a Johnny Walker bottle, half full. I got it up, took a long drink from the neck. I put the bottle down again.

The whiskey had a funny taste. While I was realizing that it had a funny taste I saw a washbowl in the corner. I just made it to the washbowl before I vomited.

I got back to the bed and lay there. The vomiting had made

me very weak, but the room seemed a little more real, a little less fantastic. I could see bars on the two windows, a heavy wooden chair, no other furniture but the white table with the doped whiskey on it. There was a closet door, shut, probably locked.

The bed was a hospital bed and there were two leather straps attached to the sides, about where a man's wrists would be. I knew I was in some kind of a prison ward.

My left arm suddenly began to feel sore. I rolled up the loose sleeve, looked at half a dozen pin pricks on the upper arm, and a black and blue circle around each one.

I had been shot so full of dope to keep me quiet that I was having the French fits coming out of it. That accounted for the smoke and the little heads on the ceiling light. The doped whiskey was probably part of somebody else's cure.

I got up again and walked, kept on walking. After a while I drank a little water from the faucet, kept it down, drank more. Half an hour or more of that and I was ready to talk to somebody.

The closet door was locked and the chair was too heavy for me. I stripped the bed, slid the mattress to one side. There was a mesh spring underneath, fastened at the top and bottom by heavy coil springs about nine inches long. It took me half an hour and much misery to work one of these loose.

I rested a little and drank a little more cold water and went over to the hinge side of the door.

I yelled: "Fire!" at the top of my voice, several times.

I waited, but not long. Steps ran along the hallway outside. The key jabbed into the door, the lock clicked. The hard-eyed little man in the short white coat dodged in furiously, his eyes on the bed.

I laid the coil spring on the angle of his jaw, then on the back of his head as he went down. I got him by the throat. He struggled a good deal. I used a knee on his face. It hurt my knee.

He didn't say how his face felt. I got a blackjack out of his right hip pocket and reversed the key in the door and locked

it from the inside. There were other keys on the ring. One of them unlocked my closet. I looked in at my clothes.

I put them on slowly, with fumbling fingers. I yawned a great deal. The man on the floor didn't move.

I locked him in and left him.

† † † † †

From a wide silent hallway, with a parquetry floor and a narrow carpet down its middle, flat white oak banisters swept down in long curves to the entrance hall. There were closed doors, big, heavy, old-fashioned. No sounds behind them. I went down the carpet runner, walking on the balls of my feet.

There were stained glass inner doors to a vestibule from which the front door opened. A telephone rang as I got that far. A man's voice answered it, from behind a half open door through which light came out into the dim hall.

I went back, sneaked a glance around the edge of the open door, saw a man at a desk, talking into the phone. I waited until he hung up. Then I went in.

He had a pale, bony, high-crowned head, across which a thin wave of brown hair curled and was plastered to his skull. He had a long pale joyless face. His eyes jumped at me. His hand jumped towards a button on his desk.

I grinned, growled at him: "Don't. I'm a desperate man, warden." I showed him the blackjack. His smile was as stiff as a frozen fish. His long pale hands made gestures like sick butterflies over the top of his desk. One of them began to drift towards a side drawer of the desk.

He worked his tongue loose—"You've been a very sick man, sir. A very sick man. I wouldn't advise—"

I flicked the blackjack at his wandering hand. It drew into itself like a slug on a hot stone. I said:

"Not sick, warden, just doped within an inch of my reason. Out is what I want, and some clean whiskey. Give."

He made vague motions with his fingers. "I'm Doctor Sundstrand," he said. "This is a private hospital—not a jail."

"Whiskey," I croaked. "I get all the rest. Private funny house. A lovely racket. Whiskey."

"In the medicine cabinet," he said with a drifting, spent breath.

"Put your hands behind your head."

"I'm afraid you'll regret this." He put his hands behind his head.

I got to the far side of the desk, opened the drawer his hand had wanted to reach, took an automatic out of it. I put the blackjack away, went back around the desk to the medicine cabinet on the wall. There was a pint bottle of bond bourbon in it, three glasses. I took two of them.

I poured two drinks. "You first, warden."

"I—I don't drink. I'm a total abstainer," he muttered, his hands still behind his head.

I took the blackjack out again. He put a hand down quickly, gulped from one of the glasses. I watched him. It didn't seem to hurt him. I smelled my dose, then put it down my throat. It worked, and I had another, then slipped the bottle into my coat pocket.

"Okay," I said. "Who put me in here? Shake it up. I'm in a hurry."

"The—the police, of course."

"What police?"

He hunched his shoulders down in the chair. He looked sick. "A man named Galbraith signed as complaining witness. Strictly legal, I assure you. He is an officer."

I said: "Since when can a cop sign as complaining witness on a psycho case?"

He didn't say anything.

"Who gave me the dope in the first place?"

"I wouldn't know that. I presume it has been going on a long time."

I felt my chin. "All of two days," I said. "They ought to have gunned me. Less kickback in the long run. So long, warden."

"If you go out of here," he said thinly, "you will be arrested at once."

"Not just for going out," I said softly.

As I went out he still had his hands behind his head.

There was a chain and a bolt on the front door, beside the lock. But nobody tried to stop me from opening it. I crossed a big old-fashioned porch, went down a wide path fringed with flowers. A mockingbird sang in a dark tree. There was a white picket fence on the street. It was a corner house, on Twenty-ninth and Descanso.

I walked four blocks east to a bus line and waited for a bus. There was no alarm, no cruising car looking for me. The bus came and I rode downtown, went to a Turkish bath establishment, had a steam bath, a needle shower, a rubdown, a shave, and the rest of the whiskey.

I could eat then. I ate and went to a strange hotel, registered under a fake name. It was half-past eleven. The local paper, which I read over more whiskey and water, informed me that one Doctor Richard Sharp, who had been found dead in a vacant furnished house on Carolina Street, was still causing the police much headache. They had no clue to the murderer as yet.

The date on the paper informed me that over forty-eight hours had been abstracted from my life without my knowledge or consent.

I went to bed and to sleep, had nightmares and woke up out of them covered with cold sweat. That was the last of the withdrawal symptoms. In the morning I was a well man.

† † † † † †

Chief-of-Police Fulwider was a hammered-down, fattish heavyweight, with restless eyes and that shade of red hair that is almost pink. It was cut very short and his pink scalp glistened among the pink hairs. He wore a fawn-colored flannel suit with patch pockets and lapped seams, cut as every tailor can't cut flannel.

He shook hands with me and turned his chair sideways and crossed his legs. That showed me French lisle socks at three or four dollars a pair, and handmade English walnut brogues at fifteen to eighteen, depression prices.

I figured that probably his wife had money.

"Ah, Carmady," he said, chasing my card over the glass top of his desk, "with two A's, eh? Down here on a job?"

"A little trouble," I said. "You can straighten it out, if you will."

He stuck his chest out, waved a pink hand and lowered his voice a couple of notches.

"Trouble," he said, "is something our little town don't have a lot of. Our little city is small, but very, very clean. I look out of my west window and I see the Pacific Ocean. Nothing cleaner than that. On the north Arguello Boulevard and the foothills. On the east the finest little business section you would want to see and beyond it a paradise of well-kept homes and gardens. On the south—if I had a south window, which I don't have—I would see the finest little yacht harbor in the world, for a small yacht harbor."

"I brought my trouble with me," I said. "That is, some of it. The rest went on ahead. A girl named Isobel Snare ran off from home in the big city and her dog was seen here. I found the dog, but the people who had the dog went to a lot of trouble to sew me up."

"Is that so?" the Chief asked absently. His eyebrows crawled around on his forehead. I wasn't sure whether I was kidding him or he was kidding me.

"Just turn the key in the door, will you?" he said. "You're a younger man than I am."

I got up and turned the key and sat down again and got a cigarette out. By that time the Chief had a right-looking bottle and two pony glasses on the desk, and a handful of cardamom seeds.

We had a drink and he cracked three or four of the cardamom seeds and we chewed them and looked at one another.

"Just tell me about it," he said then. "I can take it now."

"Did you ever hear of a guy called Farmer Saint?"

"*Did I?*" He banged his desk and the cardamom seeds jumped. "Why there's a thousand berries on that bimbo. A bank stick-up, ain't he?"

I nodded, trying to look behind his eyes without seeming to. "He and his sister work together. Diana is her name. They

dress up like country folks and smack down small town banks, state banks. That's why he's called Farmer Saint. There's a grand on the sister too."

"I would certainly like to put the sleeves on that pair," the Chief said firmly.

"Then why the hell didn't you?" I asked him.

He didn't quite hit the ceiling, but he opened his mouth so wide I was afraid his lower jaw was going to fall in his lap. His eyes stuck out like peeled eggs. A thin trickle of saliva showed in the fat crease at the corner. He shut his mouth with all the deliberation of a steam-shovel.

It was a great act, if it was an act.

"Say that again," he whispered.

I opened a folded newspaper I had with me and pointed to a column.

"Look at this Sharp killing. Your local paper didn't do so good on it. It says some unknown rang the department and the boys ran out and found a dead man in an empty house. That's a lot of noodles. I was there. Farmer Saint and his sister were there. Your cops were there when we were there."

"Treachery!" he shouted suddenly. "Traitors in the department." His face was now as gray as arsenic flypaper. He poured two more drinks, with a shaking hand.

It was my turn to crack the cardamom seeds.

He put his drink down in one piece and lunged for a mahogany call box on his desk. I caught the name Galbraith. I went over and unlocked the door.

We didn't wait very long, but long enough for the Chief to have two more drinks. His face got a better color.

Then the door opened and the big red-faced dick who had sapped me loafed through it, with a bulldog pipe clamped in his teeth and his hands in his pockets. He shouldered the door shut, leaned against it casually.

I said: "Hello, Sarge."

He looked at me as if he would like to kick me in the face and not have to hurry about it.

"Badge!" the fat Chief yelled. "Badge! Put it on the desk. You're fired!"

Galbraith went over to the desk slowly and put an elbow down on it, put his face about a foot from the Chief's nose.

"What was that crack?" he asked thickly.

"You had Farmer Saint under your hand and let him go," the Chief yelled. "You and that saphead Duncan. You let him stick a shotgun in your belly and get away. You're through. Fired. You ain't got no more job than a canned oyster. Gimme your badge!"

"Who the hell is Farmer Saint?" Galbraith asked, unimpressed, and blew pipe smoke in the Chief's face.

"He don't know," the Chief whined at me. "He don't know. That's the kind of material I got to work with."

"What do you mean, work?" Galbraith inquired loosely.

The fat Chief jumped as though a bee had stung the end of his nose. Then he doubled a meaty fist and hit Galbraith's jaw with what looked like a lot of power. Galbraith's head moved about half an inch.

"Don't do that," he said. "You'll bust a gut and then where would the department be?" He shot a look at me, looked back at Fulwider. "Should I tell him?"

Fulwider looked at me, to see how the show was going over. I had my mouth open and a blank expression on my face, like a farm boy at a Latin lesson.

"Yeah, tell him," he growled, shaking his knuckles back and forth.

Galbraith stuck a thick leg over a corner of the desk and knocked his pipe out, reached for the whiskey and poured himself a drink in the Chief's glass. He wiped his lips, grinned. When he grinned he opened his mouth wide, and he had a mouth a dentist could have got both hands in, up to the elbows.

He said calmly: "When me and Dunc crash the joint you was cold on the floor and the lanky guy was over you with a sap. The broad was on a window seat, with a lot of newspapers around her. Okay. The lanky guy starts to tell us some yarn when a dog begins to howl out back and we look that

way and the broad slips a sawed-off 12-gauge out of the newspapers and shows it to us. Well, what could we do except be nice? She couldn't have missed and we could. So the guy gets more guns out of his pants and they tie knots around us and stick us in a closet that has enough chloroform in it to make us quiet, without the ropes. After a while we hear 'em leave, in two cars. When we get loose the stiff has the place to himself. So we fudge it a bit for the papers. We don't get no new line yet. How's it tie to yours?"

"Not bad," I told him. "As I remember the woman phoned for some law herself. But I could be mistaken. The rest of it ties in with me being sapped on the floor and not knowing anything about it."

Galbraith gave me a nasty look. The Chief looked at his thumb.

"When I came to," I said, "I was in a private dope and hooch cure out on Twenty-ninth. Run by a man named Sundstrand. I was shot so full of hop myself I could have been Rockefeller's pet dime trying to spin myself."

"That Sundstrand," Galbraith said heavily. "That guy's been a flea in our pants for a long time. Should we go out and push him in the face, Chief?"

"It's a cinch Farmer Saint put Carmady in there," Fulwider said solemnly. "So there must be some tie-up. I'd say yes, and take Carmady with you. Want to go?" he asked me.

"Do I?" I said heartily.

Galbraith looked at the whiskey bottle. He said carefully: "There's a grand each on this Saint and his sister. If we gather them in, how do we cut it?"

"You cut me out," I said. "I'm on a straight salary and expenses."

Galbraith grinned again. He teetered on his heels, grinning with thick amiability.

"Okydoke. We got your car in the garage downstairs. Some Jap phoned in about it. We'll use that to go in—just you and me."

"Maybe you ought to have more help, Gal," the Chief said doubtfully.

"Uh-uh. Just me and him's plenty. He's a tough baby or he wouldn't be walkin' around."

"Well—all right," the Chief said brightly. "And we'll just have a little drink on it."

But he was still rattled. He forgot the cardamom seeds.

† † † † † † †

It was a cheerful spot by daylight. Tea-rose begonias made a solid mass under the front windows and pansies were a round carpet about the base of an acacia. A scarlet climbing rose covered a trellis to one side of the house, and a bronze-green humming bird was prodding delicately in a mass of sweet peas that grew up the garage wall.

It looked like the home of a well-fixed elderly couple who had come to the ocean to get as much sun as possible in their old age.

Galbraith spat on my running-board and shook his pipe out and tickled the gate open, stamped up the path and flattened his thumb against a neat copper bell.

We waited. A grill opened in the door and a long fallow face looked out at us under a starched nurse's cap.

"Open up. It's the law," the big cop growled.

A chain rattled and a bolt slid back. The door opened. The nurse was a six-footer with long arms and big hands, an ideal torturer's assistant. Something happened to her face and I saw she was smiling.

"Why, it's Mister Galbraith," she chirped, in a voice that was high-pitched and throaty at the same time. "How are you, Mister Galbraith? Did you want to see Doctor?"

"Yeah, and sudden," Galbraith growled, pushing past her.

We went along the hall. The door of the office was shut. Galbraith kicked it open, with me at his heels and the big nurse chirping at mine.

Doctor Sundstrand, the total abstainer, was having a morning bracer out of a fresh quart bottle. His thin hair was stuck in wicks with perspiration and his bony mask of a face seemed to have a lot of lines in it that hadn't been there the night before.

He took his hand off the bottle hurriedly and gave us his frozen fish smile. He said fussily:

"What's this? What's this? I thought I gave orders—"

"Aw, pull your belly in," Galbraith said, and yanked a chair near the desk. "Dangle, sister."

The nurse chirped something more and went back through the door. The door was shut. Doctor Sundstrand worked his eyes up and down my face and looked unhappy.

Galbraith put both his elbows on the desk and took hold of his bulging jowls with his fist. He stared fixedly, venomously at the squirming doctor.

After what seemed a very long time he said, almost softly: "Where's Farmer Saint?"

The Doctor's eyes popped wide. His Adam's apple bobbed above the neck of his smock. His greenish eyes began to look bilious.

"Don't stall!" Galbraith roared. "We know all about your private hospital racket, the crook hideout you're runnin', the dope and women on the side. You made one slip too many when you hung a snatch on this shamus from the big town. Your big city protection ain't going to do you no good on this one. Come on, where is Saint? And where's that girl?"

I remembered, quite casually, that I had not said anything about Isobel Snare in front of Galbraith—if that was the girl he meant.

Doctor Sundstrand's hand flopped about on his desk. Sheer astonishment seemed to be adding a final touch of paralysis to his uneasiness.

"Where are they?" Galbraith yelled again.

The door opened and the big nurse fussed in again. "Now, Mister Galbraith, the patients. Please remember the patients, Mister Galbraith."

"Go climb up your thumb," Galbraith told her, over his shoulder.

She hovered by the door. Sundstrand found his voice at last. It was a mere wisp of a voice. It said wearily:

"As if you didn't know."

Then his darting hand swept into his smock, and out again,

with a gun glistening in it. Galbraith threw himself sidewise, clean out of the chair. The Doctor shot at him twice, missed twice. My hand touched a gun, but didn't draw it. Galbraith laughed on the floor and his big right hand snatched at his armpit, came up with a Luger. It looked like my Luger. It went off, just once.

Nothing changed in the Doctor's long face. I didn't see where the bullet hit him. His head came down and hit the desk and his gun made a thud on the floor. He lay with his face on the desk, motionless.

Galbraith pointed his gun at me, and got up off the floor. I looked at the gun again. I was sure it was my gun.

"That's a swell way to get information," I said aimlessly.

"Hands down, shamus. You don't want to play."

I put my hands down. "Cute," I said. "I suppose this whole scene was framed just to put the chill on Doc."

"He shot first, didn't he?"

"Yeah," I said thinly. "He shot first."

The nurse was sidling along the wall towards me. No sound had come from her since Sundstrand pulled his act. She was almost at my side. Suddenly, much too late, I saw the flash of knuckles on her good right hand, and hair on the back of the hand.

I dodged, but not enough. A crunching blow seemed to split my head wide open. I brought up against the wall, my knees full of water and brain working hard to keep my right hand from snatching at a gun.

I straightened. Galbraith leered at me.

"Not so very smart," I said. "You're still holding my Luger. That sort of spoils the plant, doesn't it?"

"I see you get the idea, shamus."

The chirpy-voiced nurse said, in a blank pause: "Jeeze, the guy's got a jaw like a elephant's foot. Damn if I didn't split a knuck on him."

Galbraith's little eyes had death in them. "How about upstairs?" he asked the nurse.

"All out last night. Should I try one more swing?"

"What for? He didn't go for his gat, and he's too tough for you, baby. Lead is his meat."

I said: "You ought to shave baby twice a day on this job."

The nurse grinned, pushed the starched cap and the stringy blond wig askew on a bullet head. She—or more properly he—reached a gun from under the white nurse's uniform.

Galbraith said: "It was self-defense, see? You tangled with Doc, but he shot first. Be nice and me and Dunc will try to remember it that way."

I rubbed my jaw and my left hand. "Listen, Sarge. I can take a joke as well as the next fellow. You sapped me in that house on Carolina Street and didn't tell about it. Neither did I. I figured you had reasons and you'd let me in on them at the right time. Maybe I can guess what the reasons are. I think you know where Saint is, or can find out. Saint knows where the Snare girl is, because he had her dog. Let's put a little more into this deal, something for both of us."

"We've got ours, sappo. I promised Doc I'd bring you back and let him play with you. I put Dunc in here in the nurse's rig to handle you for him. But *he* was the one we really wanted to handle."

"All right," I said. "What do I get out of it?"

"Maybe a little more living."

I said: "Yeah. Don't think I'm kidding you—but look at that little window in the wall behind you."

Galbraith didn't move, didn't take his eyes off me. A thick sneer curved his lips.

Duncan, the female impersonator, looked—and yelled.

A small square tinted glass window high up in the corner of the back wall had swung open quite silently. I was looking straight at it, past Galbraith's ear, straight at the black snout of a Tommy gun, on the sill, at the two hard black eyes behind the gun.

A voice I had last heard soothing a dog said: "How's to drop the rod, sister? And you at the desk—grab a cloud."

† † † † † † † †

The big cop's mouth sucked for air. Then his whole face

tightened and he jerked around and the Luger gave one hard, sharp cough.

I dropped to the floor as the Tommy gun cut loose in a short burst. Galbraith crumpled beside the desk, fell on his back with his legs twisted. Blood came out of his nose and mouth.

The cop in nurse's uniform turned as white as the starched cap. His gun bounced. His hands tried to claw at the ceiling.

There was a queer stunned silence. Powder smoke reeked. Farmer Saint spoke downwards from his perch at the window, to somebody outside the house.

A door opened and shut distantly and running steps came along the hall. The door of our room was pushed wide. Diana Saint came in with a brace of automatics in her hands. A tall, handsome woman, neat and dark, with a rakish black hat, and two gloved hands holding guns.

I got up off the floor, keeping my hands in sight. She tossed her voice calmly at the window, without looking towards it.

"Okay, Jerry. I can hold them."

Saint's head and shoulders and his sub-machine gun went away from the frame of the window, leaving blue sky and the thin distant branches of a tall tree.

There was a thud, as if feet dropped off a ladder to a wooden porch. In the room we were five statues, two fallen.

Somebody had to move. The situation called for two more killings. From Saint's angle I couldn't see it any other way. There had to be a clean-up.

The gag hadn't worked when it wasn't a gag. I tried it again when it was. I looked past the woman's shoulder, kicked a hard grin on to my face, said hoarsely:

"Hello, Mike. Just in time."

It didn't fool her, of course, but it made her mad. She stiffened her body and snapped a shot at me from the right hand gun. It was a big gun for a woman and it jumped. The other gun jumped with it. I didn't see where the shot went. I went in under the guns.

My shoulder hit her thigh and she tipped back and hit her head against the jamb of the door. I wasn't too nice about

knocking the guns out of her hands. I kicked the door shut, reached up and yanked the key around, then scrambled back from a high-heeled shoe that was doing its best to smash my nose for me.

Duncan said: "Keeno," and dived for his gun on the floor.

"Watch that little window, if you want to live," I snarled at him.

Then I was behind the desk, dragging the phone away from Doctor Sundstrand's dead body, dragging it as far from the line of the door as the cord would let me. I lay down on the floor with it and started to dial, on my stomach.

Diana's eyes came alive on the phone. She screeched:

"They've got me, Jerry! They've got me!"

The machine-gun began to tear the door apart as I bawled into the ear of a bored desk sergeant.

Pieces of plaster and wood flew like fists at an Irish wedding. Slugs jerked the body of Doctor Sundstrand as though a chill was shaking him back to life. I threw the phone away from me and grabbed Diana's guns and started in on the door for our side. Through a wide crack I could see cloth. I shot at that.

I couldn't see what Duncan was doing. Then I knew. A shot that couldn't have come through the door smacked Diana Saint square on the end of her chin. She went down again, stayed down.

Another shot that didn't come through the door lifted my hat. I rolled and yelled at Duncan. His gun moved in a stiff arc, following me. His mouth was an animal snarl. I yelled again.

Four round patches of red appeared in a diagonal line across the nurse uniform, chest high. They spread even in the short time it took Duncan to fall.

There was a siren somewhere. It was my siren, coming my way, getting louder.

The Tommy gun stopped and a foot kicked at the door. It shivered, but held at the lock. I put four more slugs into it, well away from the lock.

The siren got louder. Saint had to go. I heard his step run-

ning away down the hall. A door slammed. A car started out back in an alley. The sound of its going got less as the approaching siren screeched into a crescendo.

I crawled over to the woman and looked at blood on her face and hair and soft soggy places on the front of her coat. I touched her face. She opened her eyes slowly, as if the lids were very heavy.

"Jerry—," she whispered.

"Dead," I lied grimly. "Where's Isobel Snare, Diana?"

The eyes closed. Tears glistened, the tears of the dying.

"Where's Isobel, Diana?" I pleaded. "Be regular and tell me. I'm no cop. I'm her friend. Tell me, Diana."

I put tenderness and wistfulness into it, everything I had.

The eyes half-opened. The whisper came again: "Jerry—," then it trailed off and the eyes shut. Then the lips moved once more, breathed a word that sounded like: "Monty."

That was all. She died.

I stood up slowly and listened to the sirens.

† † † † † † † †

It was getting late and lights were going on here and there in a tall office building across the street. I had been in Fulwider's office all the afternoon. I had told my story twenty times. It was all true—what I told.

Cops had been in and out, ballistics and print men, record men, reporters, half a dozen city officials, even an A.P. correspondent. The correspondent didn't like his hand-out and said so.

The fat Chief was sweaty and suspicious. His coat was off and his armpits were black and his short red hair curled as if it had been singed. Not knowing how much or little I knew he didn't dare lead me. All he could do was yell at me and whine at me by turns, and try to get me drunk in between.

I was getting drunk and liking it.

"Didn't nobody say anything at all?" he wailed at me for the hundredth time.

I took another drink, flopped my hand around, looked

silly. "Not a word, Chief," I said owlshly. "I'm the boy that would tell you. They died too sudden."

He took hold of his jaw and cranked it. "Damn' funny," he sneered. "Four dead ones on the floor and you not even nicked."

"I was the only one," I said, "that lay down on the floor while still healthy."

He took hold of his right ear and worried that. "You been here three days," he howled. "In them three days we got more crime than in three years before you come. It ain't human. I must be having a nightmare."

"You can't blame me, Chief," I grumbled. "I came down here to look for a girl. I'm still looking for her. I didn't tell Saint and his sister to hide out in your town. When I spotted him I tipped you off, though your own cops didn't. I didn't shoot Doc Sundstrand before anything could be got out of him. I still haven't any idea why the phoney nurse was planted there."

"Nor me," Fulwider yelled. "But it's my job that's shot full of holes. For all the chance I got to get out of this I might as well go fishin' right now."

I took another drink, hiccoughed cheerfully. "Don't say that, Chief," I pleaded. "You cleaned the town up once and you can do it again. This one was just a hot grounder that took a bad bounce."

He took a turn around the office and tried to punch a hole in the end wall, then slammed himself back in his chair. He eyed me savagely, grabbed for the whiskey bottle, then didn't touch it—as though it might do him more good in my stomach.

"I'll make a deal with you," he growled. "You run on back to San Angelo and I'll forget it was your gun croaked Sundstrand."

"That's not a nice thing to say to a man that's trying to earn his living, Chief. You know how it happened to be my gun."

His face looked gray again, for a moment. He measured me for a coffin. Then the mood passed and he smacked his desk, said heartily:

"You're right, Carmady. I couldn't do that, could I? You

still got to find that girl, ain't you? Okay, you run on back to the hotel and get some rest. I'll work on it tonight and see you in the A.M."

I took another short drink, which was all there was left in the bottle. I felt fine. I shook hands with him twice and staggered out of his office. Flash bulbs exploded all over the corridor.

I went down the City Hall steps and around the side of the building to the police garage. My blue Chrysler was home again. I dropped the drunk act and went on down the side-streets to the ocean front, walked along the wide cement walk towards the two amusement piers and the Grand Hotel.

It was getting dusk now. Lights on the piers came out. Masthead lights were lit on the small yachts riding at anchor behind the yacht harbor breakwater. In a white barbecue stand a man tickled wienies with a long fork and droned: "Get hungry, folks. Nice hot doggies here. Get hungry, folks."

I lit a cigarette and stood there looking out to sea. Very suddenly, far out, lights shone from a big ship. I watched them, but they didn't move. I went over to the hot dog man.

"Anchored?" I asked him, pointing.

He looked around the end of his booth, wrinkled his nose with contempt.

"Hell, that's the gambling boat. The Cruise to Nowhere, they call the act, because it don't go no place. If Tango ain't crooked enough, try that. Yes, sir, that's the good ship Montecito. How about a nice warm puppy?"

I put a quarter on his counter. "Have one yourself," I said softly. "Where do the taxies leave from?"

I had no gun. I went on back to the hotel to get my spare. The dying Diana Saint had said, "Monty."

Perhaps she just hadn't lived long enough to say, "Montecito."

At the hotel I lay down and fell asleep as though I had been anaesthetized. It was eight o'clock when I woke up, and I was hungry.

I was tailed from the hotel, but not very far. Of course

the clean little city didn't have enough crime for the dicks to be very good shadows.

† † † † † † † † † †

It was a long ride for forty cents. The water taxi, an old speedboat without trimmings, slid through the anchored yachts and rounded the breakwater. The swell hit us. All the company I had besides the tough-looking citizen at the wheel was two spooning couples who began to peck at each other's faces as soon as the darkness folded down.

I stared back at the lights of the city and tried not to bear down too hard on my dinner. Scattered diamond points at first, the lights drew together and became a jeweled wristlet laid out in the show window of the night. Then they were a soft orange yellow blur above the top of the swell. The taxi smacked the invisible waves and bounced like a surf boat. There was cold fog in the air.

The portholes of the Montecito got large and the taxi swept out in a wide turn, tipped to an angle of forty-five degrees and careened neatly to the side of a brightly lit stage. The taxi engine idled down and backfired in the fog.

A sloe-eyed boy in a tight blue mess jacket and a gangster mouth handed the girls out, swept their escorts with a keen glance, sent them on up. The look he gave me told me something about him. The way he bumped into my gun holster told me more.

"Nix," he said softly. "Nix."

He jerked his chin at the taxi man. The taxi man dropped a short noose over a bitt, turned his wheel a little and climbed on the stage. He got behind me.

"Nix," the one in the mess jacket purred. "No gats on this boat, mister. Sorry."

"Part of my clothes," I told him. "I'm a private dick. I'll check it."

"Sorry, bo. No check room for gats. On your way."

The taxi man hooked a wrist through my right arm. I shrugged.

"Back in the boat," the taxi man growled behind me. "I owe you forty cents, mister. Come on."

I got back into the boat.

"Okay," I sputtered at mess-jacket. "If you don't want my money, you don't want it. This is a hell of a way to treat a visitor. This is—"

His sleek, silent smile was the last thing I saw as the taxi cast off and hit the swell on the way back. I hated to leave that smile.

The way back seemed longer. I didn't speak to the taxi man and he didn't speak to me. As I got out on to the float at the pier he sneered at my back:

"Some other night when we ain't so busy, shamus."

Half a dozen customers waiting to go out stared at me. I went past them, past the door of the waiting room on the float, towards the steps at the landward end.

A big red-headed roughneck in dirty sneakers and tarry pants and a torn blue jersey straightened from the railing and bumped into me casually.

I stopped, got set. He said softly: "'S matter, dick? No soap on the hell ship?"

"Do I have to tell you?"

"I'm a guy that can listen."

"Who are you?"

"Just call me Red."

"Out of the way, Red. I'm busy."

He smiled sadly, touched my left side. "The gat's kind of bulgy under the light suit," he said. "Want to get on board? It can be done, if you got a reason."

"How much is the reason?" I asked him.

"Fifty bucks. Ten more if you bleed in my boat."

I started away. "Twenty-five out," he said quickly. "Maybe you come back with friends, huh?"

I went four steps away from him before I half-turned, said: "Sold," and went on.

At the foot of the bright amusement pier there was a flaring Tango Parlor, jammed full even at that still early hour. I went into it, leaned against a wall and watched a couple

of numbers go up on the electric indicator, watched a house player with an inside straight give the high sign under the counter with his knee.

A large blueness took form beside me and I smelled tar. A soft, deep, sad voice said:

"Need help out there?"

"I'm looking for a girl, but I'll look alone. What's your racket?" I didn't look at him.

"A dollar here, a dollar there. I like to eat. I was on the cops, but they bounced me."

I liked his telling me that. "You must have been leveling," I said, and watched the house player slip his card across with his thumb over the wrong number, watched the counter man get his own thumb in the same spot and hold the card up.

I could feel Red's grin. "I see you been around our little city. Here's how it works. I got a boat with an underwater by-pass. I know a loading port I can open. I take a load out for a guy once in a while. There ain't many guys below decks. That suit you?"

I got my wallet out and slipped a twenty and a five from it, passed them over in a wad. They went into a tarry pocket.

Red said: "Thanks," softly and walked away. I gave him a small start and went after him. He was easy to follow by his size, even in a crowd.

We went past the yacht harbor and the second amusement pier and beyond that the lights got fewer and the crowd thinned to nothing. A short black pier stuck out into the water with boats moored all along it. My man turned out that.

He stopped almost at the end, at the head of a wooden ladder.

"I'll bring her down to here," he said. "Got to make noise warmin' up."

"Listen," I said urgently. "I have to phone a man. I forgot."

"Can do. Come on."

He led the way farther along the pier, knelt, rattled keys on a chain, and opened a padlock. He lifted a small trap and took a phone out, listened to it.

"Still working," he said with a grin in his voice. "Must

belong to some crooks. Don't forget to snap the lock back on."

He slipped away silently into the darkness. For ten minutes I listened to water slapping the piles of the pier, the occasional whirr of a seagull in the gloom. Then far off a motor roared and kept on roaring for minutes. Then the noise stopped abruptly. More minutes passed. Something thudded at the foot of the ladder and a low voice called up to me.

"All set."

I hurried back to the phone, dialed a number, asked for Chief Fulwider. He had gone home. I dialed another number, got a woman, asked her for the Chief, said I was headquarters.

I waited again. Then I heard the fat Chief's voice. It sounded full of baked potato.

"Yeah? Can't a guy even eat? Who is it?"

"Carmady, Chief. Saint is on the Montecito. Too bad that's over your line."

He began to yell like a wild man. I hung up in his face, put the phone back in its zinc-lined cubbyhole and snapped the padlock. I went down the ladder to Red.

His big black speedboat slid out over the oily water. There was no sound from its exhaust but a steady bubbling along the side of the shell.

The city lights again became a yellow blur low on the black water and the ports of the good ship Montecito again got large and bright and round out to sea.

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There were no floodlights on the seaward side of the ship. Red cut his motor to half of nothing and curved in under the overhang of the stern, sidled up to the greasy plates as coyly as a clubman in a hotel lobby.

Double iron doors loomed high over us, forward a little from the slimy links of a chain cable. The speedboat scuffed the Montecito's ancient plates and the seawater slapped loosely at the bottom of the speedboat under our feet. The

shadow of the big ex-cop rose over me. A coiled rope flicked against the dark, caught on something, and fell back into the boat. Red pulled it tight, made a turn around something on the engine cowling.

He said softly: "She rides as high as a steeplechaser. We gotta climb them plates."

I took the wheel and held the nose of the speedboat against the slippery hull, and Red reached for an iron ladder flat to the side of the ship, hauled himself up into the darkness, grunting, his big body braced at right angles, his sneakers slipping on the wet metal rungs.

After a while something creaked up above and feeble yellow light trickled out into the foggy air. The outline of a heavy door showed, and Red's crouched head against the light.

I went up the ladder after him. It was hard work. It landed me panting in a sour, littered hold full of cases and barrels. Rats skittered out of sight in the dark corners. The big man put his lips to my ear:

"From here we got an easy way to the boiler room catwalk. They'll have steam up in one auxiliary, for hot water and the generators. That means one guy. I'll handle him. The crew doubles in brass upstairs. From the boiler room I'll show you a ventilator with no grating in it. Goes to the boat deck. Then it's all yours."

"You must have relatives on board," I said.

"Never no mind. A guy gets to know things when he's on the beach. Maybe I'm close to a bunch that's set to knock the tub over. Will you come back fast?"

"I ought to make a good splash from the boat deck," I said. "Here."

I fished more bills out of my wallet, pushed them at him.

He shook his red head. "Uh-huh. That's for the trip back."

"I'm buying it now," I said. "Even if I don't use it. Take the dough before I bust out crying."

"Well—thanks, pal, You're a right guy."

We went among the cases and barrels. The yellow light came from a passage beyond, and we went along the passage

to a narrow iron door. That led to the catwalk. We sneaked along it, down an oily steel ladder, heard the slow hiss of oil burners and went among mountains of iron towards the sound.

Around a corner we looked at a short dirty Italian in a purple silk shirt who sat in a wired-together office chair, under a naked bulb, and read the paper with the aid of steel-rimmed spectacles and a black forefinger.

Red said gently: "Hi, Shorty. How's all the little bambinos?"

The Italian opened his mouth and reached swiftly. Red hit him. We put him down on the floor and tore his purple shirt into shreds for ties and a gag.

"You ain't supposed to hit a guy with glasses on," Red said. "But the idea is you make a hell of a racket goin' up a ventilator—to a guy down here. Upstairs they won't hear nothing."

I said that was the way I would like it, and we left the Italian bound up on the floor and found the ventilator that had no grating in it. I shook hands with Red, said I hoped to see him again, and started up the ladder inside the ventilator.

It was cold and black and the foggy air rushed down it and the way up seemed a long way. After three minutes that felt like an hour I reached the top and poked my head out cautiously. Canvas-sheeted boats loomed near by on the boat-deck davits. There was a soft whispering in the dark between a pair of them. The heavy throb of music pulsed up from below. Overhead a masthead light, and through the thin high layers of the mist a few bitter stars stared down.

I listened, but didn't hear any police boat sirens. I got out of the ventilator, lowered myself to the deck.

The whispering came from a necking couple huddled under a boat. They didn't pay any attention to me. I went along the deck past the closed doors of three or four cabins. There was a little light behind the shutters of two of them. I listened, didn't hear anything but the merrymaking of the customers down below on the main deck.

I dropped into a dark shadow, took a lungful of air and let it out in a howl—the snarling howl of a gray timber wolf,

lonely and hungry and far from home, and mean enough for seven kinds of trouble.

The deep-toned woof-woofing of a police dog answered me. A girl squealed along the dark deck and a man's voice said: "I thought all the shellac drinkers was dead."

I straightened and unshipped my gun and ran towards the barking. The noise came from a cabin on the other side of the deck.

I put an ear to the door, listening to a man's voice soothing the dog. The dog stopped barking and growled once or twice, then was silent. A key turned in the door I was touching.

I dropped away from it, down on one knee. The door opened a foot and a sleek head came forward past its edge. Light from a hooded deck lamp made a shine on the black hair.

I stood up and slammed the head with my gun barrel. The man fell softly out of the doorway into my arms. I dragged him back into the cabin, pushed him down on a made-up berth.

I shut the door again, locked it. A small, wide-eyed girl crouched on the other berth. I said:

"Hello, Miss Snare. I've had a lot of trouble finding you. Want to go home?"

Farmer Saint rolled over and sat up, holding his head. Then he was very still, staring at me with his sharp black eyes. His mouth had a strained smile, almost good-humored.

I ranged the cabin with a glance, didn't see where the dog was, but saw an inner door behind which he could be. I looked at the girl again.

She was not much to look at, like most of the people that make most of the trouble. She was crouched on the berth with her knees drawn up and hair falling over one eye. She wore a knitted dress and golf socks and sport shoes with wide tongues that fell down over the instep. Her knees were bare and bony under the hem of the dress. She looked like a schoolgirl.

I went over Saint for a gun, didn't find one. He grinned at me.

The girl lifted her head and threw her hair back. She looked

at me as if I was a couple of blocks away. Then her breath caught and she began to cry.

"We're married," Saint said softly. "She thinks you're set to blow holes in me. That was a smart trick with the wolf howl."

I didn't say anything. I listened. No noises outside.

"How'd you know where to come?" Saint asked.

"Diana told me—before she died," I said brutally.

His eyes looked hurt. "I don't believe it, shamus."

"You ran out and left her in the ditch. What would you expect?"

"I figured the cops wouldn't bump a woman and I could make some kind of a deal on the outside. Who got her?"

"One of Fulwider's cops. You got him."

His head jerked back and a wild look came over his face, then went away. He smiled sidewise at the weeping girl.

"Hello, sugar. I'll get you clear." He looked back at me. "Suppose I come in without a scrap. Is there a way for her to get loose?"

"What do you mean, scrap?" I sneered.

"I got plenty friends on this boat, shamus. You ain't even started yet."

"You got her into it," I said. "You can't get her out. That's part of the pay-off."

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He nodded slowly, looked down at the floor between his feet. The girl stopped crying long enough to mop at her cheeks, then started in again.

"Fulwider know I'm here?" Saint asked me slowly.

"Yeah."

"You give him the office?"

"Yeah."

He shrugged. "That's okay from your end. Sure. Only I'll never get to talk, if Fulwider pinches me. If I could get to talk to a D.A. I could maybe convince him *she's* not hep to my stuff."

"You could have thought of that, too," I said heavily. "You

didn't have to go back to Sundstrand's and cut loose with your stutter-gun."

He threw his head back and laughed. "No? Suppose you paid a guy ten grand for protection and he crossed you up by grabbing your wife and sticking her in a crooked dope hospital and telling you to run along far away and be good, or the tide would wash her up on the beach? What would you do—smile, or trot over with some heavy iron to talk to the guy?"

"She wasn't there then," I said. "You were just kill-screwy. And if you hadn't hung on to that dog until he killed a man, the protection wouldn't have been scared into selling you out."

"I like dogs," Saint said quietly. "I'm a nice guy when I'm not workin', but I can get shoved around just so much."

I listened. Still no noises on deck outside.

"Listen," I said quickly. "If you want to play ball with me, I've got a boat at the back door and I'll try to get the girl home before they want her. What happens to you is past me. I wouldn't lift a finger for you, even if you do like dogs."

The girl said suddenly, in a shrill, little-girl voice:

"I don't want to go home! I won't go home!"

"A year from now you'll thank me," I snapped at her.

"He's right, sugar," Saint said. "Better beat it with him."

"I won't," the girl shrilled angrily. "I just won't. That's all."

Out of the silence on the deck something hard slammed the outside of the door. A grim voice shouted:

"Open up! It's the law!"

I backed swiftly to the door, keeping my eyes on Saint. I spoke back over my shoulder.

"Fulwider there?"

"Yeah," the Chief's fat voice growled. "Carmady?"

"Listen, Chief. Saint's in here and he's ready to surrender. There's a girl here with him, the one I told you about. So come in easy, will you?"

"Right," the Chief said. "Open the door."

I twisted the key, jumped across the cabin and put my back against the inner partition, beside the door behind which the dog was moving around now, growling a little.

The outer door whipped open. Two men I hadn't seen be-

fore charged in with drawn guns. The fat Chief was behind them. Briefly, before he shut the door, I caught a glimpse of ship's uniforms.

The two dicks jumped on Saint, slammed him around, put cuffs on him. Then they stepped back beside the Chief. Saint grinned at them, with blood trickling down his lower lip.

Fulwider looked at me reprovngly and moved a cigar around in his mouth. Nobody seemed to take any interest in the girl.

"You're a hell of a guy, Carmady. You didn't give me no idea where to come," he growled.

"I didn't know," I said. "I thought it was outside your jurisdiction, too."

"Hell with that. We tipped the Feds. They'll be out."

One of the dicks laughed. "But not too soon," he said roughly. "Put the heater away, shamus."

"Try and make me," I told him.

He started forward, but the Chief waved him back. The other dick watched Saint, looked at nothing else.

"How'd you find him then?" Fulwider wanted to know.

"Not by taking his money to hide him out," I said.

Nothing changed in Fulwider's face. His voice became almost lazy. "Oh, oh, you've been peekin'," he said very gently.

I said disgustedly: "Just what kind of a sap did you and your gang take me for? Your clean little town stinks. It's the well-known whited sepulchre. A crook sanctuary where the hot rods can lie low—if they pay off nice and don't pull any local capers—and where they can jump off for Mexico in a fast boat, if the finger waves towards them."

The Chief said very carefully: "Any more?"

"Yeah," I shouted. "I've saved it for you too damn' long. *You* had me doped until I was half goofy and stuck me in a private jail. When that didn't hold me *you* worked a plant up with Galbraith and Duncan to have my gun kill Sundstrand, your helper, and then have me killed resisting some arrest. Saint spoiled that party for you and saved my life. Not intending to, perhaps, but he did it. *You* knew all along where the little Snare girl was. She was Saint's wife and you were hold-

ing her yourself to make him stay in line. Hell, why do you suppose I tipped you he was out here? That was something you *didn't* know?"

The dick who had tried to make me put up my gun said: "Now, Chief. We better make it fast. Those Feds—"

Fulwider's jaw shook. His face was gray and his ears were far back in his head. The cigar twitched in his fat mouth.

"Wait a minute," he said thickly, to the man beside him. Then to me: "Well—why did you tip me?"

"To get you where you're no more law than Billy the Kid," I said, "and see if you have the guts to go through with murder on the high seas."

Saint laughed. He shot a low snarling whistle between his teeth. A tearing animal growl answered him. The door beside me crashed open as though a mule had kicked it. The big police dog came through the opening in a looping spring that carried him clear across the cabin. The gray body twisted in midair. A gun banged harmlessly.

"Eat 'em up, Voss!" Saint yelled. "Eat 'em alive, boy!"

The cabin filled with gunfire. The snarling of the dog blended with a thick choked scream. Fulwider and one of the dicks were down on the floor and the dog was at Fulwider's throat.

The girl screamed and plunged her face into a pillow. Saint slid softly down from the bunk and lay on the floor with blood running slowly down his neck in a thick wave.

The dick who hadn't gone down jumped to one side, almost fell headlong on the girl's berth, then caught his balance and pumped bullets into the dog's long gray body—wildly without pretense of aim.

The dick on the floor pushed at the dog. The dog almost bit his hand off. The man yelled. Feet pounded on the deck. Yelling outside. Something was running down my face that tickled. My head felt funny, but I didn't know what had hit me.

The gun in my hand felt large and hot. I shot the dog, hating to do it. The dog rolled off Fulwider and I saw where a

stray bullet had drilled the Chief's forehead between the eyes, with the delicate exactness of pure chance.

The standing dick's gun hammer clicked on a discharged shell. He cursed, started to reload frantically.

I touched the blood on my face and looked at it. It seemed very black. The light in the cabin seemed to be failing.

The bright corner of an axe blade suddenly split the cabin door, which was wedged shut by the Chief's body, and that of the groaning man beside him. I stared at the bright metal, watched it go away and reappear in another place.

Then all the lights went out very slowly, as in a theater just before the curtain goes up. Just as it got quite dark my head hurt me, but I didn't know then that a bullet had fractured my skull.

I woke up two days later in the hospital. I was there three weeks. Saint didn't live long enough to hang, but he lived long enough to tell his story. He must have told it well, because they let Mrs. Jerry (Farmer) Saint go home to her aunt.

By that time the County Grand Jury had indicted half the police force of the little beach city. There were a lot of new faces around the City Hall, I heard. One of them was a big redheaded detective-sergeant named Norgard who said he owed me twenty-five dollars but had had to use it to buy a new suit when he got his job back. He said he would pay me out of his first check. I said I would try to wait.

Fly Paper*

DASHIELL HAMMETT

IT WAS A WANDERING DAUGHTER JOB.

The Hambletons had been for several generations a wealthy and decently prominent New York family. There was nothing in the Hambleton history to account for Sue, the youngest member of the clan. She grew out of childhood with a kink that made her dislike the polished side of life, like the rough. By the time she was twenty-one, in 1926, she definitely preferred Tenth Avenue to Fifth, grifters to bankers, and Hymie the Riveter to the Honorable Cecil Windown, who had asked her to marry him.

The Hambletons tried to make Sue behave, but it was too late for that. She was legally of age. When she finally told them to go to hell and walked out on them there wasn't much they could do about it. Her father, Major Waldo Hambleton, had given up all the hopes he ever had of salvaging her, but he didn't want her to run into any grief that could be avoided. So he came into the Continental Detective Agency's New York office and asked to have an eye kept on her.

Hymie the Riveter was a Philadelphia racketeer who had moved north to the big city, carrying a Thompson sub-machine-gun wrapped in blue-checked oil cloth, after a disagreement with his partners. New York wasn't so good a field as Philadelphia for machine-gun work. The Thompson lay idle for a year or so while Hymie made expenses with an automatic, preying on small-time crap games in Harlem.

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Three or four months after Sue went to live with Hymie he made what looked like a promising connection with the first of the crew that came into New York from Chicago to organize the city on the western scale. But the boys from Chi didn't want Hymie; they wanted the Thompson. When he showed it to them, as the big item in his application for employment, they shot holes in the top of Hymie's head and went away with the gun.

Sue Hambleton buried Hymie, had a couple of lonely weeks in which she hocked a ring to eat, and then got a job as hostess in a speakeasy run by a Greek named Vassos.

One of Vassos' customers was Babe McCloor, two hundred and fifty pounds of hard Scotch-Irish-Indian bone and muscle, a black-haired, blue-eyed, swarthy giant who was resting up after doing a fifteen-year hitch in Leavenworth for ruining most of the smaller post offices between New Orleans and Omaha. Babe was keeping himself in drinking money while he rested by playing with pedestrians in dark streets.

Babe liked Sue. Vassos liked Sue. Sue liked Babe. Vassos didn't like that. Jealousy spoiled the Greek's judgment. He kept the speakeasy door locked one night when Babe wanted to come in. Babe came in, bringing pieces of the door with him. Vassos got his gun out, but couldn't shake Sue off his arm. He stopped trying when Babe hit him with the part of the door that had the brass knob on it. Babe and Sue went away from Vassos' together.

Up to that time the New York office had managed to keep in touch with Sue. She hadn't been kept under constant surveillance. Her father hadn't wanted that. It was simply a matter of sending a man around every week or so to see that she was still alive, to pick up whatever information he could from her friends and neighbors, without, of course, letting her know she was being tabbed. All that had been easy enough, but when she and Babe went away after wrecking the gin mill, they dropped completely out of sight.

After turning the city upside-down, the New York office sent a journal on the job to the other Continental branches throughout the country, giving the information above and

enclosing photographs and descriptions of Sue and her new playmate. That was late in 1927.

We had enough copies of the photographs to go around, and for the next month or so whoever had a little idle time on his hands spent it looking through San Francisco and Oakland for the missing pair. We didn't find them. Operatives in other cities, doing the same thing, had the same luck.

Then, nearly a year later, a telegram came to us from the New York office. Decoded, it read:

Major Hambleton today received telegram from daughter in San Francisco quote Please wire me thousand dollars care apartment two hundred six number six hundred one Eddis Street stop I will come home if you will let me stop Please tell me if I can come but please please wire money anyway unquote Hambleton authorizes payment of money to her immediately stop Detail competent operative to call on her with money and to arrange for her return home stop If possible have man and woman operative accompany her here stop Hambleton wiring her stop Report immediately by wire.

† †

The Old Man gave me the telegram and a check, saying: "You know the situation. You'll know how to handle it."

I pretended I agreed with him, went down to the bank, swapped the check for a bundle of bills of several sizes, caught a street car, and went up to 601 Eddis Street, a fairly large apartment building on the corner of Larkin.

The name on Apartment 206's vestibule mail box was J. M. Wales.

I pushed 206's button. When the locked door buzzed off I went into the building, past the elevator to the stairs, and up a flight. 206 was just around the corner from the stairs.

The apartment door was opened by a tall, slim man of thirty-something in neat dark clothes. He had narrow dark eyes set in a long pale face. There was some gray in the dark hair brushed flat to his scalp.

"Miss Hambleton," I said.

"Uh—what about her?" His voice was smooth, but not too smooth to be agreeable.

"I'd like to see her."

His upper eyelids came down a little and the brows over them came a little closer together. He asked, "Is it—?" and stopped, watching me steadily.

I didn't say anything. Presently he finished his question:

"Something to do with a telegram?"

"Yeah."

His long face brightened immediately. He asked:

"You're from her father?"

"Yeah."

He stepped back and swung the door wide open, saying:

"Come in. Major Hambleton's wire came to her only a few minutes ago. He said someone would call."

We went through a small passageway into a sunny living-room that was cheaply furnished, but neat and clean enough.

"Sit down," the man said, pointing at a brown rocking chair.

I sat down. He sat on the burlap-covered sofa facing me. I looked around the room. I didn't see anything to show that a woman was living there.

He rubbed the long bridge of his nose with a longer forefinger and asked slowly:

"You brought the money?"

I said I'd feel more like talking with her there.

He looked at the finger with which he had been rubbing his nose, and then up at me, saying softly:

"But I'm her friend."

I said, "Yeah?" to that.

"Yes," he repeated. He frowned slightly, drawing back the corners of his thin-lipped mouth. "I've only asked whether you've brought the money."

I didn't say anything.

"The point is," he said quite reasonably, "that if you brought the money she doesn't expect you to hand it over to anybody except her. If you didn't bring it she doesn't want to

see you. I don't think her mind can be changed about that. That's why I asked if you had brought it."

"I brought it."

He looked doubtfully at me. I showed him the money I had got from the bank. He jumped up briskly from the sofa.

"I'll have her here in a minute or two," he said over his shoulder as his long legs moved him toward the door. At the door he stopped to ask: "Do you know her? Or shall I have her bring means of identifying herself?"

"That would be best," I told him.

He went out, leaving the corridor door open.

† † †

In five minutes he was back with a slender blonde girl of twenty-three in pale green silk. The looseness of her small mouth and the puffiness around her blue eyes weren't yet pronounced enough to spoil her prettiness.

I stood up.

"This is Miss Hambleton," he said.

She gave me a swift glance and then lowered her eyes again, nervously playing with the strap of a handbag she held.

"You can identify yourself?" I asked.

"Sure," the man said. "Show them to him, Sue."

She opened the bag, brought out some papers and things, and held them up for me to take.

"Sit down, sit down," the man said as I took them.

They sat on the sofa. I sat in the rocking chair again and examined the things she had given me. There were two letters addressed to Sue Hambleton here, her father's telegram welcoming her home, a couple of receipted department store bills, an automobile driver's license, and a savings account pass book that showed a balance of less than ten dollars.

By the time I had finished my examination the girl's embarrassment was gone. She looked levelly at me, as did the man beside her. I felt in my pocket, found my copy of the photograph New York had sent us at the beginning of the hunt, and looked from it to her.

"Your mouth could have shrunk, maybe," I said, "but how could your nose have got that much longer?"

"If you don't like my nose," she said, "how'd you like to go to hell?" Her face had turned red.

"That's not the point. It's a swell nose, but it's not Sue's." I held the photograph out to her. "See for yourself."

She glared at the photograph and then at the man.

"What a smart guy you are," she told him.

He was watching me with dark eyes that had a brittle shine to them between narrow-drawn eyelids. He kept on watching me while he spoke to her out the side of his mouth, crisply:

"Pipe down."

She piped down. He sat and watched me. I sat and watched him. A clock ticked seconds away behind me. His eyes began shifting their focus from one of my eyes to the other. The girl sighed.

He said in a low voice: "Well?"

I said: "You're in a hole."

"What can you make out of it?" he asked casually.

"Conspiracy to defraud."

The girl jumped up and hit one of his shoulders angrily with the back of a hand, crying:

"What a smart guy you are, to get me in a jam like this. It was going to be duck soup—yeh! Eggs in the coffee—yeh! Now look at you. You haven't even got guts enough to tell this guy to go chase himself." She spun around to face me, pushing her red face down at me—I was still sitting in the rocker—snarling: "Well, what are you waiting for? Waiting to be kissed good-by? We don't owe you anything, do we? We didn't get any of your lousy money, did we? Outside, then. Take the air. Dangle."

"Stop it, sister," I growled. "You'll bust something."

The man said:

"For God's sake stop that bawling, Peggy, and give somebody else a chance." He addressed me: "Well, what do you want?"

"How'd you get into this?" I asked.

He spoke quickly, eagerly:

"A fellow named Kenny gave me that stuff and told me about this Sue Hambleton, and her old man having plenty. I thought I'd give it a whirl. I figured the old man would either wire the dough right off the reel or wouldn't send it at all. I didn't figure on this send-a-man stuff. Then when his wire came, saying he was sending a man to see her, I ought to have dropped it.

"But hell! Here was a man coming with a grand in cash. That was too good to let go of without a try. It looked like there still might be a chance of copping, so I got Peggy to do Sue for me. If the man was coming today, it was a cinch he belonged out here on the Coast, and it was an even bet he wouldn't know Sue, would only have a description of her. From what Kenny had told me about her, I knew Peggy would come pretty close to fitting her description. I still don't see how you got that photograph. Television? I only wired the old man yesterday. I mailed a couple of letters to Sue, here, yesterday, so we'd have them with the other identification stuff to get the money from the telegraph company on."

"Kenny gave you the old man's address?"

"Sure he did."

"Did he give you Sue's?"

"No."

"How'd Kenny get hold of the stuff?"

"He didn't say."

"Where's Kenny now?"

"I don't know. He was on his way east, with something else on the fire, and couldn't fool with this. That's why he passed it on to me."

"Big-hearted Kenny," I said. "You know Sue Hambleton?"

"No," emphatically. "I'd never even heard of her till Kenny told me."

"I don't like this Kenny," I said, "though without him your story's got some good points. Could you tell it leaving him out?"

He shook his head slowly from side to side, saying:

"It wouldn't be the way it happened."

"That's too bad. Conspiracies to defraud don't mean as much to me as finding Sue. I might have made a deal with you."

He shook his head again, but his eyes were thoughtful, and his lower lip moved up to overlap the upper a little.

The girl had stepped back so she could see both of us as we talked, turning her face, which showed she didn't like us, from one to the other as we spoke our pieces. Now she fastened her gaze on the man, and her eyes were growing angry again.

I got up on my feet, telling him:

"Suit yourself. But if you want to play it that way I'll have to take you both in."

He smiled with indrawn lips and stood up.

The girl thrust herself in between us, facing him.

"This is a swell time to be dummies up," she spit at him. "Pop off, you lightweight, or I will. You're crazy if you think I'm going to take the fall with you."

"Shut up," he said in his throat.

"Shut me up," she cried.

He tried to, with both hands. I reached over her shoulders and caught one of his wrists, knocked the other hand up.

She slid out from between us and ran around behind me, screaming:

"Joe does know her. He got the things from her. She's at the St. Martin on O'Farrell Street—her and Babe McCloor."

While I listened to this I had to pull my head aside to let Joe's right hook miss me, had got his left arm twisted behind him, had turned my hip to catch his knee, and had got the palm of my left hand under his chin. I was ready to give his chin the Japanese tilt when he stopped wrestling and grunted:

"Let me tell it."

"Hop to it;" I consented, taking my hands away from him and stepping back.

He rubbed the wrist I had wrenched, scowling past me at the girl. He called her four unlovely names, the mildest of which was "a dumb twist," and told her:

"He was bluffing about throwing us in the can. You don't

think old man Hambleton's hunting for newspaper space, do you?" That wasn't a bad guess.

He sat on the sofa again, still rubbing his wrist. The girl stayed on the other side of the room, laughing at him through her teeth.

I said: "All right, roll it out, one of you."

"You've got it all," he muttered. "I glauemed that stuff last week when I was visiting Babe, knowing the story and hating to see a promising layout like that go to waste."

"What's Babe doing now?" I asked.

"I don't know."

"Is he still puffing them?"

"I don't know."

"Like hell you don't."

"I don't," he insisted. "If you know Babe you know you can't get anything out of him about what he's doing."

"How long have he and Sue been here?"

"About six months that I know of."

"Who's he mobbed up with?"

"I don't know. Any time Babe works with a mob he picks them up on the road and leaves them on the road."

"How's he fixed?"

"I don't know. There's always enough grub and liquor in the joint."

Half an hour of this convinced me that I wasn't going to get much information about my people here.

I went to the phone in the passageway and called the Agency. The boy on the switchboard told me MacMan was in the operative's room. I asked to have him sent up to me, and went back to the living-room. Joe and Peggy took their heads apart when I came in.

MacMan arrived in less than ten minutes. I let him in and told him:

"This fellow says his name's Joe Wales, and the girl's supposed to be Peggy Carroll who lives upstairs in 421. We've got them cold for conspiracy to defraud, but I've made a deal with them. I'm going out to look at it now. Stay here with them, in this room. Nobody goes in or out, and nobody

but you gets to the phone. There's a fire-escape in front of the window. The window's locked now. I'd keep it that way. If the deal turns out O.K. we'll let them go, but if they cut up on you while I'm gone there's no reason why you can't knock them around as much as you want."

MacMan nodded his hard round head and pulled a chair out between them and the door. I picked up my hat.

Joe Wales called:

"Hey, you're not going to uncover me to Babe, are you? That's got to be part of the deal."

"Not unless I have to."

"I'd just as leave stand the rap," he said. "I'd be safer in jail."

"I'll give you the best break I can," I promised, "but you'll have to take what's dealt you."

† † † †

Walking over to the St. Martin—only half a dozen blocks from Wales's place—I decided to go up against McCloor and the girl as a Continental op who suspected Babe of being in on a branch bank stick-up in Alameda the previous week. He hadn't been in on it—if the bank people had described half-correctly the men who had robbed them—so it wasn't likely my supposed suspicions would frighten him much. Clearing himself, he might give me some information I could use. The chief thing I wanted, of course, was a look at the girl, so I could report to her father that I had seen her. There was no reason for supposing that she and Babe knew her father was trying to keep an eye on her. Babe had a record. It was natural enough for sleuths to drop in now and then and try to hang something on him.

The St. Martin was a small three-story apartment house of red brick between two taller hotels. The vestibule register showed, *R. K. McCloor, 313*, as Wales and Peggy had told me.

I pushed the bell button. Nothing happened. Nothing happened any of the four times I pushed it. I pushed the button labeled *Manager*.

The door clicked open. I went indoors. A beefy woman in a pink-striped cotton dress that needed pressing stood in an apartment doorway just inside the street door.

"Some people named McCloor live here?" I asked.

"Three-thirteen," she said.

"Been living here long?"

She pursed her fat mouth, looked intently at me, hesitated, but finally said: "Since last June."

"What do you know about them?"

She balked at that, raising her chin and her eyebrows.

I gave her my card. That was safe enough; it fit in with the pretext I intended using upstairs.

Her face, when she raised it from reading the card, was oily with curiosity.

"Come in here," she said in a husky whisper, backing through the doorway.

I followed her into her apartment. We sat on a Chesterfield and she whispered:

"What is it?"

"Maybe nothing." I kept my voice low, playing up to her theatricals. "He's done time for safe-burglary. I'm trying to get a line on him now, on the off chance that he might have been tied up in a recent job. I don't know that he was. He may be going straight for all I know." I took his photograph—front and profile, taken at Leavenworth—out of my pocket. "This him?"

She seized it eagerly, nodded, said, "Yes, that's him, all right," turned it over to read the description on the back, and repeated, "Yes, that's him, all right."

"His wife is here with him?" I asked.

She nodded vigorously.

"I don't know her," I said. "What sort of looking girl is she?"

She described a girl who could have been Sue Hambleton. I couldn't show Sue's picture, that would have uncovered me if she and Babe heard about it.

I asked the woman what she knew about the McCloors. What she knew wasn't a great deal: paid their rent on time,

kept irregular hours, had occasional drinking parties, quarreled a lot.

"Think they're in now?" I asked. "I got no answer on the bell."

"I don't know," she whispered. "I haven't seen either of them since night before last, when they had a fight."

"Much of a fight?"

"Not much worse than usual."

"Could you find out if they're in?" I asked.

She looked at me out of the ends of her eyes.

"I'm not going to make any trouble for you," I assured her. "But if they've blown I'd like to know it, and I reckon you would too."

"All right, I'll find out." She got up, patting a pocket in which keys jingled. "You wait here."

"I'll go as far as the third floor with you," I said, "and wait out of sight there."

"All right," she said reluctantly.

On the third floor, I remained by the elevator. She disappeared around a corner of the dim corridor, and presently a muffled electric bell rang. It rang three times. I heard her keys jingle and one of them grate in a lock. The lock clicked. I heard the doorknob rattle as she turned it.

Then a long moment of silence was ended by a scream that filled the corridor from wall to wall.

I jumped for the corner, swung around it, saw an open door ahead, went through it, and slammed the door shut behind me.

The scream had stopped.

I was in a small dark vestibule with three doors beside the one I had come through. One door was shut. One opened into a bathroom. I went to the other.

The fat manager stood just inside it, her round back to me. I pushed past her and saw what she was looking at.

Sue Hambleton, in pale yellow pajamas trimmed with black lace, was lying across a bed. She lay on her back. Her arms were stretched out over her head. One leg was bent under her, one stretched out so that its bare foot rested on the floor.

That bare foot was whiter than a live foot could be. Her face was white as her foot, except for a mottled swollen area from the right eyebrow to the right cheek-bone and dark bruises on her throat.

"Phone the police," I told the woman, and began poking into corners, closets and drawers.

It was late afternoon when I returned to the Agency. I asked the file clerk to see if we had anything on Joe Wales and Peggy Carroll, and then went into the Old Man's office.

He put down some reports he had been reading, gave me a nodded invitation to sit down, and asked:

"You've seen her?"

"Yeah. She's dead."

The Old Man said, "Indeed," as if I had said it was raining, and smiled with polite attentiveness while I told him about it—from the time I had rung Wales's bell until I had joined the fat manager in the dead girl's apartment.

"She had been knocked around some, was bruised on the face and neck," I wound up. "But that didn't kill her."

"You think she was murdered?" he asked, still smiling gently.

"I don't know. Doc Jordan says he thinks it could have been arsenic. He's hunting for it in her now. We found a funny thing in the joint. Some thick sheets of dark gray paper were stuck in a book—*The Count of Monte Cristo*—wrapped in a month-old newspaper and wedged into a dark corner between the stove and the kitchen wall."

"Ah, arsenical fly paper," the Old Man murmured. "The Maybrick-Seddons trick. Mashed in water, four to six grains of arsenic can be soaked out of a sheet—enough to kill two people."

I nodded, saying:

"I worked on one in Louisville in 1916. The mulatto janitor saw McCloor leaving at half-past nine yesterday morning. She was probably dead before that. Nobody's seen him since. Earlier in the morning the people in the next apartment had heard them talking, her groaning. But they had too many fights for the neighbors to pay much attention to that. The

landlady told me they had a fight the night before that. The police are hunting for him."

"Did you tell the police who she was?"

"No. What do we do on that angle? We can't tell them about Wales without telling them all."

"I dare say the whole thing will have to come out," he said thoughtfully. "I'll wire New York."

I went out of his office. The file clerk gave me a couple of newspaper clippings. The first told me that, fifteen months ago, Joseph Wales, alias Holy Joe, had been arrested on the complaint of a farmer named Toomey that he had been taken for twenty-five hundred dollars on a phoney "Business Opportunity" by Wales and three other men. The second clipping said the case had been dropped when Toomey failed to appear against Wales in court—bought off in the customary manner by the return of part or all of his money. That was all our files held on Wales, and they had nothing on Peggy Carroll.

† † † † †

MacMan opened the door for me when I returned to Wales's apartment.

"Anything doing?" I asked him.

"Nothing—except they've been belly-aching a lot."

Wales came forward, asking eagerly:

"Satisfied now?"

The girl stood by the window, looking at me with anxious eyes.

I didn't say anything.

"Did you find her?" Wales asked, frowning. "She was where I told you?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Well, then." Part of his frown went away. "That lets Peggy and me out, doesn't—" He broke off, ran his tongue over his lower lip, put a hand to his chin, asked sharply: "You didn't give them the tip-off on me, did you?"

I shook my head, no.

He took his hand from his chin and asked irritably:

"What's the matter with you, then? What are you looking like that for?"

Behind him the girl spoke bitterly.

"I knew damned well it would be like this," she said. "I knew damned well we weren't going to get out of it. Oh, what a smart guy you are!"

"Take Peggy into the kitchen, and shut both doors," I told MacMan. "Holy Joe and I are going to have a real heart-to-heart talk."

The girl went out willingly, but when MacMan was closing the door she put her head in again to tell Wales:

"I hope he busts you in the nose if you try to hold out on him."

MacMan shut the door.

"Your playmate seems to think you know something," I said.

Wales scowled at the door and grumbled: "She's more help to me than a broken leg." He turned his face to me, trying to make it look frank and friendly. "What do you want? I came clean with you before. What's the matter now?"

"What do you guess?"

He pulled his lips in between his teeth.

"What do you want to make me guess for?" he demanded. "I'm willing to play ball with you. But what can I do if you won't tell me what you want? I can't see inside your head."

"You'd get a kick out of it if you could."

He shook his head wearily and walked back to the sofa, sitting down bent forward, his hands together between his knees.

"All right," he sighed. "Take your time about asking me. I'll wait for you."

I went over and stood in front of him. I took his chin between my left thumb and fingers, raising his head and bending my own down until our noses were almost touching. I said:

"Where you stumbled, Joe, was in sending the telegram right after the murder."

"He's dead?" It popped out before his eyes had even had time to grow round and wide.

The question threw me off balance. I had to wrestle with my forehead to keep it from wrinkling, and I put too much calmness in my voice when I asked:

"Is who dead?"

"Who? How do I know? Who do you mean?"

"Who did you think I meant?" I insisted.

"How do I know? Oh, all right! Old man Hambleton, Sue's father."

"That's right," I said, and took my hand away from his chin.

"And he was murdered, you say?" He hadn't moved his face an inch from the position into which I had lifted it. "How?"

"Arsenic—fly paper."

"Arsenic fly paper." He looked thoughtful. "That's a funny one."

"Yeah, very funny. Where'd you go about buying some if you wanted it?"

"Buying it? I don't know. I haven't seen any since I was a kid. Nobody uses fly paper here in San Francisco anyway. There aren't enough flies."

"Somebody used some here," I said, "on Sue."

"Sue?" He jumped so that the sofa squeaked under him.

"Yeah. Murdered yesterday morning—arsenical fly paper."

"Both of them?" he asked incredulously.

"Both of who?"

"Her and her father."

"Yeah."

He put his chin far down on his chest and rubbed the back of one hand with the palm of the other.

"Then I am in a hole," he said slowly.

"That's what," I cheerfully agreed. "Want to try talking yourself out of it?"

"Let me think."

I let him think, listening to the tick of the clock while he thought. Thinking brought drops of sweat out on his gray-

white face. Presently he sat up straight, wiping his face with a fancily colored handkerchief.

"I'll talk," he said. "I've got to talk now. Sue was getting ready to ditch Babe. She and I were going away. She— Here, I'll show you."

He put his hand in his pocket and held out a folded sheet of thick note-paper to me. I took it and read:

Dear Joe:—

I can't stand this much longer—we've simply got to go soon. Babe beat me again tonight. Please, if you really love me, let's make it soon.

Sue

The handwriting was a nervous woman's, tall, angular, and piled up.

"That's why I made the play for Hambleton's grand," he said. "I've been shatting on my uppers for a couple of months, and when that letter came yesterday I just had to raise dough somehow to get her away. She wouldn't have stood for tapping her father though, so I tried to swing it without her knowing."

"When did you see her last?"

"Day before yesterday, the day she mailed that letter. Only I saw her in the afternoon—she was here—and she wrote it that night."

"Babe suspect what you were up to?"

"We didn't think he did. I don't know. He was jealous as hell all the time, whether he had any reason to be or not."

"How much reason did he have?"

Wales looked me straight in the eye and said:

"Sue was a good kid."

I said: "Well, she's been murdered."

He didn't say anything.

Day was darkening into evening. I went to the door and pressed the light button. I didn't lose sight of Holy Joe Wales while I was doing it.

As I took my finger away from the button, something clicked at the window. The click was loud and sharp.

I looked at the window.

A man crouched there on the fire-escape, looking in through glass and lace curtain. He was a thick-featured dark man whose size identified him as Babe McCloor. The muzzle of a big black automatic was touching the glass in front of him. He had tapped the glass with it to catch our attention.

He had our attention.

There wasn't anything for me to do just then. I stood there and looked at him. I couldn't tell whether he was looking at me or at Wales. I could see him clearly enough, but the lace curtain spoiled my view of details like that. I imagined he wasn't neglecting either of us, and I didn't imagine the lace curtain hid much from him. He was closer to the curtain than we, and I had turned on the room's lights.

Wales, sitting dead still on the sofa, was looking at McCloor. Wales's face wore a peculiar, stiffly sullen expression. His eyes were sullen. He wasn't breathing.

McCloor flicked the nose of his pistol against the pane, and a triangular piece of glass fell out, tinkling apart on the floor. It didn't, I was afraid, make enough noise to alarm Mac-Man in the kitchen. There were two closed doors between here and there.

Wales looked at the broken pane and closed his eyes. He closed them slowly, little by little, exactly as if he were falling asleep. He kept his stiffly sullen blank face turned straight to the window.

McCloor shot him three times.

The bullets knocked Wales down on the sofa, back against the wall. Wales's eyes popped open, bulging. His lips crawled back over his teeth, leaving them naked to the gums. His tongue came out. Then his head fell down and he didn't move any more.

When McCloor jumped away from the window I jumped to it. While I was pushing the curtain aside, unlocking the window and raising it, I heard his feet land on the cement paving below.

MacMan flung the door open and came in, the girl at his heels.

"Take care of this," I ordered as I scrambled over the sill. "McCloor shot him."

† † † † † †

Wales's apartment was on the second floor. The fire-escape ended there with a counter-weighted iron ladder that a man's weight would swing down into a cement-paved court.

I went down as Babe McCloor had gone, swinging down on the ladder till within dropping distance of the court, and then letting go.

There was only one street exit to the court. I took it.

A startled looking, smallish man was standing in the middle of the sidewalk close to the court, gaping at me as I dashed out.

I caught his arm, shook it.

"A big guy running." Maybe I yelled. "Where?"

He tried to say something, couldn't, and waved his arm at billboards standing across the front of a vacant lot on the other side of the street.

I forgot to say, "Thank you," in my hurry to get over there.

I got behind the billboards by crawling under them instead of going to either end, where there were openings. The lot was large enough and weedy enough to give cover to anybody who wanted to lie down and bushwhack a pursuer—even anybody as large as Babe McCloor.

While I considered that, I heard a dog barking at one corner of the lot. He could have been barking at a man who had run by. I ran to that corner of the lot. The dog was in a board-fenced backyard, at the corner of a narrow alley that ran from the lot to a street.

I chinned myself on the board fence, saw a wire-haired terrier alone in the yard, and ran down the alley while he was charging my part of the fence.

I put my gun back into my pocket before I left the alley for the street.

A small touring car was parked at the curb in front of a cigar store some fifteen feet from the alley. A policeman was talking to a slim dark-faced man in the cigar store doorway.

"The big fellow that come out of the alley a minute ago," I said. "Which way did he go?"

The policeman looked dumb. The slim man nodded his head down the street, said, "Down that way," and went on with his conversation.

I said, "Thanks," and went on down to the corner. There was a taxi phone there and two idle taxis. A block and a half below, a street car was going away.

"Did the big fellow who came down here a minute ago take a taxi or the street car?" I asked the two taxi chauffeurs who were leaning against one of the taxis.

The rattier looking one said:

"He didn't take a taxi."

I said:

"I'll take one. Catch that street car for me."

The street car was three blocks away before we got going. The street wasn't clear enough for me to see who got on and off it. We caught it when it stopped at Market Street.

"Follow along," I told the driver as I jumped out.

On the rear platform of the street car I looked through the glass. There were only eight or ten people aboard.

"There was a great big fellow got on at Hyde Street," I said to the conductor. "Where'd he get off?"

The conductor looked at the silver dollar I was turning over in my fingers and remembered that the big man got off at Taylor Street. That won the silver dollar.

I dropped off as the street car turned into Market Street. The taxi, close behind, slowed down, and its door swung open.

"Sixth and Mission," I said as I hopped in.

McCloor could have gone in any direction from Taylor Street. I had to guess. The best guess seemed to be that he would make for the other side of Market Street.

It was fairly dark by now. We had to go down to Fifth Street to get off Market, then over to Mission, and back up to

Sixth. We got to Sixth Street without seeing McCloor. I couldn't see him on Sixth Street—either way from the crossing.

"On up to Ninth," I ordered, and while we rode told the driver what kind of man I was looking for.

We arrived at Ninth Street. No McCloor. I cursed and pushed my brains around.

The big man was a yegg. San Francisco was on fire for him. The yegg instinct would be to use a rattler to get away from trouble. The freight yards were in this end of town. Maybe he would be shifty enough to lie low instead of trying to powder. In that case, he probably hadn't crossed Market Street at all. If he stuck, there would still be a chance of picking him up tomorrow. If he was high-tailing, it was catch him now or not at all.

"Down to Harrison," I told the driver.

We went down to Harrison Street, and down Harrison to Third, up Bryant to Eighth, down Brannan to Third again, and over to Townsend—and we didn't see Babe McCloor.

"That's tough, that is," the driver sympathized as we stopped across the street from the Southern Pacific passenger station.

"I'm going over and look around in the station," I said. "Keep your eyes open while I'm gone."

When I told the copper in the station my trouble he introduced me to a couple of plain-clothes men who had been planted there to watch for McCloor. That had been done after Sue Hambleton's body was found. The shooting of Holy Joe Wales was news to them.

I went outside again and found my taxi in front of the door, its horn working over-time, but too asthmatically to be heard indoors. The ratty driver was excited.

"A guy like you said come up out of King Street just now and swung on a No. 16 car as it pulled away," he said.

"Going which way?"

"That-away," pointing southeast.

"Catch him," I said, jumping in.

The street car was out of sight around a bend in Third Street two blocks below. When we rounded the bend, the

street car was slowing up, four blocks ahead. It hadn't slowed up very much when a man leaned far out and stepped off. He was a tall man, but didn't look tall on account of his shoulder spread. He didn't check his momentum, but used it to carry him across the sidewalk and out of sight.

We stopped where the man had left the car.

I gave the driver too much money and told him:

"Go back to Townsend Street and tell the copper in the station that I've chased Babe McCloor into the S. P. yards."

† † † † † † †

I thought I was moving silently down between two strings of box cars, but I had gone less than twenty feet when a light flashed in my face and a sharp voice ordered:

"Stand still, you."

I stood still. Men came from between cars. One of them spoke my name, adding: "What are you doing here? Lost?" It was Harry Pebble, a police detective.

I stopped holding my breath and said:

"Hello, Harry. Looking for Babe?"

"Yes. We've been going over the rattlers."

"He's here. I just tailed him in from the street."

Pebble swore and snapped the light off.

"Watch, Harry," I advised. "Don't play with him. He's packing plenty of gun and he's cut down one boy tonight."

"I'll play with him," Pebble promised, and told one of the men with him to go over and warn those on the other side of the yard that McCloor was in, and then to ring for reinforcements.

"We'll just sit on the edge and hold him in till they come," he said.

That seemed a sensible way to play it. We spread out and waited. Once Pebble and I turned back a lanky bum who tried to slip into the yard between us, and one of the men below us picked up a shivering kid who was trying to slip out. Otherwise nothing happened until Lieutenant Duff arrived with a couple of carloads of coppers.

Most of our force went into a cordon around the yard.

The rest of us went through the yard in small groups, working it over car by car. We picked up a few hoboos that Pebble and his men had missed earlier, but we didn't find McCloor.

We didn't find any trace of him until somebody stumbled over a railroad bull huddled in the shadow of a gondola. It took a couple of minutes to bring him to, and he couldn't talk then. His jaw was broken. But when we asked if McCloor had slugged him, he nodded, and when we asked in which direction McCloor had been headed, he moved a feeble hand to the east.

We went over and searched the Santa Fe yards.

We didn't find McCloor.

† † † † † † † †

I rode up to the Hall of Justice with Duff. MacMan was in the captain of detectives' office with three or four police sleuths.

"Wales die?" I asked.

"Yep."

"Say anything before he went?"

"He was gone before you were through the window."

"You held on to the girl?"

"She's here."

"She say anything?"

"We were waiting for you before we tapped her," detective-sergeant O'Gar said, "not knowing the angle on her."

"Let's have her in. I haven't had any dinner yet. How about the autopsy on Sue Hambleton?"

"Chronic arsenic poisoning."

"Chronic? That means it was fed to her little by little, and not in a lump?"

"Uh-huh. From what he found in her kidneys, intestines, liver, stomach and blood, Jordan figures there was less than a grain of it in her. That wouldn't be enough to knock her off. But he says he found arsenic in the tips of her hair, and she'd have to be given some at least a month ago for it to have worked out that far."

"Any chance that it wasn't arsenic that killed her?"

"Not unless Jordan's a bum doctor."

A policewoman came in with Peggy Carroll.

The blonde girl was tired. Her eyelids, mouth corners and body drooped, and when I pushed a chair out toward her she sagged down in it.

O'Gar ducked his grizzled bullet head at me.

"Now, Peggy," I said, "tell us where you fit into this mess."

"I don't fit into it." She didn't look up. Her voice was tired.

"Joe dragged me into it. He told you."

"You his girl?"

"If you want to call it that," she admitted.

"You jealous?"

"What," she asked, looking up at me, her face puzzled, "has that got to do with it?"

"Sue Hambleton was getting ready to go away with him when she was murdered."

The girl sat up straight in the chair and said deliberately:

"I swear to God I didn't know she was murdered."

"But you did know she was dead," I said positively.

"I didn't," she replied just as positively.

I nudged O'Gar with my elbow. He pushed his undershot jaw at her and barked:

"What are you trying to give us? You knew she was dead. How could you kill her without knowing it?"

While she looked at him I waved the others in. They crowded close around her and took up the chorus of the sergeant's song. She was barked, roared, and snarled at plenty in the next few minutes.

The instant she stopped trying to talk back to them I cut in again.

"Wait," I said, very earnestly. "Maybe she didn't kill her."

"The hell she didn't," O'Gar stormed, holding the center of the stage so the others could move away from the girl without their retreat seeming too artificial. "Do you mean to tell me this baby—"

"I didn't say she didn't," I remonstrated. "I said maybe she didn't."

"Then who did?"

I passed the question to the girl: "Who did?"

"Babe," she said immediately.

O'Gar snorted to make her think he didn't believe her.

I asked, as if I were honestly perplexed:

"How do you know that if you didn't know she was dead?"

"It stands to reason he did," she said. "Anybody can see that. He found out she was going away with Joe, so he killed her and then came to Joe's and killed him. That's just exactly what Babe would do when he found it out."

"Yeah? How long have *you* known they were going away together?"

"Since they decided to. Joe told me a month or two ago."

"And you didn't mind?"

"You've got this all wrong," she said. "Of course I didn't mind. I was being cut in on it. You know her father had the bees. That's what Joe was after. She didn't mean anything to him but an in to the old man's pockets. And I was to get my dib. And you needn't think I was crazy enough about Joe or anybody else to step off in the air for them. Babe got next and fixed the pair of them. That's a cinch."

"Yeah? How do you figure Babe would kill her?"

"That guy? You don't think he'd—"

"I mean, how would he go about killing her?"

"Oh!" She shrugged. "With his hands, likely as not."

"Once he'd made up his mind to do it, he'd do it quick and violent?" I suggested.

"That would be Babe," she agreed.

"But you can't see him slow-poisoning her—spreading it out over a month?"

Worry came into the girl's blue eyes. She put her lower lip between her teeth, then said slowly:

"No, I can't see him doing it that way. Not Babe."

"Who can you see doing it that way?"

She opened her eyes wide, asking:

"You mean Joe?"

I didn't say anything.

"Joe might have," she said persuasively. "God only knows what he'd want to do it for, why he'd want to get rid of the

kind of meal ticket she was going to be. But you couldn't always guess what he was getting at. He pulled plenty of dumb ones. He was too slick without being smart. If he was going to kill her, though, that would be about the way he'd go about it."

"Were he and Babe friendly?"

"No."

"Did he go to Babe's much?"

"Not at all that I know about. He was too leery of Babe to take a chance on being caught there. That's why I moved upstairs, so Sue could come over to our place to see him."

"Then how could Joe have hidden the fly paper he poisoned her with in her apartment?"

"Fly paper!" Her bewilderment seemed honest enough.

"Show it to her," I told O'Gar.

He got a sheet from the desk and held it close to the girl's face.

She stared at it for a moment and then jumped up and grabbed my arm with both hands.

"I didn't know what it was," she said excitedly. "Joe had some a couple of months ago. He was looking at it when I came in. I asked him what it was for, and he smiled that wisenheimer smile of his and said, 'You make angels out of it,' and wrapped it up again and put it in his pocket. I didn't pay much attention to him: he was always fooling with some kind of tricks that were supposed to make him wealthy, but never did."

"Ever see it again?"

"No."

"Did you know Sue very well?"

"I didn't know her at all. I never even saw her. I used to keep out of the way so I wouldn't gum Joe's play with her."

"But you know Babe?"

"Yes, I've been on a couple of parties where he was. That's all I know him."

"Who killed Sue?"

"Joe," she said. "Didn't he have that paper you say she was killed with?"

"Why did he kill her?"

"I don't know. He pulled some awful dumb tricks sometimes."

"You didn't kill her?"

"No, no, no!"

I jerked the corner of my mouth at O'Gar.

"You're a liar," he bawled, shaking the fly paper in her face. "You killed her." The rest of the team closed in, throwing accusations at her. They kept it up until she was groggy and the policewoman beginning to look worried.

Then I said angrily:

"All right. Throw her in a cell and let her think it over." To her: "You know what you told Joe this afternoon: this is no time to dummy up. Do a lot of thinking tonight."

"Honest to God I didn't kill her," she said.

I turned my back to her. The policewoman took her away.

"Ho-hum," O'Gar yawned. "We gave her a pretty good ride at that, for a short one."

"Not bad," I agreed. "If anybody else looked likely, I'd say she didn't kill Sue. But if she's telling the truth, then Holy Joe did it. And why should he poison the goose that was going to lay nice yellow eggs for him? And how and why did he cache the poison in their apartment? Babe had the motive, but damned if he looks like a slow-poisoner to me. You can't tell, though; he and Holy Joe could even have been working together on it."

"Could," Duff said. "But it takes a lot of imagination to get that one down. Anyway you twist it, Peggy's our best bet so far. Go up against her again, hard, in the morning?"

"Yeah," I said. "And we've got to find Babe."

The others had had dinner. MacMan and I went out and got ours. When we returned to the detective bureau an hour later it was practically deserted of the regular operatives.

"All gone to Pier 42 on a tip that McCloor's there," Steve Ward told us.

"How long ago?"

"Ten minutes."

MacMan and I got a taxi and set out for Pier 42. We didn't get to Pier 42.

On First Street, half a block from the Embarcadero, the taxi suddenly shrieked and slid to a halt.

"What—?" I began, and saw a man standing in front of the machine. He was a big man with a big gun. "Babe," I grunted, and put my hand on MacMan's arm to keep him from getting his gun out.

"Take me to—" McCloor was saying to the frightened driver when he saw us. He came around to my side and pulled the door open, holding the gun on us.

He had no hat. His hair was wet, plastered to his head. Little streams of water trickled down from it. His clothes were dripping wet.

He looked surprised at us and ordered:

"Get out."

As we got out he growled at the driver:

"What the hell you got your flag up for if you had fares?"

The driver wasn't there. He had hopped out the other side and was scooting away down the street. McCloor cursed him and poked his gun at me, growling:

"Go on, beat it."

Apparently he hadn't recognized me. The light here wasn't good, and I had a hat on now. He had seen me for only a few seconds in Wales's room.

I stepped aside. MacMan moved to the other side.

McCloor took a backward step to keep us from getting him between us and started an angry word.

MacMan threw himself on McCloor's gun arm.

I socked McCloor's jaw with my fist. I might just as well have hit somebody else for all it seemed to bother him.

He swept me out of his way and pasted MacMan in the mouth. MacMan fell back till the taxi stopped him, spit out a tooth, and came back for more.

I was trying to climb up McCloor's left side.

MacMan came in on his right, failed to dodge a chop of the gun, caught it square on the top of the noodle, and went down hard. He stayed down.

I kicked McCloor's ankle, but couldn't get his foot from under him. I rammed my right fist into the small of his back and got a left-handful of his wet hair, swinging on it. He shook his head, dragging me off my feet.

He punched me in the side and I could feel my ribs and guts flattening together like leaves in a book.

I swung my fist against the back of his neck. That bothered him. He made a rumbling noise down in his chest, crunched my shoulder in his left hand, and chopped at me with the gun in his right.

I kicked him somewhere and punched his neck again.

Down the street, at the Embarcadero, a police whistle was blowing. Men were running up First Street toward us.

McCloor snorted like a locomotive and threw me away from him. I didn't want to go. I tried to hang on. He threw me away from him and ran up the street.

I scrambled up and ran after him, dragging my gun out.

At the first corner he stopped to squirt metal at me—three shots. I squirted one at him. None of the four connected.

He disappeared around the corner. I swung wide around it, to make him miss if he were flattened to the wall waiting for me. He wasn't. He was a hundred feet ahead, going into a space between two warehouses. I went in after him, and out after him at the other end, making better time with my hundred and ninety pounds than he was making with his two-fifty.

He crossed a street, turning up, away from the waterfront. There was a light on the corner. When I came into its glare he wheeled and leveled his gun at me. I didn't hear it click, but I knew it had when he threw it at me. The gun went past with a couple of feet to spare and raised hell against a door behind me.

McCloor turned and ran up the street. I ran up the street after him.

I put a bullet past him to let the others know where we were. At the next corner he started to turn to the left, changed his mind, and went straight on.

I sprinted, cutting the distance between us to forty or fifty feet, and yelled:

"Stop or I'll drop you."

He jumped sidewise into a narrow alley.

I passed it on the jump, saw he wasn't waiting for me, and went in. Enough light came in from the street to let us see each other and our surroundings. The alley was blind-walled on each side and at the other end by tall concrete buildings with steel-shuttered windows and doors.

McCloor faced me, less than twenty feet away. His jaw stuck out. His arms curved down free of his sides. His shoulders were bunched.

"Put them up," I ordered, holding my gun level.

"Get out of my way, little man," he grumbled, taking a stiff-legged step toward me. "I'll eat you up."

"Keep coming," I said, "and I'll put you down."

"Try it." He took another step, crouching a little. "I can still get to you *with* slugs in me."

"Not where I'll put them." I was wordy, trying to talk him into waiting till the others came up. I didn't want to have to kill him. We could have done that from the taxi. "I'm no Annie Oakley, but if I can't pop your kneecaps with two shots at this distance, you're welcome to me. And if you think smashed kneecaps are a lot of fun, give it a whirl."

"Hell with that," he said and charged.

I shot his right knee.

He lurched toward me.

I shot his left knee.

He tumbled down.

"You would have it," I complained.

He twisted around, and with his arms pushed himself into a sitting position facing me.

"I didn't think you had sense enough to do it," he said through his teeth.

† † † † † † † † †

I talked to McCloor in the hospital. He lay on his back in bed with a couple of pillows slanting his head up. The skin

was pale and tight around his mouth and eyes, but there was nothing else to show he was in pain.

"You sure devastated me, bo," he said when I came in.

"Sorry," I said, "but—"

"I ain't beefing. I asked for it."

"Why'd you kill Holy Joe?" I asked, off-hand, as I pulled a chair up beside the bed.

"Uh-uh—you're tooting the wrong ringer."

I laughed and told him I was the man in the room with Joe when it happened.

McCloor grinned and said:

"I thought I'd seen you somewheres before. So that's where it was. I didn't pay no attention to your mug, just so your hands didn't move."

"Why'd you kill him?"

He pursed his lips, screwed up his eyes at me, thought something over, and said:

"He killed a broad I knew."

"He killed Sue Hambleton?" I asked.

He studied my face a while before he replied: "Yep."

"How do you figure that out?"

"Hell," he said, "I don't have to. Sue told me. Give me a butt."

I gave him a cigarette, held a lighter under it, and objected:

"That doesn't exactly fit in with other things I know. Just what happened and what did she say? You might start back with the night you gave her the goog."

He looked thoughtful, letting smoke sneak slowly out of his nose, then said:

"I hadn't ought to hit her in the eye, that's a fact. But, see, she had been out all afternoon and wouldn't tell me where she'd been, and we had a row over it. What's this—Thursday morning? That was Monday, then. After the row I went out and spent the night in a dump over on Army Street. I got home about seven the next morning. Sue was sick as hell, but she wouldn't let me get a croaker for her. That was kind of funny, because she was scared stiff."

McCloor scratched his head meditatively and suddenly

drew in a great lungful of smoke, practically eating up the rest of the cigarette. He let the smoke leak out of mouth and nose together, looking dully through the cloud at me. Then he said bruskiy:

"Well, she went under. But before she went she told me she'd been poisoned by Holy Joe."

"She say how he'd given it to her?"

McCloor shook his head.

"I'd been asking her what was the matter, and not getting anything out of her. Then she starts whining that she's poisoned. 'I'm poisoned, Babe,' she whines. 'Arsenic. That damned Holy Joe,' she says. Then she won't say anything else, and it's not a hell of a while after that that she kicks off."

"Yeah? Then what'd you do?"

"I went gunning for Holy Joe. I knew him but didn't know where he jungled up, and didn't find out till yesterday. You was there when I came. You know about that. I had picked up a boiler and parked it over on Turk Street, for the getaway. When I got back to it, there was a copper standing close to it. I figured he might have spotted it as a hot one and was waiting to see who came for it, so I let it alone, and caught a street car instead, and cut for the yards. Down there I ran into a whole flock of hammer and saws and had to go overboard in China Basin, swimming up to a pier, being ranked again by a watchman there, swimming off to another, and finally getting through the line only to run into another bad break. I wouldn't of flagged that taxi if the *For Hire* flag hadn't been up."

"You knew Sue was planning to take a run-out on you with Joe?"

"I don't know it yet," he said. "I knew damned well she was cheating on me, but I didn't know who with."

"What would you have done if you had known that?" I asked.

"Me?" He grinned wolfishly. "Just what I did."

"Killed the pair of them," I said.

He rubbed his lower lip with a thumb and asked calmly:

"You think I killed Sue?"

"You did."

"Serves me right," he said. "I must be getting simple in my old age. What the hell am I doing barbering with a lousy dick? That never got nobody nothing but grief. Well, you might just as well take it on the heel and toe now, my lad. I'm through spitting."

And he was. I couldn't get another word out of him.

† † † † † † † † † †

The Old Man sat listening to me, tapping his desk lightly with the point of a long yellow pencil, staring past me with mild blue, rimless-spectacled, eyes. When I had brought my story up to date, he asked pleasantly:

"How is MacMan?"

"He lost two teeth, but his skull wasn't cracked. He'll be out in a couple of days."

The Old Man nodded and asked:

"What remains to be done?"

"Nothing. We can put Peggy Carroll on the mat again, but it's not likely we'll squeeze much more out of her. Outside of that, the returns are pretty well all in."

"And what do you make of it?"

I squirmed in my chair and said: "Suicide."

The Old Man smiled at me, politely but skeptically.

"I don't like it either," I grumbled. "And I'm not ready to write in a report yet. But that's the only total that what we've got will add up to. That fly paper was hidden behind the kitchen stove. Nobody would be crazy enough to try to hide something from a woman in her own kitchen like that. But the woman might hide it there."

"According to Peggy, Holy Joe had the fly paper. If Sue hid it, she got it from him. For what? They were planning to go away together, and were only waiting till Joe, who was on the nut, raised enough dough. Maybe they were afraid of Babe, and had the poison there to slip him if he tumbled to their plan before they went. Maybe they meant to slip it to him before they went anyway."

"When I started talking to Holy Joe about murder, he

thought Babe was the one who had been bumped off. He was surprised, maybe, but as if he was surprised that it had happened so soon. He was more surprised when he heard that Sue had died too, but even then he wasn't so surprised as when he saw McCloor alive at the window.

"She died cursing Holy Joe, and she knew she was poisoned, and she wouldn't let McCloor get a doctor. Can't that mean that she had turned against Joe, and had taken the poison herself instead of feeding it to Babe? The poison was hidden from Babe. But even if he found it, I can't figure him as a poisoner. He's too rough. Unless he caught her trying to poison him and made her swallow the stuff. But that doesn't account for the month-old arsenic in her hair."

"Does your suicide hypothesis take care of that?" the Old Man asked.

"It could," I said. "Don't be kicking holes in my theory. It's got enough as it stands. But, if she committed suicide this time, there's no reason why she couldn't have tried it once before—say after a quarrel with Joe a month ago—and failed to bring it off. That would have put the arsenic in her. There's no real proof that she took any between a month ago and day before yesterday."

"No real proof," the Old Man protested mildly, "except the autopsy's finding—chronic poisoning."

I was never one to let experts' guesses stand in my way. I said:

"They base that on the small amount of arsenic they found in her remains—less than a fatal dose. And the amount they find in your stomach after you're dead depends on how much you vomit before you die."

The Old Man smiled benevolently at me and asked:

"But you're not, you say, ready to write this theory into a report? Meanwhile what do you propose doing?"

"If there's nothing else on tap, I'm going home, fumigate my brains with Fatimas, and try to get this thing straightened out in my head. I think I'll get a copy of *The Count of Monte Cristo* and run through it. I haven't read it since I was a kid. It looks like the book was wrapped up with the fly paper to

make a bundle large enough to wedge tightly between the wall and stove, so it wouldn't fall down. But there might be something in the book. I'll see anyway."

"I did that last night," the Old Man murmured.

I asked: "And?"

He took a book from his desk drawer, opened it where a slip of paper marked a place, and held it out to me, one pink finger marking a paragraph.

"Suppose you were to take a millegramme of this poison the first day, two millegrammes the second day, and so on. Well, at the end of ten days you would have taken a centigramme: at the end of twenty days, increasing another millegramme, you would have taken three hundred centigrammes; that is to say, a dose you would support without inconvenience, and which would be very dangerous for any other person who had not taken the same precautions as yourself. Well, then, at the end of the month, when drinking water from the same carafe, you would kill the person who had drunk this water, without your perceiving otherwise than from slight inconvenience that there was any poisonous substance mingled with the water."

"That does it," I said. "That does it. They were afraid to go away without killing Babe, too certain he'd come after them. She tried to make herself immune from arsenic poisoning by getting her body accustomed to it, taking steadily increasing doses, so when she slipped the big shot in Babe's food she could eat it with him without danger. She'd be taken sick, but wouldn't die, and the police couldn't hang his death on her because she too had eaten the poisoned food.

"That clicks. After the row Monday night, when she wrote Joe the note urging him to make the getaway soon, she tried to hurry up her immunity, and increased her preparatory doses too quickly, took too large a shot. That's why she cursed Joe at the end: it was his plan."

"Possibly she overdosed herself in an attempt to speed it along," the Old Man agreed, "but not necessarily. There are people who can cultivate an ability to take large doses of

arsenic without trouble, but it seems to be a sort of natural gift with them, a matter of some constitutional peculiarity. Ordinarily, anyone who tried it would do what Sue Hambleton did—slowly poison themselves until the cumulative effect was strong enough to cause death.”

Babe McCloor was hanged, for killing Holy Joe Wales, six months later.

Inside Job*

RAOUL WHITFIELD

FRESNEY STOOD BESIDE THE COAT-RACK, PULLING OFF his gray gloves. His eyes were on the half-moon shaped desk and his chair at the center of the inner curve, on the platform a foot above the floor. He took off his gloves slowly, stuffed them in a pocket of his tightly buttoned trench coat. His gold-headed cane he removed from an arm, hung it over the second hook of the rack. Phillips, the real estate editor, passed him and grinned with his long face.

"Nasty weather," he said.

Fresney's face was turned towards the large, black-lettered sign that hung on a wall of the editorial room.

"Is it?" he said in a cold voice.

The sign on the wall spelled *Accuracy* and was very old and dirty. Fresney's thin, long lips curved slightly in a smile. He removed his coat, took off a gray soft hat and hung it over the hook that held his stick. At one end of the room the automatic telegraph machines were making a clatter. Two or three typewriters were working. At a glance Fresney saw that seven or eight of the dozen reporters on the staff had arrived; it was five minutes of two.

He took a pack of cigarettes from a pocket of the trench coat, walked swiftly around to his chair. It was a swivel-chair; rather battered looking. Cleve Collins, his assistant, looked up from some copy. He sat across from the city editor, on the

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outer curve of the half moon. There were two chairs on each side of his—copy readers' places. Collins said:

"Vapor said he wanted you as soon as you came in, Hugh."

The managing editor's name was Clinton Vaupaugh; he was called "Vapor" around the city room. Fresney nodded and sat down. He put a cigarette in his mouth, lighted a match by scratching a thumbnail across the phosphorus, and held the flame against paper and tobacco. His small, dark eyes looked at words on a yellow sheet of news paper as he shook the match out. The words were: "*You're a good slave driver and a lousy city editor. I resign. Hennessy.*"

Fresney lifted the paper the words were typed on as though it was something dirty. He used the tips of a thumb and forefinger and let the yellow stuff fall to the platform beside him. On another scrap of news paper he read: "*Dyke has sweet alibi and smashed head. Reedy sore—says sheet didn't use his picture. Better give him break. In for the bulldog. Jake.*"

Fresney flipped the scrap across to Cleve Collins, who was watching him closely.

"Run Dan Reedy's face on Page 2—mark it 'must,'" he instructed. "Give him a good boost."

Collins blinked. "Reedy—what for?" he asked. "What did he do?"

The city editor's eyes smiled a little. "He grabbed Jap Dyke, along with two or three other plainclothes boys," he replied grimly. "But we'll forget the others for the moment."

The assistant city editor grunted. He made notes on paper. Fresney said:

"He's feeling hurt and making it tough for Jake. We'll use some oil."

Collins swore very softly. Then he said:

"Vapor wants to see you when you get here, Hugh."

The city editor nodded. "Hennessy's quit; he didn't like it because I told him to go after the Ware woman hard and tell her the police would be out if she didn't talk. I think Hennessy drew a week ahead, yesterday. If he did—send Burney after the money. If Hennessy won't pay up we'll have him pinched."

The assistant city editor widened his blue eyes. He was

thirty-two, ten years younger than Fresney. He had a pale, thin face and his body was long and thin.

"And what'll the police do, after they pinch Hennessy?" he asked dryly.

Fresney's eyes were hard. "They'll do what I *tell* 'em to do," he replied.

Collins whistled very softly. Fresney looked at him sharply, then looked down at another slip of news paper on which was scrawled: "*Cresser gets hanged tonight. C. C.*" The city editor looked at Collins and said slowly: "He put up a good fight, Cleve. Send Daly over to cover it—there's a pass around here somewhere."

Collins nodded. "Yeah. Cresser put up a good fight," he agreed. "Damn' little money—a wife—and with the sheet yelping for his neck—"

Fresney spoke coldly and softly: "Shut up, Cleve."

Collins narrowed his eyes. "The wife was in to see you about fifteen minutes ago, Hugh," he said quietly.

Fresney said: "You shut up, Cleve."

Collins paid no attention to him. "I told her you were out of the city," he said.

Fresney's lips got very tight, and his eyes very small. Before he could speak Collins said:

"But she didn't believe me."

The city editor reached deep down in a hip pocket, twisting in his chair. He got the Colt loose, opened a drawer of the desk and slipped it inside. Cleve Collins looked down at the copy before him.

"That drawer sticks," he reminded quietly. "You ought to have it fixed, Hugh."

Hugh Fresney swung his chair and stood up. He smiled down at his assistant.

"It wouldn't do *you* any good if I *did* get the works," he said grimly. "Running this sheet takes guts."

He looked beyond his assistant towards the groups of reporters. The *Dispatch* was a morning paper and was making a fight to beat the circulation of the *Press*. Fresney was driving

his men hard, and he knew that he wasn't exactly popular. The fact didn't bother him.

He said to Cleve Collins: "Take on another man in Hennessy's place—and no college stuff. And there's a fellow getting in in a few hours to see me. His name is Slade. If I'm not here when he comes in—have him wait."

Collins nodded and said without smiling:

"Vapor wants to see you as soon as you get here, Hugh."

The city editor grinned. "Why didn't you say so before?" he said. "There's no damn' system around this place."

He walked along a side of the large room towards an office door marked: *Managing Editor*. Inside the door was a small anteroom. A very good-looking girl, with red hair and blue eyes, sat back of a small desk. She frowned when she saw Fresney. The city editor smiled at her; but she didn't smile back. Fresney said:

"How about dinner tonight—late, at my place?"

The girl's expression changed just a little.

"C. V. is inside," she said coldly.

Fresney chuckled. "Lovely lady," he said mockingly. "Just another of the mob that would like to see me lying on my back in an alley, with my eyes open."

He went through another door, closed it behind him and stood looking down at the gray-haired figure of Clinton Vaupough. The managing editor was heavy, smooth-faced, handsome. He was a big man with full lips and soft gray eyes.

"It's got to stop, Hugh," he said very slowly. Suddenly he banged a fist on the desk behind which he sat; frowned with his whole face. "I tell you—it's *got* to stop!"

The city editor smiled with his long lips, but his eyes were cold.

"Who's whining now?" he asked with faint amusement in his voice.

Vaupough said grimly: "The *Press* had an editorial yesterday—you saw it? It doesn't name this sheet, but it does everything *but* name it. It says we're distorting the news. It claims we influenced the jury in the Cresser verdict; we hit at women—we're ruthless, lying—"

Fresney took a cigarette from the pack and lighted it.

"The circulation department reports a daily city gain of twelve thousand in ten days," he replied easily. "Where do you think we got that sale? It isn't new readers. It's right out of the *Press*' pocket—we stole those readers away from them. They know it. Of course we're scum—the whole lot of us."

Vaupaugh took a handkerchief from a pocket, and there was an odor of perfume. He wiped his lips.

"It's got to stop," he repeated. "You've got to tone down, Hugh."

Fresney smiled sardonically. "I haven't *started* yet," he breathed.

Vaupaugh stood up and shook a finger across the desk. He was breathing heavily and his face was pale.

"You got Cresser hanged—and you're going after Jap Dyke the same way. You know who the man back of Edith Ware is? Bernard Kyle—one of our biggest advertisers. He called me up this morning. Lay off the Ware case—and lay off quick."

Fresney yawned. "We can tone down a bit," he said. "Kyle, eh? About to walk out on her, I suppose. Afraid of his wife—she just got back from Europe. And the Ware brat makes a bum attempt at suicide."

Vaupaugh spoke in a shaken tone. "It isn't a matter of toning down—we're dropping the Ware suicide attempt. Dropping it, you understand?"

Fresney closed his small eyes, then opened them just a little.

"What's wrong, Clint?" he asked very quietly.

Vaupaugh seated himself and said in a half whisper:

"My life's been threatened—I had a phone call two hours ago. It sounded like business."

The city editor made a snapping sound with fingers of his left hand.

"So *that's* it," he breathed. "First time your life has been threatened, Clint?"

There was irony in his words. Vaupaugh looked at him coldly.

"It's the first time there's ever been any real reason for the

threats," he replied. "Drop the Ware woman suicide stuff. Tone down a lot on Jap Dyke—"

Fresney straightened and stared at the managing editor.

"No," he said in a hard voice. "Dyke's our circulation builder—just now. A tough racketeer-gambler who went a bit too far. Mixed up with some city officials. We can't drop Jap—"

Vaupough was suddenly very calm. "*Drop* Jap Dyke," he said tonelessly. "I've changed my mind. It isn't just a tone down—*drop* him! Or else—"

Hugh Fresney waited a few seconds and then repeated questioningly:

"Or else?"

Vaupough wiped his full lips again. "Or else quit the sheet," he said steadily.

Fresney looked at the managing editor a long time with his small eyes. Then he said:

"Like hell, Clint."

He turned abruptly and went into the anteroom. The red-haired girl bent her head over some papers and Fresney said grimly:

"How about that late dinner?"

She didn't answer him. He went into the big editorial room and towards his desk. As he neared it he saw Tim Slade standing close to Collins. He reached his desk, scribbled: "*82 Goorley Street at six—ask for Creese—he'll take you to back room where I feed.*" He looked at Slade's lean face and said nastily:

"That's where he lives—you're a dirty louse to hound him. This is the last tip I'll give you. Take it and get the hell out of here!"

He folded the paper on which he had scribbled, tossed it across the desk. Tim Slade's eyes flickered, and when Collins handed him the slip of paper he said grimly:

"He owes me the fifty—and if he's got anything worth that much—he'll pay up."

He went along a row between desks, and Cleve Collins said: "Did Vapor want anything special?"

Fresney nodded. "The sheet's getting virtuous again," he

stated with grim amusement. "We're dropping the Ware stuff—and we're dropping Jap Dyke."

Cleve Collins blinked at him, then whistled. Fresney said: "We'll play up the church convention and feature any women's club meetings. And remember the kiddies, Cleve—remember the kiddies. Nothing like the kiddies to build circulation."

Collins smiled grimly. Fresney called up two reporters and gave them assignments. Collins seemed to be thinking hard. After a little while he looked across at Fresney and said softly:

"It's a little late to start playing up the kiddies, isn't it, Hugh?"

Hugh Fresney looked at him narrowly. "It's not too late for *you*, Cleve," he said very quietly. "But it's awful damn' late for Vapor and me!"



Tim Slade had a lean, sun-browned face, brown eyes and hair, good features. He was almost six feet tall and there was a power in his shoulders and arms that wasn't noticeable at a glance. His movements were very quick, though they had the appearance of being slow through grace. He kept brown eyes on Fresney. Fresney said:

"Clinton Vaupough is yellow. He's greedy, too. Two months ago he inherited the paper—his father died. I talked him into putting guts into it, and going after circulation. He didn't care about the guts part, not having any himself. But a gain in circulation—that got him. He told me to go to it. I went to it. Pittsburgh hasn't had a fighting sheet in years. For a month and a half I've been tearing things loose. Pounding away at old crimes and going after the new ones. A quarter of the staff has quit or been fired. We've got three suits against us. Hell's about ready to pop."

Tim Slade smiled and nodded. "Sure," he agreed. "And what's that got to do with me coming on from Cleveland?"

Fresney tapped his cane against the wooden floor of the back room at 82 Goorley Street.

"I didn't know it when I sent for you—but Vaupaugh's life has been threatened. I had a phone call at the flat, two days ago. From a booth in a local department store. A woman's voice. She said I'd get it this week; there was nothing I could do about it—and she was just telling me so I could fix up a few things."

Slade frowned. "Any chance of it just being a bluff?" he asked.

Fresney shook his head. "Not a nickel's worth," he replied. "I made a couple of mistakes."

Slade said: "Well?"

Fresney frowned at his half-empty beer glass. Then he looked at Slade with his little eyes almost closed. He nodded his head as though in self-agreement.

"I fired a reporter named Hallam, a week ago. Vaupaugh's secretary is a red-headed girl named Dana Jones. She and Hallam were hot for each other. Hallam didn't like my talking to him about it, the way I did. He swung at me, and I knocked him cold. Then I fired him. He can't get another job and he left town yesterday. He hates my insides, and so does the girl."

Slade finished the beer. "That makes two, Hugh," he said. "Hallam might come back."

The city editor nodded. "And a reporter named Hennessy makes three," he added. "I didn't fire him—he quit. But I was going to fire him. A woman named Edith Ware tried suicide, three days ago. Reason—her lover was going to be good and stick around his wife. Reason—the wife was coming back home. I had an inside from her maid—paid fifty bucks for it. Sent Hennessy to break the woman down and make her talk. Wanted to know who the man was. Good stuff—the way I was running things. Hennessy sold out, maybe. Or maybe he just got hating me. Anyway, he wrote that I was a slave driver and a louse. He's been drinking."

Slade said: "A possible three."

Fresney looked at his fingernails. "The Ware woman is the fourth. I've smeared her all over the sheet since she made her bum attempt at suicide. I think she uses cocaine."

Slade nodded. "Four."

The city editor drew a deep breath. "I've been ripping things wide open, Tim. There are a lot of others that might do things—and the two that count biggest. Ruth Cresser and Jap Dyke. The Cresser girl is the wife of a guy that hangs tonight. We forced the police to go the limit with him. I had four men working on his past. We played for the jury—for everything. He hangs tonight. His wife was in today."

Slade said: "Five."

Fresney closed his eyes. "Cresser killed two cops, maybe. Jap Dyke told him to do it, maybe. He's bad and he's important. The other sheets keep clear of him. We did, until we went out for circulation. Jap stabbed a kid a week ago—in one of his gambling houses. A stoolie tipped me—I've been playing all ends. We ran stuff that made the city detectives grab Jap. He hasn't talked much yet, but he has an alibi. He knows that I'm city editor and that Vaupaugh is managing editor."

Slade said very tonelessly: "Six."

Fresney looked at the man across from him and smiled. It was a hard smile.

"Six—and some others we won't bother about," he breathed. "I've crammed a lot of living into forty-two years, Tim—I guess you know that. I can smell death when it's close, and I smell it now. One paper can't clean up this town—not the way I went at it. That was one of the mistakes. The other is one I've made all my life—I like to smash people that get in my way."

Slade said: "Sure."

Fresney nodded, his little eyes very small.

"Man or woman—that hasn't made any difference. That's the other mistake—you can't smash women out of the way, Tim. They're the mothers of men."

He leaned back and chuckled. Then he shrugged and battered the gold head of the cane on the table.

"I like to smash people that get in my way," he repeated. "Women have got in my way—in the paper's way. And when I'm finished, Tim—someone will have got in my way again."

Slade's brown eyes held a faintly puzzled expression.

He didn't ask the question, but the city editor answered it.

"I loaned you half the money to get started in that Cleveland agency, Tim. You've done well—you had it in you."

Slade shrugged. "In another three months—I can pay you back, Hugh," he said.

Fresney smiled narrowly. "In another three months I'll be forgotten," he breathed. "Forget the loan, Tim. I wired for you for just one reason. I'm going to be through—pretty quick. That doesn't frighten me, not much. I carry a gun and a heavy stick, Tim, and if I get a break—a chance to fight—you can go on back to Cleveland. But if they get me in the back, or machine-gun me out, or mob me out—I'd like you to get at least one of 'em, Tim. See?"

Slade's brown eyes were frowning. But he didn't speak.

Fresney said: "You'll be all alone, Tim. The police'll be pleasant, but they'll be tickled. They never knew which way I'd print stuff. And I know too much. Vaupaugh's yellow and he hates me now, because he's been scared. Maybe he'll get the dose, too. Maybe not. He'll offer a reward, but the paper won't help you much, Tim. The staff hates me. Collins might help a little, but he'll probably get my job, and he'll be busy being careful he doesn't lose it. See?"

Slade nodded. Fresney smiled and shrugged.

"You'll be alone, Tim," he repeated. "I've hurt too many humans around here."

Slade said: "All right—I don't mind being alone."

Fresney looked at the private detective with a peculiar expression in his small eyes.

"You don't think I'm going to get it, eh? Think I've gone yellow, like Vaupaugh?"

Slade said quietly: "*You* seem pretty sure, Hugh. Ever think of being a newspaper man in some *other* city?"

Fresney smiled grimly. "I never was good at running," he replied. "Well—that's all, Tim. That loan pays your fee—unless I get a chance to fight. If you look things over after, and see that I've hit back some—then trot on back to Cleveland and forget all this stuff."

The city editor stood up. He patted a pocket of the trench coat, which he hadn't removed. He looked down at Slade, smiling a little.

"I'm no damn' angel, Tim," he said. "I guess you know that. But I don't like the idea of the human that gets me having things too easy."

He held out his hand and Slade stood up. "I'll go back to the paper behind you," he said. "I'll stick around for a while. You just might be wrong about things, Hugh."

The city editor grinned and shook his head. He tossed a dollar bill on the table.

"The paper's gone virtuous," he stated with faint mockery. "It may save Vaupaugh's perfumed neck, but it won't save mine."

Tim Slade didn't argue the point. He'd known Fresney for five years, and the city editor had always shoved humans out of his way. If he said he was through—Slade knew he was through.

Fresney said: "Don't come to the funeral, Tim." His smile became a grin. "It'll be a bum show. And you may have work to do."

Slade nodded. "You had a good time while the racket lasted, Hugh," he said quietly. "I'll do what I can. But with so many hating you—"

Fresney grunted. "There may be carelessness along the line."

He dug his left hand into a pocket of the trench coat and handed Slade a grotesquely twisted piece of lead.

"This morning, in the fog," he said quietly, "I took an early walk—it hit a brick wall just ahead of me. Not much sound. Better keep it—might help. Over on the North Side, and the gun was silenced. Just the one shot. I got down low and stayed down for seconds, then I grabbed a cab and went home."

Tim Slade said: "Good size—.45 maybe."

Fresney nodded. "Maybe—doesn't matter much. So long, Tim."

Slade said: "Luck—and keep your chin up, Hugh."

The city editor went from the room and down the stairs.

Slade slipped the bullet in a pocket of his loose gray coat. He stood looking through the doorway, though Fresney was no longer in sight. After a few seconds he shoved his right hand in a deep pocket and touched the steel of his Colt automatic.

Then he went down the stairs and outside, watched the city editor turn a corner and head southward, towards the Ninth Street bridge. He followed along, a half square or so behind. Fresney walked rapidly, with his head up. When a truck made sharp exhaust racket, not far from the bridge, the city editor stopped and looked towards it. Then he went on.

Tim Slade bought a paper and glanced at it from time to time. It was dark when Fresney reached the other side of the bridge. The sky was gray and it was growing foggy. Slade increased his pace and got closer to the city editor. After seven or eight squares Fresney crossed Liberty Street and walked in the direction of the four-story brick building occupied by the *Dispatch*. The editorial rooms were on the upper floor; the presses were at street level. Slade followed to the entrance but didn't go inside. The presses were motionless; there was a small crowd standing in the murky fog and reading a bulletin to the effect that Walter Cresser's wife was making a last-hour appeal to the State governor, who was in Pittsburgh. The bulletin stated that Cresser was to be hanged between eleven and midnight.

Tim Slade lighted a cigarette and went into a drug store. He had a soft drink which killed the taste of the beer he had taken with Fresney. He didn't like the taste of beer. When he'd finished the drink he got inside a booth and called Fresney. He said:

"T. S. speaking. Do you know a small man, very thin, who walks with a limp? Left leg stiff. Carries a straight, black stick."

Fresney said: "No—why?"

Tim Slade dropped a cigarette on the floor of the booth and stepped on it.

"He tagged along across the street from you, most of the way to the building. Just now he picked up a paper a blonde gal dropped, and they went different directions."

Fresney said in an irritated voice: "Well—what of that?"

Slade said: "Maybe nothing—but she dropped the paper when she was right beside him, and I figured he might have slipped something with something written on it—inside the paper before he handed it back."

There was a little silence, then Fresney said:

"The mechanics of the way they work doesn't interest me, Tim."

Slade said: "All right—but I thought you might want to know a tip might be out that you were inside the building."

Fresney said with sarcasm: "Thanks—you think they'll walk in and get me at my desk?"

Slade said: "I thought you might know the man."

The city editor swore. Slade waited a few seconds, then said:

"What time are you coming out?"

Fresney swore again: "Around eleven-thirty, unless something big breaks. Take a nap, Tim—and we'll have a drink around midnight. Ring me at eleven-fifteen."

Slade said: "Right," and hung up. He smiled down at the receiver grimly. His brown eyes were almost closed. When he left the booth he went to the cigar counter and bought cigarettes. He recognized one of the *Dispatch* reporters he had seen in the editorial room. The reporter was at the counter, talking to an older man.

"I've got a hunch the sheet is going to be a lot softer," he was saying. "Tough on Fresney—he'll hate getting soft with it."

The reporter's companion swore. "It'll just be *another* thing for him to hate," he said grimly. "Hating comes easy for him."

Tim Slade went out to the street and walked past the *Dispatch* building again. There was a later bulletin posted—it had been pasted up on the great glass window that showed off the presses, while he was phoning. It announced that the governor had refused to reconsider the Cresser stay. Nothing more could be done.

Tim Slade moved along Liberty Street, through the fog. He nodded his head and his brown eyes were grim.

"And hating comes easy for *other* people, too," he breathed very softly.

† † †

At the moment that Walter Cresser was pronounced dead by doctors at Western Penitentiary, Tim Slade was listening to a jazz band playing on the stage of the Alvin Theatre. They were doing a new number called "*Your Baby's My Baby Now.*" They did it in slow tempo and when they had finished there was a lot of applause. The jazz band was the last number on the bill, and the bill was a long one. Tim Slade looked at his wrist-watch, left his aisle seat and went outside. It was damply cold; the fog had thickened.

He walked to Liberty Street and moved towards the newspaper building. When he was three or four squares away an ambulance sped by, going in the same direction. It didn't make much noise and Slade paid little attention to it.

When he neared the entrance to the *Dispatch* there was a crowd that wasn't looking at bulletins. The ambulance was at the curb, and there was a black, open car with police insignia showing.

Slade closed his brown eyes slightly, shoved his way through the crowd. A uniformed officer caught him by the arm and Slade said:

"I'm on the staff—what's wrong?"

The officer released his grip. "You'll be writing about it," he stated grimly and told the crowd to stop shoving.

Slade said: "Sure," and went inside.

At the top of the first flight of wooden stairs he saw another crowd. The white of an interne's coat showed. He went up the stairs. Cleve Collins, looking very pale, was saying:

"I heard one shot—and I heard Vaupaugh call out: 'For God's sake, Hugh—get him—' Then there was another shot. I was two flights up, and I ran right down. Vaupaugh was lying where he is now—and Fresney was halfway down, moving a little, on the steps."

Collins stopped. A plain-clothesman with a good pair of shoulders and a strong jaw said:

"What'd you do?"

Collins shrugged. "I went down there—" he pointed half the way down the stairs that led to the street level of the building—"and asked Fresney if he was shot."

The plain-clothesman said with sarcasm: "Wasn't *that* fine!"

The assistant city editor looked at him sharply. Then he said:

"Don't be that way, Reynolds. I'm not a suspect and I'm not stupid."

His voice was hard. Reynolds blinked at him and shrugged.

"No offense meant," he said.

Tim Slade moved a few feet and looked down at the body of Vaupaugh. He hadn't known the managing editor of the paper. The interne said in a fairly loud voice:

"All over, here—I'll go in and look at the other one."

Slade followed him into a room used by the circulation department. Hugh Fresney was stretched out on a leather divan. There was blood on his face; his head was bandaged. Five or six men were grouped around the divan. Fresney said slowly and with evident pain:

"Vaupaugh started down the stairs—something was wrong with the elevator. There was something I wanted to tell him, and I started after him. I called to him, but he didn't hear me. Collins—my assistant—came out to tell me we'd just got a flash that Cresser had been hanged. I said I'd be back—and went down after Vaupaugh. I caught up to him on the landing of the first floor."

The city editor paused. He spoke thickly—his mouth was cut. Slade noticed two of the paper's reporters in the group about him. There was a police lieutenant in uniform and a man that looked like another plain-clothes detective. Fresney went on:

"The landings aren't very well lighted—we don't use them much. The circulation department doors were closed—the offices were dark. Vaupaugh was facing me—he had his back to this door. I was talking—there was a shot. Vaupaugh grabbed at his back and called out. I think he said: 'I'm shot—for God's sake get him, Hugh.' Not sure—the shot made a lot

of racket. Vaupaugh staggered away from me—and there was another shot from the doorway here.”

Fresney raised his left arm and pointed towards the door of the circulation office. He spoke in a low tone.

“Vaupaugh fell and I stumbled over his body. I was trying to get my gun from the pocket I carry it in—it stuck. I went to my knees and something hit me on the top of the head. I grappled with the one who had struck me and was hit again. Then my body was swung around—I was falling. I hit the stairs and must have lost consciousness. The next thing I knew was when Collins was beside me, asking if I was shot.”

The police lieutenant said: “What did you tell Collins?”

Fresney swore. “I said I didn’t think so—but that the managing editor was. I told him the one with the gun must have got to the street. He ran on down the stairs and got the traffic cop near the theatre, a square away. The others came down and brought me up here—someone telephoned headquarters—”

Fresney closed his eyes, and the interne, beside him, said:

“Better let us run you to the hospital. You may be banged up inside. Outside it’s just a smashed head and face, and cuts and bruises on the body from the fall.”

Fresney shook his head. “I’ll come over for an examination later, in a cab. I’m all right. Vaupaugh—”

The interne shrugged. “Dead—maybe within ten seconds of the time he was hit. Looks as though the bullet got the heart, from behind.”

Fresney’s face twisted. “Damn!” he said weakly.

The police lieutenant asked: “You never got a look at the face of the fellow that cracked you, Fresney?”

The city editor shook his head. “He handled me as though he was big, strong,” he replied. “But I was almost out after the first crack—he might not have been big.”

One of the other men said: “You don’t think there were two or three of them?”

Fresney opened his eyes and looked at the ceiling. He was wearing no coat; his vest was opened and his white shirt sleeves were rolled up.

"Might have been," he said slowly. "I have the feeling there was only one."

The police lieutenant said: "Vaupaugh's life had been threatened, you say?"

Fresney nodded. "He told me that this afternoon."

The one who looked like a plain-clothesman to Tim Slade spoke hoarsely:

"Yours—has it been threatened, Fresney?"

The city editor smiled a little. "Hell, yes," he replied. "You fellows know that."

He used his arms and sat up a little. His eyes went to one of the reporters. Collins came into the room and Fresney said to him:

"Get this in the next edition, Cleve—but save the high-lights for the final. Vaupaugh's—last words—that sort of thing."

He shook his head, as though thinking of Vaupaugh. His eyes rested on Slade's face, but he didn't appear to see him. The police lieutenant spoke grimly.

"Maybe they were trying for you—or this one fellow was trying for you, Fresney," he said.

Fresney said thickly: "Maybe."

The police lieutenant looked at those in the room. He frowned at Slade.

"Who are you?" he asked.

Tim Slade let his brown eyes meet the city editor's. Fresney eased his head back to the raised portion of the divan, and twisted his face with pain. Then he smiled a little.

"He's all right, Lieutenant," he said. "Tim Slade—has a detective agency in Cleveland."

The police lieutenant continued to frown. He looked at Fresney.

"What's he doing here?" he asked.

Fresney said: "I wired for him—things looked bad for me. He's an old friend of mine."

The lieutenant grunted. "Bodyguard, eh?" he breathed.

Slade shook his head. "No," he said quietly. "I'm no good at that sort of thing."

The police lieutenant stared at him. Fresney swore and sat

up again. His face was pretty badly battered. The lieutenant spoke grimly.

"Know who *might* have wanted to kill Vaupaugh, Fresney?"

The city editor narrowed his eyes. "No," he said. "But he was managing editor and owner of the sheet—and a lot of people always *want* to kill editors."

The police lieutenant smiled. "Know who *might* have wanted to kill you?" he asked.

Fresney swore huskily. He touched his bandaged head with careful fingers.

"I know a few people who might *want* to kill me," he stated. "But that doesn't say they tried."

Collins said: "You might have been mistaken for Vaupaugh—or he might have been mistaken for you. They wanted you, Hugh—and they got him."

The police lieutenant grunted. "Or maybe they figured one of you was about as bad as the other—and tried for you both."

Fresney shrugged. He looked at Collins. "Better get up above, and get the story going," he said. "Reporters from the other papers will be along soon. Treat 'em nice—but don't tell them anything important, and avoid the truth as much as possible. Get a good obituary started for Vaupaugh."

His words were tight, peculiar. Collins said:

"The obit's all ready—I had Creager write it up a week ago."

Fresney smiled grimly and the police lieutenant made clicking sounds.

"You fellows work fast," he breathed.

Fresney looked at Collins as he turned to go from the room.

"Say that the paper will probably offer a large reward for the arrest of the killer or killers," he said slowly. "Don't use my picture. Play Vaupaugh's death up as a big loss to Pittsburgh and the newspaper world."

The police lieutenant swore. Collins nodded and started from the room. Fresney called in a voice that was thick and not very strong:

"Don't forget the police, Cleve—they're working hard. The

dragnet's out. The police boys all loved Vaupaugh, and they were terribly broken up over his death. When word got around that *I* was alive—they shouted with joy—”

He leaned back and closed his eyes. Collins went from the room. Tim Slade looked at the police lieutenant, who was regarding the city editor with a grim expression in his eyes.

“Our job's to get the killer,” he said simply. “This paper's been pounding the police for weeks. We've been grafters, quitters, cowards and a lot of other things. You printed the stuff, Fresney—and the dead man okayed it. But that doesn't count. We'll do our job.”

Fresney said with doubt: “Yeah? Well, anything I can do to help—”

He let his words trail off. The police lieutenant said:

“I want the names of the persons you were worried about. And any you think Vaupaugh might have been worried about.”

Fresney said: “Sure—got a pencil?”

The lieutenant said: “I can remember them.”

The city editor frowned. “Cresser was hanged a little while ago. The *Dispatch* thought he was guilty. We went after him. We dug up some of his past stuff. He has a wife—she's tried to see me a couple of times. I don't think she wanted to throw her arms around my neck. She knew Vaupaugh was the managing editor—she tried to see him, too.”

The police lieutenant said grimly: “You think a woman knocked you out and threw you down the stairs?”

Fresney smiled grimly. “You asked who might *want* to finish me—or Vaupaugh.”

The officer said: “All right. Go on—”

Fresney said: “You boys got Jap Dyke—but the paper had to tell you he was back in town. And the paper had to yelp that there might be graft holding off a pinch. Jap's mob don't love me—they didn't love Vaupaugh.”

The police lieutenant didn't speak. Fresney said:

“The Ware woman—the one that tried suicide. We gave her a play. There was a man in the background, and he was

getting pretty scared. And nasty. The one she thought she wanted to suicide for. He was worried about his wife."

The officer narrowed his eyes on Fresney's and started to ask a question. But the city editor shook his head.

"In private, maybe—but you don't get his name here." He smiled very grimly. "He's a big advertiser."

The lieutenant swore. Fresney said: "I hurt pretty bad—get me a cab, Tim. I'll go over and let the doc see if anything's wrong inside."

The police lieutenant frowned. Fresney said: "Then I've got to come back here—and get the sheet moving."

Tim Slade went outside and moved past the covered body of Clinton Vaupaugh. A uniformed cop was on a ladder that was in place near woodwork high on the wall of the landing. He had a flashlight in one hand and he called down:

"Yeah—one hunk of lead dug in here."

Tim Slade kept his brown eyes narrowed a little and went down the stairs. He hailed a cab, directly in front of the entrance. Two uniformed officers were keeping the crowd moving. Theatres were out and there was a lot of traffic. There was a bulletin up stating that Walter Cresser had been hanged.

A reporter and a plain-clothesman helped Fresney to the cab. The plain-clothesman said:

"Mind if I go along, Fresney? The lieutenant thought you might remember something between now and the time you get back, and you could tell me."

Fresney said wearily: "Climb in."

Tim Slade stood near the door of the cab, and his eyes met the city editor's. Fresney looked pretty sick.

"See what you can dig up, Tim," Fresney said in a tired voice. "I'll be back in an hour."

Slade smiled. "You aren't holding anything back?" he questioned.

The city editor frowned. The plain-clothesman beside him yawned and looked bored. Fresney shook his head very slowly.

"I didn't get a peek at the killer, Tim," he said. "I think he made a mistake—thought Vaupaugh was me. But you might

work around the building a bit—that fellow seemed to know where to lay for us. The elevator wasn't working."

Slade said: "Yeah—I'll poke around the paper."

The plain-clothesman looked straight ahead and his eyes were expressionless. His voice was that way, too.

"Sure," he said. "It might have been an inside job."

† † † †

Inspector O'Hafey had a big head, a tall body. He was gray haired and his eyes were the same color. He looked at the papers Slade handed him, handed them back.

"Your outfit got Dunner," he said in a husky voice. "Well, how do you figure?"

They were in the rear of the editorial room, and there was a lot of clatter up front. Most of the *Dispatch* staff were working on the story—there was a lot to be done. O'Hafey was doing his questioning on the spot.

Slade said: "I got a wire from Fresney. I've known him for five years or so. He's a hard man, and he doesn't scare easily. When I got here he seemed to want to keep me under cover. His life had been threatened; he was shot at this morning. Here's the lead."

He handed it to the inspector, who looked at it, then handed it to a sergeant sitting beside him. Tim Slade's browned face was expressionless.

"Fresney seemed to be pretty certain he was slated to go out," he went on. "He named some people who hated him enough to finish him, maybe. He told me Vaupough's life had been threatened, and that the managing editor was yellow. He said the policy of the paper was to be changed, because Vaupough was scared. The sheet was going 'soft.' But he thought it was too late to save *his* neck, though it might save Vaupough."

O'Hafey said: "You've got a paying agency in Cleveland, yet you came on here when he wired. Why?"

Slade smiled a little. "I was a reporter here for a while, five years ago. Worked under Fresney. He set me up in business. I still owe him some money."

O'Hafey said: "Uh-huh. What were you to do?"

Slade spoke softly: "Go after whoever murdered Fresney, after they got him."

O'Hafey blinked at Slade's brown eyes. "After they got him?" he repeated.

Slade nodded. "He didn't figure having a bodyguard would help much. But I tailed him back to the paper around six."

O'Hafey said: "Anything happen?"

Slade hesitated, then shrugged. "A small, thin man with a stiff left leg followed along from the North Side. He carried a black stick. When Fresney came in the building this fellow stopped and waited around near the bulletin window. I got the idea he was stalling. After a while a blonde girl came along and dropped a paper. The one with the stiff leg picked it up and handed it back to her. I got the idea that he might have passed something along with it. Couldn't see what he did—his back was to me. They went in different directions."

The inspector widened his gray eyes. "A tip for someone—that Fresney was inside, eh?" he muttered.

Slade shrugged. "It was just a chance. I called Fresney and asked him if he knew anyone that looked like this small, thin limper. He said no—and wanted to know why. I told him and he said he wasn't interested in the mechanics of the kill."

"Tough guy," O'Hafey said. "Well, I guess we know Fresney's tough. Wanted you to get whoever got him, eh? Working from the grave. He *would* like that idea."

Slade said: "I didn't *have* to tell you these things, Inspector. I'm working for Fresney, and he isn't exactly strong for the local police. I told you so that you wouldn't get in my way."

The inspector frowned. Then he smiled grimly.

"Go ahead, Slade," he agreed. "Fresney thinks we won't care much about grabbing the one who was after him, or who killed Vaupaugh. Well, that's true enough. But we do a lot of jobs we don't like."

The sergeant said quietly: "Where were *you*—when this murder occurred?"

Slade grinned. "Listening to a jazz band at the Alvin Theatre," he replied.

O'Hafey looked at his big hands. "Any good?" he asked. Tim Slade nodded. "Swell," he replied, and stood up. "If you don't mind I'll go out for some coffee and a doughnut."

The inspector nodded. "Sure," he said.

Slade went through the editorial room and reached Cleve Collins' side. The assistant was reading typewritten words on news paper. Fresney had not returned yet. It was eleven-forty-five. Collins looked up and Slade said:

"Pretty tough on Vaupaugh."

Collins nodded. "I think the fellow that got him was after Hugh," he said soberly.

Slade said: "You do? Well, he must have known he made a mistake. He heard Vaupaugh call out."

Collins said: "Yes—and he shot again. That was the one he missed."

Slade nodded. "Well, there are more than two bullets in a gun," he said. "What next?"

Collins shrugged. "Fresney was going for him. He stumbled. The second bullet was meant for him, maybe. It went into the wall. The spot where they dug it out is in a line—it works out right. The killer may have thought he'd hit Fresney, or he didn't want to try again. So he used his gun on Hugh's head—swung him around and threw him down the stairs. Then he went down past him and into the street. He got a break—he didn't meet anyone coming up. The theatres were out, and he got away in the crowd."

Slade's brown eyes looked down at a proof of a "head" that read: *Dispatch Owner Slain*. He nodded his head.

"That's the way it looks," he said.

He moved away from the curved desk, glancing at Fresney's vacant chair. The telegraph machines were clattering and a lot of typewriters were working. Slade moved towards the private office of Vaupaugh, opened the door quietly and went inside. He closed the door behind him.

Dana Jones looked at him with eyes that were a misty blue. She was small and very pretty. Tim Slade said:

"Pardon. You're Miss Jones, Vaupaugh's secretary?"

Her mouth set in a straight line. Her lips were nice, not too red. She didn't reply.

Slade smiled. "I'm Slade," he said. "I'm not with the police or on any paper. I'm from Cleveland. Fresney sent for me. He was worried."

Her blue eyes narrowed. "What about?" she asked so steadily that he felt surprise.

"He thought maybe he was going to be killed. I'm an agency man—an old friend of his."

She was silent again. Slade said quietly: "Some hours ago he gave me a list of those he thought might like to see him dead."

He stopped. The girl said: "Well—"

Slade looked around at framed cartoons on the walls of the anteroom.

"Your name was one of them," he said.

The girl's eyes got very wide. She pressed a tiny, damp handkerchief against her lips. Slade smiled.

"That may not mean much. I'm just poking around. The police don't know that Fresney was worried about you—not yet."

Her eyes grew hard; she took the handkerchief away from her lips.

"Fresney wasn't killed," she said steadily. "What difference does it make *who* he's worried about?"

Slade chuckled. "It's a nice point," he said. "But the police think Vaupaugh was killed by mistake. They think Fresney was slated to get the dose."

The girl sat very motionless behind the small desk that held her typewriter.

"You think I shot Clinton by mistake, then threw Hugh Fresney down the stairs, then came back in here?" she said. There was scorn in her words.

Slade shook his head and looked at the cartoons again.

"Naturally not," he replied. "Fresney fired a reporter named Hallam. Hallam hit him because he said something about you. Joking, I suppose. Fresney has a peculiar sense of humor. I understand you rather like Hallam."

The girl stood up. "Bob's out of town," she said firmly. "He went to Chicago yesterday at noon. I saw him off."

Slade nodded. "Trains run both ways," he observed.

She shook her head. "He got a job on the *News*—a night job. He got it by telephone. He didn't come back. You can call the paper now—he's probably there. You can talk with him."

Slade grinned. "No, thanks," he said. "I'll take your word for it. But Hallam didn't like Fresney much, did he?"

She smiled, her lips and eyes hard. "Of course not," she said. "And I don't like him much. And I can give you a list, too—"

Slade lifted a hand in protest. "I believe you," he interrupted. "Let's forget the idea that the killer made a mistake. Let's say he wanted to get Vaupaugh, and he got him. Fresney was coming for him, so he knocked him out and got away. That's simple enough. Can you give me a list of some people who might have wanted to get the managing editor and owner of a sheet that was stepping down pretty hard in order to build circulation?"

Dana Jones said: "Why should I? You're not with the police."

Tim Slade shrugged. "You just said you could give me a list," he reminded.

She nodded. "But I didn't say that I *would*."

Slade grinned. "You're hard to get along with," he told her cheerfully. "Think Cresser's wife might have worked the idea that Vaupaugh would be better dead?"

The girl sat down behind the typewriter again. She looked at him narrowly.

"Fresney's a pretty big man for a woman to throw downstairs," she said.

Tim Slade spoke patiently: "That fact has been mentioned several times," he said. "But sometimes a woman gets a man to do a job *for* her."

Dana Jones didn't speak. He liked her eyes and her hands. They were both ~~strong~~ and decisive. She had a nice voice, even when it was hard.

Slade said: "How about the Ware woman, and the advertiser she made a bum attempt at suicide for? Either one of them might have been pretty sore."

She nodded slowly. "Of course. And C. V. bawled out a ticket broker this morning for giving him bum seats to a show last night. The ticket broker might have been sore, too."

Tears filled her eyes again, but she blinked them away. Slade said:

"You thought a lot of Vaupaugh?"

She looked at him for several seconds, and he thought she wasn't going to answer. Then she said:

"No, he was pretty weak. I feel sorry for him. He was very frightened."

Slade nodded. "He wanted the paper to make money, so he let Fresney run it his way. His way was pretty hard. They came after Vaupaugh, and he ordered the circulation building stuff stopped. But it was too late. Is that it?"

The girl said: "I suppose—that was it."

Slade looked at the cartoons again. "How about this Hennessy?" he asked. "He was fed up with Fresney; he thought he was a slave-driver."

The girl looked at Slade and said very slowly: "What's the use of asking me these questions? You seem to know a lot of people who hated Fresney. Some of them might have hated Vaupaugh, too. Vaupaugh gave the orders around here—"

Slade widened his eyes. "Did he?" he asked.

She smiled a little. It was a hard smile. "And Hugh Fresney made suggestions," she finished.

Slade said: "You're all right. I like you."

The girl's blue eyes looked surprised. Then she said:

"That's fine—can I tell mother?"

Slade grinned and turned away. But he stopped near the door.

"Where were you when—"

He stopped as she threw up a hand. "I was sitting right in here putting powder on my nose," she said. "And I haven't a damn' bit of proof of it."

Slade chuckled. He said: "Somehow I believe you."

He went outside and closed the door. Hugh Fresney was easing himself into his chair at the inner curve of the long copy desk. When the police inspector went close to him he waved him away. Slade went towards the desk and heard Fresney say:

"Nothing wrong inside of me—give me fifteen minutes, Inspector—and then I'll answer questions all night. I've got to get the last edition lined up."

The inspector nodded and turned away. He saw Slade and beckoned to him and they went to the rear of the city room together. O'Hafey said:

"That hunk of lead we dug out of the wood in the hall here—it's a .38 bullet. The sergeant thinks the one Fresney gave you is a .38, too."

Slade nodded. "Might mean the same gent took another crack at Fresney—or the figure he thought was Fresney," he breathed. "And it might not."

The inspector nodded. "We're bringing in everyone Fresney thinks might hate him, or Vaupaugh. We haven't been able to find anyone who saw the killer run from the building."

Slade said: "You haven't found anyone who was out front, heard the shots—and *didn't* see anyone run from the building?"

O'Hafey grinned. "Funny, I thought of that, too. Yeah—there was a news-kid outside. Near the bulletins—along with a lot of others. He was near the entrance and he heard the racket. He wasn't sure it was shooting, but he sort of watched the entrance. There was a lot of traffic noise. The first person to come out, the news-kid says, was Collins. The news-kid is around fifteen years old, and seems pretty bright."

Slade said: "Well—how about the roof?"

The inspector shrugged. "I've been up there. It isn't easy. A couple of closed doors, a narrow passage, and an iron ladder for ten feet. Nothing locked, but everything closed. Only one way off—to the building on the left. A fifteen-foot drop. One of my men is trying to get down that way now. It probably can be done."

The inspector frowned and added: "But I don't think it was."

Slade said: "And you believe the news-kid?"

O'Hafey nodded his big head. "Inside job," he said very slowly. "The fellow knew Fresney was in here. He knew where to wait. It wasn't very light—he heard Fresney's voice and made a mistake because he wanted to get the city editor in the back. He wanted to get him in the back because he didn't want to be seen. He didn't want to be seen because Fresney *knew* him—and there would be a chance of him yelling his name. When he heard Vaupaugh call out, he knew he'd made a mistake. Fresney went for him and stumbled. The killer's second shot went wild. He used his gun and shoved Fresney down the stairs.

"He didn't shoot again, because he'd made enough racket already. But he didn't follow Fresney down, and pass him while he was stunned. Or if he did, he didn't go outside. There are a couple of doors he could have used on the main floor—into the space where the presses are. He could have got out three other ways. Or he could have come back upstairs."

The inspector drew a deep breath. "That's in return for the bullet you handed me," he said. "It's the way things look to me. My men are trying to find others who heard the shots—and others who saw people moving around right after they heard them. Fresney never even got the safety catch off his Colt. A full load inside. He has a permit for the gun, and when he got it, several weeks ago, he stated that he wasn't exactly loved in this town."

Slade nodded. "You're going pretty strong for the theory that Vaupaugh got the dose by mistake, and that it was an inside job," he said softly.

O'Hafey shrugged. "I'll follow any lead," he said. "That looks like the one to be followed right now. I want to find out who there is, in some way familiar with this newspaper plant, who thought Fresney was a louse."

Slade nodded again. "If I dig up anything—I'll get it to you, Inspector," he said. "I'm just poking around—I wasn't supposed to go to work until Fresney was killed."

The inspector looked grim. "Do you lose much by the guy getting the wrong man?" he asked.

Slade smiled with his brown eyes almost closed. He lighted a cigarette and inhaled.

"I haven't had time to figure it out yet," he said. "But I don't think I lose a thing."

His voice held a peculiar note. He moved away, went past reporters' desks and reached Fresney's side. The city editor was reading copy and had a blue pencil in his right hand. His head and forehead were bandaged—and there was adhesive tape around the right corner of his mouth. He was frowning.

Slade stood beside him and said softly:

"You weren't holding anything back, Hugh?"

The city editor didn't look up. He scratched out some words and said thickly:

"Just one thing, Tim."

Slade waited, and still the city editor didn't look up. Slade said: "What, Hugh?"

Fresney spoke softly. "I told you I didn't know a short, thin man with a limp. I do know one. His name is Garrow. He was a stoolie for the North Side police for a while. Then he dropped out of sight. I had a tip that he wouldn't turn up anything on the Jap Dyke mob."

Slade whistled softly. "That might mean he was in with them." He was silent for a few seconds, then he said very slowly: "I think he gave the tipoff that you were inside, Hugh. I think maybe I'd better look him up."

Fresney said grimly: "He'll be hard to find."

Slade nodded. "You're holding out the fact that you know this fellow—you're not tipping the police?"

Fresney shrugged. "They can know it now," he said. "I didn't tell you before because I didn't see that it would help things any."

Slade said: "All right—not holding out anything else?"

Fresney swore and looked up. "Hell, no," he said. "It's the Dyke mob's job—only they made a mistake. They got Vau-paugh instead of me. Damn' tough on him. As for me—they'll get me yet."

Slade smiled with his brown eyes. "You'll be around for a while yet," he said. "The inspector has questions. I'm going out, but I'll be back before you leave."

The city editor nodded. "I'll probably have to go down to the commissioner's office," he said. "If I'm not here or there—I'll be at 82 Goorley until dawn. I think best over the strong stuff."

Slade said: "Sleep would be better for you—you must hurt a lot."

Fresney nodded. "I damn' near got my neck broken," he breathed, and went to work on the copy again.

Tim Slade walked away from the city desk and went to the elevator. He asked the operator why it hadn't been running at the time of the killing. The operator said it had been out of order for an hour before the murder—motor trouble. It was fixed fifteen minutes after.

Slade got off at the street floor, went outside and stood near the curb for a few minutes. Then he went inside, went upstairs. A plain-clothesman was standing at one end of the landing, looking things over. He nodded to Tim. Tim went on up. When he opened the door of the anteroom to the office that had been Vaupaugh's, O'Hafey blinked at him from the chair he was seated on.

Slade said: "Pardon, Inspector—I thought Miss Jones was alone. Wanted to ask her a question."

O'Hafey waved a hand. "Go ahead," he instructed.

Slade looked at Dana Jones. "With Vaupaugh dead," he said steadily, "who inherits the paper?"

The inspector grunted. The girl said: "The family."

Slade nodded, smiling. "Large family?" he asked.

The girl said: "Daughter and son. The son lives abroad, in Paris. He doesn't like newspapers."

O'Hafey said: "Man after my own heart."

Slade smiled a little. "How about the daughter?" he asked.

Dana Jones shrugged. "She and her father didn't get along. She lives at the Schenley Hotel—saw him once a month, maybe."

O'Hafey sat up straight. "And they didn't get along, eh?"

he breathed. "Maybe he wouldn't give her as much money as she wanted."

Slade looked at the inspector, grinning. The girl frowned.

"Another woman who might have killed him," she said disgustedly. "As a matter of fact, he gave her all the money she needed. She never complained. She told me once he was a pretty good father, but she didn't like the perfume he used."

Slade said: "Did *you* like it?"

The secretary's eyes were very small. "If I were a man—I think I'd have liked it on a woman," she replied.

O'Hafey chuckled. Slade looked around at the cartoons on the wall, then looked at Dana Jones again.

"I got very crazy about you in a hurry, Dana," he said simply. "I've gone a good many years without doing that over any girl. Will you have dinner with me tomorrow night, before I shove off for Cleveland?"

The girl stared at him. O'Hafey blinked. Slade said:

"I'll make you forget Hallam. You weren't engaged, and he drank too much. Besides, all newspaper men are bums."

O'Hafey said: "What the—"

Slade smiled a little and kept his eyes on the girl.

"We'll have Vaupaugh's murderer by dawn," he said slowly. "And that'll be that. How about the dinner?"

The girl said: "You're—mad—"

Slade shook his head. "If we have the killer by dawn—will you have dinner with me?"

O'Hafey grunted. The girl said: "Yes."

Slade nodded. "Fine," he said. "We'll have a time."

He grinned at O'Hafey and went from the office. Fresney was calling to Collins in a loud voice:

"Where in hell's that follow-up on Lawson's feature?"

Tim Slade went down two flights of stairs, took his time going down the next. On the landing where the murder had occurred he stood for a few seconds. The plain-clothesman had gone. Slade went to the door of the circulation department room into which Hugh Fresney had been carried. He stood with his back to it and let his eyes move along the landing. After a few minutes he went down the steps and to

the street. It was twelve-fifteen by his wrist-watch. The fog was pretty bad; there was a chill in the air. Tim Slade hailed a cab and got inside.

"Schenley Hotel," he said. "Don't hurry—I want to think."

The cab driver stared at him, then grinned. "Sure," he said over his shoulder. "I get that way a lot of times, but it don't do *me* any good."

† † † † †

Collins was slumped in his chair when Slade walked into the editorial rooms at three o'clock. He had a green shade over his eyes and he looked tired. Most of the staff had quit for the night, but the telegraph instruments were still pounding out words. Slade sat on the edge of the inner curve of the copy desk, and said:

"Hugh went home?"

Collins nodded. "He went over to the commissioner's office, and got back here at two. He stayed around for a while, but his body was aching pretty badly. He finally got away. Then that police lieutenant came in and gave me a third degree."

Slade said: "You?"

Collins swore, nodding. "He thought my story might have been the bunk. Someone told him I'd made a hot speech to Vaupaugh when he refused to give me a raise he'd promised six months ago. The lieutenant had found out that Hugh had made a speech for me, too. Hugh thought I should have the raise. The lieutenant had an idea I might have done for Vaupaugh and lied about how it happened, and he figured Hugh might have tried to stop the fight and got shoved down the stairs. He thought Hugh might be protecting me."

Slade grinned. "You denied it?"

Collins swore wearily. "I told him he was a crazy fool, and he said he thought he'd take me down to the station and hold me on suspicion. I said that would be fine—that Hugh would use scare-heads on it. That calmed him down a bit. He told me not to leave town and I said it was going to be tough hav-

ing to cancel my trip to Japan. We didn't get along so well, but he left about ten minutes ago."

Slade looked at the *Accuracy* sign on the wall and whistled all that he could remember of "*Your Baby's My Baby Now.*" Collins took off his eye-shade and swore again.

"We won't have to smell that damn' perfume around here any more, that's one thing," he muttered. "Poor devil!"

He stood up and stretched. He called one of the two reporters on hand and said that if anything big broke on the Vaupaugh murder he wanted to be called.

"And I hope nothing breaks," he breathed.

He looked at Slade and said: "Staying up all night?"

Tim Slade shook his head. "I've only got about one thing more to do," he said quietly.

Collins looked at Slade narrowly. "O'Hafey came over and asked some questions about you," he said. "He seemed pretty puzzled. Wanted to know whether you were very crazy or very shrewd. Said you'd told Miss Jones you'd have Vaupaugh's murderer by dawn, and she agreed to have dinner with you if you did. He said he figured maybe you were trying to kid him, and if that was so he didn't like the time you'd picked."

Slade smiled a little. Collins said: "What did Hugh mean when he tossed over that slip of paper and said you were a louse for hounding someone?"

Slade continued to smile. "He wanted you and anyone else who might be interested to think I wasn't particularly concerned with *him*," he said. "He didn't want you to get the idea that I was a detective he'd brought on from Cleveland, because he thought he was going to get killed."

Collins stared at him, sucked in a deep breath. There was silence in the city room, except for the clatter of the wire machines. Then the assistant city editor spoke.

"So that was it," he muttered. "Well—what's the idea of spreading it around *now*? Fresney's still alive."

Slade nodded. "Unless they got him on the way home," he said steadily. "How about Miss Jones, Collins? Did Vaupaugh like her a lot?"

The assistant city editor half closed his eyes. He spoke in a hard voice.

"I haven't the slightest idea."

Tim Slade nodded and stood up. He looked at the big sign on the wall again, then at his wristwatch.

"I'll be moving along," he said cheerfully. "If you stick around another hour—you'll have something for the paper—something new."

Collins said: "Yes?" His tone was suddenly antagonistic. "Sorry, but I need sleep. If it's big enough they'll buzz me, and I'll get Fresney up."

Slade nodded again. "Are you giving the paper a black border?" he asked.

The assistant said tonelessly without looking up: "Just the editorial page."

Slade looked towards the telegraph machines. "Get in touch with Vaupaugh's family yet?" he asked. "The daughter?"

Collins shrugged. "I don't know," he said. "That isn't up to me."

Slade smiled. "So long," he said and went from the big room. He rode the elevator down and reached the street. He made a phone call, a fairly long one. He walked along Liberty Street, turned north on Ninth. Ninth was almost deserted. Over near the bridge it *was* deserted.

He was halfway across the bridge when a cab passed him, going at pretty good speed. It slowed down a hundred feet or so ahead, stopped. There was the squealing of brakes, and a second cab pulled up almost the same distance behind him. No one descended from either cab.

Slade said grimly: "Sure—"

He got a cigarette between his lips, struck a match. The cab ahead started backing slowly, and when it started the other one moved forward. The driver of the one coming forward was very low in his seat.

Tim Slade pulled on the cigarette and reached for his gun. He had it in his right-hand fingers when the first bullet struck the iron railing behind him. The bullet came from a gun in the cab that was moving forward. Almost instantly there was

a staccato clatter from the machine that was backing. A spray of bullets battered metallicly against iron—pain stabbed through Slade's left hand as the spray went away from him.

He fired twice at the cab that was moving forward, sucked in a sharp breath and vaulted the bridge rail. As he went down he ripped buttons from his coat in getting it open and let the gun slip from his fingers. He hit the water with his body hunched, in a sitting position. The shock was pretty bad.

When he came up he was under the bridge. He struggled free of his coat, toed off his low shoes. He was a strong swimmer, but it was a fight to keep under the bridge, against the current. The river was high and the water was very cold. Fifty feet along he got rid of his suit coat, and that made things easier.

Another fifty feet and he was out of the worst of the current. He was weakening pretty fast, and the hand that had been hit was numbing his left arm and bothering his stroke. The cold was getting to him, too.

He used a back stroke for several seconds, then turned over and put his remaining strength in an effort to get close to the mud at the far end of the bridge. He was almost through when he felt the water become very quiet. Another twenty feet and his knees were scraping mud. He dragged himself out of the water, lay motionless for a half minute or so. Then he got to his knees, pulled himself to his feet.

He shook the water from his ears, moved along between some wooden shacks built on the mud near the steel structure of the bridge. He was shivering and his breath was still coming in deep gulps.

Twenty minutes later he was in a cab and the cab was moving across the river, towards his hotel. The cab driver had a ten-dollar bill in his pocket, and Tim Slade had a soaked handkerchief wrapped around the palm of his left hand. He lay back in the seat with his eyes closed.

In his hotel room he had three deep drinks from a thin silver flask, got into dry clothes. He used antiseptic and bandages on his left hand, got a Luger that he'd picked up

during the war from one of his bags. His eyes showed pain, but his lips were smiling a little. He had no coat or hat when he went down and picked up a cab. When he'd given the address he sat back and let his body sway with it. His eyes were closed and he was breathing slowly, evenly.

Once he parted his lips and said: "Sure—"

The fog didn't seem to be so thick, but it had got colder. The cab driver drove very swiftly, and it didn't take long to reach the address he had given.

The man who opened the wooden door of the two-story house had a thin scar across his forehead. Slade frowned at him, keeping his bandaged hand out of sight. He said:

"Creese upstairs? He wanted me."

The one with the scarred forehead nodded. Slade went past him and he closed the door and bolted it. Slade said:

"Is he alone?"

The scarred one shook his head. "Jap's with him," he said hoarsely. "The coppers got tired of him and turned him loose."

He went away, gesturing towards the stairs. From a rear room Slade heard voices and the clink of glasses. Upstairs everything seemed pretty quiet.

Tim Slade said very softly as he climbed the wooden stairs: "Jap—sure—"

The door of the room was half opened. Slade shoved it open the rest of the way, with his left shoe. He walked inside. Jap Dyke was leaning across a table, elbows spread. He was a small, heavily shouldered man with eyes that slanted, and were slightly almond shaped. His skin was yellowish, and his dark hair edged high from his forehead. He was Italian, but he looked like a Japanese.

Hugh Fresney sat in a corner, on a chair without arms. The chair was tilted back, and Fresney's brown shoes rested on a cross rung between the two front legs. Both arms hung at his sides. There were two glasses, half filled with beer, on the table across which Dyke sprawled.

Tim Slade stood near the opened door, his back to the

stairs. Both hands were in the side pockets of his suit coat. He smiled at Fresney.

The city editor's lips twitched a little. Jap Dyke said:

"What's this?"

He had a thin tone and when he spoke his lips didn't move very much.

Slade said: "Hello, Hugh—feel better?"

The city editor's eyes were very small. He shook his head.

"My face isn't so bad, but my body hurts like the devil."

Slade nodded. "It'll hurt worse in a couple of months," he said very quietly.

Fresney let his shoes slip off the rung of the tilted chair. They dangled just clear of the floor.

"How's that, Tim?" he asked.

Slade smiled very narrowly. "You missed out, Hugh," he said quietly. "You're going to go the way Walter Cresser went—tonight."

The city editor's body jerked a little. Jap Dyke lifted his chin from his spread arms and his eyes got more almond shaped.

Fresney swallowed slowly and said: "Tell us about it, Tim."

Slade said: "You murdered Vaupaugh."

Jap Dyke drew a deep breath, then sighed heavily. Fresney closed his eyes, then opened them again.

"It was Little Red Riding Hood who did that, Tim," he said very quietly.

Slade smiled with his lips. His brown eyes were on Fresney's small ones.

"You've been tough for a long time, Hugh," Slade said. "Good and tough. But lately you've been getting *bad* and tough. Tonight you murdered Vaupaugh. You did it because you hated him—you've hated him for a long time. You've planned his murder for a long time. He was yellow, Hugh—but that yellowness was going to stop you from doing things with the sheet."

Jap Dyke swore very softly, but he didn't move his body. Fresney said grimly:

"Yes, yes—go on."

Slade said: "You built up this stuff about your life being threatened. And Vaupaugh's. You said the sheet had been hard—too hard. Maybe that was true, but it was hard where it didn't count. You said Jap Dyke was after you because you'd forced the police to pull him in. He *wasn't* after you, Hugh—he was *with* you. The sheet yelped until he was pulled in, but they didn't have anything on him. And you knew that. It just made it look good. And even with Vaupaugh dead, they wouldn't have anything on him, Hugh."

Slade paused. Jap Dyke's fingers made faint tapping sound against the table wood. Someone laughed thinly, downstairs.

Slade said: "You got me on from Cleveland, because you were ready to finish Vaupaugh, and you needed more evidence that a mistake had been made, and that someone had got the managing editor instead of you. You wanted to be sure everyone knew you were afraid. You built up a lot of little hates—some of them were real enough. Then, when Vaupaugh was leaving tonight, you went after him. You shot him in the back—and because his life had been threatened, and he still trusted you, you got a break. He didn't think you'd shot him, so he yelled to you to get whoever *had* shot him. Collins heard that."

Fresney was breathing heavily, but his eyes were still very small. Slade said:

"You knew you had him. After he yelled, you put another bullet up in the wall—in a spot that put it in line with the door you were going to use in your story. Your gun was in a pocket, loaded. I don't know what you did with the one you used, and I don't give a damn. Maybe Vaupaugh realized what had happened, and grabbed you. Maybe he didn't. He might have shoved you down the stairs before he went out, or you might have just let yourself go down. You're hard, Hugh—and you can take it. Besides you'd killed a man, and you had to make it look right. Collins found you unconscious or almost unconscious, halfway down the stairs. That's how you murdered Vaupaugh."

Jap Dyke said: "You shouldn't have done it, Hugh."

His voice was very low and hard. Fresney was still breathing heavily and evenly.

Slade said: "Vaupaugh was putting a check on you. He was going to run the sheet again, and you didn't want that. You were playing politics, Hugh—you were *going* to play politics. You and Jap Dyke. You needed the sheet—the two of you could have done things with it. But you went too fast, and too far. And when Vaupaugh weakened you knew you'd lost. Unless he was dead. If he was dead—there was his daughter—"

Fresney let the chair tilt forward. His face twisted. Slade said:

"Take it easy—both of you! I've got lead ready to rip cloth—and then some more cloth!"

After a few seconds he spoke softly. "I went to the Schenley tonight and talked to Vaupaugh's daughter. She hates you, Hugh—she hates your insides. Why? Because I told her what I figured. And she figured the same way. The chances are she would have married you, Hugh. She sort of liked you, and her father, who didn't like you, would have been dead. She wouldn't have known she was marrying his murderer. And you'd have had the paper, Hugh—the whole damn' sheet to use the way you wanted."

Fresney said in a hoarse voice: "You're lying, Tim—you're lying like hell. If you'd gone to her tonight and told her what you thought—she'd have laughed at you. You haven't any evidence—you just think—"

Slade interrupted. "She didn't laugh at me—she believed me. She *had* to believe me."

Fresney said thickly: "You're lying—"

Slade shook his head. "I called you on the phone and asked you if you knew a small man with a limp. I told you that I'd thought he had tipped that you were inside the paper. You said you weren't interested. And then you changed the story. You *did* know such a man. You said his name was Garrow, and that he was working with Jap Dyke's mob, you'd heard. He wouldn't turn up anything against them, anyway."

Fresney said: "Well?"

Slade's smile faded. "There *wasn't* any man with a limp. He didn't pick up any paper and hand it to a blonde. I was just feeding you, Hugh—just seeing whether you'd use it. And you *did* use it, when you figured it would help."

Fresney ran his tongue-tip over a lower lip. He looked at Jap Dyke and said:

"Is he safe, Jap?"

The slant-eyed one nodded. Fresney looked at Tim Slade and spoke in a very soft voice.

"You certainly earned the money you owed me, Tim. I hate to see you get still."

Slade tightened the grip on his Luger. "Sure," he said with sarcasm. "But you got worried, Hugh. I was away from the paper too much. I think you had me tailed—and spotted the Schenley visit. So guns were turned loose on me, on the bridge. They didn't take."

Fresney smiled thinly. "That's so, Tim," he said. "They didn't take."

Slade spoke quietly. "I think the police would have got around to you pretty soon, Hugh. But they were willing to believe you were hated enough for someone to have made a mistake—and have smeared Vaupaugh instead. I wasn't so willing to believe that."

Fresney said steadily: "All right, Tim. You've made your speech. About the gun—I took on a new reporter three days ago. Jap here recommended him. He was at the bottom of the stairs, with his coat spread like a blanket. I tossed him the gun, then did the dive. It hurt like the devil. The reporter went through the pressroom and out the truck entrance. He had the gun with him. The rest was the way you've told us."

Jap Dyke looked at Fresney, and Fresney nodded. Dyke called loudly and thinly:

"Terry!"

Slade shook his head. "No good," he said. "The police have been over here since I started across the first time. They let me work it my way. Terry and the rest are downstairs—they've

been talking and laughing once in a while. But the police guns are making them act that way. Your bunch weren't so strong for you taking up with Fresney, anyway, Jap. They're being good and saving their necks."

Jap Dyke let his body roll to one side and jerked at a pocket. Slade swung his body a little and squeezed on the Luger. Dyke moaned, went to his knees and fell forward. Hugh Fresney shoved over the table and leaped for Slade.

There were pounding footfalls on the wooden stairs as Slade jerked his body to one side. Fresney's arms were swinging; a fist struck Slade and knocked him off balance, to one side. Fresney swung and pounded at him again. Slade said hoarsely:

"Stop—it—I've got—a gun—"

Fresney wasn't armed, and he hated to shoot. The city editor had fingers on his right wrist now. They swayed backward, their bodies close. Fresney twisted the gun so the muzzle slanted towards his face—then jerked Slade's wrist. His finger slipped with the sharpness of the jerk—the gun crashed.

Fresney's body sagged, and he slipped slowly to the floor. O'Hafey came into the room, followed by two plain-clothesmen. They had drawn guns in their hands. Fresney was half propped against a wall. Slade said:

"He did it—and dropped the gun to one of Jap's men he'd taken on as a reporter."

One of the plain-clothesmen crossed the room and bent over Dyke. He straightened and said:

"He's dead."

O'Hafey stared down at the city editor, and Slade said:

"He twisted my gun—and jerked my wrist. It was his way of—"

Fresney's eyes were staring, his lips were colorless. He tried to smile.

"The kid's—good—O'Hafey," he said very slowly and weakly. "And I—broke him in—taught him to use his eyes—"

His eyes closed, then opened again. He said with an effort, in a hoarse whisper:

"Inside—job—but it didn't—work—"

His head fell forward, and his eyes stayed open. O'Hafey bent down and after a few seconds said:

"Well—that's all for him."

Tim Slade shook his head slowly. "He was a good, tough city editor," he said slowly. "But he got greedy."

O'Hafey nodded. "That's the way with a *lot* of good tough guys," he philosophized. "And after they get too greedy—they get dead."

Tim Slade had dinner with Dana Jones. He needed someone to cut up the meat for him. He had a pretty bad left hand. It was a quiet dinner, but they got along nicely together. She'd never been to Cleveland, and they finally got around to wondering if she'd like it there. They were both fairly sure that she would.

Red Goose*

NORBERT DAVIS

IT WAS A LONG, HIGH-CEILINGED HALL, GLOOMY AND silent. The air was musty. Tall, barred windows on one side of the hall let in a little of the bright sunlight where it formed waffle-like patterns on the thick green carpet. There was a polished brass rail, waist-high, running the length of the hall on the side opposite the barred windows.

Shaley came quietly along the hall. He was whistling softly to himself through his teeth and tapping with his forefinger on the brass rail in time with his steps.

Shaley was bonily tall. He had a thin, tanned face with bitterly heavy lines in it. He looked calm; but he looked like he was being calm on purpose—as though he was consciously holding himself in. He had an air of hardboiled confidence.

A door at the end of the hall opened, and a wrinkled little man in a gray suit that was too big for him came hurrying out. He carried a framed picture under one arm, and had dusty, rimless glasses on the end of his nose. He had a worried, absent-minded expression on his face, and mumbled in a monotone to himself.

Shaley stepped in front of him and said: "Hello."

"How do you do," said the little man busily. He didn't look up. He tried to side-step around Shaley.

Shaley kept in front of him. "My name is Shaley—Ben Shaley."

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"Yes, yes," said the little man absently. "How do you do, Mr. Shaley." He tried to squeeze past.

Shaley put out one long arm, barring his way.

"Shaley," he said patiently. "Ben Shaley. You sent for me."

The little man looked up, blinking through the dusty glasses.

"Oh!" he said. "Oh! Mr. Shaley. Of course. You're the detective."

Shaley nodded. "Now you're getting it."

The little man made nervous, batting gestures with one hand, blinking. Apparently he was trying to remember why he had sent for a detective.

"Oh, yes!" he said, snapping his fingers triumphantly. "The picture! Yes, yes. My name is Gray, Mr. Shaley. I'm the curator in charge. Won't you step into my office?"

"Thanks," said Shaley.

Gray trotted quickly back down the hall, back through the door. It was a small office with a big, flat desk next to another barred window. Gray dodged around the desk and sat down in the chair behind it, still holding the framed picture.

Shaley sat down in another chair, tipped it back against the wall, and extended his long legs comfortably.

Gray held up the picture and stared at it admiringly, head on one side. "Beautiful, isn't it?" he asked, turning the picture so Shaley could see it.

"Too fat," said Shaley.

Gray blinked. "Fat?" he said, bewilderedly.

"It's a picture of a dame, isn't it?" Shaley asked.

"It's a nude," Gray admitted.

Shaley nodded. "She's too fat. She bulges."

"Bulges?" Gray repeated in amazement. "Bulges?" He looked from the picture to Shaley. "Why, this is a Rubens."

Shaley tapped his fingers on the arm of his chair. "I suppose you had some reason for calling me?"

Gray came out of his daze. "Oh, yes. Yes, yes. It was about the picture."

"What picture? This one?"

"Oh, no. The one that was stolen."

Shaley took a deep breath. "Now we're getting somewhere. There was a picture stolen?"

"Of course," said Gray. "That's why I called you."

"I'm glad to know that. When was it stolen?"

"Three days ago. Mr. Denton recommended you. Mr. Denton is one of the trustees of the museum."

"Denton, the lawyer?"

Gray nodded. "Mr. Denton is an attorney. He said something about setting a crook to catch a crook."

"I'll remember that," said Shaley.

"I hope I haven't offended you?" Gray said anxiously.

"You better hope so," Shaley told him. "I'm bad medicine when I get offended. There was a picture stolen from the museum, then, three days ago. What kind of picture?"

"The *Red Goose*, painted by Guterrez about 1523. A beautiful thing. It was loaned to us by a private collector for an exhibition of sixteenth century work. It's a priceless example."

"What does it look like?" Shaley asked.

Gray peered at him closely. "You never saw the *Red Goose*?"

"No," said Shaley patiently. "I never saw the *Red Goose*."

Gray shook his head pityingly.

Shaley took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "Listen," he said in a strained voice. "Would you mind giving me a description of that picture?"

"Certainly," said Gray quickly. "It's twelve inches by fifteen. It's a reproduction of a pink goose in a pond of green water lilies. A beautiful work."

"It sounds like it," Shaley said sourly. "How was it stolen?"

"It was cut out of the frame with a razor blade. I never heard of such an act of vicious vandalism! They cut a quarter of an inch off the painting all around it!"

"Terrible," Shaley agreed. "When was this done?"

"I told you. Three days ago."

Shaley took a deep breath and let it out very slowly. "I know you told me three days ago," he said in a deceptively mild voice. "But what time of the day was it stolen—at night?"

"Oh, no. In the afternoon."

"Where were your guards?"

"They were stopping the fight."

Shaley made a sudden strangling noise. He took off his hat and dropped it on the floor. He glared at Gray. Gray stared back at him in mild surprise. Shaley picked up his hat and straightened it out carefully.

"The fight," he said, his voice trembling a little. "There was a fight, then?"

"Why, yes," said Gray. "I forgot to mention it. Two men got into a fight in the back gallery, and it took four of the guards to eject them from the premises. And then we noticed that the picture was gone."

"That's fine," Shaley told him sarcastically. "Now would it be too much trouble for you to describe these men who fought?"

Gray said: "I noticed them particularly, because they seemed a trifle out of place in a museum. One was a big, tall man with long arms and short legs. He had four gold teeth, and he was bald, and his ear—" Gray stopped, hunting for the word.

"Cauliflower?" Shaley asked.

Gray nodded quickly. "Yes. Thick and crinkly. The man interested me as an example of arrested development in the evolutionary process."

Shaley blinked. He scratched his head, squinting.

"You mean he looked like an ape?" he asked.

Gray nodded again. "He had certain definite characteristics—the small eyes sunken under very heavy brows, the flattened nose, the abnormally protruding jaw—that have come to be associated with the development of the human race in its earlier stages."

"That's nice," Shaley said blankly. "What did the other one look like?"

"A nice looking young man. A trifle rough-looking—but quiet and self-effacing. He had red hair and big pink freckles. The thumb on his left hand was missing."

"That's enough," Shaley said. "Have you notified the police of the theft?"

"Oh, no. Mr. Denton advised us not to. He said the thieves might destroy the picture if they thought the police were after them." Gray shook his head sadly at the thought of such an outrage. "Mr. Denton said to tell you to get it back for nothing if you could; but that the museum was willing to pay up to five thousand dollars. The picture must be returned undamaged. It's a matter of honor with the museum. It would be a terrible blow to our reputation if the property of a private collector should be lost while in our possession."

Shaley stood up. "I'll see what I can do."

"Mr. Denton said he would take care of your fee."

Shaley said: "I'll take care of him. Calling me a crook."

Shaley drove his battered Chrysler roadster into Hollywood, entered a drug-store and went into one of the telephone booths in back.

He took a leather-covered notebook from his pocket, flipped through the pages, found the number he wanted. He put a nickel in the phone and dialed.

"Yeah?" It was a thin, flat voice.

"This is Ben Shaley, Mike."

"Oh, hello, Ben. Wait a minute." The voice pulled a little away from the telephone. "Turn that radio down. How the hell do you think I can hear?" The voice came closer again. "How are you, Ben? Long time no see."

"I'm okay, Mike. How you doing?"

"Damn' good. I got the place all redecorated. I got a real bar now—a swell one—mahogany. Come on out, sometime, Ben."

"Thanks, Mike. Listen, is that guy that writes for *Ring and Turf* there—Pete Tervalli?"

"Yeah. He's upstairs playin' blackjack. You want him?"

"Uh-huh."

"I'll call him. Hold the phone."

Shaley waited, tapping out a complicated rhythm on the mouthpiece of the telephone and humming softly.

"Hello, Ben. This is Pete Tervalli."

Shaley said: "Pete, I want to ask you about a couple of guys. Number one is a big gook that looks like an ape. He's got gold front teeth, a flat snozzle, a thick ear, and he's bald. Know him?"

"Nope," said Pete. "He's a new one on me."

"All right. Here's the other one. He's red-headed and sort of quiet, and he's got big pink freckles on his face. He's minus his left thumb."

"Sure," said Pete. "Sure. That's Fingers Reed. He fights in prelims at the Legion stadium sometimes. Been on at the Olympic a couple times, too. Had a semi-final down to Venice once—got knocked out."

"Where can I find him?"

"At Pop's gym down on Main."

"Thanks a lot, Pete."

† †

Shaley went up a flight of long, dark stairs littered with white blotches that were ground-out cigarette butts. He went along a short, dirty hall, through swinging double doors with frosted glass panels.

He was in a big high-ceilinged room that smelled strongly of tobacco, liniment, gin and sweat. A youth in a grayish sweat-shirt was jumping rope in the middle of the floor. He skipped expertly and solemnly, first from one foot and then the other, counting aloud. In one corner a punching bag battered back and forth in a stuttering roar under the quick fists of a small, bowlegged Filipino. In another corner a fattish man made a rowing machine creak mournfully.

Shaley walked along the wall and entered an open door. It was a small office with a dusty desk in one corner. The walls were papered with pictures of fighters in various belligerent poses.

Shaley said: "Hello, Pop," to the man sitting at the desk.

Pop was a small man with a shiny bald head. He wore a celluloid collar so high that it took him just under the ears and made him look like he was always stretching his neck.

He had a dead brown-paper cigarette in one corner of his mouth.

"Hello, Ben," he said without enthusiasm.

"Where can I find Fingers Reed?"

"Fingers Reed?" Pop repeated absently. "Fingers Reed? I wouldn't know him. He a fighter?"

Shaley grinned. "Come on, Pop. Don't pull that stuff. I just want to give him twenty bucks. Which one is he?"

"Give me the twenty," Pop requested. "He owes it to me for gym fees. He's in the ring."

Shaley went out of the office, through another door and into a small room with seats in high, close tiers against three of its walls. There was a ring in the middle.

Fingers Reed, in a heavy sweat-shirt and helmet, was sparring with a tall, spider-legged middleweight. The middleweight danced around very fancily, stepping high. Fingers Reed shuffled after him, his left poked out in front of him, his right held back shoulder high. He was much too slow for the middleweight. He crossed his right again and again—long, heavy blows that the middleweight slipped easily.

A little man in a checkered cap stood beside the ring. He had a watch in one hand and a string in the other. He pulled the string as Shaley watched. The gong boomed.

Fingers Reed and the middleweight patted each other on the back and started walking back and forth in the ring, breathing deeply and swinging their arms.

Shaley said: "Fingers!"

Fingers Reed stopped and looked down at him.

"I want to talk to you a minute," Shaley said.

Fingers Reed nodded. He slid through the ropes, jumped down on the floor. With the thumb of his right boxing glove, he hooked a rubber tooth protector out of his mouth. He spat on the floor and ran his tongue over his front teeth.

"What?"

Shaley said: "Who paid you to put on that fracas at the museum?"

Fingers Reed pulled up the front of his sweat-shirt. He had an inner tube, cut open, wound tightly around his stom-

ach. He loosened the inner tube a little. Then he rubbed his nose with the back of one glove, squinting sidewise at Shaley.

"I had an idea there was something sour about that."

Shaley said: "I don't want to get hard about it, but there was a picture lifted while you were having that little to-do, and I want to know about it."

"Sure," said Fingers. "Somebody tells me that they got some pictures of some old fight scenes over in this museum in Pasadena, and me not having nothing to do, I think I will go over and take a look at them. So I do, and they are pretty good pictures, too. After I am done looking at them I walk around to take a look at the rest of the stuff, and while I am looking up comes this big monkey and steps on my foot." He stopped and nodded at Shaley.

"So what?" said Shaley woodenly.

"Well, so I ask him what the hell he thinks he is doing, dancing with me? And then he hauls off and pops me, so I pop him back, and pretty soon a few guys in monkey suits come along and toss us both out on our ears." Fingers gestured with the boxing gloves. "So that's that."

Shaley said: "You wouldn't know this big monkey's name?"

Fingers shook his head. "Never saw him before or since."

Shaley took a twenty-dollar bill out of his vest pocket and folded it lengthwise and looked at Fingers calculatingly.

"That's too bad," he said regretfully. He poked the twenty back into his vest pocket. "Well, I'll be going, then. Thanks."

"Wait, now," said Fingers. "Wait a minute. Don't get in a rush."

Shaley took the bill out of his pocket and gave it to him.

Fingers said: "Here, Jig. Keep it for me." He tossed the folded bill to the timekeeper.

"Let's have the real dope," Shaley requested.

"Well, it's like this. The big monkey's name is Gorjon. He's the stooge for a gent by the name of Carter. The two of them come around the gym here a couple of times, and then they put this proposition up to me. Would I put on a

phoney fight at the museum for ten bucks? I was flat, so I said sure, why not? So I did."

"Where can I get hold of these boys?"

Fingers shrugged. "By me."

Shaley said gently: "You wouldn't try to be smart with me, would you, Fingers? You wouldn't try to shake me down?"

Fingers held up one gloved hand, palm out. "So help me. I never see them but three times."

Shaley said: "It'd be worth a hundred to me if I could locate them."

Fingers blinked thoughtfully, rubbing his nose with the glove on his right hand. "Hm. The big boy is a fight fan. You might stake out the stadiums around here."

"You do it. You might get some of your pals to help. I could make it fifty for the guy that found them and a hundred to you."

Fingers nodded. "Okay."

† † †

When Shaley came into his office, Sadie, his secretary, was tapping away briskly on the typewriter with glossy, pink-nailed fingers.

"Hi-yah," said Shaley, tossing his hat on the hat-rack and heading for the inner office.

Sadie raised her sleek, dark head and watched him. She didn't say anything.

Shaley got to the door of the inner office, then turned around and came back to her desk.

"Well, what's your trouble?"

Sadie said: "A woman called you up. Who is she?"

"How do I know who she is? Who'd she say she was?"

Sadie sniffed. "She wouldn't tell me her name. Talked like a blonde though."

"How'd you know she was blonde?"

"Humph! I can tell, all right. Talking baby talk—all about a red goose. Who ever heard of a red goose?"

"Did you get her number?" Shaley demanded.

"Certainly I did. I always remember to ask people their number."

"Hell— Give me that number."

Sadie shoved a pad of paper along the desk. Shaley picked up her telephone and began to dial the number.

"And my mother was saying just last night," said Sadie righteously, "that she didn't think this office was the proper place for a young girl to work. All these questionable people coming in and out all day long and you swearing and yelling at me all the time and—"

"Shut-up," said Shaley absently.

"Hello." It was a nice voice—small and clear and sweet—shyly innocent.

"This is Ben Shaley. Did you call my office?"

The nice voice said: "Oh, yes."

"About the *Red Goose*?"

"Yes, Mr. Shaley. I called the museum, and they told me you were in charge. Are you looking for the picture?"

Shaley said suspiciously: "Who're you? A reporter?"

"Oh, no. I'm the one that has the picture."

Shaley nearly dropped the telephone. "What?"

"Well, Mr. Shaley, I haven't exactly got it right here. But I can get it for you. Do you want it?"

"Where are you?" Shaley demanded. "When can I see you?"

"I'll be home tonight at seven-thirty. It's the Hingle Manor apartments on Harcourt just south of Sunset, in Hollywood. Apartment seven. The name is Marjorie Smith."

"I'll be there, Marjorie," Shaley said cheerfully, hanging up.

He put the telephone slowly back on Sadie's desk, frowning thoughtfully. He picked up her pencil and drew a pattern of squares on the desk-pad, still frowning.

"You know," he said absently, "some way or other I didn't like the sound of that. It sounded just a little screwy. I wonder if somebody is trying to lay me an egg?"

"Humph!" said Sadie. "Blondes!"

Hingle Manor was a long, neat, two-story stucco building with turrets on the four corners and blue pennants on each of the turrets. Floodlights placed on the front lawn and slanted up made the building look larger and newer than it was.

Shaley found the card that said: "Marjorie Smith," and buzzed the bell under it. After a while the latch clicked. Shaley pushed open the door and was in a small, narrow hall, thickly carpeted.

He looked around, then went up a short flight of stairs. At the end of the hall an open door made a yellow square of light that was like a picture frame for the young woman standing there.

Shaley was reminded of an old-fashioned tintype he had once seen in a family album. The woman wore a neat blue dress, modest and plain. She had wide blue eyes and corn-colored hair wound around her small head in thick braids. Given a sunbonnet and a slate she would have been a perfect copy of a school girl of fifty years ago.

She smiled and curtsied a little and said shyly: "Won't you come in, please?"

Shaley went into a small, well-furnished living-room and stood there holding his hat in his hands and shifting from one foot to the other uneasily.

The woman came into the room, shutting the door. She sat down on a couch and folded her hands neatly in her lap.

"I'm Marjorie Smith," she said, smiling nicely.

"I'm Ben Shaley."

Marjorie Smith smiled up at him with admiring blue eyes. Shaley watched her uncomfortably. Something was wrong with all this. Marjorie Smith didn't fit in with the rest of the picture—with Fingers Reed and Carter and Gorjon.

"Who lives here with you?" he asked.

She shook her head, wide-eyed. "No one."

"Are we here alone?"

She nodded. "Oh, yes."

Shaley grunted. He scratched his head, scowling. He said: "Listen, Marjorie, I'm just a nasty man with mean suspicions.

The only kind of fairy stories I believe are the kind they tell about the boys who carry handkerchiefs in their cuffs. Just sit right here while I sniff around."

"Oh, surely," said Marjorie.

He nosed through the rest of the apartment—kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, closets. He shot the bolt on the back door. He came back into the front room, opened the front door, peered out into the hall. He sat down in a chair and stared at Marjorie Smith.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said blankly.

She put her hand up over her mouth. "Why, Mr. Shaley!"

"Excuse me," said Shaley. "But this is over my head like a tent. Let's talk business."

"Oh, yes," said Marjorie Smith. "Oh, yes. Business." She leaned forward and watched him with big blue eyes.

"You've got the painting I want—the *Red Goose*?"

She nodded earnestly. "Yes."

"Where'd you get it?"

"A man gave it to me—a man by the name of John Jones."

"That was nice of him," Shaley said.

"He said you would pay me two thousand dollars for it."

"He's an optimist," Shaley said sourly.

"It seems like a lot of money, doesn't it?" Marjorie Smith asked earnestly. "But John Jones assured me that it was worth that much. Have you got the money, Mr. Shaley?"

"Huh!" said Shaley. "Where's the picture?"

"John Jones said I was not to give it to you until you gave me the money."

"John's a smart fellow," said Shaley. "But I can't give you the money until I know if you have the picture."

"Oh, but I have got it."

"Yes, yes. But I want to see it. Where is it?"

She shook her head regretfully. "Not until you give me the money. Then I'll give it to you. Really, I will, Mr. Shaley."

Shaley took a deep breath and held himself in. "Listen, Marjorie, I don't want to get hard with you, but if I were you I'd hand over that picture right now."

"But, Mr. Shaley, I explained—"

"Once more—will you give me that picture?"

"But, Mr. Shaley—"

Shaley jumped for her. He grabbed her by the shoulders and hauled her off the couch and shook her.

"Now, you little dummy—" he snarled.

She made no resistance. Her body was soft and relaxed in his hands. She moved just enough to bring her right hand up under Shaley's nose.

She held a small bottle in her hand, uncorked.

Shaley got one whiff of the contents of that bottle. He choked suddenly. He let go of Marjorie Smith and jumped backwards, gasping.

"Acid!" he said, one hand over his nose.

"Yes," she said, smiling just as nicely as before. "Touch me again, and I'll throw it in your face."

Shaley swallowed hard. The picture wasn't out of focus any more. Marjorie Smith fitted right in.

"Wow!" said Shaley in an awed voice, backing away from her warily. He backed clear to the door, keeping his eyes on the bottle.

"Now listen, boob," said Marjorie Smith in her clear, child-like voice. "Let me tell you something—"

The door behind Shaley opened suddenly, bunting him forward. He whirled around, one hand inside his coat, and looked squarely into the blunt, round muzzle of an automatic. His hand came out, empty.

"Take it easy, baby."

Gray had given a good description. This man Gorjon looked like an ape. He had enormously broad, sloping shoulders, hunched forward. He stood there, swaying a little easily. The gold front teeth gleamed as he grinned at Shaley.

Another man was standing in the doorway behind Gorjon. This man didn't look at Shaley. He was looking at Marjorie Smith.

"Double-crossing little tramp," he said levelly.

He stepped around Gorjon and went towards her, walking springily on the balls of his feet. He was short and round

and plumply dapper. He had thick red lips and a small black mustache. He wore a soft white felt hat. He was smiling a little.

Marjorie Smith had hidden the hand holding the acid bottle behind her. She watched the fat man. She waited until he put out a plump, white hand, reaching for her, and then she said something to herself in a tight whisper and hurled the acid at him with a quick sweep of her arm.

The fat man was astoundingly quick. He dropped into a crouch, ducking his head. The acid missed him, spattering on the wall in a bubbling brown stain.

The fat man bounced up again instantly and hit her with his fist. Marjorie Smith fell over a chair and lit on her hands and knees in the corner.

Gorjon hadn't moved either his eyes or the automatic from Shaley. He reached out one big hand and shut the door.

"Sit down, mister," he said to Shaley.

Shaley sat down slowly and tensely in the chair in back of him.

The fat man picked up Marjorie Smith effortlessly and planked her down on the couch. He was still smiling.

She didn't say anything. She watched the fat man expressionlessly. There was a red mark on her face where he had hit her.

The fat man turned to Gorjon. "Take his gun."

Gorjon reached inside Shaley's coat and pulled out the big automatic Shaley carried in a shoulder-holster. He hefted it, grinning.

"It's a .45. He goes loaded for bear. Maybe he's one of these here rough characters you read about in the papers."

The fat man said: "Who is he, Marj?"

Marjorie Smith said sullenly: "Ben Shaley. He's a private peeper—from the museum."

Shaley said: "And you are Carter."

The fat man smiled at him. "So you found Reed, did you? I knew that dead-head would blab all he knew. Yeah, Carter is one of my names. Take a good look at me. Me and Gorjon are gonna be your shadows until you get that money from the

museum." He turned back to Marjorie Smith. "Where's the picture?"

"Try and find it."

Carter said: "I will," softly.

He picked her up by the front of her dress and slapped her in the face—quick, sharp slaps that rocked her head back and forth.

"Hey!" said Shaley.

Gorjon pushed his automatic into Shaley's neck. "I wouldn't poke my head out, boy."

Carter said: "Well?" and stopped slapping Marjorie Smith.

She spat at him. He hit her in the mouth with his fist and knocked her back on the couch.

"Rap that boob on the nut," he said calmly to Gorjon, "and take her shoes off. We'll have to get rough with her."

Marjorie Smith wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. Her lips left a little smear of blood on her hand.

"I'll tell you," she said thickly. "Tannerwell has it."

Carter watched her thoughtfully. "Tannerwell, huh? You wouldn't fool an old Civil War vet, would you, Marj?"

"Tannerwell has it."

Carter moved his plump shoulders. "So it was that artist sap, huh? I didn't think he had it in him. Where is he?"

"I don't know."

Carter said very gently: "Where is he, Marj?"

She shrugged impatiently. "I tell you I don't know. I've got his telephone number. I can get him to come here."

"That's just dandy," said Carter. "What's the number?"

"Rochester 2585."

Carter went over to the stand near the door and picked up the telephone. "I'll talk to him first, and then I'll let you. You tell him to come over here—and make it good. I'm going to be mad if you try something funny."

Marjorie Smith said: "He'll come."

Carter dialed the number. He waited, listening. Then he said: "Hello, Tannerwell? This is Carter." He listened, grinning at Shaley. Then he said: "Yes. Your dear old pal, Carter.

Now listen, smarty, while I tell you something. I'm over at Marj's apartment. You get that picture and come over here, or something sudden will happen to her. She's going to talk to you."

He held the mouthpiece of the telephone in front of Marjorie Smith.

She said brokenly: "Bill-Bill. Come quick. Bring the picture." Then she screamed suddenly, so loudly it made Shaley jump.

Carter pushed down the receiver hook with his thumb and put the telephone back on its stand. "Dandy, Marj. You should go on the radio."

"He'll be here in about fifteen minutes," Marjorie Smith said, still sullen.

Carter pulled up a chair and sat down. He tipped his hat back and began to whistle softly and patiently between his teeth, watching Marjorie Smith unblinkingly. Gorjon stood just behind Shaley's chair.

Shaley said: "How about sitting down? You make me nervous."

Gorjon chuckled. "Don't get too nervous, because if you start jiggling around this thing is liable to go off."

"Do you think you're going to put this over?" Shaley asked Carter.

Carter stopped whistling long enough to say: "I think so," and then began again. He stopped and looked at Shaley. "Just keep your nose out of this, baby. When I get that picture, then you and me will have a little talk. Until then you're just a kibitzer. Don't get the idea that anybody has dealt you a hand."

Marjorie Smith moved impatiently on the couch. "Can I have a cigarette?"

Carter said: "I don't smoke, dearie. You know that."

"There's some cigarettes in my right-hand coat pocket," Shaley said.

Gorjon fished the package out and tossed it on the couch. Marjorie Smith took one and used the lighter on the table at the end of the couch.

Carter got up and turned on the radio. He found a dance orchestra, nodded approvingly, sat down, and began to whistle in tune with it, tapping his foot.

They waited.

† † † † †

It took Tannerwell sixteen minutes. His footsteps came up the hall noisily, running. He rapped loudly on the door.

Carter got up quickly and got against the wall beside the door. He nodded at Marjorie Smith.

She said: "Come in, Bill."

Tannerwell came in with a rush. Carter pushed the door shut behind him.

Tannerwell didn't pay any attention to him. He went straight to Marjorie Smith and stood over her anxiously.

He didn't look like an artist. He looked more like a football player. He was tall, and he had wide, square shoulders. He was blond, and his features were evenly handsome, except for his nose, which had been broken and set crookedly.

"You screamed," he said to Marjorie Smith.

She sniffed a little, sadly. "D-did you bring the pic-picture, Bill?" She looked woe-begone and bedraggled. She looked like a hurt child, crying there on the couch.

Tannerwell jerked a roll of parchment from inside his coat. "Sure. Here." He tossed it over his shoulder at Carter. He never took his eyes from Marjorie Smith.

Carter unrolled the parchment and examined it approvingly.

"Well," he said pleasantly. "Here we are at last."

"Marjorie," Tannerwell said. "Over the telephone. You screamed. Did they hurt you?" He put his hands out in front of him. He had big hands with long, thick fingers. He moved the fingers a little. "Did they hurt you, Marjorie?"

She sobbed. "Y-yes. Look." She pulled aside the neck of her dress and showed a round, ugly burn on the white skin of her shoulder. "Carter burned me with a cigarette to make me scream. He laughed when he did it."

Carter looked up from the picture. "Herel!" he said, blankly amazed. "What—"

Tannerwell stared at the burn on Marjorie Smith's shoulder. Suddenly his face twisted crazily. He spun around and grabbed Carter by the neck with both big hands.

"Hey!" said Gorjon, starting around in front of Shaley.

Shaley braced his arms on the chair and kicked him savagely in the stomach with both feet. Gorjon doubled over, grunting.

Shaley jumped out of the chair. He got hold of the barrel of the automatic and twisted it out of Gorjon's hand.

Gorjon straightened up. He was grinning. He hit Shaley's wrist with the edge of one palm and knocked the automatic on the floor. He reached for Shaley.

Shaley swung on him with both fists, backing away. He hit Gorjon five times as hard as he could, squarely in the face. Gorjon shook his head, still grinning. He shuffled after Shaley, reaching.

Shaley hit him some more. It was like pounding on a wall. Gorjon didn't even try to block the blows. He let Shaley hit him. He even chuckled a little, his gold teeth gleaming. He was like a cat playing with a mouse. He had forgotten all about Carter and Tannerwell. He kept shuffling after Shaley, one hunched shoulder pushed forward, sidling a little.

Shaley bumped into a chair, and Gorjon got him. He got one big hand in the front of Shaley's coat. He pulled him forward and hit him with the other hand.

Shaley's coat ripped, and he went backward. He bounced off the table, fell over a chair. He got up quickly. He was breathing in gasping sobs. Over Gorjon's shoulder he caught a quick glimpse of the rest of the room and realized that all this was happening in seconds instead of hours.

Tannerwell was still shaking Carter by the neck. Carter's plump face was beginning to turn purple. He was trying to get a revolver from his pocket, but apparently the sight had caught in the cloth and, with Tannerwell shaking him, he couldn't get it free.

Marjorie Smith was still sitting on the couch. And she was

laughing. She was laughing at Carter, pointing her finger mockingly at him.

Shaley slipped along the wall away from Gorjon's reaching hands. Gorjon got too close, and Shaley began to hit him again, putting everything he had in each blow. Gorjon grinned and shuffled after him.

Shaley tripped over a stool and fell. Gorjon dropped on him. He got Shaley by the neck, loosely, and began to pound his head on the floor slowly and methodically, chuckling gleefully to himself.

The room rocked in front of Shaley in a red haze. His fingers scrabbled on the floor, touched the barrel of Gorjon's automatic. He twisted and squirmed, scraping at the automatic with stiff fingers.

The red haze began to get black slowly. Gorjon's face was a long way above him—like a gleaming pin-point that nodded and bobbed and leered.

Shaley got his stiff fingers around the butt of the automatic, pushed the muzzle against Gorjon's side.

At its blasting report the room suddenly cleared in front of Shaley's eyes. Gorjon fell over sidewise, very slowly, and hit the floor and lay there without moving.

Shaley got slowly to his feet, staggering a little. His nose was broken. He could feel the blood running down his face. He started towards Tannerwell and Carter.

Carter saw him coming and finally got his pistol free. He slapped Tannerwell on the side of the head with it. Tannerwell dropped him and bent over, holding his head.

Carter took a quick snap shot at Marjorie Smith that pocked the plaster just above her head. Then he whirled and ducked towards the door. He still held the roll of parchment in his left hand.

Shaley dived for him. He hit Carter's knees just as Carter was going through the door. They rolled out into the hall.

Carter was amazingly strong and quick. It was like trying to hold a squirming ball of soft rubber. He got one leg loose, kicked Shaley in the face. He hit Shaley's broken

nose, and Shaley writhed on the floor, swearing thickly, losing his grip on Carter's legs.

Carter bounced to his feet instantly. He ran down the hall towards the stairs.

"Carter!"

It was Marjorie Smith. She was standing in the doorway, and she had the .45 automatic Gorjon had taken from Shaley in one small hand.

Carter whirled around like a dancer and jumped sidewise crouching. Marjorie Smith shot him.

The bullet caught Carter and slammed him back and down in a limp pile. His arms and legs moved aimlessly. After a second he got slowly to his feet and staggered down the hall.

Marjorie Smith shot him again, deliberately, in the back. Carter collapsed weakly and slid down the stairs, bumping soddenly on each step.

A woman was screaming somewhere close by.

Shaley got up off the floor. He walked down the hall, guiding himself with one hand on the wall and trying to keep his feet from walking out from under him. He got to Carter and leaned over to pick up the picture. He fell down and got up again slowly, holding the picture.

Marjorie Smith came running down the hall. She was pulling Tannerwell along behind her. She looked calm, sure of herself, as if she knew just where she was going. Tannerwell was shaking his head foggily, and he staggered a little as he ran.

They went by Shaley without even looking at him.

Feet were pounding up and down the hall overhead. A half dozen people were screaming for the police into telephones and out windows.

Shaley climbed the stairs, shuffled slowly towards the rear entrance.

A man opened a door, looked at him blankly, said: "Good God! He's all blood!" and slammed the door.

Shaley got out the back door into cool darkness. He fell over a hedge, got up, and ran heavily through a weed-choked

lot, swearing to himself in a mumbling monotone. A siren began to moan in the distance.

† † † † † †

Shaley had a piece of white court-plaster over his nose. It made his tanned face look darker and thinner. He had his hat tipped forward over his face because the back of his head was swollen.

He walked down a long, gloomy hall and found Gray at the end of it. Gray was on top of a high step-ladder carefully dusting a painting with a brush about an inch wide. He dusted in quick, dabbing strokes, stopping every minute to squint sidewise at the picture through his thick, dusty glasses.

Shaley said: "Hello!"

Gray said: "How do you do, Mr. Shaley," without looking around.

Shaley leaned against the brass railing and watched him. "Well," he said. "It's a long story. Want to hear it?"

Gray dabbed busily at the picture. "Certainly, Mr. Shaley."

"A guy by the name of Carter stole the picture. The fight was staged by a pal of his and another bird they had hired, to attract the guards' attention while Carter got the picture. Carter had spotted this scatter as an easy one to crack, but he didn't know anything about pictures. So he hired an artist to pick out the right one to steal. The artist selected the *Red Goose*."

Gray nodded. "A good choice, I must say. It's a very beautiful painting."

"Carter didn't care whether it was beautiful or not. He wanted something the museum would want back in a hurry—something that couldn't be replaced. So he took the *Red Goose*. But Carter had a girl by the name of Marjorie Smith. The artist fell for her. She got ideas. She stole the picture from Carter and lit out with it and the artist. She got in touch with me, intending to sell me the picture for the museum. But Carter found her, just about that time. Are you listening?"

"Yes, yes," said Gray absently. "Go on."

"The artist had the picture. Carter had Marjorie Smith. She

pulled a fake screaming act over the telephone to get the artist to bring the picture to Carter. Then, when the artist got there, she double-crossed Carter again. She told the artist that Carter had actually tortured her to make her scream over the telephone. She had burned herself with a cigarette to make it look better. The artist is nuts about her, and he went screwy and tackled Carter. Carter and his pal got themselves killed in the excitement, and I got a broken nose, and Marjorie and her friend Tannerwell got away."

"Tannerwell," said Gray thoughtfully. "Tannerwell. Oh, yes! He's the man that brought back the picture."

There was a long silence.

At last Shaley said: "Brought back—the picture?" in a strained voice.

Gray looked down at him. "Oh, yes. I must have forgotten to notify you. A man by the name of Tannerwell came around yesterday afternoon some time after you left. He had the *Red Goose*, and I paid him three thousand dollars for it. We had promised not to ask any questions about how he happened to have it—we only wanted the picture back."

Shaley took the roll of parchment from his coat pocket with fumbling fingers. "What's this, then?"

Gray trotted down the step-ladder. He examined the picture, holding it up to the light and nodding in a pleased way to himself.

"Yes. Nice work. Of course it hasn't the depth, the color blending of the original, but it's very nice work."

Shaley said thickly: "It's—it's a copy?"

"Oh, yes. Couldn't you see that? Mr. Tannerwell told me, after it came into his hands he had made a copy of the picture to keep for himself."

Shaley said: "That little tramp. She had Tannerwell copy the painting intending to shake me down with it. Then when Carter butted in, she just switched her plans a little."

Gray smiled at him. "I'm sorry you were deceived, Mr. Shaley. You could say that the *Red Goose* was a sort of red herring, couldn't you?"

"I could say a lot worse than that," said Shaley.

Red 71*

PAUL CAIN

(Peter Ruric)

SHANE PRESSED THE BUTTON BENEATH THE NEAT RED number. Then he leaned close against the building and tilted his head a little and looked up at the thick yellow black sky. Rain swept in great uneven and diagonal sheets across the dark street, churned the dark puddle at his feet. The street-light at the corner swung, creaked in the wind.

Light came suddenly through a slit in the door, the door was opened. Shane went into a narrow heavily carpeted hallway. He took off his dark soft hat, shook it back and forth, handed it to the man who had opened the door.

He said: "Hi, Nick. How is it?"

Nick said: "It is very bad weather—and business is very bad."

Nick was short, very broad. It was not fat broadness, but muscled, powerful. His shoulders sloped heavily to long curving arms, big white hands. His neck was thick and white and his face was broad and so white that his long black hair looked like a cap. He hung Shane's hat on one of a long row of numbered pegs, helped him with his coat, hung it beside the hat.

He stared at Shane reproachfully. "He has been waiting for you a long time," he said.

Shane said: "Uh-huh," absently, went back along the hallway and up a flight of narrow stairs. At the top he turned into

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another hallway, crossed it diagonally to an open double doorway.

The room was large, dimly lighted. Perhaps fifteen or eighteen people, mostly in twos or threes, sat at certain of the little round white-covered tables. Three more, a woman and two men, stood at the aluminum bar that ran across one corner.

Shane stood in the doorway a moment, then crossed the room to where Rigas sat waiting for him at a table against the far wall. Several people looked up, nodded or spoke as he passed; he sat down across the table from Rigas, said: "Bacardi," to the hovering waiter.

Rigas folded his paper, leaned forward with his elbows on the table and smiled.

"You are late, my friend." He put up one hand and rubbed one side of his pale blue jaw.

Shane nodded slightly. He said: "I've been pretty busy."

Rigas was Greek. His long rectangular face was deeply lined; his eyes were small, dark, wide-set; his mouth was a pale upward-curved gash. He was in dinner clothes.

He said: "Things are good with you—yes?"

Shane shrugged. "Fair."

"Things are very bad here." Rigas picked up his cocktail, sipped it, leaned back.

Shane waited.

"Very bad," Rigas went on. "They have raised our protection overhead more than fifty per cent."

The waiter lifted Shane's cocktail from the tray with a broad flourish, put it on the table in front of him. Shane looked at it, then up at Rigas, said: "Well . . ."

Rigas was silent. He stared at the table cloth, with his thin lips stuck out in an expression of deep concentration.

Shane tasted his cocktail, laughed a little. "You know damned well," he said, "that I'm not going to put another dime into this place." He put down his glass and stared morosely at Rigas. "And you know that I can't do anything about your protection arrangement. That's *your* business."

Rigas nodded sadly without looking up. "I know—I know."

Shane sipped his drink, waited.

Rigas finally looked up, spoke hesitantly: "Lorain—Lorain is going to get a divorce."

Shane smiled, said: "That's a break."

Rigas nodded slowly. "Yes." He spoke very slowly, deliberately: "Yes—that is a break for all of us."

Shane leaned forward, put his elbows on the table, put one hand down slowly, palm up. He stared at Rigas and his face was hard, his eyes were very cold. He said: "You made that kind of a crack once before—remember?"

Rigas didn't speak. He gazed wide-eyed, expressionlessly at Shane's tie.

"Remember what happened?" Shane went on.

Rigas didn't speak, or move.

Shane relaxed suddenly. He leaned back, glanced around, smiled faintly.

"I backed this joint," he said, "because I thought you might make it go. I don't like you—never have—but I like Lorain; have liked her ever since we were kids together. I thought she was an awful chump when she married you, and I told her so."

He sipped his cocktail, widened his smile. "She told me what a great guy you were," he went on, "an' she stuck to it, even after you'd dropped all your dough, and hers. Then she told me you wanted to take over this place, an' I came in on it, laid fifteen grand on the line."

Rigas moved uncomfortably in his chair, glanced swiftly around the room.

"Since then," Shane went on, "I've chunked in somewhere around five more. . . ."

Rigas interrupted: "We've got nearly twelve thousand dollars' worth of stock." He made a wide gesture.

"What for?" Shane curved his mouth to a pleasant sneer. "So you can be knocked over, and keep the enforcement boys in vintage wines for a couple of months."

Rigas shrugged elaborately, turned half away. "I cannot talk to you," he said. "You fly off the handle. . . ."

"No." Shane smiled. "You can talk to me all you like, Charley—and I don't fly off the handle—and I'm not squawk-

ing. But don't make any more cracks about Lorain and me. Whatever I've done for you I've done for her—because I like her. *Like* her. Can you get that through that thick spick skull of yours? I wouldn't *want* her if she was a dime a dozen—an' I don't like that raised eyebrow stuff. It sounds like pimp."

Rigas' face had turned dull red. His eyes were very sharp and bright. He stood up, spoke very softly, breathlessly, as if it was hard for him to get all the words out: "Let's go upstairs, Dick."

Shane got up and they crossed the room together, went out through the double door.

On the third floor they crossed an identical hallway, Rigas unlocked a tall gray door and they went into another large room. There were two large round tables, each with a green-shaded droplight over it. There were eight men at one of the tables, seven at the other; Rigas and Shane crossed the room to another tall gray door.

The stud dealer and two players looked up from the nearest table, one of the players said: "H' are yah, Charley?" Then Rigas opened the tall door and they went into a little room that was furnished as an office.

Rigas pressed the light-switch, closed the door and stood with his back to it for a moment. His hands were in his coat pockets. Shane sat down on the edge of the desk. Rigas crossed to the desk slowly and when he was near Shane he jerked his right hand out of his pocket suddenly and swung a thin-bladed knife up at Shane's throat.

Shane moved a little to one side, grabbed Rigas' arm near the elbow with one hand; the knife ripped up crosswise across the lapel of his coat. At the same time he brought his right knee up hard against Rigas' stomach. Rigas grunted and one of his knees gave way and he slumped down slowly, sidewise to the floor. The knife clattered on the glass desk top.

As Shane slid off the desk, stood over Rigas, the door opened and a very tall, very spare man came a little way into the room.

Shane glanced at the man and then he looked down at Rigas and his eyes were almost closed, his mouth was a thin hard

line. Rigas groaned and held his hands tight against his stomach, his chin tight against his chest.

Shane looked up at the tall man, said: "You'd better not let this brother of yours play with knives. He's liable to put somebody's eye out." He spoke with his teeth together.

The tall man stared blankly at Rigas.

Shane went past the tall man, to the door, went out and across the big room. All of the men at the tables were looking at him; all of them were very quiet. Two men were standing up at the nearest table.

Shane went out and closed the door behind him, went swiftly down two flights. He found his hat and coat and put them on. Nick came up from the basement as he was knotting his scarf.

Nick said: "Shall I get you a cab, Mister Shane?"

Shane shook his head. He slid the big bolt and opened the door and went out into the driving rain. He walked to Madison Avenue, got into a cab and said: "*Valmouth*—on Forty-ninth."

It was five minutes after eight.

Shane's rooms at the *Valmouth* were on the eighteenth floor. He stood at one of the wide windows and looked down through the swirling, beating rain to Fiftieth Street.

After a little while he went into the bathroom, turned off the water that was roaring into the tub, slipped off his robe.

Someone knocked at the outer door and he called: "Come in," looked into the long mirror in the bathroom door that reflected part of the living room. A waiter with a wide oval tray opened the door, came in and put the tray down on a low table.

Shane said: "There's some change on the telephone stand." He kicked off his slippers and stepped into the tub.

In five minutes he was out, had put on the long dark-green robe, slippers, was sitting at the low table, cutting a thick T-bone steak into dark pink squares.

As he poured coffee the phone buzzed; he leaned sidewise, picked it up, said: "Hello." Then he said: "Mister Shane is

not in. . . . She's on the way up! . . . What the hell did you let her start up for? . . ."

He slammed the phone down, went swiftly to the door and turned the bolt. He stood near the door a moment, then he shrugged slightly, turned the bolt back and went slowly back and sat down.

Lorain Rigas was slender, dark. Her black eyes slanted upward a little at the corners, her mouth was full, deeply red, generous. She wore a dark close-fitting raincoat, a small suede hat. She closed the door and stood with her back to it.

Shane said: "Coffee?"

She shook her head. She said: "Charley called me up this afternoon and said he was going to give me the divorce—that he wouldn't fight it."

"That's fine." Shane put two lumps of sugar in a spoon, held it in the coffee and intently watched the sugar crumble, disappear. "So what?"

She came over and sat down near him. She unbuttoned her coat, crossed her slim silken legs, took a cigarette out of a tiny silver case and lighted it.

She said: "So you've got to help me locate Del before he gets to Charley."

Shane sipped his coffee, waited.

"Del started drinking last night," she went on, "an' he kept it up this morning. He went out about eleven, and some time around one, Jack Kenny called up an' told me that Del was over at his joint—roaring drunk, and howling for Charley's blood. He gets that way every time he gets boiled—crazy jealous about Charley and me."

She leaned back and blew a thin cone of smoke at the ceiling. "I told Jack to let him drink himself under the table, or lock him up, or something—an' in a little while Jack called back and said everything was all right—that Del had passed out."

Shane was smiling a little. He got up and went to the central table and took a long green-black cigar from a humidor, clipped it, lighted it. Then he went back and sat down.

The girl leaned forward. "About three o'clock," she said,

"the Eastman Agency—that's the outfit I've had tailing Charley for evidence—called up and said they'd located the apartment-house up on the West Side where Charley's been living with the McLean woman. . . ."

Shane said: "How long have they been on the case?"

"Three days—an' Charley's ducked them until today—they traced a phone call or something."

Shane nodded, poured more coffee into the little cup.

Lorain Rigas mashed out her cigarette. "I told Eastman to keep his boys on the apartment until they spotted Charley going in—then I figured on going over tonight and crashing in with a load of witnesses—but in a little while Charley calls me and says everything's okay, that he'll give me the divorce any time, any place, and so on."

Shane said: "You've had a busy day."

"Uh-huh." She reached over and picked up the cup of coffee, sipped a little. "I didn't call Eastman back—I figure on going through with it the way I intended to—get the evidence an' the affidavits an' what-not. Then if Charley changes his mind . . ." She put the cup back on the tray, leaned back and lighted another cigarette. "But we've got to find Del."

Shane said: "I thought he was cold at Kenny's."

She shook her head, smiled. "I called Kenny to see how Del was, and Del was gone. He came to and started where he left off—stole a gun out of Jack's trunk, and went out the back way. I don't think he'd really go through with it, but he goes nuts when he gets enough red-eye under his belt. . . ."

Shane was leaning far back in the deep chair, staring vacantly at the ceiling. He said: "If you think Del would really make a pass at Charley—" He puffed at the cigar, finished slowly: "You don't seem quite as excited about it as you should be."

"What the hell's the use getting excited?" She stood up. "It's a cinch they won't let Del into 71—an' he wouldn't wait outside for Charley—not when he's drunk. He gets big ideas about face to face and man to man when he's drunk. I know Del."

"Then what are you worrying about?" Shane looked up at

her, smiled gently. "He's probably at home waiting for you."

"No—I just called up." She went over to the window.

Shane looked at her back. He said: "You're pretty crazy about Del—aren't you?"

She nodded without turning.

Shane put his cigar down, reached for the phone. "Where do you think we ought to start?"

She turned, cocked her head a little to one side and looked at him sleepily. "If I knew where we ought to start, Dick," she said, "I wouldn't have had to bother you. You've known Del for years—you know the screwy way his mind works as well as I do—and *you* know the places. Where would he go, do you think, looking for Charley—besides 71?"

Shane picked up the phone, stared at it a little while, put it down. He got up, said: "I'm going to put on some clothes," went into the bedroom.

Lorain Rigas sat down near the window. She pushed the small suede hat back off her forehead, leaned back and closed her eyes.

When Shane came in, knotting his tie, she was lying very still. He stood over her a moment, looking out the window. Then he finished his tie and looked down at her and put one hand out tentatively, touched her forehead with his fingers. She opened her eyes and looked up at him expressionlessly for a little while; he turned and went to the chair where he had thrown his coat, put it on.

The phone buzzed a second after Shane had closed and locked the door. He swore under his breath, fished in his pockets. The girl leaned against the wall of the corridor, smiled at his futile efforts to find the key.

The phone buzzed insistently.

He finally found the key, unlocked the door hurriedly, and went to the phone. Lorain Rigas leaned against the frame of the open door.

Shane said: "Hello. . . . Put him on. . . ." He stood, holding the phone, looking at the girl, spoke again into the phone: "Hello, Bill. . . . Yeah . . . Yeah . . . What the hell for . . . ?" Then he was silent a while with the receiver at his

ear. Finally he said: "Okay, Bill—thanks." Hung up slowly.

He sat down, gestured with his head for the girl to come in and close the door. She closed the door and stood with her back to it, staring at him questioningly.

He said: "Charley was shot to death in the *Montecito Apartments* on West Eighty-second, some time around eighty-thirty tonight."

Lorain Rigas put her hand out slowly, blindly a little way. Her eyes were entirely blank. She went slowly, unsteadily to a chair, sank into it.

Shane said: "They're holding the McLean gal—an' they've found out that Charley and I had an argument this evening—they want to talk to me. They're on the way over to pick me up."

He glanced at his watch. It was nine-forty. He got up and went to the table, took a cigar from the humidor, lighted it. Then he went to the window and stared out into the darkness.

"One—base of brain. One—slightly lower—shattered cervix." The autopsy surgeon straightened, tossed the glittering instrument into a sterilizer and skinned off his rubber-gloves. He glanced at Shane, turned and started towards the door.

Sergeant Gill and an interne turned the body over.

Gill said: "Rigas?" looked up at Shane.

Shane nodded.

Gill spread a partially filled-out form on the examining table near Rigas' feet, took a stub of pencil from his pocket and added several lines to the form. Then he folded it and put it in his pocket and said: "Let's go back upstairs."

Shane followed him out of the room that smelled of ether and of death; they went down a long corridor to an elevator.

On the third floor they left the elevator and crossed the hall diagonally to the open door of a large office, went in. A tall, paunched man with a bony, purplish face turned from the window, went to a swivel-chair behind the broad desk and sat down.

He said: "How come you stopped by tonight, Dick?" He leaned back, squinted across the desk at Shane.

Shane shrugged, sat down sidewise on the edge of the desk. "Wanted to say hello to all my buddies."

"You're a God damned liar!" The tall man spoke quietly, impersonally. "A couple of my men were on the way over to pick you up when you showed up, here. You were tipped, an' I want to know who it was—it don't make so much difference about you, but that kind of thing is bad for the department."

Shane was smiling at Gill. He turned his head to look down at the tall man silently. Finally he said: "What are you going to do, Ed—hold me?"

The tall man said: "Who tipped you to the pinch?"

Shane stood up, faced the tall man squarely. He said: "So it's a pinch?" He turned and started towards the door, spoke over his shoulder to Gill: "Come on, Sarge."

"Come here, you stubborn son of a bitch!"

Shane turned. His expression was not pleasant. He took two short, slow steps back towards the desk.

The tall man was grinning. He drawled: "You're hard to get along with—ain't you?"

Shane didn't answer. He stood with one foot a little in advance of the other and stared at the tall man from under the brim of his dark soft hat. The flesh around his eyes and mouth was very tightly drawn.

The tall man moved his grin from Shane to Gill. He said: "See if you can find that Eastman Op."

Gill went out of the room hurriedly.

The tall man swung around a little in the chair, turned his head to look out the window. His manner when he spoke was casual, forced:

"The McLean girl killed Rigas."

Shane did not move or speak.

"What did you and him fight about tonight?" The tall man turned to look at Shane. His hands were folded over his broad stomach and he clicked his thumbnails together nervously.

Shane cleared his throat. He said huskily: "Am I under arrest?"

"No. But we've got enough to hold you on suspicion. You've sunk a lot of dough in Rigas' joint and so far as we

know you ain't taken much out. Tonight you had an argument. . . ."

The tall man unclasped his hands and leaned forward, put his arms on the desk. "Why don't you help us get this thing right instead of being so fidgety?" He twisted his darkly florid face to a wry smile.

Shane said: "Rigas and I had an argument about money—I left his place at eight o'clock and I was in my hotel at a quarter after. I was there until I came here." He went forward again to the desk. "I can get a half dozen people at the hotel to swear to that."

The tall man made a wide and elaborate gesture of depreciation. "Hell, Dick, we know you didn't do it—and it's almost a natural for McLean. Only we thought you might help us clean up the loose ends."

Shane shook his head slowly, emphatically.

Sergeant Gill came in with an under-sized blond youth in a shiny blue serge suit.

The young man went to the desk, nodded at Shane, said: "H' are ya, Cap?" to the tall man.

The tall man was looking at Shane. He said: "This man"—he jerked his head at the youth—"works for Eastman. He was on an evidence job for Mrs. Rigas and went in with the patrolman when Rigas was shot. . . ."

"Yes, sir," the youth interrupted. "The telephone operator come running out screaming bloody murder an' the copper come running down from the corner an' we both went upstairs"—he paused, caught his breath—"an' there was this guy Rigas, half in the bedroom and half out, an' dead as a door nail. The gun was on the floor, and this dame, McLean, was in pyjamas, yelling that she didn't do it."

The tall man said: "Yes—you told us all that before."

"I know—only I'm telling *him*." The youth smiled at Shane.

Shane sat down again on the edge of the desk. He looked from the youth to the tall man, asked: "What does McLean say?"

"She's got a whole raft of stories." The tall man spat carefully into a big brass cuspidor beside the desk. "The best one

is that she was asleep and didn't wake up till she heard the shots—then she turned on the lights an' there he was, on the floor in the doorway. The outer door to the apartment was unlocked—had been unlocked all evening. She says she always left it that way when he was out because he was always losing his key, an' then he could come in without waking her up."

Shane said: "What was she doing in bed at eight-thirty?"
"Bad headache."

Sergeant Gill took a .38 automatic from the drawer of a steel cabinet, handed it to Shane. "No fingerprints," he said—"clean as a whistle."

Shane looked at the gun, put it down on the desk.

The tall man looked at the youth and at Gill, then bobbed his head meaningly towards the door. They both went out. The youth said: "So long, Cap—so long, Mister Shane." Gill closed the door behind him.

Shane was smiling.

The tall man said: "Rigas' wife had these Eastman dicks on his tail—has she got anything to do with this?"

"Why?" Shane shrugged. "She wanted a divorce."

"How long they been having trouble?"

"Don't know."

The tall man stood up, stuck his hands in his pockets and went to the window. He spoke over his shoulder: "Didn't you and her used to be pretty good friends?"

Shane didn't answer. His face was entirely expressionless.

The tall man turned and looked at him and then he said: "Well—I guess that's all."

They went out together.

In the corridor Shane made a vague motion with his hand, said: "Be seeing you," went down two flights of stairs and out the door to the street. He stood in the wide arch of the entrance, out of the rain, looked up and down the street for a cab. There was one in front of a drug-store six or seven doors up from the Police Station; he whistled, finally walked swiftly up to it through the blinding rain.

As he got in, the youth in the shiny blue serge suit came

out of the drug-store, scuttled across the sidewalk and climbed in beside him, sat down.

The driver turned around and said: "Where to?"

Shane said: "Wait a minute."

The youth leaned back, put his hand confidentially on Shane's shoulder. He said: "Tell him to drive around the block. I got something to tell you."

The driver looked at Shane. Shane nodded. They swung out from the curb.

The youth said: "I seen Mrs. Rigas about a half a block from the place uptown where Rigas was killed, about ten minutes before we found him."

Shane didn't say anything. He rubbed the side of his face with one hand, glanced at his watch, nodded.

"I was coming back from the delicatessen on the corner, where I got a bite to eat. She was going the same way, on the other side of the street. I wasn't sure it was her at first—I only seen her once when she came in to see Mister Eastman—but there was a car coming down the street and its headlights were pretty bright and I was pretty sure it was her."

Shane said: "Pretty sure."

"Aw hell—it was her." The youth took a soggy cigarette out of his pocket, lighted it.

"Where did she go?"

"That's what I can't figure out. It was raining so damned hard—and the wind was blowing—when I got to our car, that was parked across the street from the *Montecito*, she'd disappeared." The youth shook his head slowly. "I told my partner about it. He said I was probably wrong, because if it was her she would have called up the office and found out how to spot us, because she would be wanting us to go in with her. He went on down to the corner to get something to eat, an' I sat in the car an' figured that I probably had been wrong, an' then in a few minutes I heard the shots an' the telephone operator come running out."

Shane said: "Did you see Rigas go in?"

The youth shook his head. "No—an' my partner swears he

didn't go in while he was on watch. He must've gone in the back way."

Shane took a cigar out of a blue leather case, bit off the end, lighted it. "And you say you were figuring you were wrong about thinking you'd seen her?"

The youth laughed. "Yeah—that's what I figured then. But that ain't what I figure now."

"Why not?"

"Because I pride myself, Mister Shane, on being able to look at a dame what is supposed to have just bumped a guy off, an' knowing whether she did it or not. That's why I'm in the business." He turned his head and looked very seriously at Shane.

Shane smiled faintly in the darkness.

The youth said: "It wasn't McLean." He said it very positively.

Shane said: "Why didn't you tell the Captain about this?"

"We got to protect our clients."

The cab stopped in front of the drug-store, the driver turned around, looked at Shane questioningly.

Shane blew out a great cloud of gray-blue smoke, glanced at the youth, said: "Where do you want to go?"

"This is oke for me." The youth leaned forward, put his hand on the inside handle of the door. Then he paused, turned his head slightly towards Shane.

"I'm in a spot, Mister Shane. My wife's sick—an' I took an awful beating on the races the other day, trying to get enough jack for an operation. . . ."

Shane said: "Does anybody besides your partner know about Mrs. Rigas?"

The youth shook his head.

Shane tipped his hat back on his head, drew two fingers across his forehead, said: "I'll see what I can do about it. Where do you live?"

The youth took a card out of his pocket, took out a thin silver pencil and wrote something on it. He handed the card to Shane, said: "So long," and got out of the cab and ran across the sidewalk to the drug-store.

Shane said: "Downtown."

On Twelfth Street, a little way off Sixth Avenue, Shane rapped on the glass, the cab swung to the curb. He told the driver to wait, got out and went down a narrow passageway between two buildings to a green wooden door with a dim electric light above it. He opened the door, knocked on another heavier door set at an angle to the first. It was opened after a little while and he went down four wide steps to a long and narrow room with a bar along one side.

There were seven or eight men at the bar, two white-aproned men behind it: a squat and swarthy Italian and a heavily built Irishman.

Shane went to the far end of the room, leaned on the bar and spoke to the Italian: "What've you got that's best?"

The Italian put a bottle of brandy and a glass on the bar in front of him; Shane took a handkerchief out of his breast pocket, held the glass up to the light, wiped it carefully. He poured a drink, tasted it.

He said: "That's lousy—give me a glass of beer."

The Italian picked up the glass of brandy, drank it, put the bottle away and drew a glass of beer. He skimmed off the foam, put the tall glass on the bar.

He said: "Seventy-five cents."

Shane put a dollar bill on the bar, asked: "Kenny around?"

The Italian shook his head.

Shane said: "Where's the phone?"

The Italian inclined his head towards a narrow door back of Shane. Shane went into the booth and called the *Valmouth*, asked for Miss Johnson. When the connection had been made, he said: "Hello, Lorain—what room are you in? . . . All right, stay there until I get back—don't go out for anything—anybody. . . . I'm down at Jack Kenny's. . . . Tell you when I see you. . . . Uh-huh. . . . G'bye. . . ." He hung up and went back to the bar.

The Italian and the Irishman were talking together. The Irishman came down to Shane and said: "Jack's upstairs, asleep. What do you want to see him about?"

"You'd better wake him up—I want to tell him how to keep out of the can." Shane tasted the beer, said: "That's lousy—give me a glass of water."

The Irishman looked at him suspiciously for a minute, put a glass of water on the bar, went to the door at the end of the room. He said: "Who'll I say it is?"

"Shane."

The Irishman disappeared through the door.

He was back in a little while, said: "You can go on up—it's the open door at the top of the stairs."

Shane went back and through the door, across a dark, airless hallway. He lighted a match and found the bottom of the stair, went up. There was a door ajar at the top of the stair through which faint light came; he shoved it open, went in.

Jack Kenny was big and round and bald. He was sitting deep in a worn and battered wicker armchair. He was very drunk.

There was another man, lying face down across the dirty, unmade bed. He was snoring loudly, occasionally exhaled in a long, sighing whistle.

Kenny lifted his chin from his chest, lifted bleary eyes to Shane. He said: "Hi, boy?"

Shane asked: "What kind of a rod did you give Del Corey?"

Kenny opened his eyes wide, grinned. He leaned heavily forward, then back, stretched luxuriously.

"I didn't give him any—the bastard stole it."

Shane waited.

Kenny was suddenly serious. He said: "What the hell you talking about?" He sat up straight, squinted at Shane through his little red-rimmed eyes. "What the hell you talking about?"

Shane said: "Charley Rigas was killed tonight with a .38 Smith & Wesson automatic—the safety was knocked off, an' the number on the barrel started with four six six two . . ."

"Jesus Sweet Christ!" Kenny stood up suddenly, unsteadily.

Shane said: "I thought you might like to know." He turned and started towards the door.

Kenny said: "Wait a minute."

Shane stopped in the doorway, turned.

All the color had gone out of Kenny's bloated, florid face, leaving it pasty, yellow-white.

He said: "You sure?" He went unsteadily to a little table in the middle of the room, picked up an empty bottle, held it up to the light, threw it into a corner.

Shane nodded, said: "Pretty dumb for Del to get so steamed up about Lorain an' Charley that he killed Charley—huh? Lorain's been washed up with Charley for months—an' Del ought to 've known about it if anybody did. . . ."

Kenny said: "He wasn't worrying about Lorain— It was that little cigarette gal Thelma, or Selma, or something—that works for Charley. Del's been two-timing Lorain with her for the last couple weeks. That's what he was shooting off his mouth about this afternoon—he had some kind of office on her an' Charley."

Kenny went to a dresser and opened a drawer and took out a bottle of whiskey.

Shane said: "Oh."

He went out and down the dark stair, out to the bar. The glass of beer and the glass of water were on the bar where he had left them. He picked up the glass of water, tasted it, said: "That's lousy," and went out through the front door and the passageway to the cab.

It was a few minutes before eleven when Shane got out of the cab, paid off the driver and went into the *Valmouth*. The clerk gave him a note that a Mister Arthur had telephoned, would call again in the morning.

Shane went up to his rooms, sat down with his coat and hat on and picked up the telephone.

He said: "Listen, baby—tell the girl that relieves you in the morning that when Mister Arthur calls, I'm out of the city—won't be back for a couple months. He wants to sell me some insurance."

He hung up a moment, looked up the number of 71 in his little black book, called it. A strange voice answered. Shane said: "Is Nick there? . . . Is Pedro there? . . . Never mind—what I want to know is what's Thelma's last name?—Thelma,

the cigarette girl? . . . Uh-huh. . . . Never mind who I am—I'm one of your best customers. . . . Uh-huh. . . . How do you spell it? . . . B-u-r-r . . . You haven't got her telephone number, have you?" . . . The receiver clicked, Shane smiled, hung up.

He found Thelma Burr's address in the telephone directory: a number on West Seventy-fourth, off Riverside Drive. He got up and went to the table and took several cigars from the humidor, put all but one of them in the blue leather case. He lighted the cigar and stood a little while at one of the windows, staring at the tiny lights in the buildings uptown. Gusts of rain beat against the window and he shuddered suddenly, involuntarily.

He went to a cabinet and took out a square brown bottle, a glass, poured himself a stiff drink. Then he went out, downstairs to the sixteenth floor. He knocked several times at the door of 1611, but there was no answer. He went to the elevator, down to the lobby.

The night clerk said: "That's right, sir—1611, but I think Miss Johnson went out shortly before you came in."

Shane went to the house phone, spoke to the operator: "Did Miss Johnson get any calls after I talked to her around ten-thirty? . . . Right after I called—huh? . . . Thanks."

He went out to a cab, gave the driver the number on Seventy-fourth Street.

It turned out to be a narrow, five-story apartment house on the north side of the street. Shane told the driver to wait and went up steps, through a heavy door into a dark hall. There were mail-boxes on each side of the hall; he lighted a match and started on the left side. The second from the last box on the left bore a name scrawled in pencil that interested him: N. Manos—the apartment number was 414. He went on to the right side of the hall, found the name and the number he was looking for, went up narrow creaking steps to the third floor.

There was no answer at 312.

After a little while, Shane went back downstairs. He stood in the darkness of the hall for several minutes. Then he

went back up to the fourth floor, knocked at 414. There was no answer there either. He tried the door, found it to be locked, went back down to 312.

He stood in the dim light of the hallway a while with his ear close to the door. He heard the outside door downstairs open and close, voices. He went halfway down the stair, waited until the voices had gone away down the corridor on the first floor, went back to the door of 312 and tried several keys in the lock. The sixth key he tried turned almost all the way; he took hold of the knob, put his shoulder against the door, lifted and pushed, forcing the key at the same time. The lock clicked, gave way, the door swung open.

Shane went into the darkness, closed the door and lighted a match. He found the light switch, pressed it. A floor lamp with a colorful and tasteless batik shade, a smaller table lamp with a black silk handkerchief thrown over it, lighted. The globes were deep amber; the light of the two lamps was barely sufficient to see the brightly papered walls, the mass of furniture in the room. Shane picked his way to the table, jerked the black handkerchief off the table lamp; then there was a little more light.

There was a man on his knees on the floor, against a couch at one end of the little room. The upper part of his body was belly down on the couch and his arms hung limply, ridiculously to the floor; the back of his skull was caved in, and the white brightly flowered couch-cover beneath his head and shoulders was dark red, shiny.

Shane went to him and squatted down and looked at the gashed and bloody side of his face. It was Del Corey.

Shane stood up and crossed the room to an ajar door, pushed it open with his foot. The light over the wash basin was on, covered with several layers of pink silk; the light was very dim.

Thelma Burr was lying on her back on the floor. Her green crepe de chine nightgown was torn, stained. There were black marks on her white throat, her breast; her face was puffy, a bruised, discolored mask, and her mouth and one cheek were

brown-black with iodine. There was a heavy pewter candlestick a little way from one outstretched hand.

Shane knelt, braced his elbow on the edge of the bathtub and held his ear close to her chest. Her heart was beating faintly.

He stood up swiftly, went out of the bathroom, went to the door. He took out his handkerchief, wiped off the light switch carefully, snapped the lights out. Then he went out and locked the door, wiped the knob, put the key in his pocket and went downstairs, out and across the street to the cab.

The driver jerked his head towards another lone cab half-way down the block. "That hack come up right after we got here," he said. "Nobody got out or nothing. Maybe it's a tail." He stared sharply at Shane.

Shane said: "Probably." He glanced carelessly at the other cab. "You can make yourself a fin if you can get me to the nearest telephone, and then over to 71 East Fifty — in five minutes."

The driver pointed across the street, said: "Garage over there—they ought to have a phone."

Shane ran across to the garage, found a phone and called Central Station, asked for Bill Hayworth. When Hayworth answered, he said: "There's a couple stiffs in apartment 312 at — West Seventy-fourth. Hurry up—the girl's not quite gone. Call you later." He ran out to the waiting cab, climbed in, leaned back and clipped and lighted a cigar, watched the other cab through the rear window. They went over to the Drive, down two blocks, turned east. Shane thought for a while that the other cab wasn't following but after they'd gone several blocks on Seventy-second he saw it again. They cut down Broadway to Columbus Circle, across Fifty-ninth.

In front of 71, Shane jumped out of the cab, said: "That's swell—wait," went swiftly across the sidewalk and pressed the button beneath the red number.

The slit opened, a voice that Shane did not know whispered: "What is it you want?"

Shane said: "In." He stuck his face in the thin shaft of light that came through the slit.

The door was opened and Shane went into the narrow hallway. The man who had let him in was about fifty-five—a slight, thin-faced man with white hair combed straight back from a high forehead. He closed the door, bolted it.

Nick was standing behind and a little to one side of the slight man. He held a blunt blue automatic steadily in his right hand. His chin was on his chest and he stared at Shane narrowly through thick, bushy brows. He jerked his head up suddenly, sharply, said: "Put your hands up!"

Shane smiled slowly, raised his hands slowly as high as his shoulders.

A bell tinkled faintly above the door, the slight white-haired man opened the slit and looked out, closed the slit and opened the door. Another man whom Shane recognized as one of the stud dealers came in. The slight man closed the door.

Nick jerked his head up again, said: "Upstairs." He put the automatic in the pocket of his dinner coat, the muzzle held the cloth out stiff.

Shane turned and went slowly up the stairs, and Nick and the man who had followed him in came up behind him. The slight man stayed at the door.

On the second floor, Shane put his hands down as he passed the double-door into the big room, glanced in. There were three people, a man and two women, in earnest and drunken conversation at one of the corner tables. There was a couple at a table against the far wall. With the exception of these and a waiter and the man behind the bar, the room was deserted.

Shane spoke over his shoulder to Nick: "Swell crowd."

Nick took two or three rapid steps, took the automatic out of his pocket and jabbed it against Shane's back, hard. Shane put his hands up again and went up the second flight to the third floor. Nick and the other man followed him. He stopped at the top of the stair, leaned against the balustrade; Nick went past him and knocked at the tall gray door. It was

opened in a little while and the three of them went into the room.

Pedro Rigas, Charley's brother, was sitting on one of the big round tables, swinging his feet back and forth. He was very tall and spare and his face was dark, handsome, his features sharply cut.

There was a plump young man with rosy cheeks, bright blue eyes, shingled sand-colored hair, on a straight cane-bottomed chair near Pedro. His legs were crossed and he leaned on one elbow on the table. There was a heavy nicked revolver on the table near his elbow. He stared at Shane with interest.

Lorain Rigas was sitting on a worn imitation leather couch against one wall. She was leaning forward with her elbows on her knees, her hands over her eyes. She had taken off the small suede hat, her dull black hair curved in damp arabesques over her white forehead and throat and hands.

The little Eastman operative was half sitting, half lying on the floor against the wall near the couch. His face was a pulpy mass of bruised, beaten flesh; one arm was up, half covering the lower part of his face, the other was propped in the angle of the floor and wall. He was sobbing quietly, his body shook.

Pedro Rigas looked at the dealer who had come in with Shane and Nick, nodded towards Shane, asked: "You bring him in?"

Nick said: "He came in—by himself." He grinned mirthlessly at Shane.

Shane was staring sleepily at Lorain Rigas.

She lifted her face, looked at him helplessly. "Somebody called up a little while after I talked to you," she said—"said it was the night clerk—said you were waiting for me out in front of the hotel. I went down an' they smacked me into a cab, brought me over here."

Shane nodded slightly.

She turned her eyes towards the Eastman man on the floor. "He was here," she went on, "an' they were beating hell out of him. I don't know where they picked him up."

Shane said: "Probably at the Station, after he talked to me. They've been tailing me all night—since I left the hotel to go over an' talk to the captain. That's how they knew you were at the hotel—they saw you come in around nine—an' they got the fake Johnson name from the register."

Pedro Rigas was smiling coldly at Shane, swinging his feet back and forth nervously.

He said: "One of you two"—he jerked his head towards the girl—"killed Charley. I find out pretty soon which one—or by God! I kill you both."

Shane had put his hands down. He held them in front of him and looked down at them, stroked the back of one with the palm of the other. Then he looked up at the rosy-cheeked young man, questioned Rigas: "Executioner?" He smiled slightly, sarcastically.

Lorain Rigas stood up suddenly, faced Pedro. She said: "You God damn' fool! Can't you get it through that nut of yours that Del killed Charley? Christ!"—she made a hopeless gesture—"Read the papers—the gun they found was the one Del swiped from Jack Kenny this afternoon. Jack'll verify that."

Pedro's face was cold and hard and expressionless when he looked at her. "What were you doing up there?"

"I told you!" she almost screamed. "I went to warn Charley that Del was after him! I heard the shots when I was halfway upstairs—got out."

Shane was looking at Lorain Rigas and there was a dim mocking glitter in his eyes.

She glanced at him, said: "I didn't tell you about that, Dick, because I was afraid you'd get ideas. You wouldn't trust your own mother across the street, you know."

Shane nodded gently, slowly.

He turned to Pedro. "Where do I come in?" he said. "I went from here to the hotel—an' I was there till about a quarter of ten. . . ."

The dealer, who was still standing near the door, spoke for the first time: "No. After you left here, you didn't get to the

hotel till about ten minutes of nine. I found that out from a friend of mine—a bellhop.”

Lorain Rigas looked from the dealer to Shane. Her eyes were wide, surprised.

Pedro stopped swinging his feet suddenly. He said: “Where did you go after you left here?” He was staring at Shane and his eyes were thin heavily fringed slits.

Shane was silent a moment. Then he reached slowly, deliberately towards his inside pocket, smiled at Lorain Rigas, said: “May I smoke?”

Pedro stood up suddenly.

The rosy-cheeked youth stood up, too. The revolver glistened in his hand and he went swiftly to Shane, patted his pockets, his hips, felt under his arms. He finished, stepped back a pace.

Shane took out the blue case, took out a cigar and lighted it.

It was silent except for the choked sobbing of the little Eastman man.

Nick came suddenly forward, took Shane by the shoulder, shook him. Nick said: “You answer Pedro when he asks you a question.”

Shane turned slowly and frowned at Nick. He looked down at Nick’s hand on his shoulder, said slowly: “Take your hand off me.” He looked back at Pedro. “Ask Nick where *he* went tonight.”

Pedro jerked his head impatiently.

Shane took the cigar out of his mouth, said: “Did you know that Thelma—downstairs—is Nick’s gal?” He hesitated a moment, glanced swiftly at Nick. “An’ did you know that Charley’s been playing around with her?”

Pedro was staring at Nick. His mouth was a little open.

Shane went on: “*Nick* knew it. . . .”

He whirled suddenly and smashed his left fist down hard on Nick’s broad forearm, grabbed for the automatic with his right hand. The automatic fell, clattered on the floor. Shane and Nick and the rosy-cheeked young man all dived for it, but

the young man was a little faster; he stood up grinning widely, murderously—a gun in each hand.

Pedro said: "Go on."

Shane didn't say anything. He was looking at Nick and his eyes were bright, interested—he was smiling a little.

Pedro snapped at the dealer: "Go downstairs an' send Mario up—you stay at the door."

The dealer went out and closed the door.

They were all very quiet. Nick was staring at the automatic in the young man's hand and there was a very silly, far-away expression on his face. Shane was watching Nick like a vivisectionist about to make the crucial incision. Lorain Rigas was sitting down again on the couch with her hands over her eyes.

Pedro only waited, looked at the floor.

The door opened and the slight, white-haired man came in.

Pedro said: "What time did Nick go out tonight?"

The slight man looked at Nick bewilderedly. He cleared his throat, said: "Nick went out right after Charley went home. He said there wasn't any business anyway, an' he wanted to go to a picture-show, an' would I take the door for a while. He came back some time around nine. . . ."

Pedro said: "All right—go on back downstairs."

The slight man gestured with one hand. "You seen me on the door when you went out right after we heard about Charley," he said. "Wasn't it all right for me to be on the door?"

"Sure." Pedro was looking at Nick. "Sure—only I thought Nick was down in the basement or something—I didn't know he'd gone out."

The slight man shrugged and went out and closed the door.

Shane said evenly: "Nick had a hunch that Charley was going to Thelma's. He didn't follow Charley, but he jumped in a cab, probably, an' went to her place. He didn't find Charley—but he found Del Corey."

Lorain Rigas put her hands down and looked up at Shane. Her face was drawn, white.

"That's what *Del* went there for," Shane went on—"expecting to find Charley. Del's been making a big play for Thelma—

an' he knew about Charley and her—was cockeyed an' burnt up an' aimed to rub Charley." Shane was watching Nick narrowly. "Thelma must've calmed Del down—Nick found them there. . . ." Shane turned his eyes towards Lorain Rigas. ". . . And caved in Del's head."

Lorain Rigas stood up, screamed.

Pedro crossed to her swiftly, put one hand over her mouth, the other on her back, pushed her back down on the couch gently.

Shane said: "Then Nick beat the hell out of Thelma, made her admit that Charley had been in the woodpile, too, damn' near killed her."

He was looking at Nick again.

"He dragged what was left of her into the bathroom and poured some iodine on her mouth, an' put the candlestick that he'd smacked Del with in her hand—so it would look like she'd killed Del an' then committed suicide."

Nick turned to stare at Shane vacantly.

Shane was puffing out great clouds of blue-gray smoke, seemed to be enjoying himself hugely.

"She wasn't quite dead, though," he went on. He glanced at his watch. "The law ought to be over there by now—getting her testimony."

Pedro said: "Hurry up."

Shane shrugged. "Nick took the gun that Del got from Jack Kenny, jumped up to Charley's. He knew he was in a good spot to let Charley have it because Charley and I had that argument tonight—an' it'd look like me—or he could make it look like me. Charley evidently stopped some place on the way home—Nick got there first and either stuck Charley up in the corridor and took him into the apartment to kill him, or sneaked in—the door was unlocked—and waited in the dark. Then he went out the back way—the way Charley came in—and came back down here."

Pedro went to the door, turned to Shane, said: "You and the lady go on."

Shane gestured towards the Eastman man. "What about him?"

"We'll fix him up—give him some money. It is too bad." Pedro smiled, opened the door.

Shane looked at Nick. Nick's face was pasty, yellow, still wore the silly, far-away expression.

Lorain Rigas stood up and took up her hat and went to Shane. They went together to the door, out into the hallway. Pedro leaned over the balustrade, called down to the little man at the outside door: "Okay."

Shane and the girl went downstairs, past the doors of the dark and empty barroom, down to the street floor.

The slight, white-haired man and the dealer were whispering together. The slight man opened the door for them, said: "Good night—come again."

They went out and got into the cab.

Shane said: "*Valmouth.*"

It had stopped raining for the moment, but the streets were still black and glistening and slippery.

He tossed his cigar out through the narrow space of open window, leaned back, said: "Am I—or am I a swell dick?"

Lorain Rigas didn't answer. Her elbow was on the arm rest, her chin in her hand. She stared out the window blankly.

"You're not very appreciative." Shane smiled to himself, was silent a little while.

The light held them up at Fifth Avenue. Theater traffic was heavy in spite of the weather.

Shane said: "The only thing I'm not quite sure about is whether you went to Charley's to warn him—or whether you'd heard about Del and Thelma—thought that the day Del was yelping about shooting Charley, in front of witnesses, was a swell time for you to shoot Charley yourself."

She did not answer.

As the cab curved into Sixth Avenue, she said: "Where did you go after you left 71—before you went back to the hotel?"

Shane laughed. "That lousy alibi held up with the captain," he said. "He didn't question it." He unbuttoned the top button of his top-coat, took something wrapped in tissue paper out of

his inside pocket. "You know what a sucker I am for auction sales?"

She nodded.

He unfolded the tissue paper and took out a platinum-mounted diamond ring. The stone was large, pure white, very beautiful.

He said: "Pip?"

She nodded again.

He put the ring back in the tissue paper, folded it, put it back in his pocket. The cab slid to the curb in front of the *Valmouth*.

Shane said: "Where you going?"

She shook her head.

He said: "You keep the cab." He pressed a bill into her hand, said: "This'll take care of it—why don't you take a nice long ride?"

He brushed her forehead lightly with his lips and got out of the cab and went into the hotel.

Best Man*

THOMAS WALSH

CARVER, PLAIN-CLOTHESMAN ON HOMICIDE, LEFT THE elevator at the fourth floor, and stepped out to a wide marble corridor flanked by glass-paneled doors on either side. "To your right," the operator said. Carver nodded and turned.

It was a very long corridor, running the length of the Gresham Building. There was a stairway at the side farthest from him, and as he turned around a short man in a camel's hair coat was going down this. He wasn't hurrying; Carver, reading the labels on the office doors, didn't pay him much attention.

The fourth door he came to was marked Tammany and Sutorius, Attorneys At Law. He was reaching for the knob when a bald fat man with mildly puzzled eyes stepped out into the corridor from an office on the opposite side.

The fat man looked curious. "You hear anything?" he asked. When Carver shook his head he stopped a little uncertainly, peered up and down, grunted: "Well," and drew back into his room. Carver stared after him a moment, pinching his nose thoughtfully.

The door of Tammany and Sutorius was locked. Carver rattled it once to make sure, then rapped his knuckles heavily against the frosted glass panel.

He waited perhaps sixty seconds before rapping again. Inside a man's voice was speaking shrilly, rapidly. At Carver's second knock it choked off, a phone hook was banged

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down; footsteps inside hobbled across a hard wood floor, and the voice of Abel J. Sutorius, high and a little hysterical, came thinly to him:

"Who—who is it? You'll have to smash the door." He stopped; Carver heard his loud gasping, saw the feeble shadow of his hands beating at the glass. Then his whimper: "My God! My God!"

Carver got his broad knuckles under the knob, lifted it, and crashed his shoulder against the door's wooden edge. Metal splintered and snapped, and the door swung in unevenly. He saw Sutorius kneeling on the floor of the small office, above another man whose body was prone, whose light brown coat was stained with blood.

Sutorius turned to him, his face very white. He babbled: "The man! The one that just left— Did you see him, Carver?"

Coming fast across the rug, Carver didn't answer him. The prone man's eyes were closed but he was still breathing, with a rapid, liquid sound; he had a long thin face, narrow lips, a small black mustache. There was blood on his checked tie and on the white breast of his shirt.

Sutorius wrung his hands together, gasped as Carver reached for the phone: "I called the police—the ambulance. My God, Carver, do something! Perhaps he's still downstairs. He was wearing a camel's hair coat, a dark hat. I couldn't see his face—he had a handkerchief over it—but he was short and pretty broad. He came in while I was talking to De Villier; he didn't say anything. Just shot and ran out—" He wiped his face.

"You gave him two minutes start," Carver said gravely. He looked up sidewise at the crippled attorney. "This building has three exits and a subway station in the cellar. He could have used any of them in sixty seconds."

Sutorius breathed heavily, looking down at the wounded man. He shuddered again. "It was horrible, Carver. That fellow came in just after Frenchy got here. He closed the door to the hall and fired twice without speaking at all, before I could get out of my chair. Then he went out and locked it

after him. It didn't seem to take a moment. I phoned for help first, of course. Then I heard you knocking—"

The fat, bald man stood in the doorway, with other faces crowded over him. He was staring at De Villier, and there wasn't much color in his pudgy cheeks. He said to someone behind him: "I got the office just across the hall. Yeh, I heard the shots but I thought maybe they were backfires. I asked that man—" Carver pushed him out tiredly with one hand on his fat stomach and closed the door. His light eyes were cold, expressionless, and not sorry. He said: "Don't throw a convulsion, Sutorius. Frenchy got it the way he gave it—in the back. It was way past due."

The lawyer got up, groaning as his weight went on to his withered leg. "It's horrible," he repeated faintly. "It means my practice will be ruined. Shot down in my office—"

Carver said: "Think of that the next time before you play with crook trade!"

In the street under him a siren screamed, and as it died an ambulance bell jangled tinnily on the avenue. A minute later the room was filled with people; two stretcher bearers, an interne in white, two blue-coated patrolmen and a detective in plain-clothes who looked surprised and said: "Hello, Joe," when he saw Carver there.

Carver nodded to him, pushed out through the crowd at the door, and went downstairs to the lobby. He bought some cigarettes at the stand there, then went up again slowly, using the stairs, after the stretcher was brought down. The plain-clothesman was questioning Sutorius in the office.

The lawyer's voice was calmer now, but his narrow mouth was still white and nervous. He made aimless little gestures as he spoke, wiped his cheeks twice with a linen handkerchief.

When he had finished Carver said: "I saw this bird in the camel's hair coat go downstairs, Barnes. Only I didn't know what was wrong until I got in the room here. If Sutorius had hollered through the door when I knocked first I could have got him."

Sutorius wiped his lips again. "But, Carver, in a position like that you don't do logical things. My first thought, of

course, was to phone the police. I was doing that when you came."

Carver grunted and got up. He took the elevator down with Barnes and got in the police car with him. After two blocks he said: "I don't like coincidences. I don't like Sutorius. The whole thing smells, Barnes. Sutorius called me an hour ago and said he wanted to see me about something very important. When I get up here I'm just in time to see this bird leave. Sutorius doesn't holler to me what's wrong; he just lets out a few squeals and runs back. When I find out what it is, camel's hair has two minutes start. Too late to catch him."

Barnes shrugged. "Open and shut to me, Joe."

"Too much," Carver growled. "That's the point. Me, I have to back up that shyster's story. It looks like a plant, and I don't like plants. Not even when they smell nice. This one doesn't."

He stared plaintively out at Park Avenue traffic, worrying at his lips.

Al Tammany, his partner Sutorius, Carver and a broad-shouldered young man, whom Carver didn't know, were in the hospital reception room waiting for news of the wounded man.

Al Tammany stopped being genial when the door behind him opened. His head turned quickly on its beefy neck, and his heavy jowls, his small merry eyes, took on concern in the instant that he waited. Watching him, Carver thought that his eyes were like a pig's—a happy, plump pig that was trying unsuccessfully to look sad.

He asked: "What's the news, doctor?"

The doctor was a lean jawed, very clean man in surgical white. He closed the door behind him and made twin black arches with his brows across a narrow, grave face. "Unfortunate," he said, spreading his hands. "De Villier died on the operating table. I don't see how he lasted an hour with his right lung blown apart."

Abel J. Sutorius let out a long breath without much sound to it. Tammany said: "Poor Frenchy," and shook his head

dolefully. The young man in the corner whom Carver didn't know looked briefly at the doctor with steady and cold black eyes. His hair was dark, brushed back like a cap of smooth enamel, and he was dressed quietly and very well in gray tweeds. His face, too, was dark and oval, handsome, but the eyes and the strong chin took away weakness from it. Carver eyed him narrowly. Pretty enough, this lad, but not just that. Hard, too. Who the hell was he?

The doctor said: "Sorry, gentlemen," and went out. A strong reek of antiseptic swept in around them from the white-washed hospital corridor as he left. Carver wrinkled his nose against it, got up, and smoothed out his overcoat with the palm of one hand.

Sutorius sighed, hobbled forward to the desk, took his hat. The dark young man rose after him and crossed to the door, closed it quietly, without turning.

Carver stared after him. "Who's the Valentino, Abel?"

"Jack Miller?" the cripple looked surprised. "I thought you knew him. Everybody does. He was Frenchy's collection man in the racket before repeal."

Carver prodded a front tooth thoughtfully. "What's he in now?"

"A fine thing to ask me," Sutorius cackled. "How would I know? He's quite a dancer; Frenchy told me once he intended to quit the game and work at that. I think he was at Harry Caddis' place for a while, doing tangoes."

"Let's go," Tammany growled. His little eyes seemed uneasy, moving away from Carver's. "I got that brief to prepare yet, Abel."

Carver frowned at them faintly and followed them out. His coolness seemed to annoy Tammany; his red face swung back once across his shoulder, but he did not say anything.

They went along the hall and through the glass doors at the end that led to the street. It was very cold outside; a late afternoon snow fell softly, and sounds from the avenue beyond came through it muted and dull. Sutorius limped down the steps first and got into the only taxi in line. Tammany

crouched and entered after him, and as the door swung shut Carver grabbed the knob and drew it out again.

"You don't mind dropping me uptown?" he said.

Tammany grunted, settling back. Little Sutorius pulled in his wizened cheeks, smiled. "Honored," he said. He turned abruptly to his partner. "We can drop you at the office first, Al."

Carver lit a cigarette without offering them around. Smoke from it spiralled up slowly in the dim interior, and clung in small thick swirls to the icy windows. When they were stopped by a traffic light on Broadway, Tammany roused himself and looked at Carver.

"Now, don't get me wrong on this," he growled. "Whatever you police had against Frenchy he was a good client of ours and I liked him. I hate like hell to see some yellow rat plug him and get off scot free. You have any line on his killer?"

"Sure," Carver said. "We got a perfect description from Abel J. He had a camel's hair coat and a dark hat. We figure to pick him up any minute on that. Maybe he'll turn out to have two eyes and a nose too."

Tammany said ha, ha, very loudly, disgustedly. "That's funny as hell, Carver." He didn't speak again until the cab swung up on the Grand Central ramp, crossed it, turned into a side street and stopped. Then he barked: "See you later, Abel," and slammed the door after him.

The cab started again. Sutorius leaned forward and lit a slim brown panatela. He murmured, blowing out smoke: "I might like you if you weren't so clever, Carver. But really you annoy people—people who might be able to help you." His large, greenish eyes slid to Carver, with a bright glitter of something undefined far down in their depths. The something seemed to amuse him hugely. "And that, of course, makes them decide not to. You're left out in the cold when you might be warming yourself at a nice log fire. I may say—"

Carver shrugged. "I get along."

Sutorius nodded gravely. "You do," he said. He looked through the window and puffed on his panatela; he didn't speak again. When the cab turned off Park and rolled the

short block to Lexington, Carver stepped on his cigarette and got out.

With the door half closed behind him he stopped it with his hand, put his head back in. "That something important, Sutorius, you wanted to see me about this morning. It still on your mind?"

Sutorius stroked his narrow chin with yellow fingers, smiled above them. "You get along," he said.

Carver shrugged again and closed the door. He had taken three steps across the pavement when it opened and Sutorius peered out. He said: "Merely in the interests of justice, Carver. Jack Miller, the man you saw at the hospital, has a bungalow on Gibson's Island, in the Sound. I went up there with Frenchy three days ago, after I freed him on those income tax charges." He smirked, preened himself. "Which was really a nice piece of work, if I may say so."

"Not bad," Carver said. "How many jurymen you have fixed?"

"Tut, tut." Sutorius waved his hand easily. He leaned forward and clasped skinny fingers around one wrist, smiled up at Carver with dry, very bright eyes. "I proved to the satisfaction of a court of law that my client had made no money in the past five years."

Carver said: "Abel J. Sutorius, of the Legal Aid Society. Big hearted Abe. What'd he pay you with? Empty bottles?"

"That," Sutorius pronounced, smiling, "is beside the point. You asked me what Miller was doing. I wondered myself, when I found him on that island in midwinter. There's nobody else there from October until May. He had a charming girl with him—I caught a glimpse of her in the bedroom. She looked uncommonly like Mary Flood Harrington." The lean smile darted up once more at Carver; then Sutorius bowed, waved, closed the door. The cab rolled away. Carver stared after it until snow got on his brows and began to melt down over his cheeks.

He got a paper on the way to a restaurant, read it as he was finishing his coffee. De Villier's picture was on the front page under headlines that screamed blackly across its breadth, but

Carver didn't pay much attention to that. There was a photo on an inner page, with a thinner black caption under it—a photo of a very beautiful young girl with large eyes, apparently a blonde. The leader under it was: *Harrington Girl Feared Kidnaped; Father Still Silent*. Then, in smaller letters: *Parent Refuses to Interview Police; Believed Fearing for Girl's Safety*.

Carver read this through to the end, then stared for some moments, thoughtfully, at the ceiling. Later he paid his bill, walked over to a garage on Third Avenue, and took out his roadster.

His headlights picked out the sign fifty yards ahead. He slowed as he came to it, swinging the nose of his car slightly in. It said: *A. Johnson—Boats for Hire—75c an Hr.*

At the far end of the long, low building set back from the road a rectangular line of window shone yellow. Carver turned his roadster in on the faint markings of the gravel and parked it before the stoop. It was bitterly cold, though without wind; snow still fell, heavy and soft, and under the flakes he could smell the salt strong freshness of the Sound.

In a room just off the porch a big yellow haired Swede sat at the center table, reading a paper. He asked: "Yah?" in a heavy, surprised tone when he saw Carver, took the pipe slowly out of his mouth and lowered his shoes from the table edge.

Carver knocked the snow off his coat before speaking. Then he said: "You know where Gibson's Island is?" A. Johnson nodded, watching him with great, candid blue eyes. Carver took a five dollar bill from his wallet and tossed it to him. "They told me at the Point that the ferry doesn't run there after October. One of the men said you could take me over. The five's yours if you do."

A. Johnson got up, his face puzzled. He said earnestly, and his voice was almost a roar: "But t'ere iss nobody t'ere now, in vinter. You know t'at? T'e island iss what t'ey call a summer resort. In vinter t'ere iss—"

"Nobody there," Carver said. "I got good ears, Axel."

A. Johnson smiled. "It iss Adolph," he said. "T'ere iss no axles in a boathouse, yah?" He rumbled laughter. "But I tak' you if you wantta go."

Carver grinned sourly, crossed with him to a door in the rear. There was a long damp shed off this, that smelled heavily of wet wood, with tiers of rowboats lined on either side, and the varnished sides of canoes glinting in the light. From somewhere below came the faint slap-slap of water.

At the end the shed lay open to the Sound, and they walked from it to a narrow descending gangplank that ran to a floating dock. Carver stepped into a long hooded black motorboat at the side, while A. Johnson busied himself with ropes.

Presently the motor purred and they slid away from the dock; behind them on the black bosom of the water a wake of foam whiter than the snow stretched out from the stern in a fantastic V. Soon the lights on shore vanished under the soft, endless flakes; they sliced ahead faster, and spray stung Carver's cheek. He shivered closer into his coat, dug his hands deep into his pockets.

The Swede spun the wheel, and they veered. Carver could see nothing but the whiteness of snow, the blackness of water. The breeze here came fresher, icier, and they rolled slightly in long, gentle swells. After ten minutes something dark and shapeless loomed up on their right, and the Swede slowed, circled in with a soft grunt. In a moment the white bones of a pier jutted out before them, and, barely moving, they slid up to it.

After the boat was fast Carver got out and stamped his feet on the planks. He could see a vague shoulder of land beyond, with the faded green and yellow of summer bungalows bulking up on it like a stage scene backdropped to the snow.

"Yah," A. Johnson said, nodding his head. "Like I told you, mister. Vinter, t'en t'e people all go."

Carver grunted. "How big is it around?"

A. Johnson thought, stroking his chin. He said at last: "It might be two miles. T'ere is a road round from t'e pier. It goes past all t'e bungalows."

"I might be an hour," Carver answered. "Take it easy."

The Swede's face grew pleading, anxious. His heavy voice chased Carver down the planks. "That Sue faller, mister—Ed Vine—he talks on t'e radio tonight. Ay want to hear him. You coom back by t'en, eh?" He stared up from the boat like a huge child.

Carver growled: "Wait, squarehead," and went down the pier.

At its end he struck off to the left along the faint depression of a path. Bungalows were lined closely here along the water's edge, but he could see no lights, hear no sounds. He came to a blank space which in summer might have been the beach; the ground before him was even, white, unmarked, and on the farther side tree branches were laced blackly against the low solidity of the sky.

He plunged across this, shoes crunching through the hard surface of the snow. Past the trees on the far side he came out to another clump of houses, with the black sheet of the Sound below them, on the left. He had passed the first of these when he heard gun shots a distance ahead: three, perhaps four, the reports hammering over each other so fast that they were almost simultaneous.

Carver began to run. His shoe soles struck against the polished white sheen of ice and he lunged forward through the air, burying his shoulder in dry, cold particles of snow. Some of it sifted through his pocket flap to fingers numbed on the steel butt of his automatic. He cursed and got up, went forward more cautiously.

A second clump of bungalows swam up around him. But their windows were dark, and he could hear nothing. He passed the dirty, unlit window of a store and stopped suddenly on the ridge of a plank path. Sound came from somewhere, faint, fast, harmonized.

There was a small gray building on his left, isolated from the others. Its windows were dark as the rest. Carver crossed to it carefully and saw the reason. Steel shutters were locked over the panes, a dark shade pulled down across the glass panel of the front door. But the rhythm was plainer now: a saxophone's soft complaint, the muted syncopation of cornets.

He put his hand on the knob and pushed, found it smoothly turning, silent, and unlocked.

The room inside was warm, brightly lit, but there was nobody in it. From the console cabinet of a radio in the far corner dance music swirled out drowsily. There were many floor lamps around, and a gas flame glowed in the brick fireplace. It was very well furnished. Cigarette smoke was thin in the air.

Carver closed the door softly and remained a moment careful and rigid against it. The room ran from side to side of the bungalow; there were two doors at the back, ten feet apart. Both of these were closed.

He took the automatic out of his pocket and walked across a deep rug on the balls of his feet, choosing first the door on the left. It opened to darkness and a stale smell of fried steak; before him the metal hood of an electric range glittered whitely. He closed it, crossed to the other, listened with his ear against the wood, heard nothing and jerked it out with a twist of his hand.

On a big bed in the center of the room a pajamaed girl was sprawled face down. She didn't seem to hear the sound of the door; she was making a funny noise deep in her throat, and there was blood on the cloth twined roughly around her right arm. Carver walked lightfooted to the side of the bed and looked at her with uncertain eyes. He was bending down when a voice behind him said: "Don't move, Carver."

Carver let his body drop across the girl, seeing in the bureau mirror the man who stood in the doorway. In the narrow space at the footboard Carver turned, waving his automatic through the bars.

"Check!" he said.

The man was Jack Miller, whom Carver had seen in the hospital reception room. Miller made a tired movement with his shoulders as he came fully into the room. There was a roll of cotton draped over his left arm and a white basin in his right hand. His eyes were cold and luminous against the olive face.

He said: "You shouldn't have done that, Carver. Been stupid if I'd had a gun."

"Sure," Carver said. "Only I could see you in the bureau mirror. I don't scare yet at basins."

Miller lowered his head slightly and looked at the mirror, at Carver. He shrugged again.

"Sit down," Carver said. From the bed the girl stared at him wide eyed. He kept watching Miller and backed around to her, bent one leg and squatted down. "How's the wound? Bad?"

She said it wasn't. Her voice, underneath a surface steadiness, struggled for balance. It ran up in little ripples of shrill sound that bordered on hysteria. "But you mustn't think that—that he shot me." Her gaze flicked to Miller, away. "It came from outside, through the window. We—"

Even before the report it seemed to Carver that something like the blow of an iron bar smashed against his shoulder, numbing it, knocking him to the floor. The girl screamed, and Miller flung himself to the light switch on the wall. Then Carver whirled, sprawling his body out flat as darkness snapped over the room, while from the window in back orange spurts of flame stabbed viciously through a deafening ricochet of sound that bounced against his eardrums like the beat of hollow metal hammers.

Carver fired rapidly, wildly, as his body rolled over and over out of direct range. Crouched by the bureau and protected by it, a narrow streak of gray showed him the unshuttered half of the window. It was empty now, silent. He did not fire again.

After a minute Miller said: "I guess he's gone. That's what happened just before you came. The shutter hinges must have been sliced through so he could pull it loose."

There wasn't much strength in Carver's arm. He believed a shoulder bone had been touched. The numbness was wearing off and his whole arm was beginning to ache. When he spoke it was an effort to keep his voice steady. "Don't put on the light. Any way out here, from the back?"

"Through the kitchen," Miller answered. The door behind

him, pushed in, revealed the fainter darkness of the passage.

Carver said: "The girl better get out of this room," and waited until he heard the creaking of the bed springs. In the blackness he crawled after the dim colored splotch of her pajamas through the small lobby that connected, through another door, with the kitchen and bath.

Sheltered in this, he got up and felt his shoulder with the fingers of his left hand. It was still throbbing, but he could detect no blood. As he moved something wobbled under it—the thick leather holster he carried at his armpit. He prodded a forefinger through the hole in the side where the bullet had been deflected, grunted. The damn' thing felt like it had smashed his shoulder. He asked Miller: "Where's the door?"

Huddled behind the stove, the girl watched them as they went out. He kept Miller before him as they rounded the house, and still ahead as they followed footprints on the snow a hundred yards in the woods. The prints were wide apart and deep, as if the man was running. Carver stopped, heard nothing, and turned back.

The girl was waiting in the kitchen for them when they got back to the house. They went in together and Carver said: "You can put on the lights. What's the story, Miller?"

"I told you," the other man said. His black eyes were grim, worried; he was watching the girl. "Five minutes before you came someone fired through the living-room window. They shot Mary—the girl—in the arm. I ran outside but I couldn't see anyone. I was too excited to notice if the shutters in the bedroom were safe. Then I went in again and started to fix her arm, and when I came out of the bathroom you were there."

Carver said: "Where does Sutorius fit in?"

Miller's face got careful, vacant. "I didn't think he did."

Carver turned to the girl. "You're Mary Flood Harrington?"

She didn't answer him. She looked at Miller, terror in her face and something else that Carver couldn't fathom. After a while she said: "Yes," with difficulty. Carver closed the outer door and followed them through to the living-room. There he

looked at her wound and tightened the rough bandages that Miller had put on.

"That'll do till we get you to a doctor. Now get dressed, in the bathroom. We'll wait here."

She was gone five minutes. Jack Miller sat in a chair and put his elbows on his knees, his face between his hands. Once he looked up at Carver and started to speak. He was haggard now and not so handsome with the black gloss of his hair ruffled and the narrow mouth set deeply. He was very nervous; he kept rubbing the side of his cheek with one hand, pulling his lips in and out with the other.

"Give me a break on this, copper. I—"

"It's late," Carver said. "I'm cold. Speak your piece at the house."

Miller's mouth widened and turned down. He said very emphatically: "To hell with you." He lit a cigarette.

Music still droned from the radio in the far corner and Carver hummed the words until the girl came out again. As Miller took a coat from the closet Carver fixed cold eyes on it.

"Camel's hair," he said, pointing the gun. "That makes it bad. Frenchy De Villier's killer was dressed in one. You wouldn't have a revolver in one of the pockets?"

Miller shrugged, held up his arms to be searched. After a moment Carver stepped away from him and grunted: "All right. We're getting out of here. You first, Miller."

He followed them through the front door and turned off the light switch as he passed. Out on the path he put the automatic in his pocket, and kept his hand on the butt. Three paces behind Miller, he hummed a little going along; none of them spoke.

But when they came to the white ridge of the pier Carver cursed. The Swede was gone; the boat was gone. He looked out at the narrow stretch of Sound visible and let his lips droop ferociously. "Where in the hell—"

It was nine-thirty by his watch. When he saw that he whistled a long note, nodding his head. Ed Wynn, of course;

he came on at nine-thirty and stayed until ten. And the lousy squarehead wanted to—

“Let’s get back,” he said irritably, without explaining. “My ferry won’t come back until after ten. It’s too cold to wait here.”

They returned along the path, following their own tracks. Snow got inside Carver’s shoes and began to melt coldly on his socks. He thought a good deal about Adolph Johnson, not nice thoughts.

As they turned off the path up from Miller’s bungalow the girl stopped suddenly. Following her gaze, Carver saw a yellow streak of light staring out from the sagged shutter of the bedroom.

Miller turned, faced Carver. “The pop-pop boy,” he said. “He probably saw us go.”

Carver nodded, his lips thin. They crossed the porch, the girl behind them, and Carver tried the front door, opened it softly. He saw Abel J. Sutorius standing in the center of the room, his bad leg favored slightly, his long fingers caressing the sharp small angle of his chin. He was smiling, and at Carver’s approach he didn’t lose the smile.

“Ah,” he said, eyes darting to Miller. “Delightful, really, to see you here. I wasn’t sure whether my hint—”

Carver didn’t return the smile. He pulled the lawyer around to him and ran his fingers over the man’s slight form, down to the steel brace that held up his withered right leg.

Sutorius raised his brows. He murmured: “Forgive me if I don’t quite understand. You seem—”

Carver moved his eyes up at him. “I don’t get it,” he said, “and I don’t like things I don’t get, weasel. You gave me a tip this afternoon that the Harrington girl was here. Well, she was. Only I can’t figure why you spilled it. It didn’t mean money in your pocket.”

The lawyer’s thin smile, the mild gesture of his hand, were bland, self deprecating. “Perhaps it is too simple for your—shall we say unduly suspicious?—mind. I am, after all, a man of warm emotions, Carver; I am quite capable of doing the

little in my power to assist a grieving parent. This morning I phoned you, intending to tell what I knew, but unfortunately before you came De Villier—" He looked sad, spreading his hands.

Carver said nothing. He swung the automatic slightly on his index finger, pinching his nose, watching Sutorius with narrowed, puzzled eyes.

Sutorius began again: "And I can assure you—"

Carver growled: "Don't bother. I wouldn't believe you anyway. Someone slammed off at me with a .45 a half hour ago. He came damn' near blowing me apart. I think you are kind of lucky you aren't carrying a gun."

"Violence!" Sutorius protested, in a very loud voice. He moved closer to the window as he spoke, looking horrified. "My poor young friend your delusions run away with you if you seriously imagine that I would have anything to do with that." He stopped, gave an exclamation of pitying wonder, then added: "There is a limit, I remind you, to what a respectable professional man will endure at your hands."

His voice was rising higher, though his eyes were without anger; for an instant Carver was puzzled by that.

He went on: "There is a question, also, of your method of handling this case. When you keep this poor young girl away from her parent instead of restoring her to him as soon as humanly possible—" His shrug was nasty, a shade too elaborate, too careless; under cover of it his eyes darted to the clock.

Carver read it then. He cut in, sharp toned: "Get back from the window. Keep quiet. Sit in that chair facing the door and don't move until I tell you you can."

Sutorius' face got dark. He began: "I don't intend to—" Something in Carver's stare stopped his words; he wet his lips with his tongue, sat down.

Carver kept watching him. He told Miller: "You and the girl get back here, by me. Where anyone that comes in won't see you."

They stood by the wall, to the left of the door. The pleasant sheen was gone from the cripple's face. It was naked and

savage, the lips twisting silently. He started once to rise, then changed his mind, sat back. His hands were gripped very hard on the arms of the chair.

Three minutes went by—quietly, save for the quick, high breathing of the girl. At her side Carver began to worry at his lips. Sutorius expected someone, of course—someone he wanted to warn. Thus the loud voice, the stand near the window, where he had a better chance of being heard outside, the glance at the clock. If that someone had already heard. . . .

Even as he thought it a sliding, crisp sound came from outside, materialized into the brisk patter of steps on the porch. The door came back fast and hit Carver's shoulder; a big man shot past its end.

"Abel," he said, panting. "I got lost in those damn' woods. I was afraid to follow them too close and I missed the path. But the boat was gone when I got to the pier. So they must have—"

The cripple's frozen face stopped him. He stuttered: "What—what—" and turned his head. Carver saw the beefy red face of Al Tammany glaring at him.

He waved his automatic gently. "Don't let me stop you," he said.

Tammany swore, whirled about at Miller and the girl. He looked back to Sutorius and heavy bluster came into his voice and his eyes.

"What the hell's the matter with you? Point your gun at that thug and not at me. By God, Carver, you've acted the wise boy long enough. I'll have your badge off you by morning. I'll—"

Some of the redness went out of his cheeks when Carver stepped up to him, and he went a pace backward, against the wall, wriggled there as if only that stopped him from retreating further. Carver prodded the automatic into his belly and smiled; it wasn't a nice smile. When he took a .45 out of Tammany's coat pocket the smile died on his lips and left them narrow and white.

Tammany put his hands before him and pushed at the air. He said: "Don't—don't look that way, man. I—"

Carver lifted the gun and smelled it, watching him from under his brows. His lower jaw came out a little and he brought his own automatic up to Tammany's chin, breaking the flesh. The fat man wiped dazedly at the blood.

Carver said in a soft voice without moving his lips much: "You fired through the window at me a half hour ago. I want to know why, Tammany. Now."

Tammany didn't seem to feel the pain. His eyes, veering to Miller, were bewildered. "I thought it was—"

Sutorius snarled, came halfway out of his chair. Carver put one hand against his chest and flung him back.

"There's a part of it missing," he said. "You told me today that the girl was here, Sutorius. You knew it for three days but didn't spill until De Villier was dead. Then you tell me. Why? So I'd come up and get her and Miller, take them away. Then you decide maybe Miller knows too much about this missing piece; you figure it will be better to have him shut up too. He might spoil your act. So Tammany tries twice to get him but he has lousy eyes. The first time he wings the girl, the second time he mistakes me for Miller. You couldn't do the shooting yourself; with your game leg you couldn't get away fast enough."

Sutorius' eyes glittered like green glass. He snarled: "You're insane. This girl was kidnaped—there's her abductor. He was holding her here for ransom. And instead of taking them in you stand here questioning my partner and myself. I—"

"I'll take them in," Carver said. "I'll do it right now if you tell me what you came here for. That's the part that's missing. What the hell are you here for?"

Sutorius smiled viciously. He said: "Maybe the country air. This island isn't private. As a matter of fact, I came to see if it really was the Harrington girl. I thought perhaps you hadn't taken me seriously and I wanted to do what I could to help if it really was she."

Carver didn't seem to hear him. His brows were wrinkled in a thoughtful, cold frown.

"You wanted the place left empty, Sutorius; that's it," he said, "and the first gag you thought up was for me to take Miller and the girl away. I guess you were afraid to tackle him alone. Then you decided to kill him but Tammany spoiled that. He even messed things up when you sent him after us to make sure we left the island. When he saw us go off he was supposed to come back here and tell you. Then you'd hunt for the thing that's here—the thing you wanted so much you'd kill for it."

Tammany's glance, in panic, moved from Sutorius to Carver, to his partner again.

"Wait a minute. You're not getting it straight. Abel and I naturally wanted to free the girl, but we were afraid to speak while Frenchy was alive. I thought he was in on the snatch with Miller. Then—"

"Shut up," Carver said. He used the gun again on Tammany's chin, lightly but effectively. "So now I want to know what that thing was, Sutorius. You're going to tell me."

"You don't need me," the cripple sneered. "You're smart. You're Joe Carver."

Miller came out from the wall, frowning.

"The whole thing's a joke, Carver. There's nothing here. I used it because—" He glanced at the girl; very pale, she was watching him, her hands clasped together. He repeated: "There's nothing here. We had no visitors until tonight. De Villier came three days ago, but he only stayed an hour. He left me—" He stopped suddenly.

Sutorius looked up at him with nothing human in his eyes.

Carver asked: "What'd he leave?"

"Two bags." Miller's voice was slow, queer. He was turning slowly, facing Sutorius, his dark face like stone. "I didn't look in them; I don't know what's inside. They're in the closet. I'll get them now."

"Uh-huh," Carver said. "Miss Harrington gets them. You stay here."

Miller stopped, shrugged. The girl went across to the bedroom and vanished inside. When she came out she had a small traveling bag in each hand. Sutorius' breathing was heavy.

"All right," Carver said. "I guess we'll start. You first, Sutorius. Tammany carries the bags."

The cripple ran a hand over his withered leg, winced. "I presume I may adjust my brace," he said nastily. Under Carver's eyes he bent and gripped his pants leg.

Tammany's lips wobbled with a queer sound; there was perspiration on his forehead but he didn't seem to mind it. He kept watching Carver and there was terror in his face. Carver was amused. He said: "Take a good look at the bogey man, Al. When they open the bags at Headquarters I'll have you and Abel J.—"

The girl saw it first. She screamed. Whirling, Carver had no more warning than the split second glitter of steel as Sutorius' hand swept out from the brace.

Then he felt a shock, a hot flash streak across his left side like the burn of a steel rod at white heat. A moment later he opened his eyes. He was lying on the floor, but he hadn't remembered falling. His left side was powerless, and gunpowder smelled acrid in the room. Tammany, with his frightened face, was bending for the automatic Carver had taken from him and Carver's own gun, and Sutorius was by the wall, speaking to the others in a queer whine that didn't make words for Carver.

The room blurred in, ran together in Carver's mind like a dissolve shot in a film. It was very hard for him to think. He came unsteadily to his feet under Sutorius' gun, but his mind was queerly hazy.

He knew that when they left the house they turned left, away from the pier where the Swede would be waiting; he tried to tell Miller that but his voice only made mumbling noises. Later he fell—it seemed a long, long way—and his face touched snow; then he was walking again, and Miller's arm was holding him up.

It had stopped snowing, and the air was thin, cold, biting. Between gray clouds there were stars, small and bright. Presently his head grew clearer, though he felt very weak, and the pain from his side seemed unendurable. They were walking

through woods that thinned gradually to an open space of beach, and on the left the Sound lay huge, black and silent.

They crossed the beach, and Miller helped Carver up to a thin row of boards that led out across the water. The girl went first, they followed, and behind them came the sounds of Tammany's heavy tread, the uneven clip clop of the cripple, Sutorius. Then they stood huddled by one side, the girl and he, with Sutorius and Miller before them, and Tammany jumping down, crouched, from the dock's edge.

By the tip of the pier a big launch was moored, with a glassed cabin running forward. But Tammany had not gone to this; he had dropped down further back, and there came to Carver heavy sounds like the beating of a mallet on wood. Later Tammany crawled back to the planks, his eyes veering swiftly to Carver and the girl.

"Hell, Abel!" he said. "You can't do it. Not to the girl."

Sutorius cursed him, waved the gun. He said: "Be very careful, Miller. You're getting a chance. When I tell you, cut the rope."

Miller nodded. Sutorius watched him narrowly, holding the automatic. "The girl first," he said. Miller lowered her to the boat, and then he and Tammany helped Carver forward, lifted him in after her.

They were in a small rowboat, layered by dirty snow. But as Carver looked down the snow turned colorless, and specks of it floated around. The launch motor purred and they slid out from the dock, a rope from their bow stretched taut to the rail of the big craft.

The girl was holding Carver's arm, peering into his face. She breathed: "What are you going to do? They're not—"

Carver didn't answer her. He tried to drag himself forward to the rope that connected with the launch. As he crawled water swept coldly about his ankles, filled the bottom of their boat almost to the seats. The nose of it wobbled unsteadily from side to side.

When he got to the rope there was no strength in his left arm, not enough in his right.

He tried twice to pull them up to the launch hand over

hand, but his fingers slipped and his head jerked down against the gunwale. He lay there, panting. Behind them the dark spread of water grew wider, the shore line sank lower and lower into the gray sky. For a moment Sutorius smiled down at him from the launch, then turned and hobbled away.

Carver pulled again at the rope. It was like iron. Their boat was very deep in the water now; the tip of a wave slapped in over the wobbling side. Jack Miller came to the rail and bent from it, something that glittered extended in his hand. Carver's mouth twitched a little; he watched him, panting.

But Miller didn't use the knife. His body heaved once and their craft slid up to the launch. Then he bent and his arms went over Carver to the girl; her weight bore Carver down as she crept forward, and under the pressure water swirled up coldly to his armpits. He was struggling weakly, trying to grip the rail, when Miller caught him by the collar, drew him up and over, into the launch as easily as a child.

On a raised space before the cabin Tammany stood at the wheel, his back to them. Beside him Sutorius talked, pointing one hand forward. Tammany nodded and Sutorius stepped down to the deck, started to turn. He called: "All right, Miller. We're out far enough. Now you—"

He stopped very quietly, in the middle of a stride, staring at the girl; he didn't seem to see Carver behind Miller. In the faint light his narrow white face became wax. He said to Miller: "You fool," without much viciousness, without any force. "There's more than enough for you—for me, for Tammany. You can't hope to save her for ransom again. She knows too much. She dies with Carver."

Miller's body bent slightly, faced Sutorius, balanced and light on spread feet. He said softly—a kind of dreadful softness: "I told you back there it was a joke. It is, Sutorius. I didn't kidnap her. She's my wife."

Sutorius made a long sound with his lips. His face remained motionless and pale in the half light, the green surfaces of his eyes steady and depthless, but after the pause his arm rippled in to his body smooth and effortless and fast. Yet

Miller's movement was faster; he stepped in and his lean shoulders pivoted once, hard.

Carver heard the blow. Sutorius groaned, ~~not~~ loud. He fired once but he fired at the deck, as if he couldn't bring the gun up. Then Miller struck again; the tall slight body staggered back, balanced across the rail. It wobbled a little there, and after an instant, very gently, almost silently, slid out to the black water. Miller didn't try to catch him.

Tammany, at the wheel, made frightened sounds, words to which no one paid attention. Miller had picked up Sutorius' gun and covered the fat man.

Miller took over the wheel, throttled down to little more than drifting and told the others to get under shelter and fix up Carver.

In the cabin, after Carver's side had been bound up, Tammany talked freely enough. He was crying, his fat face distorted, like a baby's; he kept pulling at Carver's arm with pleading fingers.

"Sutorius got me into it," he said. "I didn't know he was going to kill De Villier until I got out in the hall and heard the shots; then I was in so deep that I couldn't back out. Later he said you'd seen me on the stairs, and that he'd tell you who it was if I didn't do what he said."

Carver nodded, tired. "It was a plant. I figured that. But how did he time things so nice?"

"He was a clever devil," Tammany shuddered. "He phoned you at the precinct just before De Villier came; then he told me to watch from the window, that you'd come straight across Fiftieth Street. When I saw you coming I nodded to him, and he told me to go over to the court house for some papers. I still didn't know what he meant to do—De Villier had just got there and they were talking about the tax case.

"Then, when I got halfway down the hall I heard the shots—I knew then what they meant, why he asked me to lock the door as I left. I didn't dare go back, but I should have. I just walked downstairs and out of the building on the Forty-ninth Street side. When he told me that you'd

seen me leaving, and that you'd probably recognize my coat if he told you who it was, I was afraid to say anything; I had to do everything he wanted. God knows I didn't want to shoot Miller or the girl or you; but that devil—" He shuddered again.

Carver grunted. "He pulled it smart. With the door locked and the key gone, no one would figure he'd shot De Villier—it didn't occur to me that he might have had someone lock it for him. That was the angle of the story that didn't fit. He kept the gun in his brace, of course, like he did here; nobody would look there and he had a perfect story."

There was a bottle of Scotch on the table and Carver took a long drink. Then his glance moved down to the two traveling bags at his feet, packed with neat stacks of currency row on row. "How'd he know De Villier had all this money?"

"We defended Frenchy on those income tax charges," Tammany answered. "He'd been our client for years, and Sutorius had been warning him not to keep books or bank his earnings. He said the government would get after the boys on tax charges sooner or later. That was the reason he gave why Frenchy should keep all his earnings in cash, on him; maybe he had this plan in his mind all the time.

"After the case fell through—since nobody could prove where Frenchy's assets were—he told De Villier that the Federal men were watching him, and that he'd better put the cash some place where they wouldn't search. He went with Frenchy while he took the bags to Miller's place. Then things started."

The girl nodded. "They came up to us three days ago. I didn't want anyone to see me, so I kept in the bedroom, but he must have had a glimpse of me some way. But Jack closed the door quick and I suppose with all the paper talk he thought that I'd been kidnaped."

"Who didn't?" Carver growled. "Your father know you're married?"

"Yes." Her chin came up; her eyes flamed. "I met Jack three months ago when he was dancing at Harry Caddis' club. I think I fell in love with him the first moment. Last

week we got married. I knew father would raise an awful row so I didn't tell him until it was done. Then father told me I'd disgraced the family, things like that. I told him that he needn't worry, that nobody would ever know we were married. It was foolish, of course, but he made me terribly angry. So I didn't tell any of my friends, and Jack kept it quiet, too. We came up here where we could be alone, where there'd be no one to bother us."

Carver grinned up at her. "You should be spanked," he said. "Happy?"

"Terribly," she smiled. "Jack never had a chance—I'm going to see that he gets one now. Oh, he isn't bad, Mr. Carver; it was only that money was so easy to make in bootlegging, and so hard to get other ways. But he had broken with Frenchy even before I met him; he didn't want to take the bags from him that day he came up to the bungalow until Frenchy almost begged him. He said he was in terrible trouble."

Carver sighed. "You gave me enough of that when your father wouldn't say where you'd gone or deny what some smart reporter doped out that you'd been kidnaped and that he was negotiating privately with the ransom gang. We were all suckers enough to believe it, even Sutorius."

He took another drink of the Scotch and went on: "It was lucky for us that he did. He thought things out smart all through but he slipped on that and he was afraid to put Miller in the boat with us because he had only one gun, and he figured if the two of us rushed him and Tammany one of us might get to him. He didn't, of course, have to be afraid of Miller squealing, since he figured Jack would have to keep quiet to save his own hide. The plan was to cut the rope when we were out far enough, and let us sink. If our bodies were ever found it would look like we'd swamped escaping from the kidnapers. That would let him out clear."

Mary Miller got up, smiling at him. "Jack wanted to tell you about us back there, but I think he decided to wait—and then things happened. When they put us in the boat I was a little afraid, but I knew Jack would help us the first chance he

got. Then when the water got so high—" She shivered slightly.


"It got higher for Sutorius," Carver said. He pulled a minute, reflectively, on his long nose. "Things work out funny. A big dumb Swede he never heard of wanted to listen to Ed Wynn. That was the only thing he didn't figure."

Mary Miller smiled. She held out her finger and Carver saw the wedding ring.

"That too," he said, grinning back at her.

Kick - Back*

ED LYBECK

 FRANCIS ST. XAVIER HARRIGAN—STAR REPORTER, DEADLY gunman, from earlier occupation—lollled at his desk in the *Leader* office and slept dull care away.

The telephone snarled in his ear. Harrigan shook his head a little, wet dry lips with the tip of his tongue and settled deeper into the chair.

The telephone continued to ring. Harrigan roused, shoved his hat on the back of his neck and cursed the newspaper business. He picked up the receiver; said ironically: "Well, who's dead now?"

A man's voice, very low, said: "Nobody—yet!"

The fog of sleep lifted from Harrigan's brain. There was something personal in that crack. He asked: "Why—is somebody going to be?"

The same voice, thick and muffled, came again. "That's liable to be up to you, brother. It's your move. Frank Crocker's gunnin' for you!"

Harrigan came upright in his chair. The ends of his mustache came down in a sneer. Frank Crocker gunning for him? Good; he had a long score to settle with rats of the Crocker breed! Questions rattled in his throat. "Where is he? And who are you?"

The voice answered, "He's in the Myer Building. 1413, I think. You better duck. You asked for it in this morning's

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paper an' don't be surprised if you get it. Me—I'm just a friend. Thought I'd tip you off."

Harrigan's lips twisted. He said: "Thanks, friend; but you're wasting your time. You better warn Crocker. If that louse makes a play for me, he'll get hit with Chicago lightning!"

"Yeah!" There was a sneer in the muffled tone. "That kid, Sullivan, was a wiseguy too, an' look what happened to him!" The receiver clicked sharply.

Harrigan cursed and left the office in nothing flat.

† †

High up in the Myer Building, Frank Crocker quivered in the throes of rage. His hundred and eighty pounds were a bundle of raw nerves. He cursed and was silent by turns. The most important play of his career was in danger of going wrong.

Spread on the desk in front of him lay the morning's *Leader*. Black headlines glared up at him. For perhaps the twentieth time, he re-read them. "*Political Conspiracy Exposed. Kane-Crocker Tie-Up Hinted. Racketeer May Be Backing Reform Candidate.*"

A flood of obscenities burst from his lips anew and his dark eyes flashed again to the by-line. "*By F. St. X. Harrigan, Leader Staff Correspondent.*" With passionate earnestness, he consigned Frank Harrigan to the lowest pit of hell.

A door at the end of the room opened and Icky Yeager, Frank Crocker's chief of strafe, came in.

They presented a sinister picture as they stood beside the desk. The flat, un-muscled tautness of Icky Yeager was the tautness of a coiled snake; the blue sheen of Frank Crocker's close-shaven jowl was the dull blue of an automatic pistol. One short and stocky, the other thin and anemic, they had a quality in common—both radiated danger.

Icky Yeager dropped words into the silence. "How much d'you figure this Harrigan knows?"

"How the hell do I know?" snapped the politician. "That's

what I got to find out! An' I can't wait to read it in the paper, either!"

The gunman's eyes were cold and hard. He rubbed his right hand gently over his left lapel. He said significantly: "When he comes in we'll find out what he knows!"

Frank Crocker stopped him with raised hand. "Not that way," he said quickly. "I don't want trouble if I can side-step it. It's damn' close to election an' dead men don't make good campaign-posters."

"Then, how—"

The politician made a sweeping gesture of impatience. "Don't do so damn' much worryin'," he growled. "I gotta figure out the play. Get outside and let me think!"

Icky Yeager shrugged and went out through the door to the outer office. Frank Crocker sat down at the desk, put his mind on his problem, his elbows on the *Leader* and began to stroke his hair.

Fourteen floors below him, Eighth Avenue seethed and swirled. Through the high windows of his office-apartment, the distant Hudson gleamed coldly. Across the flat mahogany desk, "Ape" Scalisi—half an inch from eyebrow to hair-line, half a yard around the biceps—was shoving two closely figured ledger sheets. He was saying: "Here's the latest figgers on the Kane campaign dough, Boss. Yeager brung 'em in but he forgot to give 'em to you. Too excited over that damn' rat down to the *Leader*!"

To none of this, Frank Crocker paid any attention. His wide-set, level eyes stared into space. His broad forehead was furrowed and lined. His mane of very black hair gleamed like burnished ebony from the constant passing of his hand over it.

Ape Scalisi hesitated; asked: "Anythin' you want, Boss?" waited a moment and went back into the outer office, closing the door behind him.

Frank Crocker heeded neither question nor movement. He wrestled with his problem. And Crocker was a good wrestler. At least, he had been. Prize-fighter and bartender, too. And high-class procurer.

A guy like that is a natural. His course is plainly marked. Frank Crocker took to politics like a Kerry man to a brick.

Not that he ran for office. Hell, no! Frank Crocker cared nothing for who made the city's laws; he wanted to make its law-makers. He had money, which he spent; underworld connections, which he used; a golden smile that shone over everything.

From racketeer to political power is a short step anywhere. Frank Crocker's case was no exception. His name began to mean something. Politicians bowed to him; police-sergeants waved at him; newspapers gave him feature stories. But Frank Crocker wasn't satisfied.

He was broad without being squat and heavily muscled without being beefy. He had a jaw that was built along the delicate lines of the front end of a steam-roller and he had one great ambition: To control the office of Mayor of the City of New York. He wasn't so far away!

And then the bottom fell out of the bag.

Front-page scandals had leaked. Civic corruption had been exposed. John Voter was running a temperature. The political line-up changed over-night. A reform ticket came into the field.

Reform tickets are like Broadway tryouts. They'll give the public a good run for somebody else's money.

Frank Crocker saw the chance of a life-time. Much money appeared from nowhere. The Reform Ticket began to boom. Monster rallies were held. John Voter was shouting: "Down with Corruption!"

The ticket was, in the main, a good one. The newspapers picked it up and shoved it along. More money came and, with it, more publicity. A wave of hysteria swept the city. Father Knickerbocker's house-cleaning was on.

And back of Ezra Kane, candidate for President of the Board of Aldermen, stood Frank Crocker—anonymous as a selling-plater—a money-bag in each hand.

The situation shaped beautifully. The fatal Tuesday was very close. The newspapers were solid in support and the Re-

form Ticket was even money. No one suspected phenagling. Frank Crocker was getting along.

And then, with election a week away, Harrigan of the *Leader* broke a headline over his skull.

It was a stunning wallop, but Frank Crocker had ridden many a K. O. punch. He leaned his elbows on the desk, muttered: "This guy will have to be taken care of!" and began to stroke his sable mane.

His elbows rumpled paper. He looked down. His darkly frowning eyes fell on the two neatly figured sheets of the expenditures for Ezra Kane's campaign. They totaled a staggering sum but he scarcely glanced at it. He took a fountain pen from his vest pocket, scrawled: "O.K. Frank Crocker," across the lower right-hand corner of each sheet; said, "Harrigan, eh!" and stabbed a savage period.

He laid the okayed accounts at one side of the desk, folded the *Leader* over them and placed a paperweight on everything. He thought: "It's damn' close to election to knock him off, but—"

He looked up suddenly as the knob to the door of the outer office was tried. Came a shout—the sound of running feet—the thud of a falling body. The stillness was shattered by a great roar of pain and rage.

Frank Crocker left his chair like Dempsey used to leave his corner.

He flung open the door to the outer office. There Harrigan, the despised reporter, and Ape Scalisi were engaged in a merry-go-round.

There was a growing lump on Scalisi's bullet-head where Harrigan's cane might have contacted; but right now Harrigan was fast becoming the underdog. Long, tenuous arms were round him. His arms were pinned to his sides. A huge man fumbled for his throat.

Harrigan writhed and gasped for breath. He could not free his arms. He twisted his head sidewise. A thumb brushed across his parted lips. He opened his mouth and let the

thumb come in. Then his jaws locked like the leaves of a steel trap.

Scalisi roared like a wounded bull. The fingers of his right hand clawed at Harrigan's eyes. His left arm circled the reporter's waist in a bone-crushing grip. Harrigan was bent backward to the breaking point. His ribs caved, his knees buckled, black spots danced before his eyes.

Then the voice of Frank Crocker cried: "Break! Break! What the hell is this, anyway!"

† † †

Harrigan had Dante stopped. He'd go to hell for a story, too—and get back in time for the late edition. He hunted headlines and the underworld was his hunting ground. Yeggs and racketeers were his meat; and crooked politicians. He pursued and they dodged and sometimes they sniped at him from ambush. It was a sort of a game and Harrigan didn't mind—until they murdered Billy Sullivan.

Sullivan'd been a nice kid. Harrigan had liked him a lot; had taken him under his wing and practically adopted him. But the kid had dug up a big killing and the rats had bumped him off. And tried to frame him.

Harrigan had smashed the frame; more, he'd gotten the kid's killer. But that hadn't cleared the slate. The bitterness remained. No longer was "getting the news" an exciting game between crooks and himself. It was now a battle in deadly earnest with Harrigan striving to lay gangdom bare—to expose every crooked move to the newspaper-reading public.

And now he had come to the front line trenches again, and moved over No Man's Land into enemy territory.

Frank Crocker sat down at his desk and crossed his legs. Ape Scalisi went out and shut the door. Harrigan drew a handkerchief from his breast-pocket and dabbed at a bloodied lip. He said: "Good bodyguard, Scalisi. But he takes his work too seriously."

Frank Crocker lit a black cigar and spoke between the

puffs: "You got plenty moxie to come bustin' in here like this."

"Why?" Harrigan's eyes were innocent. "You wanted to see me, didn't you?"

Frank Crocker took the cigar from his mouth; asked in a surprised tone: "What makes you think that?"

Harrigan shrugged; asked: "What'd you have Yeager call me for and tell me where you were if you didn't want to see me?"

Frank Crocker's lips were hard and straight. He said something under his breath.

Harrigan laughed, dabbed at his lips with his handkerchief, replaced it; said: "Don't give Icky too much hell about this. I was just guessing. And you've confirmed the guess."

Frank Crocker's eyes reflected a savage humor. He hurled the cigar into a brass cuspidor, sat up straight at the desk; said through tight lips: "Listen here. You're just too damned clever to live! But I can't be havin' trouble now. It's too close to election. If you'll play dead an' keep your nose clean till the votes are counted, I'll cut you in for five grand."

Harrigan grinned. "You throw your dough around like a Prohi on a party. The reform-racket must be a money-maker."

Frank Crocker rasped: "I knew damn' well you'd chisel for more. But you won't get it! Five grand is tops. It's a lot o' dough for a minor political office."

Harrigan's eyes toyed with the angry figure before him. "Minor political office," he mimicked. His tone was suddenly crisp. "What the hell d'you mean—minor? You're running Kane for President of the Board, aren't you? Well, if something should happen—and something will!—to the duly elected mayor of this fair city, who'd be mayor, huh? Right; the President of the Board of Aldermen! And Frank Crocker'd own him! Pretty sweet, eh?"

Crocker's heavy face was impassive. His lips were stiff. His eyes were disks of flint. His voice grated: "I'm givin' your lousy, snoopin' hide a break. You can take it or leave it!"

Harrigan smiled; said softly: "*Reporter Scorns Bribe. Racketeer's Power Broken.* What a lead for the early edition!"

Frank Crocker's mask gave way. His mouth was an ugly gash. He snarled: "There's no early edition in hell!" He jabbed a button; jabbed again.

The door to the outer office opened and Ape Scalisi came in. The door at the end of the room flew back and Icky Yeager stood on the threshold. Both held leveled guns.

Harrigan's face was hard as granite. He bit his wounded lip. The blood began to flow afresh. He said: "Stuck-o!"

Frank Crocker leaned back in his chair and sneered. "I gave you a break an' you muffed it. You can have it now—in the neck!" The gunners started forward.

Blood oozed down over Harrigan's chin. He put his hand to his breast-pocket slowly. The advancing gunmen tensed. A hammer went back with a metallic click. He drew out the handkerchief and swabbed at his lip.

He bent close to Frank Crocker. His voice was low and cold. "It's too close to election for gunplay, you fool!"

"I know," said Crocker, "but it's easier to fight fancy than fact. Pick your spot, wiseguy!"

There was a pressure on Harrigan's kidneys. Icky Yeager, dapper and dangerous, spoke: "Oke, brother. Loft 'em. High!"

Frank Crocker, dark eyes locked with the reporter's gray ones, leaned back in his chair and watched Harrigan replace his bloody handkerchief. Harrigan's voice was bantering. "Will you have it here or in Mineola?"

Frank Crocker gasped and went suddenly rigid.

Harrigan's hand had dug deep in his breast-pocket; passed through a cunningly split seam to the gun in his shoulder-holster. A blue steel .45 automatic was level. Frank Crocker was staring straight up Death Alley.

He recoiled, gasped: "Wait—"

Icky Yeager's gun bored into Harrigan's back. Ape Scalisi was two feet away to the left. Harrigan held Frank Crocker with an almost hypnotic gaze.

The politician was stiff as a corpse. The barrel of the automatic nuzzled into his neck. Harrigan's words were like tin-

klings, musical notes running the blazing scale of death. "We're gambling for real stakes now, Crocker! And it'll be damned close! Go ahead!—deal!"

Frank Crocker's face was a dirty gray. He gagged convulsively; said nothing.

At Harrigan's left, Ape Scalisi bent at the knees and flexed one long arm at his side. At Harrigan's right, a reaching arm pressed lightly against him as Icky Yeager swung round to break his wrist. The steel spring gave a little as Harrigan's finger went tight on the trigger. By —! he wouldn't go out alone!

In front of him, Frank Crocker came out of his nearly fatal trance. "Don't!" he cried in a strangled tone. "Lay off, you dummies! Down rods!"

Scalisi and Yeager drew back and lowered their guns. Harrigan straightened and laughed—a high-pitched, unnatural laugh. Frank Crocker went limp in his chair and the sweat streamed off his face. The portals of death had gaped.

Harrigan stepped slowly around Frank Crocker. He gestured with the gun. "Come on," he said. "Let's go. I want to get out of here."

Crocker wiped sweat from his forehead. "Go on," he said. "Nobody's stopping you."

Harrigan grinned a twisted grin. "Maybe not, but you're coming out to the elevators with me." He took the folded *Leader* from Crocker's desk, covered his gun-hand with it and prodded the political boss to his feet. He said: "I wouldn't trust you as far as Primo Carnera sways in the breezes. Come on!"

At the elevators, he rang the bell, watched Frank Crocker turn and re-enter the office. He crushed the *Leader* in his hand and took the stairs, half a landing at a jump.

In the office, Ape Scalisi opened and shut tremendous hands. The thumbs were almost as long as the fingers. He asked: "Will we go get 'im, Boss?"

Frank Crocker snapped: "Certainly; go get him!" He turned to the desk, grew suddenly pale; gasped: "The bastard!"

Scalisi and Yeager wheeled in their tracks; asked simultaneously: "Whatsa matter, Boss?"

"Matter!" roared Frank Crocker. "Matter? Damn his stink-in' soul, he's got the Kane campaign account! An' I okayed and signed it! Come on; quick!"

† † † †

Harrigan came into Forty-third Street like a breeze from a swinging door. He knew that pursuit would follow fast but a minute's start was enough. Once in that tangle of traffic, he'd be as safe as the gold reserve. He saw a taxi, beckoned to it; snapped: "Leader Square, fast!" and settled back to light a cigarette.

The cigarette-case had a mirror set in its cover. In the mirror, Harrigan caught a glimpse, through the side window, of three men boiling into Forty-third Street from the lobby of the Myer Building.

Harrigan thought: "Damn' quick work!" and watched them climb into a car. He watched them gesticulating; knew that they had seen him. In every direction, a wall of moving traffic stretched. There was no chance to slip away unnoticed.

He watched through the mirror as they closed in, then rapped on the glass and said to the driver: "See that Duplex behind us?"

The driver looked in his mirror and nodded.

Harrigan barked: "Lose it!"

The driver nodded easily and wheeled into the thickest of the traffic, looking for a break. He got it, shot through a momentary opening and was off, zigzagging between the El pillars. He turned left—through a one-way street—right, through a shopping center; hit the inside lane of fast traffic, stepped the gas down to the floor and slid past a cop in the act of raising his hand to halt the flow of vehicles. He saw an opening, passed a trolley on the wrong side, turned right again and swung into the motor-maze of one of New York's most heavily trafficked arteries. The Duplex was right behind.

The driver—his name on the card was Marx—looked in

the mirror, grunted; said: "He don't lose so easy, does he?"

Harrigan, leaning forward and bending low in the seat, spoke to the back of the driver's head. "A double-sawbuck if you get to Leader Square without him."

Chauffeur Marx turned his head a little, cast a swift glance of appraisal over his fare; asked cautiously: "You said a *double* sawbuck, mister?"

"Right! Can you do it?"

The driver's answer was a chuckle. He straightened behind the wheel and pulled his cap over his eyes. "For twenty bucks, mister, I could lose a Mack truck on a miniature golf course!"

The hide-and-go-seek was on. It was a beautiful game. Both men had apparently been born with steering wheels in their hands. They beat lights, timed signals, judged the gestures of the traffic cops with the accuracy of striking snakes. They were Wizards of the Wheel—Masters of the Machine—typical New York taxi drivers.

For twenty blocks, they dived and dodged and neither gained an inch. Harrigan was crouched low in the seat lest Frank Crocker, growing desperate, should order Icky Yeager to shoot. Then at Twenty-fourth Street, Harrigan's driver swung into a lane between parallel lines of traffic. The Duplex, with nowhere else to go, followed him in. The taxi began to slow—to diminish speed—to loaf along in the ebb of the traffic. Harrigan looked up in alarm. His hand went inside his coat.

The Twenty-third Street light was dying. The taxi crawled on. Horns began to blow, brakes squealed, drivers cursed. The Duplex nosed out to come alongside. Harrigan drew his gun. The light went red.

The traffic officer's whistle shrilled. Marx flashed his stop-light, slid gently over the cross-walk and came to an abrupt halt in the path of the crosstown traffic.

The policeman's face was a classic in disgust. He roared: "Hey, there! Where d'ye think y'are, you dimwit! Get back!"

But the Duplex had blocked the gap. There was no space to retreat. The crosstown traffic was closing in. The taxi had

several cars blanketed. The air quivered with the raucous sound of horns.

The officer ground his teeth. He was fed up with bone-head drivers. His voice was hoarse; his face was red. He cried: "You damned mopey half-wit! I'll give you a ticket to Bellevue!" He started towards the taxi. A horn blared in back of him. He jumped; grated: "My God! if I only had time!"

He halted the traffic momentarily; roared: "Get out o' here, you sleepy dope, before I lose me temper!" He waved the taxi through. The driver grinned; Harrigan sighed; the cross-town traffic closed behind them like a wave.

At Twenty-second, Marx swung west on an east-bound street, went twenty feet, swung completely around in a maze of cursing drivers and headed back into the avenue from which he had come.

Harrigan clenched his fists and swore. "What a dumb play! You lost all you gained, you wooden-head!"

"Yeah?" said the driver. "Look behind you."

Harrigan looked. The Duplex was gone.

The driver grinned at his puzzlement. "That's the break I wanted," he explained. "A block's lee-way an' a right turn. Soon's I turned, he did—goin' over to cut me off. I'll drift along a few blocks an' swing crosstown. By that time, he'll be comin' back to look for me. I'll see 'im no more today."

"Smart boy!" said Harrigan. "That rates an extra ten."

The cabby grinned. "Ride often, Mister!" he said.

The taxi drifted on. Three blocks went past. Harrigan took his hand away from his gun, settled back in the seat, sighed—and went out like a match in the wind.

† † † † †

Harrigan lay in the street with his back to an El pillar. He spit out a mouthful of blood and began to sit up and take notice.

A small crowd had already gathered and more people were adding themselves to it. Between the curb and the trolley-tracks, the taxi leaned drunkenly on its nose. It was spewing

oil and steaming water. The big Duplex, sweeping in from Eighteenth Street, had cut it almost in half.

A large policeman, note-book and pencil in hand, was barging up, asking questions as he came. A muscular, well-set-up man with a mane of very black hair moved close to him and spoke in low tones. He pulled the engraved card of a political club from his pocket and showed it to the policeman. He said:

"I am Frank Crocker, Officer, and I feel that this crash is largely my fault. I told my driver to hurry and this is the result. I feel responsible for the safety of these men and I want to get them to a hospital as quickly as possible so that they can get medical aid without delay. The car I was riding in is in good condition and my driver is not hurt. Can you oblige me by letting me take them, right away?"

The cop twisted the pasteboard in his fingers. He knew the name—who didn't? Knew that it was synonymous with great political power. He cleared his throat nervously. He was in a tough spot. He had his duty to do and he wanted to do it—but not in Staten Island. He took his courage in both hands; said hesitantly: "Why—yes—Mr. Crocker, but—er—my report—"

Frank Crocker stopped him with raised hand. "Certainly, Officer; certainly! Make out your report in the usual way, by all means! You may report me as responsible for the entire occurrence. All I want is permission to take these unconscious men to a hospital without having to wait for an ambulance. I shall consider it a great favor, Officer."

The officer sighed and looked relieved. Failure to call an ambulance would be—at worst—a minor irregularity. He said: "Okay, Mr. Crocker. That'll be fine," and turned again to his note-book.

Harrigan, collecting his scattered wits with an effort, began to realize that all was far from fine. He put a hand against the El pillar, started to raise himself; cried: "Hey! Just a—"

Ape Scalisi, above and behind him, spread an overcoat in protective fashion and parted his hair with the butt of a .38.

Harrigan sighed a little and went into the clear without a murmur.

A man in a brown top-coat, standing on the other side of the pillar, had a clear view. His eyes widened. Color flooded his face. He took a sudden step forward and cried: "Officer! Officer! I saw—"

Icky Yeager, cool and deadly, fell negligently into step with him. His right hand was in his top-coat pocket and the pocket flap was slightly raised. From under it, a blue-steel, octagonal barrel peered questioningly into the world.

The officer, pencil poised, turned quickly about. "Well," he asked: "What did you see?"

The indignant citizen halted in mid-stride. The hole in that blue-steel barrel was staring him straight in the eye. The color drained from his face as suddenly as it had come. He gulped, wet parched lips, made aimless gestures with his hands. High resolve fell from him. He mumbled: "I saw the accident, Officer."

The police sighed and shook his head. He said, ironically: "You an' the other six million!" and turned again to his notes.

Frank Crocker was saying: "Let's not waste any more time, Officer. These men may be seriously injured."

"Okay, Mr. Crocker," said the cop, and started towards the taxi. Frank Crocker beckoned with raised finger.

Ape Scalisi caught the sign. He picked Harrigan up like a bag of meal and slammed him into the Duplex. He and the big policeman took the unconscious Marx from behind the wheel of the wrecked taxi. Frank Crocker was going over the cab, picking up scattered articles.

The cop stepped into the Duplex, laid Marx's shoulders on the rear seat, and started to back out on the far side. The door slammed behind him. A sharp object jabbed him at the waistline. Icky Yeager's voice was low in his ear: "No reportin' for you, Cull! We're takin' you along."

Frank Crocker, shutting his own door, murmured: "If you don't mind."

Ape Scalisi, leaning back through the front window, held

a Colt .38 very low. He said: "He damn' well better mind!"
The Duplex, leaking a little oil, roared crosstown.

† † † † † †

Harrigan came out of the ether by sections. He was damnable cold and he creaked all over. The back of his head was the worst. It was noisier than an Elks' clambake.

He tried to put his hands to his head—discovered that he couldn't; tried to sit up—found he couldn't do that either. He started to swear—got only bubbling noises. He was bound—hand and foot—and gagged. He thought: "I can still see; wonder how they overlooked that," and began to take stock of his surroundings.

He was stretched on a low, hard cot, almost under a window. The cot was pushed close to the wall. At the bottom of the window was a partly open transom. A cold wind blew in.

Late sunlight glinted across the transom, making its lower face a reflector. A broad street—high-stooped houses—trolley-tracks—automobiles—going in both directions. Yet the picture in the glass was a silent one. Now and then, a horn blared faintly; a street-car went past with scarcely a sound; the unceasing flow of human voices was not to be heard at all.

Harrigan, his numbed brain awakening, strained his ears to catch the familiar noises. He couldn't be far above the street; why didn't the street-sounds come to his ears? The explanation burst on him suddenly. He was in a sound-proof room. That was why the transom was open; they didn't want him to smother! He thought: "They're damned careful to keep me alive. I must be worth something to 'em."

He twisted his head towards the interior of the room and saw a startling picture. On the floor, in the corner opposite the couch, a big man lay trussed and gagged. A man as tall as himself and half again as heavy. A man in blue clothes and brass buttons. A cop! The cop with the pencil and note-book!

He was straining futilely at the ropes; trying to free himself. His neck was swollen and puffed. His face was purplish. His eyes were wide and staring. Harrigan choked with sardonic laughter. That was the why of the gag. They didn't

want him to teach any tricks to the broken Arm of the Law.

His laughter ceased abruptly and his eyes narrowed in thought. Why was he still alive? Why were they taking precautions to keep him alive? The reason was obvious. They wanted something from him. The answer to some question; an idea of how much he knew; the names of other people who might be in the know. And Harrigan knew Frank Crocker's methods. Whatever the question was, they'd promise him freedom for his answer and, once that answer was given, a gun would roar and the name of Francis St. Xavier Harrigan would be added to the roll of New York's murder mysteries!

Harrigan bit savagely into the gag. They had him and they had him right. His only chance lay in keeping a tight mouth. And it mightn't be so easy!

Somewhere behind him, a key went into a lock. A door opened and shut again. Feet thumped on the floor. Into his range of vision came Frank Crocker—Ape Scalisi—Icky Yeager.

The three regarded the trussed-up policeman. Ape Scalisi, chewing tobacco, curved a brownish stream into the officer's purple face. Icky Yeager grinned. Frank Crocker said: "Save some. We got another customer over here." They turned to Harrigan.

Frank Crocker took a stand beside the couch. Icky Yeager sat down on the foot of it and took a pistol from his pocket. Ape Scalisi ripped off the gag. Frank Crocker said: "Now don't get foolish an' start lettin' out a yawp. That's what Icky's here for. You know what Icky can do with a gun."

Harrigan cleared his throat and told him exactly what he could do with it.

Frank Crocker sneered. "Still wise-crackin', eh? Well, we'll take care o' that, too." He stepped closer, bent forward a little and asked: "Where's the Kane account?"

Harrigan's heart bounded. They hadn't found the account. And that account was mighty important. If he could stall 'em, he might get a break. He asked: "What's the terms? What do I get if I tell?"

Frank Crocker's face was wooden. He said: "If you turn

up that expense account an' lay off till after election, I'll call it quits an' let you off."

Sincerity was in his voice; gravity was in his eyes; his entire demeanor was businesslike. It was a proposal that might have tempted a less experienced man, but Harrigan *knew*—knew that he knew too much to be freed; knew that, once he opened his mouth, he'd land on a Queensborough dump; knew that this was a game of Questions and Answers with blazing death as the stake. He asked: "What makes you so sure that I know where it is?"

Frank Crocker grimaced. "You stole it off my desk an' you didn't have a chance to pass it. It wasn't in the taxi an' it isn't on you now. I'm bein' big-hearted; givin' you a chance for your life. Where is it?"

A chance for his life! Harrigan's chuckle was grim as the death he expected. He said: "You sound like a Headquarters dick. All you need is the badge."

"Where's that account?"

"Getting ready for the paper, by this time."

"Ixnay. I had a man down there. They're not gettin' out an extra an' they don't know anythin'. You might as well come clean; run-arounds ain't stickin' today."

Harrigan smiled his sweetest. "Soon's we lost you for a few blocks, I slipped it into a stamped envelope I always carry, addressed to Roger Conwell, 'Personal-Important,' with a note to hold it until I showed up. Boy I tossed it to stuck it in a mail-box. Course they don't know anything at the office—yet."

Harrigan, watching intently, saw Yeager start and even Ape Scalisi frown. But Frank Crocker's eyes bored into his. Harrigan read their message. If it was true Crocker couldn't help himself; if it was a bluff, he'd call it.

"For the last time—what'd you do with that expense account?"

"If what I told you isn't true," said Harrigan, "then I ate it."

The politician's lips curved down. His voice had the edge

of a razor-blade. "Not a bad idea," he said. "We'll have a look. Go get 'im, Wop!"

Ape Scalisi leaped forward. He bent over the reporter, ripped open vest and shirt, stripped underwear down with a sweep of a ham-like hand—laid Harrigan bare to the waist. He pulled out a queer-looking stubby pistol with a silencer on the barrel, clicked it open, slipped in a heavy, slug-less cartridge and looked at Frank Crocker.

The politician was looking at Harrigan. Eyes and voice were level and cold. "It takes a long time to kill a man with blank cartridges—an' that's how I'm gonna have Scalisi kill you! He's gonna blast away till you talk; make a livin', breathin' hamburg outa you till you open up! You might as well know the truth: I'm gonna croak you anyway, but it's up to you how I do it. You can have your choice; spill your guts or let Scalisi spill 'em for you!" He turned to the Ape. "Get set, Wop. We'll start in the belly!"

Ape Scalisi muttered: "Suits me!" and jabbed Harrigan savagely in the wind. Harrigan gagged.

Frank Crocker closed the transom, pulled down the shade and switched on the light. He asked quietly: "Gonna talk?"

Harrigan set his teeth. He didn't know whether he could go through with the play or not. The odds were heavy against him but life is ever sweet. He didn't want to be found in a ditch. He gasped for breath; said: "Go to hell!"

Frank Crocker gestured to the Ape. The guerrilla prodded soft, white skin, selected a spot and pulled the trigger.

Harrigan lunged forward to meet the charge. Legs and arms strained at their ties. Stomach and chest went red with a sudden flush of color. His face was pale as death. His eyes were closed and crinkled. He gasped and went slack in the ropes that held him.

Icky Yeager said: "Over the fence!" He holstered his gun in disgust and went out. Ape Scalisi raised shoe-button eyes from his victim and looked at Frank Crocker. Crocker snapped: "Bring 'im to! I'm gonna have that lousy sheet o' paper if I have to cut out his guts an' show 'em to him! Come on; hurry up!"

Scalisi went to the wash-stand and drew a pitcher of cold water. He came back to the cot and hurled it on Harrigan's face and chest. Harrigan stirred and made piteous sounds in his throat. Frank Crocker drew open the lower window slightly. The icy November wind did the rest.

Harrigan opened bloodshot eyes and stared through a film of agony. Ape Scalisi, grinning savagely, fondled the snub-nosed gun. Icky Yeager was not to be seen. Frank Crocker was asking, grimly: "Gonna come through?"

Memory stirred in Harrigan's pain-racked brain. They were asking him a question. The answer to that question was his only claim to life. If he answered it, he'd die. Hell, he didn't want to die; not at thirty-four! Wordlessly, he shook his head.

Scalisi began to prime his gun. Crocker rapped: "All right, Wop; snap into it! We got no time for monkey-shines! Take an eye this time!"

Harrigan started and caught his lower lip between his teeth. Scalisi grinned from ear to ear; mouthed: "That hits 'im, Boss!" and raised the snub-nosed gun. He bent over Harrigan, hesitated a moment and said thoughtfully: "The left one looks the best. I'll try that 'ne first!" The blood spurted as Harrigan's teeth sliced through his lip.

The door of the room burst open and Icky Yeager rushed in. He said quickly: "Kane's callin', Boss. The *Leader's* runnin' him ragged. The yellow's squirtin' out o' him. He won't get off the phone; you better talk to him!"

Frank Crocker whirled. "The damn' dummy!" he snarled viciously. "I've told him an' told him never to get in touch with me! I'll talk to him, all right! I'll bring 'im up here an' slip 'im a dose o' this!" He sprang for the door; rasped over his shoulder: "Come on; we'll finish this after!" and ran for the stairs. Icky Yeager followed.

Ape Scalisi waddled his bow-legged bulk across the room, turned suddenly round and slapped his knee. "By God! I knowed I was forgettin' somethin'!" He took deliberate aim and slung tobacco-juice at Harrigan.

Harrigan didn't even know it.

† † † † † † †

Harrigan became aware that he was being shaken vigorously. It was nothing new; he had been roused so, several times. It was getting to be a game. He rolled his head to one side, said: "No!" thickly and relapsed into punch-drunk stupor.

The shaking continued. Harrigan opened weary eyes and gazed into the beefy face of the cop who was his cell-mate. The cop put his finger to his lips; said softly: "Sssssh!"

Harrigan stared stupidly about. He put up a hand and rubbed his chin. His wrists and ankles ached. Realization came. He was free to move—untied! He cried: "What's—"

The cop laid a hand over Harrigan's mouth and hissed: "Shut up!" in a fierce whisper.

The reporter's eyes narrowed. The old think-tank began to boil. He brushed the officer's hand aside and sat up quickly. "To hell with noise," he said. "This is a sound-proof room." He clapped his hands to his middle, suddenly; gasped: "Christ! My stomach!"

The big policeman nodded sympathetically. "That was a hell of a thing they done to you, the bastards! They was back since, tryin' to finish the job, but they couldn't bring you to, enough."

Harrigan reached for his handkerchief and said in the same breath: "Here, wet this," and: "How'd you get loose?"

The cop turned on the water in the wash-stand, soaked the handkerchief and grunted: "Oh, I'm pretty strong. I just kept monkeyin' around. I knew I could do it if I got time enough." He handed the dripping cloth to the reporter and added: "An' besides, I kinda had that taxi-driver in my mind." He shivered a little. "That helped rush the job along."

Harrigan folded the sopping bit of rag and laid it tenderly over the angry red-black powder burn. His lips twisted in pain but he held the pad firmly in place, doubled his shirt over it and buttoned his vest tightly; asked: "What about the taxi-driver?"

"Oh—nothin'." The policeman was vague. "He woke up an'

started to get tough. They—" He shrugged and drew his finger across his throat.

"Who?"

"The guy they call 'Wop,'" said the officer.

"Tough!" murmured Harrigan. "Now, how do we get out?"

The cop made a puzzled gesture. "I thought you knew this layout. The door—"

"Not in a week," said Harrigan. "It's sound-proof. Heavier'n the anchors o' hell. How's the window?"

"Three-story drop." The policeman brightened suddenly. "You say this dump is sound-proof? We ain't gotta be careful o' noise? Hell; then it's easy!" He started looking around the room. "We can throw somethin' out an' attract attention. Then we can holler an' get a cop an'—"

Harrigan's eyes widened. "No, no!" he said. "That's out!"

The cop stared. "Whatdaya mean—out?" He hunted feverishly about the room.

Harrigan took an eager step forward and swore as clothing rubbed his wound. His voice was hoarse with excitement. "Listen! This'll make a whale of a story; I want to keep it exclusive. All I've got so far is a twenty-four-carat shellacking; I might as well get some credit, too. Take it easy for a second, while I figure it out."

The policeman paid no attention. "I'm gonna get out o' here," he said; "an' quick, too. You can figure all you want; me, I'm gettin' out!" He walked over to the iron cot; said: "I got a notion to toss this out." He hefted it; grinned. "That oughta bring a cop on the run!"

Harrigan's eyes glowed. The idea of scooping the town was taking firm hold on him. "Wait," he pleaded. "I'll think of a way to get out in a minute. This is Page One stuff for keeps and I want to make it a beat. If we land in a station-house, all the papers get it; don't you see?"

"The papers can have it," said the Law calmly. "I want no part of it! I woke you up 'cause I thought you might gimme some help an' all you've give me is arguments." He dragged

the cot to the window and pulled up the shade; he asked: "Did you know there's four of 'em here now?"

"Four?"

"Yeah; Kane's come to join his flock."

"Kane? Ezra Kane! You sure?"

"'Course I'm sure," grunted the cop. "Don't I know the politicians?" He started to raise the cot.

Harrigan bit his thumb-nails. His face lit up; he took a step forward and cried: "Wait! I've got a scheme!"

"Wait, hell!" snapped the officer. "I've got a wife an' kids!" He balanced the cot on one end and leaned forward to shove it over the sill. There was a flat report behind him. He threw up his hands, clawed at his throat, weaved uncertainly towards the window and crashed to the street below.

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Harrigan, whirling at the faint scrape of the opening door, saw flame streak from Icky Yeager's gun and dived for the killer's weapon. Yeager cursed, lost his balance as Harrigan hit him and threw a wild shot. He staggered against the half-open door, heard a terrific noise on the stairs, steadied himself and fired—twice—into the blackness of the well.

Harrigan bounced off the killer's chest, gained the head of the stairs on hands and knees, saw a blacker shape in the blackness and knew that the stairs were blocked. His position was plainly untenable. Reinforcements would come from below; leaden messengers of death from above. There wasn't a moment to waste; Harrigan didn't. He launched himself head-long down the steps.

A man cried out in high-pitched alarm and tried—too late—to side-step. Harrigan hit him above the knees, threw him over his shoulder by momentum and went riding down the stairs on his chest with a wriggling, screaming burden across him.

Two flat reports came from above. Two thudding slaps came from behind. Then his face dug into a rough straw mat and his shoulders crashed the landing wall.

The man he'd hit on the stairs was all over him like a

blanket. Harrigan spun on his back and grabbed him by the throat; the thin neck was limp in its stiff collar. Harrigan thought: "Knocked cold!" and fumbled over him for a weapon. His fingers touched something wet; something thick and sticky.

Harrigan's twisted smile flashed in the dark. He felt for the man's wrist. No pulse; no heart. Harrigan thought: "It's a damned good thing you were there, brother! That moqui shoots like Billy the Kid!"

His hands passed swiftly over the corpse. On the right hip was a flat automatic. He drew it out, snapped off the catch, murmured: "Sweetheart!" and wriggled towards the lower stairs.

Something occurred to him suddenly. That high-pitched cry of fright—that high, stiff collar. . . . He bit his lip and reversed his direction; his fingers played over the body again. There was a sprinkling of hair around the ears and a cow-lick over the forehead. The top of the skull was smooth and bare; the nose was long and thin and bony. Harrigan gasped: "Ezra Kane, for a million! My God! What a story!" A bullet plocked into the wall at his ear.

Harrigan groaned, hit the floor with his fist, threshed against the wall with his feet and lay still with his gun at the ready.

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No sound came from above. Heavy silence was everywhere. The darkness was thick as gravy. Everything seemed suddenly dead.

Outside could be heard faint cries. A police whistle raised dim echoes. An ambulance bell clanged on the wind. Harrigan thought: "My God! I forgot! There's a copper dead; all Centre Street'll be here soon!"

The reporter was in a hole. He had the reform racket all sewed up. He had to get out; hop a phone; make an edition. If he waited for the cops to raid, he'd lose a beautiful story; if he made a break, he was meat for Icky Yeager. Harrigan's lips tightened. This thing had gone too far; Kane's killing had

settled it. The story was too big. If he muffed it now, he'd better give up reporting!

The landing walls were left and center; the stair-head must be to the right. He held the gun in his right hand, pushed himself up with his left. He came to his knees, then to his feet and edged slowly towards the stairs. On the landing above him, a board creaked.

Concealment was out of the question. He took the landing at a bound, hit the steps going down, heard bullets smack around him and came into the lower hall—straight as a homing pigeon. The front door was a light in the darkness. Through the glass, he had a glimpse of people gathering. Impossible to get out unnoticed!

He took a chance, swung to the left and ran down a dark hall with an arm stuck out before him. A door barred his way. He fumbled for a knob—found it—came into a sort of kitchenette.

Street-lights shone in through the windows, making his surroundings plain. At the other side of the room, a door swung free on its hinges. Beyond was a backyard—a high fence—glowing lights. Harrigan breathed: "Happy days!" bounded across the floor, hurled himself through the half-open door—straight into the arms of Ape Scalisi, just coming in.

Scalisi staggered from the sudden shock. He took a step back; then closed in, with a move surprisingly swift.

Harrigan's gun-hand was held high; the guerrilla raised it higher. He snapped a muscle-ridged arm around Harrigan's back; crushed him in deadly embrace.

Harrigan wrenched to one side to give the Ape the knee. Scalisi brought him closer; in at the waist, out at the shoulders—got set to break his back. Harrigan's breath was coming in gasps; his spine was beginning to crack. Scalisi had gotten his bone-crushing hold. It would be a matter of seconds, now. No man could stand such pressure.

Scalisi exerted his giant strength. His bullet head dug into the reporter's chest. An ancient instinct roused in Harrigan's blood. He arched his neck, pulled back his head, bared his teeth and struck at one of Scalisi's flattened ears.

The guerrilla cried out like a beast in pain. His great muscles tensed spasmodically. He pulled Harrigan down and in with a convulsive movement. For the fraction of an instant, the muzzle of the gun rested under his armpit. In that instant Harrigan pressed the trigger twice. They hit the dirt together.

Harrigan got up; Scalisi didn't.

† † † † † † † † † †

The Managing Editor couldn't be found. The City Editor's kid was sick. Harrigan stamped in the drug-store phone booth. "My God! What a sheet! Is it running itself?"

The head copy-boy's tone was upstage. "Mr. Conwell is in his office."

Old Roger Conwell—owner and publisher of the *Leader*—maker and breaker of politicians—latter-day Pulitzer! Harrigan's voice was almost a shout. "Plug me in on him; quick!"

Harrigan got him—just that way. He went into his story without a halt; rattled it off in headline style—phrases ready to slap into print. A beautiful bit of dictation.

The *Leader's* phones had four extensions. Two stenos took him word for word. Old Roger only interrupted once. He asked: "Where is that Kane expense account?"

Harrigan chuckled hoarsely. "That's where the laugh comes in! They didn't dare to bump me as long as I held it out. An' that's the kick-back, see. I don't know where the damn' thing went; I lost it in that taxi crash!" He was back in his word-spilling stride.

"Okay," he finished briefly. "That's all. Better send DeLavan to cover the raid. They'll be gettin' Yeager; Crocker's gone. I'll be at the nearest hospital. My belly hurts like hell."

Old Roger snapped: "Hold everything!"

A momentary silence; then: "Ezra Kane is dead in the same apartment that the policeman and Scalisi died in?"

"Yeah."

"No weapons on or about Kane's person?"

"No; not now."

"Nothing to indicate that Kane and the officer of the law were not tricked there and brutally murdered?"

"Well—no."

"Fine!" Old Roger's voice grew fainter. He was speaking to someone beside him. "That's the way the story'll go: '*Reformer Murdered by Racketeers.*'"

Harrigan cried: "Hello! Hello! That's the lead every sheet in town'll carry! Hell, man! I'm giving you the inside stuff!"

"It's no good!" Old Roger's voice carried excitement. Again he was speaking beside the phone. "Rip the forms! Page One and Editorial! I'll supervise the layout, personally!"

Then: "Hello, Harrigan! This is under your hat, see! This killing on the eve of election will swing voting opinion into a reform landslide! That reform ticket's a good one! Kane was the only blotch and he's gone! The city needs the rest of those men. We'll hold off with the Crocker connection and give New York a reform administration. It's all for the best, my boy!"

"But—"

"Go butt your head! I'm still running this paper, Harrigan! And, listen! don't you get the kick in it? That ticket was practically constructed by Crocker's racketeers to give Ezra Kane a chance of election. Now, Kane's killing will elect the rest of 'em! There's a *real* kick-back for you, my boy! It's beautiful! Can't you see it?"

Harrigan's voice was very dry. "Yeah," he said. "I'm laughing!"

The doctor was heavy-eyed and sleepy. He said wearily: "Well, what is it now?"

Harrigan winced and unbuttoned his shirt.

Sleepiness fled from the medico. He stared wide-eyed; his tone was shocked. "My God! man! What've you been up to?"

Harrigan's lips twisted. The crooked grin distorted his face. He said: "I was monkeyin' with a kick-back, Doc. An' the damn' thing did!"

Clean Sweep*

ROGER TORREY

DAL PRENTICE STOOD WITH FEET APART, HEAVY EYEBROWS meeting in a line above hard eyes. He stared at the blonde young woman, said: "And he just walked in and started shooting, eh? Where was you?" in a skeptical voice. His eyes didn't blink, held round and scowling.

The woman looked back defiantly, met the hard glare, turned her eyes towards the side of the room and away. She pointed, said: "I was in the kitchen. There. I let him in and he said, 'I want to see Margie,' and called her. I knew he was her old man. I went in the kitchen and then the shooting started."

"And then?"

"Well, I waited a minute and heard him run out and then I went in."

"What didja wait for?"

"My gawd! Did I want to get shot?"

Prentice considered. He said: "Well, I s'pose not," in an easier tone, turned, called through the door of the bedroom at his right: "How 'bout it, Doc?" said: "All right, all right," to the irritable voice that called back a request for time, and swung to the blonde again. He asked: "Who was with her when he come?"

"Nobody."

He spoke to the lean man at his elbow. "Y' see, Al. He just comes in and starts shooting. What a honey!"

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The lean man looked bored, offered: "Maybe he was sore," in a voice that showed a total lack of interest, and Prentice snorted: "Sore!" and slewed back to the woman.

"You said nobody?"

The blonde stuck out her lower lip.

"I said nobody."

"No?"

"No."

Prentice smoothed his voice and smiled. His eyes didn't soften. He said: "Now, now, be nice. Tell a man. Who was with her? This heel wouldn't have killed her if she'd been alone, would he?"

"He *did*."

"Now, now. You know what the score is. Let's tell secrets."

"You tell me one and I'll tell you one."

The blonde took in her lower lip, tried a smile, and the grin left Prentice's face and he snapped: "Okay! This Marge is a witness against Pat Kailor on the murder rap he's facing. *The* witness. If that's a secret, you're told. Who was with her?"

"Nobody."

"That's your story?"

"It's the truth."

Prentice gritted: "Like hell!" between his teeth, took a step ahead with his hand raised, and the lean man at his side caught his arm, held it, said: "Easy, Dal! Don't be a chump."

"She's lying."

"What of it?"

The blonde girl said: "You're Allen, aren't you?" and he dropped Prentice's arm, told her: "Yes."

"I'm not lying."

Allen slid between the scowling Prentice and the girl, said softly: "No . . . just stalling. Let me put it in a different way. Who was with her earlier if there wasn't anybody here when he came?"

The blonde said: "I . . . uh . . ." looked past Allen and caught Prentice's eye and finished: "There was three," in a hurried voice.

"Who?"

"Two of 'em I don't know. They been here before but they wasn't looking for anyone in particular. The other one wanted Margie."

"Who was he?"

"Hal Cross. That bird of a deputy District Attorney. If it wasn't that he'd have closed me up I wouldn't have let him in the house."

Allen flashed Prentice a look, said: "Oh, oh," with the accent on the first one. He asked the blonde: "You sure?"

"I should be. He stuck me on a liquor rap that cost me a hundred dollar fine. They only found part of a pint."

"What did he want?"

The woman shrugged. "Margie. Margie come in the room when I was talking to him or he'd never have seen her. I was just going to tell him she was out, but she come in and I flashed her not to crack wise and he says to her, 'I want to see you' and she takes him in her bedroom."

"Why didn't you want him to see her?"

The muscles on the girl's jaw tightened. She flashed out: "A hundred dollars. Didn't you hear? He told me if I copped a plea he'd see it was suspended."

Allen laughed suddenly, said: "Tough break!" and to the man in the white coat who came out of the bedroom: "Howzit, Doc?"

The police surgeon had glasses jammed up on his forehead. He was wiping his hands on a towel but one sleeve had a bloody cuff. He shook his head, growled: "Dead. About two minutes after I got here. She was unconscious."

Prentice grunted: "How 'bout one of the slugs?" and the surgeon reached into the pocket of the white coat, pulled out a piece of lead and tossed it to him. The bloody cuff made a smear by the pocket and he swabbed at this with the towel, complained: "I put this on fresh, not an hour ago. Damn these shootings," added in a tired voice: "I suppose you'll want to know. Thirty-eight. Three times. Stomach and twice in the right lung. Almost center, the last one. Looks like he turned that one loose just as she was falling. It slants. She never spoke a word. That cover it?"

Prentice looked at the bullet, tossed it from one hand to the other while he thought. He turned to the woman, asked: "You sure she and this heel that killed her was married?"

"Uh-huh! There was an argument once, and she showed me her certificate."

"What was *his* name on that certificate?"

She hesitated, just for an instant, then said: "Denzer—George Denzer."

The surgeon stopped pawing at his coat with the towel. He looked up from this at the two detectives and the woman, jerked out irritably: "Well! Is there any reason I've got to stay here? How about it?"

"Okay, Doc! We'll lock the room until the print and camera-men get here. Thanks a lot."

The doctor grunted: "For nothing! Be seeing you," and went out. The white coat made a gray blotch in the darkness as he climbed into the ambulance.

Prentice argued: "You don't get it, Cap! Here's this gal bumped. The story'll be her old man come back to town and finds her in a spot. He'll be supposed to've gone screwy and given her the works in a fit of rage. See. He'll either beat the rap or get at the most five years. See. He's got a swell defense. Outraged husband finds wife hustling. The only thing is, it ain't so."

Captain of Detectives Hallahan said: "Why ain't it, Dal?" in a weary voice.

"Well, for one thing, Hal Cross come to see her earlier in the evening. I could tell that the landlady was hushing something and I figured there was a man in the room with her when her husband came in. There wasn't. It turned out that Cross had been down and seen her and left."

"What of it?"

Prentice laughed. "Plenty! Three months ago I told you there was going to be trouble over the contract to run the new paving out on Seventh. That it'd be juicy enough to bring out all the sharpshooters. You said I was screwy but here's the second killing over this same contract. Screwy, hell!"

"You *are* screwy. You add two and two and get nine. Or nineteen."

"Then nine or nineteen is the right answer. Cap, I know."

"You mean you guess."

"Listen. Hal Cross is the deputy in charge of prosecuting Kailor, who's charged with killing Grossman, who *was* chairman of the board of supervisors. There's one tie-up with the paving contract. Now this Margie gal would've proved Kailor guilty of that shooting. She was an eye-witness to it. Cross seeing her makes a further tie-up."

"You're screwy but go on." Hallahan leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes but the fingers of his right hand continued their nervous drumming on the battered desk.

"I hate to say it but Hal's mixed in some way. He went down to buy her off and she wouldn't go for the shot. He, or somebody, had it all arranged with this husband of hers to gun her out if she didn't."

"Cross is the prosecutor, not the defense attorney. It don't make sense. You got paving contracts on the brain and can't see anything else to it."

"Have I? It'd make sense if Hal was working for Izzy Schwartz as well as the D. A. It all works in. Izzy Schwartz was after that big paving job. Grossman doesn't let him in and Grossman gets bumped. If Izzy don't clear Kailor on this Grossman rap, Kailor'll spill his guts. What was Cross down there for if he ain't mixed in the mess?"

Hallahan held his hand palm out. His eyes were half closed but his voice held heat. "You're dingy about the whole affair, Dal. Hal Cross is a good boy. You're trying to figure out angles when there ain't any angles. Even if you were right about Grossman getting killed over this paving steal, you're wrong about Hal being wrong. Kailor *might've* been working for Schwartz but Cross isn't. That's the trouble with you. You get a notion and let it ride you. Cross isn't mixed."

Prentice made his jaw lumpy, slammed the table. "Hal Cross *is*. Al and I've known that for two months or more." He slammed the desk for emphasis. "And . . . I'll . . . prove

. . . it. I'm going out and pick up this rat that killed his wife and I'll prove it by him. A heel like that'll *talk*."

Hallahan brushed white hair back from his forehead, opened light blue eyes. He shrugged: "Go ahead if it makes you feel any better. I was going to put Peterson and McCready on it but you can have it. God himself couldn't blast an idea out of that pig head of yours."

"Allen thinks the same way I do."

"He does?" Hallahan looked questioningly up at Allen and the lean man nodded, took a match from his mouth, said mildly: "Dal's right, Cap! He's *bound* to be." He looked at the frayed end of the match, threw it on the floor. "Once in a while. Le's go, Dal."

Prentice followed him to the door, turned and glowered at Hallahan. He said: "And I'll tell you what'll happen. If we *don't* find him, he'll come in by himself as soon as everything's fixed. Hal Cross'll have it set for him to prosecute. And the guy'll have the best lawyer Izzy Schwartz's money can buy and he'll beat the case. And mind you, I like Hal Cross. I *used* to think he was honest." He stared hard at Hallahan, jerked out: "You see! The rat!" without saying for whom the name was meant, and went out.

Hallahan didn't seem to have any doubt about who was meant. He said: "Izzy Schwartz!" under his breath, as if he didn't like the words.

After putting out a general alarm for George Denzer, husband and killer of the woman, Prentice and Allen methodically contacted all of the stools they knew. This was without result for the first day but late in the afternoon of the next, Prentice answered the phone, talked, and banged the receiver down with a satisfied expression. He told Allen, seated across from him: "Toad Simpson. He says Denzer's holed up in a house on Alvarado. 1423 West Alvarado. Can't miss it, he says. As soon as it gets dark we'll take him."

Allen looked bored and agreed, asked: "Do we take a squad?" and Prentice said with rising excitement: "No! It'd cramp us. I'll sweat this frame out of him or break both

hands. This Denzer thinks he's got power back of him and I'll show him a different kind."

"We might take McCready. He won't talk."

"Well, all right. He can cover the back and we'll crash it. You tell him."

Allen nodded, yawned, and sauntered out to the general room, leaving Prentice staring at one big-knuckled hand and muttering about wife-killers.

With McCready at the back door, Prentice and Allen went quietly, side by side, up on the porch, tried the door as softly, found it open and stepped inside, guns out and covering the blackness they met. The flashlight in Allen's hand clicked on with the light as far from his side as he could hold the torch, and as it ranged he said: "Too late!" in a hushed voice, holstered his gun and turned the house lights on from the switch the flash picked out. Prentice made no answer until he had soft-footed through the other three rooms and back, and looked again at the body on the floor.

He finally said: "I knew he was stiff the minute I saw him. I can tell a stiff as far as I can see one." He motioned at the knife in the hollow of the dead man's throat, pointed out: "And whoever done it twisted the knife."

Allen still wore a bored look but his face was a shade whiter. "He ain't been dead long. There's still a little bleeding yet." He raised his voice, shouted: "Hi! Mac! Come in!"

The three men stood looking soberly at the body and finally Prentice knelt and taking his handkerchief from his pocket wrapped it around the haft of the knife. Allen said warningly: "Why not leave . . ."

With both the front and back doors open the shrill of the police whistle carried no hint of direction, and while McCready raced to the back door, both Prentice and Allen dashed out the front. The whistle shrilled again and Prentice cursed, cried out: "In the back!" and they circled the house with Allen tripping over a low hedge concealed in the shadow.

They came to the back, Prentice ten feet in the lead, saw McCready leaning against a garbage container, shoot into

the blackness at the end of the lot . . . and saw a tongue of flame lance back from the black and McCready sit down suddenly and lean against the can. Prentice dashed past him, the marksman at the end of the lot fired again, and Prentice slid to his belly and shot back.

Allen shouted: "Roll to the side, you fool! The kitchen light's showing you!" He dived past the prone Prentice into the shade, then ten feet ahead. He shot once, heard a door slam, shouted: "They're in the house that faces the back street. I'll head 'em off from the front of it. We got 'em boxed."

He got to his feet and running low, went past the side of the house and around to its front. Prentice slid back to McCready, stooped over him, and the hidden gun blasted again and the can by his side clanged. He took McCready by the feet and drew him back into shelter, heard Allen bawl out: "I'm set. How's Mac?"

Prentice drew a whistle from his pocket and blew three times, called back: "In the body some place. Ambulance case and quick. He's bleeding from the nose and mouth." He heard Allen blow his own whistle three times . . . and three times more . . . heard an answering rattle of a nightstick some distance away . . . then another whistle at the same distance.

Lights were flashing on in the house next door and when Prentice saw the back door show a thread of light he called: "You there in the house! Come here quick! It's police!" The door opened wide; the marksman cornered in the rear house fired again and there was a frightened squawk and the door closed and the light went out. Prentice bawled impatiently: "You in there. Leave that light out and come here. You won't get hurt."

A side window opened and a voice quavered: "I . . . I'm af-f-fraid."

"Hurry and phone the police station to send riot cars and an ambulance to this address. Hurry, man! There's an officer dying here. Tell 'em Prentice said so."

"Riot cars and an ambulance?"

"Yes! Hurry, man! Riot cars and an ambulance. Hurry!"

The window went blank and in a moment he heard an excited voice say: "Operator! Operator! The police station. Quick!" He lifted McCready's head higher, McCready coughed bloody foam and he lowered him hastily.

Allen shouted: "How's Mac?"

Prentice felt McCready's wrist and found a strong pulse and shouted back: "He'll make it, I think, if they get him to a hospital quick."

The voice at the window asked: "He dead yet? The police are coming. With an ambulance."

"Good! Thanks! Stick out in front and tell 'em where I am and not to rush in here."

"I'll not leave my house."

"Go to the front window and holler then."

Another whistle shrilled and Prentice heard flat feet pounding down the sidewalk. He shouted: "In here. Come close to the house," and in a moment a uniformed man was alongside him. He said: "Take care of this man. No matter what, you stay here. Got it?" He slid close to the back door of the rear house, keeping in the shadow, shouted: "Al! They're on their way."

"Good. I found the guy that started this. The copper."

"Yeah!"

"He was laying alongside the house when I found him. He saw something moving and told whatever it was to come out. Nothing came so he blew his whistle and went in after whatever it was. He got crowned."

Prentice could hear a dissenting voice. "He says it wasn't a whatever. It was two guys."

"They must have just killed the guy and were making their sneak when he come along. Make him watch the other side."

"I have."

Prentice heard the moan of an ambulance siren, followed by a deeper, lustier roar that he identified as the riot squad cars and he heard and segregated the latter sound as belonging to three of these. He said: "Eighteen men and the works!" with an evil grin, hurried past McCready and the watching

patrolman to the street and called: "Doc! Here he is. You need a stretcher."

He watched McCready get loaded on the stretcher, saw one limp hand trail along the ground as he was carried to the ambulance, hurried to the first of the riot cars drawn up along the walk, commandeered a shotgun and took charge.

He ordered: "You six cover the front and where you can watch the sides. Snap it up. Lieutenant Allen is there and he'll tell you. You three get on this side and you other three on that one. They've got Lieutenant McCready already, so watch your step. You four, come with me. I'm going in, and you cover me."

He started with head down, walking fast towards the back door of the house that held the imprisoned men. One of the four men with him came along his side, said: "Here's a grenade, Lieutenant! For God's sake, don't go in with nothing but a shotgun."

The interruption shook Prentice out of the black rage the sight of the wounded McCready had bred in him and he stopped while yet in the shadow, bawled out: "Hey! You in there! Come out or we're coming in. Quick!"

There was a moment's silence, then a voice shouted back: "We got some people in here that ain't mixed in this. Can they come out?"

"Send 'em."

Prentice called a low-voiced warning and the four men with him scattered out, watching the house. The back door opened and a man and woman came out, the woman half-carrying, half-dragging the man. She stopped when just outside the door, and Prentice called, "Come on. Get clear."

The woman laughed hysterically, said: "They come in and pointed guns at us and my husband fainted." She wavered a moment, dropped the unconscious man and started to slump down, and Prentice stepped from the shadow of the bush and started towards her.

A gun crashed from the back window and he jumped back, slid to his belly, said: "She'll just have to faint," in a resigned voice. The gun blasted again and two of the men with

him shot back at the pale tongue of flame. He said from the ground: "Hold 'em. I can't rush the back door with them two laying in front of it. I'll go in from the front with the pineapple."

He eased on his belly out of the range of fire from the back window and to the front, called softly: "Al! Oh, Al!" heard an answer and said: "Cover me. I'm on my way."

He got to his feet, pulled the pin on the grenade, took two steps towards the house and lobbed the bomb to the front porch with just enough to carry it to the door, dropped, counted five before the crash and was on his feet again running as the shock came to him. He saw the front door hanging crazily on broken hinges, smashed into it shoulder first, with his pistol in his hand, and was in the hall and shooting at the dim shape outlined against the hall window when he heard Allen's feet pound the floor behind him. The shape fired back once, went down with the combined blast of his and Allen's guns, and he turned, cursed, said: "You would shoot in my ear. He was cold turkey for me. You wrecked that ear, sure as hell."

He heard Allen laugh and crept cautiously down the hall, heard a burst of pistol shots and the deep roar of a shotgun, stood up and said: "Broke out the back! It's curtains!" They heard a shout from outside that confirmed this guess, saw the man in the hall was a stranger and quite dead, went out the back door and found the guard placed there grouped around a body that had just cleared the window.

The woman by the steps sat up as they came out, said in a shaky voice: "They said they had shot a policeman and that they were afraid to give up." Allen patted her shoulder, said: "They were smart." He followed Prentice to the body and as they reached it one of the men snapped a light on, showing the dead face. Prentice asked: "Any of you know who . . . My good God! It's Williams, of the D. A.'s office."

The silence held for a long minute—was broken by one of the uniformed men blurting out: "Jeeze!"

Dal Prentice nodded at Hallahan triumphantly and said:

"Does that check?" in a tone that showed his satisfaction. He added: "I may be screwy about paving contracts but it's proving up." He turned to the new chairman of supervisors, who sat across the desk, said: "Didn't Mr. Cross tell you where he heard this fairy story? Who's supposed to've told him all this, Mr. Heilig?"

Heilig was florid-faced and heavy-chinned. One eyelid had a tic and this twitched as he said: "Mr. Cross didn't reveal his source of information. I asked him but he refused to tell. Frankly, Lieutenant Prentice, I'll admit I believe him."

Allen, from the side, offered: "So do I."

Hallahan's voice was incredulous. "Do you mean, Mr. Heilig, that because you hear a cock-and-bull story about why a man was murdered . . . a story without the slightest bit of proof or verification to back it up . . . you believe it? Do you realize that you are practically accusing Izzy Schwartz of having Grossman killed because he wasn't going to favor Schwartz on this paving business?"

Heilig shrugged and spread his hands. He said evenly: "I'm telling you what Hal Cross told me. I'm frank in saying I believe him and I want protection." The tic became more pronounced. "Cross claims that I am in danger unless I *do* throw my influence in his way and I'll not do it." His face tightened. "Am I to understand you will do nothing about this?"

Hallahan said hurriedly: "I'll be very glad to detail a man or two men to go with you."

Prentice jeered: "So they'll make him an easier target, huh? This backs up what I think, don't it?"

"What you think!" Hallahan said, sarcastically.

"My reason for coming to your office, Captain," Heilig said, "wasn't alone this. I'm honestly nervous over this warning but there's another angle you seem to overlook. Sid Grossman was a damn' good man and a damn' good friend of mine. He was killed for *some* reason, and this is a good explanation. May I say that I don't understand your attitude towards this same explanation? It seems to me you should be interested in any possible lead."

Hallahan's face showed red. He snapped: "We got the man in jail that killed him. Lead, hell! We got the killer."

Allen's voice was very mild as he pointed out: "But he won't be convicted. There are no witnesses, *now*, that he is the killer."

Hallahan stood up, crossed to the wall and stared at a reward poster. His clenched hands were behind his back and showed the knuckles white. He didn't turn as Heilig said: "Lieutenant Prentice tells me that he believes Schwartz to be responsible for that. That he thinks Kailor was hired by Schwartz."

Hallahan turned and glared at him. He blurted out: "Lieutenant Prentice also thinks that Cross is mixed up in that. I've known that boy for ten years, helped him get his deputy job for that matter, and he's mixed, according to Lieutenant Prentice. All I hear this last few days is Cross, Kailor and Schwartz, and now more of it."

Heilig shrugged and Hallahan swung around to Prentice. "Dal! You're so damn' sure about this, *you* see that Mr. Heilig is protected." He added with heavy sarcasm: "Why don't you go up and see Schwartz and tell him to tend to his paving business and quit the murder racket. Tell Cross, too, while you're at it."

"That's an idea at that."

"Mr. Heilig, we'll see that you have two men with you that'll do everything but get in the bathtub with you. That is," he bowed to Prentice, "Lieutenant Prentice will see that you have. How's that? As far as Kailor being convicted for killing Grossman, I'm not the D. A. I'm only in charge of the department that puts 'em in jail for the D. A. to convict. That isn't up to me."

Allen said to Heilig in the same mild voice: "That wasn't meant as a rib."

"I take it that Cross didn't threaten you," Hallahan said to Heilig. . . "that he warned you. Is that right?"

"That's the way I took it. He as much as told me that Schwartz was the man that hired Kailor to kill Grossman for that reason, and that I was in danger for the same reason."

"All right, Dal! This don't fit your pipe dream about Cross being in it."

"Why don't it fit? Maybe Cross is losing his guts. Maybe he figures that Mr. Heilig will take it as a warning and throw the deal to Schwartz."

"Maybe!" Hallahan snorted contemptuously. "Maybe this, maybe that. I guess this and I guess that. But you don't know." He turned to Heilig. "Maybe you'll go for Schwartz then if you're so damn' worried about this."

Heilig said: "I didn't ask to be appointed to the board in Grossman's place but . . ." His voice grew firm as he finished the sentence. "As long as I am, I'll do as I think best, regardless of threats." He walked to the door. "Then you'll see I'm protected, whether you believe there's need or not. Is that right?"

"Right."

Heilig went out and Hallahan snapped out: "I'll be dingy if this keeps up."

"You and me both. C'mon, Al."

"Where you going?"

Prentice grinned: "Up and see Schwartz. That was an idea."

Prentice led the way down the hall and past the door that said: "Magna City Construction Company—Isadore Schwartz, President" . . . around a jog in the hall and to a door that said "Private." The door opened on an intersection with one branch corridor leading to the back and service elevators. There was no one in that corridor and it was apparently rarely used. He raised his hand to knock and the door opened under it and Schwartz, with his back partially turned to the opening door, said: "Then, Gino, you go ahead and . . ." He turned from the man inside the room, said: "Why, why, hello, Lieutenant!"

Prentice shouldered past him, said: "I didn't know you had company," in an ironic tone. Allen followed him into the room, staring hard at the man called Gino, and Gino backed to the desk, sat on its edge.

Schwartz still held the door. He said: "Of course I'm always glad to see you, Lieutenant, but . . ." He coughed. "I have a secretary in the outer office to announce visitors. I might have been busy instead of all through with my talk." He made an almost imperceptible motion with his head towards the still open door, and Gino came to his feet, said: "I'll be seeing you then, Mr. Schwartz."

"Come up any time. Lieutenant Prentice is an old friend of mine . . . such an old friend he doesn't bother to be announced." He slightly stressed the name.

Gino's sloe eye swiveled to Prentice. He said: "Prentice?" slowly, hesitated, again said: "Prentice?" with the same question in his voice and Prentice said: "Yeah!" He reached out, said: "I'll close the door," and Gino said: "But I'm just going!" Schwartz was still holding the door and Prentice shook it and as Schwartz released his hand, closed it, asked: "Where? Not by any chance to see Heilig, were you?"

Gino said: "I don't understand!" in an angry voice, and Allen spoke from the side. "You got a permit for that gun you're packing under your arm?" His eyes had not left Gino since he had entered the room but his face was blank.

"Yeah! I got one."

"Let's see it."

Gino produced a wallet and the permit from the wallet, and Allen looked it over and handed it back. He said to Prentice: "It's from that heel of a police chief down at Colton. It's good any place in the county though."

Gino grinned. Prentice opened the door and Gino started towards it, but as he went out his eyes slewed back at Prentice, with a malevolent gleam.

Schwartz went back of his desk, asked: "What was it you boys wanted?" His tone was mild but his eyes were very cautious.

Prentice leaned over the desk, spoke bluntly. "To tip you to lay off Heilig."

"I don't get you."

"Why stall! Listen, Schwartz! We know why Grossman was killed. *Know!* Get that. Don't let it happen to Heilig."

"Don't be silly, Lieutenant. I'm running a reputable business and I won't stand for that kind of talk."

"No-o-o? You're running a contracting business that depends on what you can swing from the city hall." He leaned farther over the desk, his eyes dark and smoky looking, his lips curled over his teeth in a snarl. "Listen, Schwartz! You may be a big shot but you ain't big enough to murder in order to swing these same contracts. You can burn as easy as the next man. Don't forget that. Lay-off-Heilig!"

"Is that what you came up to tell me?"

"Just that!"

Schwartz laughed, mocked: "Just that! Listen, you heel! You make trouble for me and I'll have your job in twenty-four hours. Now get to hell out of my office."

Allen took hold of Prentice's arm, shook it. He said: "All right, Dal, that's enough. He's told. It's up to him." He started Prentice towards the door and Schwartz asked: "What makes you think I've got anything to do with Heilig?" but Allen laughed and ignored the question. He said: "Come on, Dal!" and opened the door, but turned there and said to Schwartz: "You'd be safer at that."

"What do you mean by that crack?"

"If you got our jobs in twenty-four hours. Be seeing you." He laughed again, as followed by Prentice, he went out.

The door slammed, cutting off Prentice's muttered: "In jail!"

The two men started down the dim back corridor that led to the service elevators. Allen wore rubber heels, and only Prentice's footsteps made sound. They rounded a turn in the hall, passed a tiny closet reserved for the storage of janitor supplies and as they passed it Allen, who was behind, shouldered into Prentice, knocking him to one side. At the same time he caught Gino's arm, deflected the blade that was directed between Prentice's shoulders. Prentice turned, saw what was happening, and swung his gun from under his arm and against Gino's jaw with the same motion, and Gino slid to the floor between them. The knife clattered against the wall.

Allen panted out: "I saw a shadow. That's all. He was in

the closet." He reached for the knife, added: "Hell! What a shiv!"

Prentice reached down and hauled Gino to his feet. He said: "I've seen this mug some place, or his picture. D'ya suppose Schwartz hired him for this?"

"Let's ask him."

They turned and started back the hall to Schwartz's office and when they reached it, grinned at each other, knocked, and when Schwartz opened the door filed through, carrying the unconscious Gino with them. Prentice said: "Look what we found in the hall, Schwartz," and threw Gino half across the room to where he fell on the desk and from there to the floor. In falling he took a dictaphone and two letter baskets down with him.

Schwartz stood by the door staring at Gino and Allen asked: "What d'ya know about him?"

"Nothing much. What's happened?"

"Not one damn' thing yet. He made a mistake and started to stick Dal with about a yard of shiv and we took it away from him. Didn't you expect it?"

"My God, no!" Schwartz's tone carried conviction.

"Who is he anyway?"

"Gino Petrone. He came up to see me about a job."

"Didja give him one?"

"No."

Prentice said slowly: "He'll have one for about five years now. Working for the state. That'll be a load off his mind."

"Surely you boys don't think that. . . ."

"Hell, no, Schwartz! We don't think. We wouldn't be policemen if we did." Allen picked up Gino, who was showing signs of renewed interest in life, hauled him to his feet. He said: "C'mon, boy friend. Let's go down and see what you think of our ailjay." He boosted him to the door, waved his hand at Schwartz and said: "Be seeing you, like I said we would." His voice was cheerful.

Schwartz said: "That's right, you *did* say that." He looked worried, cursed when he put the shattered dictaphone back on the desk.

Dal Prentice said: "But we have to see him tonight. We'll wait."

The maid had a tiny white apron over a black uniform and a white cap, that matched the apron, perched on one side of her head. She rattled the chain that held the door from further opening, explained again: "Mr. Cross didn't leave any word," and Prentice, as patiently, said again: "Then we'll wait for him." She looked undecided and he showed her his badge and identification card, told her: "It's business from Mr. Cross's office that's supposed to be a secret. Get it?"

"But Mr. Cross didn't say. . . ."

"He didn't know we were coming tonight or he'd have waited."

"It's my night off and I was going to a show."

"We won't stop you. We have to see Mr. Cross tonight. It's important."

"Well, I guess it's all right."

"Sure it is, sister."

She opened the door, said: "I guess you could wait in the library," and Allen said: "That'd be fine." As they went in he poked a finger at the white cap, and she giggled and blushed.

Prentice asked: "Any idea where Mr. Cross went?"

"He didn't say." She hesitated a second, offered: "But you might get him at Mr. Schwartz's house. I answered the phone just before Mr. Cross went out, and Mr. Schwartz was on the line. Shall I call and see?"

Allen said: "Oh, don't bother!" in a hasty voice. He was glancing at the flat desk and the pile of letters on it and the girl saw his glance and misunderstood. She blushed again. "It looks terrible but Mr. Cross won't have me tidy it. He says that important papers might be misplaced or lost."

Prentice was looking at a decanter and tray of glasses on a stand made by a very small but very modern safe. He grinned at the flustered maid, said: "D'ya think a drink would be misplaced?" and Allen said: "Shut up, you chiseler."

The girl laughed, went to the door, asked: "Do you really

think Mr. Cross wouldn't be mad if I *did* go? I've had the date for a week."

Allen said: "I'm sure it will be all right. We'll take care of things." He was still looking at the papers.

The girl coughed and blushed again, asked: "Do you know a policeman named Kerrigan?"

"Don't believe so."

"I go with him steady."

"Lucky man!"

She went out and as she did, Prentice grunted: "Yeah! If he's deaf!" and lifted the decanter. Allen said nothing in return, sorted papers on the desk.

When they heard the front door slam a half hour later Allen had a bulge in his inner coat pocket and Prentice had a perceptible flush on his face. The level in the decanter was four inches lower than on their arrival and both men held glasses. Cross stopped in the doorway, blurted out: "What . . . how . . ."

"The maid let us in, Hal. She had a date."

"Sorry I was out, Prentice. Been waiting long?" He flashed a look at the desk, said sharply: "The maid should have taken you in the other room."

Allen chose to misunderstand and looked at the decanter. He said: "We figured you'd have bought a drink if you'd been here so we went ahead. Sorry if we overstepped." His grin did not show sorrow.

Cross reddened, said: "I didn't mean it that way, Lieutenant. You are very welcome. Lieutenant Prentice and I are old friends." He sat down back of the desk, worried eyes searching the litter, asked: "What is the trouble, or is it just a friendly call? I hate like the devil to talk business after I leave the office, Dal; you know that."

Prentice stared over the rim of his glass at him. "We could have seen you at the office as well as not. Or can see you, rather. It's up to you."

"I don't understand."

"What's the tie-up between you and Schwartz?"

Cross half rose from his chair, dropped back. His face

turned white and his eyes bulged. He repeated: "Tie-up!" in little more than a gasp, pulled at his collar with his left hand while his right hand stirred the papers on the desk.

Allen said: "They're here!" and tapped his breast pocket. "We thought you'd rather talk it over with us here than down to the office. You being a good friend of Hallahan and Dal both."

Cross choked and dropped his right hand below the desk top, while his left still pulled at his collar. Prentice took his eyes from his tortured face and stared back at the whiskey glass. He said: "It might make things clearer, Hal, if we tell you what we know. Would it?" in a mild voice.

Cross made a strangled noise and nodded.

"You're to get a cut from Schwartz if his paving deal goes through. So you go in on the Grossman deal. We put the finger on Kailor for that, and you go down and try to buy the witness that we dug up that saw the shooting. When she wouldn't pop you had her killed."

Cross made a motion with his left hand, still kept his right below the desk. He cried out: "Dal! No! You're wrong on that." His eyes were bulging and his voice was unrecognizable.

"Am I? You were in the Grossman deal."

"Yes, but not that way. I thought he was to be bribed. I was to talk to him on Thursday, and he was killed Wednesday night. That's the truth. I didn't know a thing about it."

"You were in it, just the same. Why were you fretting about Kailor taking the rap if you wasn't mixed in it?"

Cross hung his head, stared down at what his right hand held. He blurted: "I . . . I . . . couldn't help . . . I was . . ."

Prentice was leaning forward in his chair, whiskey glass poised in his hand, and Allen was listening with a half grin. Cross looked up, moving only his eyes, stammered: "I . . . I couldn't help it." He straightened his shoulders and tried to lift his head but the effort seemed too great and he motioned with his left hand towards the safe and said: "It's all in there. Signed and all. I was afraid. . . ."

Prentice's eyes had followed the motion and when his

glance came back to Cross he saw him bring his right hand up from under the desk. As he jammed the gun it held against his temple, Prentice threw the whiskey, glass and all, full into Cross's face and in the same motion was leaning across the desk and had Cross's wrist bent down and the gun pointing at the floor. He was in a position where he could not get leverage enough to free the gun from Cross and he cried out: "Al! Get it."

Allen had not moved from his chair. He said: "What for? I took the shells out of it when I went through the desk. I knew damn' well he'd try to do the Dutch when he got caught up with." He laughed, and at the sound Cross wilted and put his head down in his arms on the desk. Prentice sat on the edge of the desk, balancing the gun, and Allen asked: "Blackmailed into it, weren't you?"

The head nodded.

"Why didn't you tell us? That'd been better than getting mixed in a murder."

Cross looked up in horror, tear stains streaking his cheeks. "I wasn't in that. I went down there to warn her. I got thinking about Grossman being killed and thought she was in danger."

"She was in danger all right."

"I told her she'd better leave town and not tell anyone where she was going. I was afraid of Schwartz, but I didn't want any more people killed."

"Why were you afraid?"

Cross made a motion towards the safe, said dully: "It's all in there. I was in a jam for money and I took some from him. It was when those inspectors on the new Armory job he contracted were under fire. I didn't make a case against them, and he could have ruined me at any time after that. I've just been getting in deeper all the time." He dropped his head, stared at his hands. "The only thing left is . . ." He shrugged and looked at the empty gun on the desk.

Prentice was staring at Cross, a question in his eyes. He jerked his head at Allen, said: "Al! See what you think of this," led the way to a corner of the room and talked, nodding

his head at Cross from time to time. They came back to the desk and Prentice asked: "If we show you a way out of this, will you play ball with us?"

Cross spoke in the same dull voice. "There's no way out. Schwartz will have me killed when he knows I've talked. And the whole dirty business will come out."

"There is a way. A chance at least."

"I'll do anything you want." Cross's face did not lighten.

"It's compounding a felony."

Cross smiled with no mirth, shrugged.

"It'll take Schwartz and everyone else that knows a thing about your deals with him out of the way. It's dangerous, though. Plenty!"

Cross looked at the empty gun on the desk, shrugged again.

Cross opened the door to Schwartz, said: "How are you, Izzy?" and to the dim shape behind him: "And you, Kailor?" He told Schwartz: "Gino's here and I've let the maid go and my wife's out of town. I thought this would be a better place to meet than at your office."

Schwartz shrugged out of a topcoat, grunted: "It'd make no difference. What can't be proved, won't hang anybody," and Kailor, behind him, laughed and added: "Stiffs can't get up and testify."

Cross led the way to the library and as he stood at the door to let Kailor past him before closing it, Schwartz strolled to the desk and stood looking at the papers still littering its surface. He said without looking up: "That was good work getting Gino out," and nodded at the little Italian seated across from him. "If you hadn't pointed out to the judge that he was a stranger in town and had no motive for attacking those two coppers, I doubt if the judge would have gone for only five grand for bail."

Kailor walked behind Gino and sat down, still behind him and facing Schwartz, who was standing back of the desk. He grunted: "That jail is nobody's bargain, either. Before the writ and bond caught up with me, these same two coppers

worked me over plenty, but didn't learn anything." He spat on the heavy rug, and staring at the back of Gino's head, said, "If I was a damn' wop I'd have spilled my guts."

Gino swung around, snapped: "What's that!" and Schwartz said: "Now, now boys!" He spoke to Cross. "Kailor got in a jam once and an Italian boy spoke his piece. I've told him that Gino ain't that way . . . that Gino's right."

Kailor grunted scornfully and Gino turned his eyes away from him and back to Schwartz, who was reading a letter he had picked up from the desk. Gino said: "Cross has been telling me that this Prentice came to see him when I was in jail." His voice had a slight accent but was soft and low.

Schwartz looked up from the letter, sat down at the desk, said: "He told me, too. What of it? They didn't learn anything."

"Cross did." Gino's eyes were black and glowing, and Schwartz looked puzzled. "Cross learned plenty."

"What do you mean by that?" Schwartz swung towards Cross but Gino rapped out: "I'm still talking!" and Schwartz turned back to him. "Cross said this copper told him he had a tip about my brother and Williams going to do the Denzer job. And that he was there waiting and that the only reason he didn't catch 'em in the house was because the job took no time. Did Cross tell you that?"

"Why, no," Schwartz said slowly. "I figured they were tipped to Denzer's hideout but that was all." He turned to Cross, asked: "Did they tell you that, Hal?" in a puzzled voice.

Cross said: "Yes, they did."

"Why didn't you tell me this?"

Cross shrugged: "I thought you knew it," turned his head away from Schwartz.

"Thought *I* knew it!" Schwartz shook his head and put the letter down on the desk. "What *is* all this?"

Gino slipped his right hand up his left sleeve, said in his soft, low voice: "Why shouldn't he think you knew it? The copper said your office called him and told him." His right hand slid out from the sleeve and an inch of steel followed it.

"You told me and Mario it was a cinch. Told us that Denzer expected us to come there and pay off for you. I couldn't go, so Williams went with Mario instead. They run into a stake-out."

Schwartz burst out: "You're crazy!" His eyes were on the knife blade showing in the Italian's sleeve.

"Like a fox, I'm crazy! You had the girl killed because she knew too much. And Denzer. Why not my brother and me? If we were killed by the cops, *we* couldn't talk."

Cross, at the right, was leaning against the library door and was twenty feet from the group at the desk. Kailor was some five feet behind and directly in back of Gino, who faced Schwartz across the desk. Wide French windows, closed and draped, were at the left of the room. Schwartz looked over Gino's head, narrowed his eyes at Kailor, who nodded slightly in return.

Gino bent a little in his chair, whispered, "Well . . . ain't it so?"

His hand moved out of his sleeve a little more, and Kailor took a blackjack from his pocket and balanced it in his hand. He stood up and Gino heard the movement and turned his head. Schwartz squirmed in his seat, dragged a gun from his hip pocket, and Gino caught the motion and turned back. He said: "You would!" and flashed the knife all the way clear from his sleeve, and with this, Schwartz shot from below the desk.

Kailor had the sap halfway up to strike, but with the shot fell forward on Gino. Gino twisted free, flinging him to the floor, and as Schwartz fired again, leaned across the desk. Schwartz cried out and made an attempt to lift his gun above the desk, but Gino was halfway across it with his right hand out, and the gun barrel hit the edge of the desk and clattered to the floor.

Gino lunged with the knife once more, turned his head towards the windows as they crashed open. Prentice, already half through the windows, flinched as Allen fired past his ear. Gino fell across the desk with his right hand still holding the knife in Schwartz's throat. Schwartz, with his hands

around Gino's and the knife, wavered and slowly fell towards him and across him.

Prentice stepped gingerly towards the desk, gun in hand, watching Kailor, who had not moved since Gino had thrown him to the floor. He turned him over, said: "Deader than hell!" and to Cross, leaning whitefaced against the door: "Looks like a clean sweep. How did he get it . . . from what we heard it was between Gino and Schwartz."

"He fell when Schwartz shot the first time. Schwartz missed Gino and got him."

Allen was straightening the tangle on the desk. He said: "Gino ain't dead. Not yet. He won't last until the surgeon gets here, though." He bent over the Italian, asked: "Can you talk? Listen, you! Can you talk?" and straightened with a shrug when he got no answer except in muttered Italian.

Cross said: "Oh, my God!" in a sick voice. He retched and Prentice went to him and patted him on the back and told him: "You're okay now. You'll be a hero from now on. 'Deputy District Attorney traps band of yeggs.'" He turned to Allen, who was trying to telephone. "And you, you lug, that's twice you've blown my ear damn' near off me. Is it a game?"

Captain Hallahan looked up when the two men came into the Homicide office, his red face shining, his white hair in an angry ruff. He bellowed: "That wop that tried to knife you is out on bail and so is Kailor and I've tried to get you since four o'clock to stop it. Cross stood there and let their lawyer plead 'em out on bail. Bail on a murder rap. That's what we've come to!" He snorted violently. "Don't stand there with silly grins on your faces. Where was you? In some speak drunk? I'm going to the D. A. and build a fire under him that'll burn Cross out of his lousy job inside of twenty-four hours. You was right on him at least; he's a heel."

Prentice said: "Easy, Cap! You got high blood pressure!" in a calm voice and this calm infuriated Hallahan the more. He exploded: "You may think it's a joke to have a hood like that out running around knifing people in the back, but by

God I don't. Where was you? Hey! Don't you know you're supposed to phone in if you can't come in? Huh!" He added in a milder tone: "Lord! I been worried sick about you."

Prentice sat on the edge of the desk and swung his leg back and forth. He said: "We couldn't help it. We was busy and couldn't phone."

"Busy! You should've been out and picking them two up again. You could hold 'em on an open charge."

"Sure we could but why fret about them. They're dead."

Hallahan ruffled his hair, opened his mouth.

"They're dead and so is Schwartz."

Allen said: "They all killed each other. It was more fun!" and Prentice grinned: "Couldn't you buy a boy a drink?"

Hallahan reached blindly for the drawer in his desk. He said: "Is this a rib?" and jerked his hand away from the drawer, roared: "By God if you think you can come in here and . . ."

"It's no rib, Cap!" Prentice's voice was soothing. "They're all dead and we're damn' near it from needing a drink. Come on and pop. We even took care of Hal for you."

Allen looked pointedly at the drawer.

"All right, all right. You chiselers!" Hallahan jerked the drawer open and Prentice sighed happily as he poured his glass over full. He waved it at Hallahan, a little of the whiskey splashed, and Hallahan cursed and moved a report blank out of danger. He said: "All right, I know you're two smarties. Tell it! What you been trying to do?"

Allen corrected: "Not trying. Doing. It worked."

Hallahan grimaced and spat towards a battered cuspidor. He snapped: "If it worked, it worked late. First the chairman of the Board of Supervisors killed. Then there's a girl shot, then a man knifed, then two more killed resisting arrest. One of them a detective assigned to working for the D. A. Then three more killed, all at the same time, you say. Something worked." He snorted.

Allen said soberly: "Grossman was killed by Kailor. That wasn't our fault. Then the girl that could have proved this was killed by her old man. We couldn't help that either."

"I s'pose not. Dal had the notion that Cross was mixed in that." He snorted again.

Prentice tipped his head and drank and put the glass on the desk. He argued: "He was. The story I told you was all true . . . about the frame being this guy killed his wife because he caught her hustling. And Cross was supposed to see that the guy beat the case when it came up. The only thing was that Cross didn't know this and that the plan was changed. Cross wasn't in the change, either."

"Go on." Hallahan rapped nervous fingers on the desk.

"Schwartz hired two hoods to wipe out Denzer because he figured that'd be safer than having him stand trial. Gino and Mario Petrone. Gino struck a snag, got held in Centerville three days on a speeding charge, and Mario had to have somebody else go with him on the job. Schwartz got Williams, who was working for him just the same as Cross was, to go. That's all there was to it. We got here right after they done their stuff and cornered 'em. Williams knew he couldn't beat it if he was caught but figured he might break free if he fought it out. He didn't but I'll always say he tried."

Allen took up the story while Prentice filled glasses. "Cross wasn't in this because Schwartz figured he'd lost his nerve. He was right because Cross went down and warned the gal but he was too late. We went up and tried to scare Schwartz into laying off Heilig and run into this Gino. The crazy hood knew it was us that killed his brother and tried to knife Dal. I don't think Schwartz had a thing to do with that."

Hallahan said: "Maybe not. You could've stuck Gino on that."

"Sure we could. And have him get not more than five years. We got hold of Cross and scared hell out of him. He was ready to crack and I think he had the notion that Kailor had spilled his guts to us when we give Kailor the works. We worked a frame with him, let him get Gino and Kailor out, and got him to set Gino against Schwartz. Gino was nuts about his brother getting the business and believed everything he was told. That's all there was to it. When the beef started,

Schwartz tried to kill Gino and popped Kailor by mistake. That saved us the bother."

"And Gino killed Schwartz?"

"He surely did." Allen looked reflective. "And the funny thing is, it was with a knife and he stuck him in the same place his brother struck Denzer." He tapped the hollow in his throat. "He even turned the knife the same way. I shot Gino through the chest but Schwartz had already hit him in the belly and he'd have died from that."

"What about Cross?"

"He's okay! He got blackmailed into working for Schwartz in the first place and he's such a weak sister he couldn't get guts enough to break loose. We're covering him on the whole thing. That's Dal's idea."

Hallahan argued: "But if he was in it?"

Prentice complained: "Oh, what the hell! It was just drag in a lot of dirt and he's smarted up now. What would we make by it?" He leaned forward. "Look, Cap! If he hadn't worked with us we couldn't have proved a thing on either Schwartz or Kailor and Gino'd only got maybe five years. He helps us and they kill each other off. Ain't that better?"


Hallahan looked doubtful and Prentice persisted: "He got roped in on the whole damn' thing. Give the guy a break. He's been a friend of yours. And besides, the way politics are in this rotten town it's a damn' good thing to know there's one deputy prosecutor that's honest."

Hallahan grinned slightly, said: "Even if he went crooked to get that way. Maybe you're right. I always liked Hal."

Prentice laughed suddenly, set his glass down. "I feel sorry for the poor guy. He's got the messiest rug I ever saw in my life." He grinned at Allen, added: "The hell he'll catch when his old lady gets home."

South Wind*

THEODORE TINSLEY

 BUTCH'S BIG FEET ALWAYS SHUFFLED WHEN HE WAS worried or puzzled. As he led the old man into the private Broadway cubby of the *Planet's* famous columnist, he squirmed his huge shoulders sidewise and his soles dragged like twin ashcans.

He shot a brief glance at Jerry Tracy and resumed his fore and aft scrutiny of the visitor.

In the canny experience of Butch old guys like this worked the novelty grift between Longacre Square and the lobby of the Republic Theatre. They were hired by the Minsky Brothers or maybe Luckyfield cigarettes. Every few yards on their strolling they pressed a button and an electric sign lit up on their shirtfront, or maybe on the seat of their pants. They all wore crummy Prince Alberts like this in the daytime and changed to dress suits with shiny shirt-fronts after dark; and they all sported that white, goatlike whisker under the lower lip. Must be a rule of the union, Butch figured.

Butch waited stolidly to get the office from Jerry—either a discreet scam for himself or a swift bum's rush for the old bird.

"Mistuh Je'y Tracy?"

A soft, blurry voice. Southern. The columnist looked at the straight back, the mild eyes. Sixty, he guessed. His gaze dropped to the veined back of the hand resting on the knobbed cane. It was puckered and fragile looking, spotted

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on the skin with faint brown marks like overgrown freckles. Jerry changed his guess. Seventy, at least.

He answered the formal query with a brisk: "Check. What's the complaint?"

The old man sat down.

"Why, no complaint, I reckon. It's merely that I've been info'med, suh, that you're in a position by virtue of yo' knowledge of theatrical matters and Bro'dway, to render me a kindly service—"

Uh, uh! Here comes the bee, Jerry thought. He could almost hear it buzz. In a moment it would alight painlessly on his wallet and fly away with a buck. Well, maybe two, damn it! The old fella looked pretty tired; the hand that mopped his face was trembly . . .

"I've come to see you about my granddaughter, Mist' Tracy. I tho't—I've been reliably info'med—that you could probably help me find her."

Tracy's eyes narrowed. Might be the McCoy; might be a build-up. Too hot to speculate. The dead pan of his body-guard wasn't much help.

"Outside, Butch," he suggested curtly.

The old man was fingering the edge of an inner pocket. "I've got a photograph—"

"Just a minute, Colonel."

"Major, suh," he corrected courteously. "Major Geo'ge Fenn."

"Okay by me . . . What makes you think I find women? Somebody tell you I was a private op? And who gave you the address? Been over to the *Planet* office?"

"Yes, suh. I forgot—I saw a gentleman named Hennessey, I believe, and he gave me this yere note."

"Let's have a look, Maje," said the columnist grimly. Dave Hennessey was getting to be pretty much of a lousy nuisance lately! Him and his nose for news! Jerry would put a cover on his can the next time he saw him!

He ripped open the envelope and read the thing with a scowl.

"The attached prize package has been getting under our feet and walking around presses looking for you. He refuses to spill the plot except to Mistuh Tracy, suh. Maybe there's a gag in the guy. If there isn't, toss him to Butch.

D. H."

Jerry crumpled the message disgustedly and flipped it into the waste-basket.

"That makes everything as clear as the depression," he grinned. "Who sent you over to the *Planet* in the first place?"

"The clerk at the hotel. Mr. Collins. A ve'y nice man. Most helpful an' courteous. When I explained to him that Alice Anne was in the theatrical profession he said that—"

"I know. He said Jerry Tracy, just like that. He's not Snitch Collins, by any chance, of the dear old San Pueblo?"

"That's right. That's where I'm stoppin'. I like it first-rate, suh. Ve'y quiet. No noise. The cab driver recommended it."

His wrinkled eyes smiled:

"New Yo'k is a real homey town. As nice an' friendly folk as you'd find in the hull of No'th Ca'lina."

Tracy nodded absently. Friendly, all right . . . The friendly hackman, cruising around Penn Station in a gyp-wagon, hauling fresh meat to the San Pueblo, pulling down his commission. The friendly Snitch Collins, steering the old guy to the *Planet* on the off chance that his joint might horn in on some publicity for a change. The friendly Hennessey, his Irish nose alert for a cheap hot-weather gag for his lip-reading customers . . . Just a great big friendly town!

And quiet! You couldn't find a quieter spot than the San Pueblo Hotel if you started at the Aquarium and walked all the way to Gun Hill Road. The San Pueblo specialized in dense silence. The hard-pan dicks who dropped in for an occasional chat with the guests and the management did all the loud talking. A month back they had carried out a small blonde exhibit from a room on the fifth floor. The Tabs made an awful noise. "*Dance Hostess Slain by Fiend!*" But the San Pueblo merely said: "Tsk, tsk!" got a pencil and a

Racing Form and stretched out in its underwear to study the Pimlico results with the shades discreetly pulled.

Tracy said, in a flat murmur: "Yeah, it's pretty quiet . . . The granddaughter's in show bizness, you say—her name's Alice Anne Fenn and you say she's been up here—"

"Fo' years, suh. But I haven't had any letters since—"

"Let's see the photograph."

He studied it with a scowl. The picture was about as helpful as ear-muffs in August. A faded three-quarter pose of a girl about sixteen in a fluffy white dress, with a white ribbon on her hair and a rolled diploma in her left hand.

"Her graduation picture," said the old man proudly. "First in her class. Smart as a buggy whip."

"What's her stage name? Never told you, eh?"

"No, suh. I always wrote to Alice Anne at general delivery. She wasn't much hand at answerin' letters and for the last two years—"

"I know."

Damn' right, he knew! An actress, eh? that meant she might be anything. A waitress in Childs, a salesgirl in Gimbels basement. Or she might be demonstrating corn-razors or opening day-beds in a store window. Pounding the sidewalks of Sixth Avenue or doing a strip act in a cheap burlesque show. Hell—for all he knew she might have a coupla kids and be living in the Bronx, married to a shoe-clerk. Try to find a stage-struck kid from the South in this burg! New York was lousy with Southern gentlewomen trying to get their monickers up in the lights.

He picked up a sheet of paper, folded it, tore a semi-circle out of the crease. He opened the paper and laid it flat on the photograph with the girl's face in the hole.

He studied it, looked away with eyes closed, studied it again. There was something vaguely familiar about that isolated head in the center of the white sheet. Add a few years, subtract the schoolgirl simper . . . Hmm . . . Lower-lip pout, round face and movie chin; moonlight and honeysuckle in the slow drawl of that famous second act exit . . .

Behind his own closed eyelids jigsaw letters joined hands and formed a name. Lola Carfax, Lola . . .

When he opened his eyes his face was wooden.

"Can't place her at all, Major," he said. "Some more dirt, please."

"Suh?" The old man looked puzzled.

"Details. Dope. Information."

Major George Fenn wiped his moist face and began tremulously to recollect. Jerry sucked a pencil end and listened.

Alice Anne was the only kin—his only granddaughter—all he had left—he was gettin' old, powerful lonesome. Smart little tyke; she used to play with his watch-chain an' call him Marse Geo'ge. The Fenns came from Thunder Run, in No'th Ca'lina. Not much of a place, but pretty, suh . . . Saggin' fences an' houn' dawgs blinkin' lazy, with their paws couched in the red dust o' the road. Thunder Run warn't much of a crick but it certainly did thunder, by Judas Priest! when the stars made everythin' else quiet an' the spray kep' brashin' an' gurgling in the dark over them flat stones. An' the hills—blue, suh!—with hawks driftin' like dots an' fat white clouds that never moved . . .

"So Alice Anne packed up and left," Tracy reminded him.

That was correct. She went No'th. Grandpap couldn't hold her, not after she married that damn' Jeff Tayloe. Only seventeen, she was. Headstrong as a colt.

Jerry stopped sucking the pencil abruptly. So La Carfax was married! Well, well—and also, hum, hum!

Jeff Tayloe was a scamp, it seemed. A damn' cawn-pone hillbilly with white teeth an' a big laughin' voice—an' she ma'ied him. Three months later Jeff was in jail and Alice Anne smiled calculatin' an' far-away, packed up and went North. Plenty o' spunk. She wrote letters for a while, then they stopped coming. Never told him her new name—he always wrote to Alice Anne Fenn at general delivery, and after a while his letters came back with big carmine rubber-stamp marks all over them.

"How long since she left, did you say?" Tracy murmured.

"Four years this fall."

Humm . . . Lola Carfax—seventeen and four—check! Three years since Hymie Feldman picked her out of thin air and gave her the juicy lead in “Southern Charm.” A natural! Couldn’t act worth a plugged dime, but her drawl—oh, man! And her luscious innocence in the second act—oh, ma-a-a-an! And her wise, case-hardened persistence in the part after the smash-hit closed. Little Lola knew instinctively what the wise critics didn’t—that Southern Charm was a golden racket in a big evil-minded burg, if you played the role on Park Avenue and met the right people and your voice was as soft and velvety as pollen on a bee’s thigh . . . A luscious peach from the Southland with a small, rotten pit tucked snugly away in the fruit. Jerry knew the outlines; Patsy would know a hell of a lot more!

He said, absently, “Beg pardon?”

“—my declinin’ years,” the old man was saying in a slow, stately murmur. “The last prop of my house. If you could only find her—”

“I thought you said she had a brother,” Tracy lied in an odd voice.

The old man hadn’t said anything of the kind, yet he nodded.

“Did I mention him? Her brother, Henry Fenn, made the supreme sacrifice in France, suh. She’s all I have left.”

“Check,” said an odd, gasping voice in Jerry’s brain. “No brother to guide her. Then who whelped Buell Carfax? And—holy sweet hominy!—can it be that young Massa Buell has white teeth and a big, laughing voice? Also, how tight are Southern jails, I wonder?”

He was burning with a desire to get to Patsy and soak up her slants on the subject. Patsy could spear a fish like Lola Carfax with a dozen well-chosen words.

He got to his feet, smiled, held out his hand.

“Tell you what, Major. You’ve got me interested. I don’t recognize the photograph but I’ll keep it, if you don’t mind. You wait for developments at the San Pueblo—I’ll have Butch ride you over in a cab. It may take a little time to trace Alice Anne—”

"I was hopin' you might find her for me in the next fo'ty-eight hours," Major Fenn said faintly. "Circumstances at Thunder Run make it impe'ative, I'm afraid—"

Busted. The old fella had his fare probably and a small, carefully counted roll . . .

"We'll do the best we can, Maje," said Tracy cheerfully.

He stepped into the outer office and leaned over Butch's cauliflower ear.

"Take this guy over to the San Pueblo. After you've parked him, go up to Snitch Collins at the desk and tell him I said to keep his hooks off the major. Tell him if he doesn't I'll send someone over there that'll take him by the ears and smash every damn' chair in the lobby with his heels! Tell him that from me."

Butch made a slow spittle-noise with his lips. He pulled his unflinching joke, a high-pitched falsetto: "Is that a pwomise?"

He went out with the major and Tracy walked to the window and stared across at the dirty façade of the Times Building.

He put on his hat after a while and went out.

Typewriters were clicking busily in the *Planet's* big news room. Hennessey looked up from the city desk as Tracy breezed by.

"Hi, Jerry! Get any belly laffs outa the old gempmum?"

"Shut up, you ape, or I'll raise a high hat on your skull!" Tracy grinned. "Patsy around?"

"Where d'yuh get that Patsy stuff? Lay off! I happen to know she don't like it."

"Brrr! You happen to know! You wouldn't know if your collar was unbuttoned, Dave. See you later when you got money."

He turned a corner, went down a corridor and stepped into the third cubby on the left.

"Howzit, Patsy?"

"H'lo, Bum." She sat back. "Lousier an' lousier. This place makes me sick. I could be fired right now for what I think.

I've been toying with the quaint notion of expunging myself from the payroll."

"So what? And if same occurs?"

"I could try newspaper work for a change."

"Ouch! That hurt!" He looked at her with alert eyes.

"No kiddin', Jerry," she said gravely.

She was tall and slim, almost loose-jointed. Nice face, dark hair and eyes, small mouth. She dished up society news and could write with a cruel, jewel-like hardness when the need arose. It seldom did. Her customers rode in the Bronx Express and liked prose poems about Piping Rock. She could turn that stuff out in her sleep. She and Jerry were the twin stars that made the circulation manager of the *Planet* sing in his bathtub. Doris Waverly's Chat, syndicated . . .

She had been born in a beery flat on Tenth Avenue. Kicked loose, saved up, pulled a grim A.B. out of Vassar—talked nice to strangers and tough to friends. Her real name was Veronica Mulligan. Tracy called her Patsy and she liked it. Hennessey, the city editor, tried it once and she curled him like Cellophane with a brief, pungent description of his type, straight out of the Elizabethan drama.

"Ever hear of Lola Carfax of the ole Southern Carfaxes?" Tracy asked her.

"Ah reckon, Mistuh Beauregard . . . Why ask me? You've got the rat assignment, Jerry."

"Come, come, child! Poppa wants the dirt."

"Want it brief?"

"Uh, uh."

"I'll say it slowly. She's a wise, crooked, honey-drawlin', little—"

"I getcha. B as in bird-dog."

"And not the Poppa, either. . . ." She grinned. "Why the sudden interest?"

"Her grandpappy's in town. The real name, if you'd like to know, is Alice Anne Fenn. Take a long look and say yes or no."

She studied the photograph.

"It's Lola, all right. That's one dame that can make the hackles rise on me. She and her pretty brother!"

"What's he like, this brother? Wait—don't talk! Has he got nice strong, white teeth and a big laughing voice?"

"That's Buell. Add the professional drawl and the phoney courtly manner and he's yours."

The columnist's smile cut a little crease in his face.

"What makes you think I want him? Listen, Patsy! She married him when he was Jeff Tayloe, when she was shy and seventeen, in the dear old deep Southland."

"Tell me some more," Patsy said slowly. Her dark eyes were like agate.

He told her a lot. When he had finished she nodded.

"I've often wondered about Buell Carfax," she admitted. "He's only been on the scene for a year or so. Her graft is no mystery but I never could figure brother Buell. They're smooth workers. Right now I'd say they're both definitely in the inner sanctum. I've only heard one 'no' since Lola gave Park Avenue the office. It came from old Miss Lizzie Marvin of Sutton Place. Somebody said: 'Dear little Lola! Such a sweet child!' And the ancient virgin from Sutton Place smiled her wise old smile. 'The little girl in white? Ah, yes. . . She fairly stink-ks of Southern charm!' I had all I could do to keep from hugging the old warhorse!"

Jerry lit a cigarette, leaned over the desk and blew smoke against his trick Panama.

"Scene changes. What about this Doctor Altman? Profile, please."

Her lips curled.

"The good doctor is Church of England. Edgar Louis Altman. He gets around. Surgeon, polo, squash—maybe Lola Carfax."

"Why maybe?"

"There's always a big maybe about matrimony—did I tell you the girl was smart? She's been in the money for months, but like old Robert E. Lee, she won't surrender without a ceremony. If I were you I'd bet on matrimony. Altman has

sunk enough dough already to make a wedding look like good economy. He's chasing her hard, Jerry."

"I'll make a note of that," he grinned. "The little girl is chased."

She said irritably: "Stay sober. How about Buell Carfax? The big brother with the nice teeth."

"You asking me, Patsy? A nice boy like Jeff Tayloe gets out of a North Carolina jail, sees something in a rotogravure, reads something else in the social chatter, picks a few pockets and comes North. What a lovely reunion *that* must have been! I'd say the split was 50-50, but we know Lola is smart so maybe he's only cutting a straight 10 per cent. Even at that, he could play ball—it's a life job, Patsy, and a handsome brother with a smooth line is worth 10 per cent of anyone's dough."

Her face clouded. "And the old grandpappy's in town? He sounds nice. It's nice to find someone that's McCoy once in a while. . . . Where's he parked?"

Jerry chuckled. "You'd never guess. San Pueblo. Nice and quiet, he says."

"Holy cats! Well—what are you going to do?"

"None of your damn' business."

"I'd like to talk to the old fella."

"You'd *better* like it," he said. "You've been talking to too many phonies lately. It spoils your temper. Go on over and pump him. It's a tonic. Tell him I've got a lead. If you have time you might drop in on the Carfax suite and smell the air. . . . What would you like to do tonight?"

"You wouldn't understand, you heel."

"The hell I wouldn't! I'll shoot an arrow, just to show you. Let's go yokel for the evening."

"Are you kidding?"

He pulled on his Panama, snapped the trick brim, waited.

"A corned-beef dinner," said Doris Waverly, Inc. "With cabbage, or you can go to hell! A ride on the Staten Island Ferry. We'll sit on the top and you'll keep your mouth shut and hold my hand. Did anyone ever tell you you talk too much?"

He leaned over and kissed her on the tip of her sharp nose.

"You simple-minded ape," he said, and went out the door, grinning.

She's got the summertime heebies, he decided mentally. The poor kid looked seedy, tired. He'd siphon a coupla drinks into her tonight and try to wisecrack her out of the gloom.

But Patsy wasn't to be blarneyed. She was glum over the corned-beef, sour on the boat ride. She borrowed his butts and stared morosely at the lights of St. George. The boat thudded monotonously; the vibration tickled their feet.

"How'd you enjoy Lola and the boy-friend?" he inquired.

"Dead fish," she snapped. "Must be a few more in the Harbor tonight. Get that sweet whiff! Do you s'pose it's true that Indians used to paddle around this lousy burg in clean water before the smell era?"

"Don't go Noble Redman," he grinned. "Friend of mine went to Taos once. According to him, the Injun kids learn to smell long before they learn to eat."

"I wouldn't be surprised. . . . I saw a clean show today, Jerry."

"You're telling me! How'd you like the old fella?"

He watched the slow smile come and go.

"N-i-ce. An old-fashioned road show crammed full of hoke. . . . I don't think it was good for me. Made me think of Dennis Aloysius."

"Do I know Dennis?"

"Why should you?" she said sweetly. "He was the respected sire. The ancestor. Tenth Avenue. Waterfront whiskey. Beer by the scuttle for a chaser."

Her cigarette end glowed jaggedly, once, twice, and then went over the rail in a long arc.

"You're swell company," said the columnist feebly.

They stood outside the gaunt cavern of the South Ferry Terminus and a hackman threw open his door invitingly.

Tracy said: "You need a coupla highballs, cheerful!"

"No." She hesitated. "But if you knew where we could get a tall glass of good old-fashioned beer—"

Tracy grinned. "With pretzels."

"And some Roquefort and crackers—and a slice of Bermuda onion."

Jerry turned to the chauffeur.

"Okay, Rocco. Click us uptown till you hit Third Avenue. I'll tell you where to stop."

They downed a couple of tall ones, found out they were hungry, and fixed that too. They walked over to Fifth.

On the downtown bus the girl said, suddenly: "What are you going to do about Anne and the last of the Fenns?"

"Have I got to tell you that again? None of your damn' business."

"You always were a consistent rat!" she said with cold rage.

Tracy chuckled without rancor.

"Here's the schedule. Go over to see Massa Geo'ge Fenn tomorrow morning. Tell him that Old Sleuth Tracy knows all and that the search has been successful. Take him over to the Consolidated Ticket offices and if they roll Pullmans as far as Thunder Run, say Pullman as though you meant it."

"Any other little jobs?"

"Sure. Check him out of the San Pueblo. See that Snitch Collins behaves himself on room extras. Then I'll let you bring the major over to me. I'll be in the Times Square hideout. Any questions? Dismissed!"

He pressed the stop buzzer.

She wrenched around to look at him. Her voice was a whisper, a mere thread.

"You lousy heel, if you do anything or say anything to hurt that old man, I swear to—I'll—"

"My corner. I get off here," said the columnist.

He tipped his hat, swayed down to the rear of the bus and swung off. He called up from the sidewalk: "So long, Babe."

She leaned over the rail and gave him a furious farewell—a loud and rather fruity bird.

"Ding, ding," went the bell. The grinning conductor leaned way out to stare. He hung like a swaying chimpanzee for the next five blocks.

Mr. Buell Carfax was tall, handsome, with cold eyes and a small ash-blond mustache. He bowed briefly to Tracy and shot a quick flicker at the stolid Butch. Tracy had forgotten to mention Butch over the wire.

"I hardly think, Mister Tracy," said the courtly brother of Lola, "that Mis' Carfax would care to be interviewed. Any news of plans, social engagements and so fo'th is, of co'se, sent to yo' readers regularly by Mis' Carfax's secretary."

Tracy said: "This is different."

"If there is anything that I personally might—"

Tracy said, again: "This is different."

The cold eyes focused on him. After a moment they blinked.

"Very well. This way, please."

Nobody said anything to Butch. He trailed after Tracy. Lola Carfax was standing on the far side of the room, examining a small hunting print on the wall. She didn't turn around.

Buell said, in his stately drawl: "Lola, honey, here's that newspaperman."

She paid no attention. Tracy walked swiftly across. His smile was as thin as a hacksaw blade. He stood and looked at her back for a moment. He caught her eyes reflected in the glass of the picture frame.

He said, deliberately: "Turn around, you cheap little grifter!"

She whirled. Her beauty was like the flash of a blinding ray. Tense, wordless, carved in ice. Her red lips were parted slightly, she seemed scarcely to breathe. Her eyes had the cold, hard glaze of a cat's.

Across the room, Buell Carfax gave a thick bellow of rage.

"Why, dam' yo' filthy Yankee—"

As he sprang forward his hand came away from his vest pocket. The light glinted on the muzzle of a tiny derringer. Butch's hand thrust out with the speed of a striking snake. His hairy fingers closed around the slender wrist and bent arm and weapon upward.

There was a muffled report; a short, straining tussle; Carfax squealed shrilly as his pinioned arm snapped.

Butch's left hand caught the slumping man by the throat and pinned him upright against the wall. He held him there almost casually. His attention was on the little derringer in his own right palm. Butch had never seen a toy like that before. He stared at it with the absorbed curiosity of a monkey.

Tracy smiled into the lovely eyes of Lola. She was lifeless, stiff, except for the candle-flame in her eyes. There was something eerie and horrible in the intensity of her fright. Her voice was barely audible.

"Is this a hold-up?"

"You're damn' right."

"What are you after?"

"Everything you got."

They were like conspirators whispering together in a dark cave.

"You can't get away with this. You must be insane. You're a madman."

He said to her: "No, I'm not—Mrs. Jeff Tayloe."

The flame he was watching was quenched for an instant and then blazed up brighter than before.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh yes you do, baby."

There was no humanity in Tracy, either. Two lumps of ice whispering together.

He paused a moment.

"Thunder Run," he said. "It's in North Carolina. No comment?"

She watched him with that horrible immobility.

"Just an old-fashioned story about an old-fashioned gal. Once upon a time there was a gal. Pretty name. Alice Anne Fenn. Lots of brains but no judgment. She was always a sucker for white teeth and a big bass voice. So she married a lousy hillbilly home from the wars, name of Jeff Tayloe—and Jeff carved a yaller gal in a particularly nasty way and went to jail—and little Alice Anne saw the Big Town beckoning, packed her cotton underwear and scrambled North."

Tracy grinned like a wolf. Butch had pocketed the deringer. His left hand still pinned the boy friend against the wall. He was listening to the bedtime story with a puzzled interest.

"Only trouble was Jeff Tayloe was smart too," the columnist resumed. "He wangled a pardon after a while and saw a photo and read the papers. He had pretty sharp eyes. It all worked out swell after the first dirty argument. Then they got down to business. Jeff got a break; Alice Anne got a well-built husband that she had kinda missed; Lola Carfax got a brother and a protector. Background means a lot on Park Avenue. Brother Buell was well worth the percentage he held out for."

His voice sounded friendly, quite cheerful.

"A swell arrangement for all hands except the fish. But the fish has dough, so who cares? This fish even thinks about marrying, believe it or not. Good old Doctor Edgar Looie Altman. Let's see; he lives at the *Mayflower*, doesn't he?"

The movie chin trembled. The little-girl eyes were grown up now and haggard. A bead of sweat gathered in the hollow under the red pout of her lower lip.

"Blackmail," she whispered stonily.

"You tellin' me?"

"You can't prove it. He'll throw you out on your face."

Tracy said, mildly: "I forgot to tell you. Grandpa's in town. Major Geo'ge Fenn. As innocent as a child—proud of his race and his lineage—as simple and honest as they come. I thought I'd take him over to see the Doctor."

Her throat made an ugly rattling sound.

"Damn your soul, if I had a knife I'd rip your belly—"

Slow tears welled from her eyes. He waited.

"How much?" she said, finally.

"I told you once. Everything you got."

"Five thousand, cash."

Tracy laughed at her.

"Put on your hat, lousy. Go get your bankbook. We're gonna take a walk and close an account."

"It's all I've got in the world. You'll strip me."

"That's a good start. You'll get along. . . . Keep an eye on

the boy friend, Butch. We'll be back. Look this joint over."

Butch nodded and his big forehead creased with a self-conscious and intelligent frown. "Sure, sure." Buell Carfax's face was a dull purple. He was out on his feet. His broken arm hung limply.

She looked at him with a cold loathing as she went out. Tracy held open the door ceremoniously. He had a brief case with him. He had brought it along because he preferred cash.

When they returned Butch was sitting alone in an armchair, smoking a cigar. The top of his breast pocket looked like a pipe organ of Havana Specials. He nodded towards an inner room.

"On the bed in there, Mr. Tracy. I hadda slough him. How'd yuh make out?"

"Fair. Did you go over the joint?"

"Yop. Small change. . . . Got a baby roll outa his hip pocket. Coupla sawbucks in the bureau, wrapped up in a silk pantie."

He grinned, got up and took the heavy brief case.

Lola Carfax watched them go. A faint moaning reached her ears from the inner room. She stood rigid listening to the monotonous sound for a long time. A haggard face swam back at her from the small antique mirror on the wall.

She screeched at it suddenly. Sprang at the mirror and wrenched it down. Whirled, flung it viciously with both hands. Then she stood there shaking, looking dull at the jagged fragments.

Patsy brought Major Fenn into Tracy's little Times Square office with a slow, solicitous smile for the old man and a quick, stabbing scowl at the bland columnist. There was not much of Doris Waverly about her—and a whole lot of Veronica Mulligan. She looked worried, vaguely suspicious.

Tracy sprang up and gave the old man his chair. He hooked another one closer with his toe and Patsy snapped shortly: "Thanks," and sat down.

Tracy fiddled with a pencil and laid it down again.

"I, er . . . I promised I'd try to find your granddaughter, Major. It's been quite a search. I, er . . . I've been successful."

"You've found Alice Anne?"

"I've found out about her," Tracy said evenly.

"Where is she? Have you her address?"

The *Planet's* playboy hesitated.

"Do you want the truth? You'd like to know the truth, even if it—hurt?"

The shaggy eyebrows twitched. The pink face went gradually gray.

"I reckon the plain truth will suit me, suh."

The girl at his side made a sudden hopeless gesture.

"Listen, Jerry! You didn't find her. You're lying. You made a mistake."

"Shut up!"

His shaking voice became even again.

"I found her under her stage name. The identification is proved. The photograph of Alice Anne and the facts you gave me were conclusive evidence . . . Did you ever hear of the Arcadia Theatre?"

No. George Fenn hadn't heard. Neither had Veronica Mulligan from the look on her face.

Jerry told them about it. It stood on Fifth Avenue and 59th Street, opposite the Park. The pride of New York—the old Arcadia Theatre. It housed nothing but the best, the finest, the cream. Alice Anne was its greatest star—its last glorious star.

The girl was staring at Tracy with amazement.

"A little over a year ago," Jerry said, "Alice Anne played her greatest role. In the middle of the second act there was a blinding flash backstage, a sheet of flame shot out from the proscenium. . . . There's a new hotel where the grand old playhouse stood. The theatre was totally destroyed."

The columnist's forehead was glistening with sweat.

"Alice Anne Fenn was standing in the wings in costume, waiting for her cue, when the flames came. She refused to leave the theatre; shook off the hands of rescuers. She knew there were two chorus girls, hemmed in by flame in a blind

corridor on the dressing-room level. Alice Anne gave up her life in a vain effort to save those two girls."

He added tonelessly: "When the ruins were searched she was not-found."

Patsy's palm rested suddenly on the back of the major's veined hand. Her eyes were hard and bright, enigmatic.

"Thank you, suh," George Fenn managed to articulate. He drew in a deep breath. "I certainly want to—to thank you for your—efforts—"

"Why, that's all right. . . . There—there were a few legal matters connected with your granddaughter's estate. I took the liberty of acting as your agent, signing for you. The trust officials were quite sympathetic, friendly."

He touched the fat brief case awkwardly.

"The estate, of course, goes to you. I thought you'd like it in cash. It's here—a little over ten thousand dollars."

The columnist shifted slightly in his chair to avoid the angry challenge in Patsy's eyes. The old man wasn't listening at all; the talk of money was a meaningless buzzing on his ear-drums.

He said, gently: "She could do no other, being Fenn. She was suckled on gallantry, suh. . . . She used to twist my watch chain with her little fat fingers, call me Massa Geo'ge. . . . My dead son's child. . . ."

"You've got his ticket bought?" Tracy whispered to Patsy.

"Yes."

He pressed a buzzer with a fierce fumbling jab.

"All right, Butch. Take care of the brief case. Go over to Penn Station with him. See him aboard."

The major got slowly to his feet. He turned at the door and Patsy turned with him. Her arm braced his.

"I want to thank you," said the major, "for yo' kindly help. New York's been mighty fine to me. Nothin' but friendliness in the two days I've been here. I'd feel it remiss not to thank you, not to let you know my deep gratitude." He patted the hand on his arm. "You too, Mis' Waverly."

They passed outside and the columnist heard Patsy's strained voice. "Wait a minute, Butch. Just a second."

She came back and closed the door.

"Listen, Rockefeller! I'm in on this. Your damn' dough's no better than mine! I've got a half interest in the racket or I'll swing on your lip right now!"

He grinned at her in startled wonder.

"You're as pretty as a picture, Kid. . . . Don't be silly. It's not my dough."

"Whose?"

"I went to the proper window for it. Carfax. I pumped her for every nickel she had."

"Are you lying, you lowlife?"

"Stop snuffling and show sense. Do I dig for ten grand of hard-earned Tracy jack because some old bozo comes drifting in to put the bee on me? Grow up, baby; you're living in a big town."

"It stinks," she shrilled suddenly.

"Who said it didn't? So does Thunder Run. So does every other damn' burg. You're still soft, baby; get back in the water and boil some more."

She stared at him with brimming eyes that jeered at him.

"Tell your friend Hennessey to run a *want-ad* in the *Planet*."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm through with this lousy town. I'm going where I can breathe clean air."

She fumbled in her handbag, threw an envelope on the desk in front of him. Jerry could see Pullman tickets—two seats—to Thunder Run.

She looked at him defiantly. "What the hell do you think of that!"

She swept the tickets into her purse and the door slammed. A moment later it opened slowly.

"Jerry. . . . Hey, hardboiled. . . ." Her eyes were soft. "Any time you get sick of this crooked game, come on down to Thunder Run. I'd be awful glad to see you. . . . Anytime. . . ."

The door swung with a small click.

Tracy leaned back in his chair, cupped the back of his

skull with his clasped hands. After a while he grimaced wanly.

"I'm not so tough," he thought. "I gotta be careful or they'll have me pitchin' hay in Wichita—or wherever the hell you pitch hay!"

He dragged a notebook out of his pocket and flipped open the pages to a recent entry. He got up and went over to the dictaphone.

He shrugged and spoke nasally into the flexible tube of the instrument:

"Harvey Smith, feed and grain impresario, and his wife, the former Claire La Tour, are ffft-ffft. . . . Mrs. Smith has left for Reno to establish legal residence. . . . It's a girl. . . ."

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Front cover illustration by Maurice Thomas

