



By Beech Allen

A dick turns on the
HEAT
to cool off a couple of crooks!

It was ninety in the shade and getting hotter. The sidewalk along Front Street before the courthouse was sizzling, hot enough to fry an egg.

Inside the building, in the courtroom presided over by Judge Craig, the temperature was even higher. Arthur Corey—alias “Bugs” Corey—on trial for his life for the murder of a Marshall Street jeweler—was sweating copiously as he realized that the breaks were going against him.

He did not have a chance. Smythe, the district attorney, had built up a hole-proof, ironclad case against him. There was only one last formality before the opposing attorneys summed up—the positive identification of Corey as the man who had killed the jeweler in an attempted holdup.

Detective Ben Hart of the homicide squad was on the stand. It was he who had broken the case.

The D.A. held him with a compelling eye and an upraised forefinger. “Just one more question, Detective Hart,” he said in a clear voice that carried to every corner of the crowded courtroom. “Is the man who killed—”

The defense attorney was on his feet. “I object, your honor!”

The judge’s gavel banged. “Objection sustained.

You will have to frame your question differently, Mr. Smythe.”

The district attorney bowed gravely toward the bench in deference to the judge’s ruling. He was satisfied. He had succeeded in focusing the undivided attention of the jurors and the entire courtroom on this last question of his.

He confronted Detective Hart once more, proceeded in his clear, sharp voice. “Is the man you saw running from the jewelry store of Greer & Stone, two minutes after the murder of Amos Stone, with a still smoking automatic in his hand—here in this courtroom?”

The lean, bronzed jaw of Detective Hart hardened perceptibly. He pivoted slowly in his chair, confronted the prisoner in the dock squarely. For a tense, electric moment the eyes of the two men clashed—the hunter and the hunted.

Then Hart spoke, slowly, distinctly: “He is, sir. There he is now, seated in the—”

He never finished. The *ping!* of breaking glass cut his words short. He stiffened in his chair. Something strange and terrible had happened to his face. From a dark, round hole in his forehead blood streamed into his eyes. Hart’s hand came up to his

mouth. He choked once, swayed, pitched forward on his face.

There was stunned silence for a moment. Then it was broken by the hysterical scream of a woman, followed by chaos. Bailiffs, blue-coated coppers, detectives—some leaped forward; others rushed toward the door.

As one, the jurors and the spectators surged forward. The frantic banging of the judge's gavel was drowned in the babel of a hundred excited voices.

For there was nothing that could be done for Detective Ben Hart. He was already dead on the floor, with a bullet in his brain.

DETECTIVE SAM CORRIGAN straightened up slowly from the body. His eyes were bleak, and little quirks of pain pulled at the corners of his mouth. He had been Hart's sidekick; had worked with him on the Corey case.

And, back in his cell, Corey was grinning at the assurance of a new trial and a possible acquittal.

Was that the answer? Had Hart been murdered in that moment when he was on the point of putting the finger incontrovertibly on Corey? There had been talk of retribution; Corey's pals had said that he would never be convicted. Was this what they had meant?

Corrigan turned shortly to Detective Tracey, who also had been in the courtroom at the time of the murder. He spoke sharply and to the point. Tracey, in his turn, growled, waved his arms at the ring of morbidly curious that hemmed in the body and cleared the room.

The door locked with blue-coated coppers on guard, the two detectives communed alone a moment with their dead. Then they crossed to the bank of windows at the rear of the courtroom.

High up in the top pane of the middle one was a neat, round hole. Beyond that, on the far side of a narrow alleyway, the low parapet of a tenement roof was sharply silhouetted against the brassy summer sky.

"It was a cinch," said Tracey, bitterly. "The killer hid behind the parapet up there till Ben got on the stand. Then he steadied his gun, took aim—" He shrugged, swore. "The answer's up there on the roof!"

"Maybe," said Corrigan, slowly.

Tracey eyed him narrowly. "What do you mean—maybe? It's a cinch. Simple as A B C."

Then he snorted. "Got one of your weird theories again?"

Corrigan sighed, shook his head. "Wish I had. Corey's mob said they'd get Ben—and I guess they have."

He pulled meditatively at the lobe of his left ear a moment; for another moment continued to scratch at his jaw.

Tracey watched him with ill-concealed impatience; then mumbling again that "it was a cinch," he headed for the door. It banged shut behind him, but Corrigan did not move. He still continued to scratch at his jaw with an abstracted air.

FIVE minutes later, when Corrigan followed his partner up to the roof of the tenement from which the fatal shot had been fired, he found Tracey in a high state of excitement.

Gingerly between thumb and forefinger, Tracey held up a worn leather wallet. He dangled it annoyingly in front of Corrigan's long nose.

"Didn't I tell you?" he exclaimed, triumphantly.

"Tell me—what?"

"The answer was up here. I picked this up by the trapdoor leading down from the roof. It's got initials on it. *D.L.*!"

Corrigan grunted.

"And it's lousy with prints!"

Corrigan grunted again.

Tracey looked aggrieved. "What's the matter, Sourface?" he demanded. "Don't it click yet? Who's running Corey's mob—I ask you?"

"Larsen—Dave Larsen," answered Corrigan.

"Of course. He fits the initials. There's his papers inside! It's in the bag!"

Corrigan shook his head doubtfully. "Maybe," he said, reluctantly, "but if you ask me, the answer is down there in the courtroom."

Tracey scowled, then laughed. "It's the heat, Sam. It's got you. You got one of your weird theories again, that's all. How can the answer to Ben's murder be down in the courtroom when he was killed from up here?"

"I went over the roof. There's marks in the gravel by the parapet where Larsen waited. The trapdoor, leading down, has been jimmed. And then there's this wallet with Larsen's papers inside and his initials on it. He must have dropped it getting down the skylight!"

Corrigan nodded. "Sounds nice. It's O.K. by

me. Beat it now and pick up Larsen. I'm going to take a look around here."

Tracey growled at the heat, wrapped the wallet carefully in a clean handkerchief. "You're just sore because I got up here first. This is one case that *I* break."

"Luck," said Corrigan laconically, as Tracey headed for the trapdoor.

When his partner's head had disappeared, Corrigan walked slowly to the parapet and stood there for a long moment. Then he dropped to one knee, studied the angle between the parapet and the hole in the courthouse window.

There was no question about it. The shot *had been* fired from there. A rifle, most likely, fitted with a telescopic sight.

This point established, Corrigan next gave his undivided attention to the roof at the base of the parapet. It was flat, covered with loose gravel. The blazing sun beat unmercifully down on his head as he narrowly examined the depression in the gravel—a depression made by the killer as he had crouched down behind the low wall.

It was several minutes before Corrigan straightened up. He pulled at his ear, scratched at his chin. Tracey might be right about Larsen, he mused, but he still thought that the answer was to be found in the courtroom. And back to the courtroom he went.

The body of Ben Hart had been removed. Corrigan stood in perspiring silence, searching his brain for the answer that he felt eluded him. The enervating heat did not help him any.

Then at last he moved. Near the window that bore the telltale round hole at its top, stood a chair. An ordinary-looking chair, just like the rest in the courtroom. But Corrigan seemed to find it most interesting.

He looked it over carefully, examined every inch of its surface. A faint frown appeared between his eyebrows. Then he picked it up gingerly and carried it with him from the room.

In a cooler corridor in police headquarters next door, lounged two young rookies. They straightened at the sight of Detective Corrigan, carrying a chair down the corridor.

"Got something?" one asked, eagerly.

Corrigan grunted, left their curiosity unsatisfied. At the far end of the passage he opened a door that led to the police laboratories, edged his burden

inside and disappeared.

When he stepped through that door again some five minutes later, the rookies saw that he was now burdened with a camera and a case of plates. They exchanged glances.

"What now?" called the nearest.

"This," said Corrigan with elaborate politeness, "is a camera. I'm going to take some pictures—on an empty roof."

They looked after his broad figure until he had disappeared.

"Chasing a cop killer with a camera, eh?" said one, bitterly.

His companion swore softly beneath his breath. "Wish they'd give me the job," he said, grimly. "I'd get Hart's killer and any pictures that would be taken would be taken in the morgue!"

They were gone when Corrigan returned from his trip to the tenement house across the street. Once more he marched into the laboratories. This time, when he emerged empty-handed an hour later, the corridor resounded to the heavy tread of Ed Tracey's feet.

Tracey was in high, good spirits. "Got him!" he told Corrigan, proudly.

"Got who?"

Tracey hooked his thumbs in his vest. "Dave Larsen, of course. Didn't put up any resistance with *me!* He's all tucked away nice and safe behind bars now. And what do you think, Sam"—he jabbed a rigid forefinger at Corrigan's broad chest—"he didn't have an alibi! Not even a phony one! The case, is absolutely open and shut!"

Corrigan avoided the prodding finger and looked very thoughtful. "Good work," he said absentmindedly. Then he started off down the passage. "See you later, Ed. I got work to do."

HAD a casual observer followed Mr. Corrigan around for the rest of that day, he would have been interested and more than a little puzzled by his actions.

Corrigan went first to a dingy tavern known as "Joe's Place," sat down at a rickety table and ordered a drink. When it was brought to him, however, he merely toyed with his glass.

Inconspicuous and silent, he sat there for some fifteen minutes, casually surveying the patrons who drifted up to the bar and went away again. When he paid for his drink, he asked a single low-voiced question of the waiter, received a negative shake of

the head in answer, and left.

From there he began what seemed an interminable round of cafes, bars, and later, in the evening, nightclubs. Each place on his calling list was known to the police as a haunt of the underworld.

In each place Corrigan surreptitiously studied faces; in each place he asked his often-repeated question.

But it was well on toward midnight before he at last got the answer he was seeking. In the back room of a corner saloon a peaked cap nodded an affirmative; lips that barely moved, whispered something from behind a grimy hand.

That something was an address. Corrigan needed no more. And exactly fifteen minutes later, he was ascending the steps of a rooming house.

He squashed a broad thumb on the buzzer beside the door. A slatternly-looking woman answered his summons, her chin at a belligerent angle, one work-worn hand on her hip.

"Well?" she demanded, coldly.

Without being invited, Corrigan marched past her into the hall. "You've got a man named Pete Lanza living here, right?"

"Yeah, but he's out right now," answered the landlady. "Anyway, it's midnight, and—"

"Swell," grunted Corrigan. His hand went into his coat pocket and out again. The dim light overhead gleamed softly back from the shield in his open palm. "Got an extra key for his room? I'm from headquarters."

GRUMBLING anathema at both detectives and criminals alike, the woman drew a jangling bunch of keys from her apron, removed one and handed it to Corrigan. "Next floor, rear," she said, sullenly. "And you needn't start a rumpus that'll wake the house."

"Thanks," said Corrigan, politely. Then he added pointedly. "And *you* needn't let Mr. Lanza know that he's got a caller, see?"

With a sniff, she departed for regions below. Corrigan mounted the long flight of stairs, covered by a strip of worn and faded carpet. From somewhere above came the muted blare of a radio. The rest of the house was still.

He walked quietly to the door at the rear of the hall, leaned his ear against the panel, listened. No sound came from within. He eased the key at last into the lock, turned it gently. Then, drawing his

gun with his left hand, he thrust the door inward a foot and fumbled for the switch beside the casing.

Corrigan's fingers found it, clicked it on. A soundless whistle escaped his lips; then, hastily, he stepped into the room and closed the portal behind him, locking the door once more and dropping the key into his pocket.

He had been surprised to find Pete Lanza, of the nimble wit and nimbler fingers, living in such a shabby rooming house. Now Corrigan understood.

This room was much larger than he had expected and it was luxuriously furnished. Even if Pete Lanza found it wiser to live in this squalid neighborhood, he saw to it that he lacked neither comfort nor luxury in his surroundings.

A swift survey of the room and the private bathroom adjoining it told Corrigan at least one thing that interested him. Lanza did not live here alone; he shared these quarters with another man. Corrigan grunted. He was quite sure that he could name that other man—Sam Scarpio.

As the most likely place to find what he was seeking, Corrigan went first to the large clothes closet in one corner of the room. He pulled open its door and stepped in closer, brushing aside the garments hanging there.

Only a neat row of shoes was on the floor of the closet. Reaching up on tiptoe, he ran an exploring hand behind the hats on a little shelf up above. His fingers closed around something hard and unyielding. Grasping the object, he lifted it down.

It was a .30-.30 rifle! Corrigan's eyes narrowed as he saw that it was fitted with a telescopic sight. Handling it as gingerly as possible, he found that the gun was fully loaded and its barrel clean.

Intent on his prize, he heard no sound. The open door of the closet blocked his view of the door that led to the hall. Corrigan's first knowledge that he was no longer alone came with a rasping voice from behind him:

"Looking for something, mister?"

The detective straightened. Still holding the rifle, one hand near the butt and the other well up on the barrel, he pivoted very slowly.

FACING him, slouch hat pulled low over slitted eyes, stood Pete Lanza. Beside him, an automatic covering the detective's broad figure, was the stocky Sam Scarpio. He moved in closer, took his stand beside Corrigan.

"Uh-huh," Corrigan answered the question.

“And I found it.” He glanced down at the rifle in his hands. “This.”

“A rifle,” said Lanza. “So what?”

Corrigan saw the dark suspicion in his eyes; saw that beside him Scarpio’s finger quivered on the trigger of his automatic.

“A rifle,” he repeated. Then, abruptly, straight from the shoulder: “And it’s going to convict you of the murder of Ben Hart!”

For a split second the eyes of the two men sought each other’s. And in that split second Corrigan took his chance.

To drop down the barrel of the rifle into a firing position was out of the question. There was no time for that. Instead, the detective did the opposite thing. With a sudden coordinated movement of both wrists, he snapped the butt end of the gun—*up*.

The heavy stock smashed Scarpio’s gun hand with terrific force, sending the automatic in a crazy parabola from his grip. Scarpio staggered backward, cursing and nursing his shattered fingers. And before Lanza could recover from his surprise and draw his own gun, the muzzle of the rifle gaped hungrily at his belt buckle.

“Not a move out of either of you,” snapped Corrigan, “or I’ll blast you both!” He jerked his head at Lanza. “Hoist ‘em, you!”

Sullenly, Lanza raised his hands. Corrigan edged over, kicked out at Scarpio’s fallen automatic, sent it spinning into a far corner of the room. Then with his left hand, while he held the rifle in the crook of his right arm, he withdrew a pair of handcuffs from his hip and dropped them at Scarpio’s feet.

“Pick ‘em up!” he ordered. “One is for your good hand—the other is for your pal.”

Still muttering dire oaths, with his bleeding hands Scarpio picked up the handcuffs, snapped one steel bracelet around his own left wrist and approached Lanza. Under the watchful eye of Corrigan and the threatening muzzle of the rifle, Lanza submitted to the manacle.

It was not till then that Corrigan stepped in, relieved Lanza of the gun in his hip pocket and sent it clattering after the other. Lanza’s eyes were pinpoints of malignant hate.

“So you found a rifle and you pull this,” he said, slowly. “Well, copper, after we beat this rap—Heaven help *you!*”

Corrigan was unperturbed by the ominous threat

in the words. “Thanks for cleaning and reloading the rifle, Pete,” he answered. “It didn’t help you any, but it sure helped me.” He smiled wryly.

“I promised the landlady there’d be no rumpus, so we’ll finish this little session down at headquarters. On your way, you guys! March!”

Scarpio headed reluctantly for the door, with Lanza stumbling in his wake. Corrigan knew a grim satisfaction as he patted the stock of the rifle crooked in his arm.

That gun had killed Ben Hart. But it had already saved his—Cardigan’s—life. And now it would send Hart’s killer to the chair.

AN hour later, Detective Corrigan emerged from the district attorney’s office down at headquarters. Night had brought little relief from the torrid heat, and he mopped his brow.

“Sweating, eh?” said Ed Tracey, who had been waiting for him in the corridor.

“Sure,” answered Corrigan, “but this is nothing. You ought to see those two mugs in there.” He jerked his thumb at the door of the district attorney’s sanctum.

Tracey scowled. “I still don’t get it,” he muttered. “Dave Larsen’s wallet was on that roof. Larsen had no alibi at all. And now he walks out of here, nice as you please.”

“That was just it,” said Corrigan. “Your case against Larsen was *too* pat. In the first place, a smart guy like Larsen wouldn’t have been sap enough to have dropped his wallet on that roof. It was a plant. In the second place, a smart guy like him *would* have *had* an alibi if he’d pulled the job—and an ironclad one at that. That’s what got me thinking.”

“Just like that, eh?” retorted Tracey. “So you walked out, grabbed Lanza, and—”

“Not exactly,” said Corrigan. “I had a hunch the answer was in the courtroom. ‘Just one of my weird theories,’ as you call ‘em. Anyway, I went back there. I decided that the killer on the roof probably had been tipped off by somebody *in the courtroom*, to make sure that they got Ben at the right moment.

“You remember he was going to identify Bugs Corey when he was shot—and that’s what made everybody think it all had something to do with Corey’s case.”

Tracey grunted, “Go on.”

“Where would the man that signaled be?” continued Corrigan. “Near a window, of course. I

found a chair near the window; I took it over to the laboratories. They found fingerprints on it—the fingerprints of Sam Scarpio!

“THAT was all I needed to know. Scarpio and Pete Lanza have been pals for years. Pete swore he’d get Ben, when Ben sent Joe Lanza to the chair. Pete saw a good way to revenge his brother—frame Larsen at the same time—and get away with it. Or, at least, he thought he did.”

Corrigan ran a finger around the inside of his wilted collar. “And he’d have gotten away with it, if it hadn’t been for this damn heat!”

“Maybe it’s gone to your head,” suggested Tracey, sourly. “What’s the heat got to do with it?”

“Everything,” said Corrigan, wearily. “That was a graveled roof on that tenement—a thin sprinkling of gravel—over tar. When Pete Lanza on the roof waited for the signal from Scarpio in the courtroom, he rested the butt of his rifle on the roof. The tar was soft from the heat. I borrowed a camera and took pictures of the spot where he had been standing and where the butt of the rifle had rested.

“The D.A. has just showed those pictures to Lanza. The rifle I brought in had been cleaned and reloaded, but there were still traces of tar on the butt. And that’s not all.

“The pictures are nice and clear and the marks of the end plate of the gun show up. There was a broken screw on it that made a clear impression. And on the end plate of the rifle is that same broken screw. Get it, now?”

“Well, I’ll be—”

The door of the district attorney’s office opened. Lanza and Scarpio, manacled now to burly officers, marched down the corridor. Corrigan and Tracey stepped aside to let them pass. Lanza stopped, glared at Corrigan from smoldering eyes.

“Smart copper, eh?” he snarled.

Corrigan tugged thoughtfully at the lobe of his ear. “I don’t know about that,” he said, slowly. “But you were *too* smart, Pete! You were so anxious to get Ben at the right minute, to make it look like Larsen’s work, that you planted Scarpio, here, in the courtroom. And that’s where you overplayed your hand.”

With a curt “Come along, you!” the guard hauled Lanza none too gently on his way. The footsteps of the prisoners echoed hollowly down the narrow hall.

It was Tracey’s turn to mop at his perspiring face. “Whew, but it’s hot!”

“Yeah,” answered Corrigan, grimly, “but those two cop killers are headed for a still hotter place—the chair at Sing Sing!”