

The Kid Comes Clean

By STANLEY BRUCE

Just a Tia Juana lady—and the Kid thought different. But ya can't think in the racket—it doesn't pay.

THREE loud knocks on the door. The "Kid" jumped from the couch and grabbed his .45 automatic. There could be no mistake about those knocks. Coppers have a peculiar way of knocking and what the Kid didn't know, about coppers wasn't worth telling.

More raps on the door. This time louder and in quick succession. The Kid removed the cartridges from his gun and threw the weapon in the corner. Funny thing for a killer to do. The Kid must be screwy—tossing his rod away when the dicks were outside.

He didn't throw his gun away in 'Frisco when the bulls trailed him to his room. No. Police records relate how he pumped a stream of hot lead through the door. Before the smoke cleared he crawled out of the window and climbed the fire escape to the roof. He ran across the roof to the next building and slid down a pipe to the alley. It was a pretty getaway the Kid made in 'Frisco. The records at Police Headquarters will vouch for that.

The Kid didn't intend to croak that 'Frisco copper. Really he didn't. He just shot through the door and Sergeant McGarrity was standing in the way of three of the Kid's bullets. He felt rather sorry the next morning when he read about McGarrity's widow and baby boy. But then McGarrity shouldn't have stood

in front of the door. It was a tough break—that's all.

The chief of police announced through the press that the gunman who murdered Sergeant Timothy McGarrity would be apprehended within twenty-four hours. The Kid started to laugh when he read it and then he thought of McGarrity's widow and he only smiled.

So the coppers were going to capture him within twenty-four hours. The police net spread over the city. Headquarters was filled with suspects. For three days the Kid hid in his room. Then he came out in the open. He remained in 'Frisco for six weeks and departed from the city by the Golden Gate with five grand from a pay roll job.

THE law would never catch up with the Kid, and even if the dicks did accidentally stumble across his trail and trap him like a rat he would shoot his way out. He had one notch on his rod and he might as well carve a second if he was destined to swing at the end of a rope.

But the law did cross the Kid's trail again. The coppers were knocking on his door now—loud, heavy, determined raps. In a minute they would break the door down.

He still had time to get his gun and reload it before they entered. There was ample time for him to

leap through the window and climb the fire escape as he did in 'Frisco. The Kid was familiar with the neighborhood—knew every inch of the district for blocks around. He could run across the roof to the adjoining building and disappear through a skylight. Then down a dark stairway to the basement. It would be easy to outwit the dicks. They weren't as smart as the Kid, you know.

He would have to act quickly, though. Massive shoulders were pressing against the door. The door commenced to give. The Kid walked over and opened it. Funny thing for the Kid to do.

Three dicks burst into the room—three dicks from the Homicide Squad. The Kid, his hands above his head, was looking into the barrels of three sawed-off shotguns.

Detective Captain Jolin searched him.

"Where's your rod?"

Detective Sergeant Thompson asked the question.

The Kid nodded toward the corner where his .45 automatic lay.

"Guess we got you this trip," said Detective Sergeant Thompson, as "Rough House" Brown knocked the Kid to the floor with a sledge-hammer blow to the jaw.

"Suppose you know why we're calling. If you don't we'll wise you up. You're going back to 'Frisco on a murder rap."

The Kid staggered to his feet. A minute passed before he was able to speak.

"Back to 'Frisco on a murder rap, eh? Oh, yes—I know. McGarrity, eh?"

The Kid betrayed no nervousness. He was calm, cool, collected.

"I'm not going to squawk—don't think that for a minute. But there is one thing I want to say."

"Spit it out," the captain snapped.

"There's a girl in the next room. Asleep, if this noise didn't awaken her."

The captain looked in the adjoining room.

"Still sleeping," he informed the Kid. "What about her?"

"She doesn't know my racket. Thinks I'm a square shooter. Get me? She's just a kid—a baby—innocent as they make 'em."

"How long you been living with this tart?" asked Rough House Brown, picking up the Kid's gun.

"She's not a tart. She's a lady and a queen. Get that. A lady and a queen. And another thing. I haven't been living with her. Understand?"

"Just a fatherly interest in the dame, eh?" Thompson exclaimed.

The Kid's face flushed. He clenched his fists but he was too wise to make any cracks. It wouldn't do to antagonize the law. They were three to one. Besides the Kid had an idea and he wanted it to work.

"Where did you meet the queen?" the captain asked gruffly.

"Night before last in the Paradise Café," the Kid replied.

"Pretty tough joint—the Paradise," Thompson remarked.

"But she isn't tough. You could tell she didn't belong there. A perfect little lady. Didn't swear—didn't smoke—and you couldn't hire her to take a drink of hootch."

"One of those old-fashioned girls, eh?" said the captain, sarcastically.

"That's it exactly—old-fashioned. Away from home and broke. Despondent—see. Taking the gas route. I cheered her as best as I could and persuaded her to come with me."

The captain smiled. "A lady and a queen in the Paradise Café."

THE Kid lit a cigarette. He was thinking fast now. The "Queen" might awaken any minute and then it would be too late.

"Boys, I have proposition that might interest you."

"The only thing that interests us is getting you to headquarters," was the captain's answer as he reached for his handcuffs.

"But how would you like to return to headquarters with the dough from the Starr Mills job and the rocks from the Willoughby robbery? If you guys will play with me, I'll play with you. Get me? So much for so much.

"You birds can return to the dicks' bureau with two of the biggest jobs pulled in this burg cleaned up."

"What do you want us to do?" the captain asked eagerly.

"Give me a break with the girl—that's all. If you do I'll give you a signed confession on the Starr Mills and the Willoughby jobs. Big-time stuff, wasn't it? Give me credit, boys, for being one of the biggest shots in the racket. You never heard of me trying to make a Woolworth safe, did you?"

"I guess you're right, Kid—you do shy at nickels and dimes."

The captain was interested. He changed his attitude toward the Kid. He even placed a hand on his shoulder in a sympathetic way.

"Just what kind of a break do you want with the dame?" he asked.

"I want to walk out of here as if everything is all right. No handcuffs—no shotguns—nothing to indicate my racket. For the first time in my twenty-nine years I've fallen for a girl. And I am glad she is the right kind—glad she is a lady and a queen."

The Kid turned and glanced toward the room where the Queen was sleeping. He didn't notice Brown and Thompson wink at the captain. Neither did he see the captain wink at the two detectives.

"And does she love you, Kid?" inquired the captain.

"Say, I could marry her tomorrow."

"Like hell you could!" Thompson blurted.

"Now, listen—maybe the Queen does love him," said Rough House Brown.

"I know she does. And all I ask of you boys, is to let me walk out of here as if everything is all right. When you get me in the squad car you can slip the bracelets on my wrists. If you'll let me walk out as I say I'll clear up those two jobs—confession—loot—everything."

THE captain looked at the Kid for a moment. He wasn't sure he was telling the truth about the Starr Mills and Willoughby cases.

"How do we know you're telling the truth about the Starr Mills and Willoughby jobs?"

The captain was looking the Kid straight in the eye.

"I'm playing square. Didn't I throw my rod away when you came to the door? I could have sent a stream of lead through that door but I didn't want any gun play. I was thinking of her. And when I leave this room I want to walk out with that girl in there believing that I'm on the level."

"We'll give you a break with the Queen," the captain replied.

"Gee—that's swell. And remember—no handcuffs—no shotguns—no——"

The Kid was smiling. He would say good-bye to the Queen without her knowing what he was. He could frame some sort of a story. He had to go away suddenly—unexpectedly. He would think of something to tell her.

Suddenly the smile on the Kid's face disappeared.

"Say, Cap—there's one more thing

before this agreement goes through."

"What is it?"

"Those newspaper guys. Don't book me under my right name. She might read about it in the papers. Book me under that Kansas City alias—Judd Brown. Or that one I used in St. Paul—Henry Smith—will do as well. And, oh, yes—no pictures. Just tell those flashlight boys that I refuse to pose. Wait a minute. I got a better idea. Hold me incommunicado. Then no one can see me—not even those fresh reporters. Is that a go?"

"Sure. We'll do anything we can to clear up those two big jobs," the captain assured him.

The Kid was smiling again as Rough House Brown left the room carrying the shotguns. Everything was coming out as he planned. He raked his brain for a logical story—a story that would explain his hasty departure. At last it came to him.

"Call the Queen in and tell her whatever you have to say. But remember, no phoney moves. The shotguns are out of the room, but you are still covered," was the captain's warning as he and Thompson placed their service revolvers where they could draw them instantly.

THE Kid crossed to the door with Thompson only a step behind him.

"Oh, honey."

The Kid peeped into the room.

"Honey!"

"Yes," the Queen replied, yawning.

"Are you awake?"

"I will be in a minute."

"Will you come here, honey? I want to see you."

In a moment she appeared in the doorway—a beautiful girl in the early twenties. When she saw the Kid's companions she drew her

kimono around her figure and stepped back.

"It's all right, honey, to come in," the Kid said reassuringly. "These boys are my friends—known them for a long time."

She entered the room again and went straight into the Kid's outstretched arms. The Queen was small in stature. She appeared like a beautiful doll that had been touched by a magic wand and suddenly brought to life.

The Kid pressed his mouth to her delicate lips.

"I love you, honey."

"I know it," the Queen whispered.

"And, honey, you would marry me, wouldn't you?"

"Yes."

The Kid turned to the captain and Thompson.

"You see, she does love me. You didn't believe me when I told you."

The Queen's dark brown eyes flashed as she looked at the two men from Headquarters.

"You needn't take his word but you can take mine. I do love him. Understand? I do! I do!"

The Queen was sobbing on the Kid's shoulder—sobbing as if her heart would break. Her frail little body shook convulsively.

The captain and Thompson gazed at each other in amazement.

The Kid tried to comfort her, but she couldn't be consoled.

"Listen, honey."

The Kid's voice trembled for the first time.

"I'll have to tell you as gently as I can. I got to go away unexpectedly. You see——"

"Don't leave me—don't," she pleaded through her tears.

"But I have to—there's no other way out. You see, honey, I'm an adventurer and I signed for this trip months ago. Why, if I'd known that I was going to meet you I'd

never have signed, honey. It's going to be the longest trip I ever took, and there isn't a chance in the world to back out now—not a chance. And you needn't worry about me because I'll be all right. You'll be all right, too. The money I gave you last night will take you home to the folks. You remember you told me all about them in the Paradise Café.

"Gee, I'm glad I found you. Wasn't it funny how I met you in the Paradise? I'll bet you were never in a joint like that before. You're so different than the other girls I've known. You are a lady and a queen. Always remain a lady and a queen, honey—always."

THE Queen looked up in the Kid's face and smiled.

"After a fellow has known the girls at Tia Juana he can appreciate a kid like you."

The Queen shuddered.

"What did you say about the girls at Tia Juana?"

"You haven't even heard about that place. It's the devil's playground, honey—across the line from San Diego. No place for a lady and a queen like you."

"We'll have to be moving, Kid. The boys are expecting us at the office," the captain said, walking over to the door.

The Kid and the Queen were clasped in each other's arms. The Kid was dreaming a dream that could never come true. He was a square shooter and the girl by his side was his wife. They were standing outside a little home with a green lawn and flowers. On the porch a baby cooed and laughed. The infant saw the Kid and waved its little pink fingers at him.

Suddenly a different picture flashed in front of the Kid. Sergeant McGarrity was looking at him.

There was a noose at the top of a scaffold. The Kid saw himself mounting the steps assisted by two somber guards. A dark-robed priest followed, chanting a prayer.

THE Kid reached the scaffold without collapsing. For a moment his knees trembled as he looked down upon the upturned faces in the small enclosure below. A guard slipped a black hood over his head. There was a terrific silence and—

It seemed so real to the Kid that for a moment he didn't feel the moist lips of the Queen against his cheek. Neither did he notice the captain or Thompson waiting for him by the door.

"Let's go," came the captain's stern command as Thompson opened the door.

The Kid was saying good-bye to the Queen. He stooped over and kissed her. It was a holy kiss that he pressed to her lips. Love came to the Kid near the end of his life—a pure, wholesome love. When the time came for him to die his last thoughts would be of her.

The Kid felt the captain's firm grip on his arm. He was being dragged away from the Queen's side.

He stooped over and kissed her again. She was weeping softly now.

"Good-bye, honey, always remain a lady and a queen—always."

The Kid walked from the room smiling. He knew that she believed he was a square shooter—he knew that she would never know his racket—never.

THOMPSON remained in the room with her. She asked him for a cigarette.

"I believe you do like that guy, Josie," Thompson said.

A cloud of cigarette smoke was floating above the Queen's head.

"Like him? I love him, you damn fool."

"It was a clever piece of work you put across. It was really clever the way you spotted him in the Paradise and then had him bring you here so we could knock him over. And say, that boy sure fell for you. Can't blame him for that, though."

"Shut up, will you? I don't want to talk about it."

"If you love this guy why did you put him on the spot?" Thompson asked.

Tears streamed down the Queen's face again.

"If you love this guy——"

"I didn't know I loved him at first. I didn't know that I loved him until you dicks came in—until I realized that he was trapped and I'd done it."

"Well, it was a clever piece of work, Josie—very clever."

The Queen walked over and opened the door.

"Come on—get out of here—you beef-necked copper. I hate your guts—all of you. Let that sink into the place where your brains ought to be. I'm through with your lousy police work."

"Gee, but you're getting tough. That ain't no way for a lady and a queen to act."

"A lady and a queen, eh? Well, I guess I ain't a lady and a queen. The devil's playground—across the

line from San Diego. In another week I'll be back at Tia Juana—laughing and dancing in the Silver Dollar—taking the dough away from the suckers and planting it down in my sock to get the Kid the best mouthpiece in 'Frisco."

"Say, the Kid can't beat that murder rap if you had the dough to get the best in the world."

"No? Well, maybe I can get him life—see—perhaps I can get him life instead of the rope."

Thompson walked over and stopped in the doorway.

"That's good. He thought you were a lady and a queen. So you're one of those Tia Juana dames, eh?"

"Sure, that's my old racket. And it's better than slipping info to a lot of dumb coppers."

"I hope there's no hard feelings, Josie. If I'm ever in Tia Juana I'll look you up. So-long," Thompson said, leaving the room.

The Queen walked over to the window and looked out. A police car was parked near the corner. The dicks were snapping the bracelets on the Kid's wrists. In a moment the squad car moved away from the curb and was lost in the heavy stream of late afternoon traffic.

The Queen staggered across the room to the center table and buried her face in her hands.

"A lady and a queen, eh? yeah!"

