

# *Facing the Mob*



A Complete Novelette

By MARGIE HARRIS

*Smooth killed a rat—and then took over—because he was smooth  
.... but the derisive gods of the Underworld laughed in  
their sleeves at this killer who thought he knew women!*

“SMOOTH” BRODY, due to receive fifteen yards in cash from the successful hijacking he had led the night before, let himself into the private office of Jimmy Claffey without knocking, lounged over to the desk.

“Slip me,” he said to the chief of the High-Jack-Game mob.

“Surest thing you know, kid,” Claffey produced a huge roll, meanwhile eyeing Smooth suspiciously. At his side on the desk lay a heavy automatic. Slowly he counted off ten fifties, pressing the bills into Smooth’s hands.

The visitor let them drop to the table top.

“A grand short,” he snapped. “Keep thumbing!”

“Tellin’ me what to do?” Claffey snarled the words. His protuberant blue eyes became bloodshot with quick anger. “Where’d you think you’d rate more jack?”

“Twelve grand worth we knocked off last night,” Smooth said quietly. “Six grand for you; six to cut four ways—fifteen yards apiece.”

“Try and get it.”

“I will!”

Smooth’s voice, cold and deadly, struck a responsive note in Jimmy Claffey’s mind.

“Ye-ah?” he snarled. “Take it or leave it. I’m makin’ the cuts in this racket.”

“Then you’ve made your last one!”

Jimmy should have remembered that Smooth, before going to Ossining for a ten spot jolt, had been known as being stingy with words, lavish with action. Instead, the mob boss ran true to form. His right hand snatched up the rod at his elbow as he bellowed.

“Get new with me, will you? I’ll pistol-whip some sense into that rat head of yours!”

He swung once with the gat—once only.

Then a purple bordered hole bloomed in the bridge of his thick nose, a nose already made unbeautiful by a blow from a blackjack.

The crater made by the heavy slug gave him the look of some particularly obscene and horrible monster in human form; one possessed of three eyes, all leering with a hellish tolerance on the combined sins of the world.

Jimmy Claffey’s body slumped almost comfortably across a corner of the table-desk.

SMOOTH, bolstering his automatic, pulled the swivel chair forward with his toe, shoved and so arranged the body of his late chief that it seemed to be resting—sardonically—between visits of the mobsmen he intended to gyp out of their earnings.

With this attended to, Smooth set to work methodically. First he found and pocketed the shell the ejector of his rod had sent spinning across the room. Then he divided the plethoric Claffey roll into two sections, storing each in a hip pocket.

His hand was steady, his mind working coolly, as he lit a cigarette and stared curiously at the unlovely remains of this victim of his too-ready gat; the boss who had risen from a sneaking river thief to the most hated and feared hijacker of booze and dope in Manhattan.

Smooth gave thought to the consequences of his act. He had been prepared for it for days. Jimmy, he knew, was ripe for the knockoff. Never fair in his dealings, he suddenly had gone sour on the gang, giving ever-lessening cuts to the gang for the work they performed.

Two tasks confronted Smooth. The first, to convince the gang that he was justified in putting Jimmy on the spot, and that he, Smooth, should succeed him, should not be difficult. There had been too much muttering, too much discontent the last few weeks.

The second—breaking the news in a satisfactory manner to Bad News Carrie—might require a little more finesse. Smooth, however, felt little doubt of his ability to put it over.

In fact, a half derisive grin spread over his lips as he thought of the tall, angular, hawk-beaked moll Jimmy Claffey had chosen for his own from the Garden of Women.

The Underworld called her “Bad News,” which exactly described her effect on those unfortunates who incurred her displeasure. Gangland told moving tales of her rages, her bitter, tigerish hatreds; the manner in which she had beaten into an ugliness exceeding even her own other women who had sought to help Jimmy Claffey spend the golden earnings of the High-Jack-Game mob.

Smooth discounted all of this. In the final analysis Bad News was only a moll. Like the rest of them, she’d grieve mightily a few days, then turn to someone else for solace.

With a last glance about the room, Smooth

strolled out nonchalantly—and the derisive gods of the Underworld laughed in their sleeves at this killer who thought he knew women.

## CHAPTER II

### TAKING OVER

SMOOTH, as he strolled down-street, away from the room where Jimmy Claffey looked out on the world through three dead eyes, continued to plan his course for the next few hours.

He decided to leave Carrie for the last; to face the mob and see things through on their merits and the quickness of his trigger finger, before Carrie learned of Jimmy's passing and, woman-like, did something to inflame the boys against him.

This settled, he turned his steps toward the hangout; two rooms over the dingy poolroom and cigar stand with which Jimmy had masked his speakeasy. Lounging through the doorway, he caught the eye of Joe Grimes, his assistant in the foray of the night before.

"Get Nigger and Stuss," he said in a sibilant whisper. "I've got their jack—and news. I'll be down at Mack's speakee."

Five minutes later, the four gathered about a battered table in the back room of Billy Mack's blind pig—a neutral meeting place for the gangsters of the Midtown and West Side districts.

For a full moment, Smooth stared from face to face without speaking. Of the dozen men—eleven now—who comprised the High-Jack-Game mob, these three represented his potential percentage of friends. With them at his back, he could run his sandy with a fair chance of winning.

If they turned against him, it was on the cards he might, as he phrased it mentally, catch up with Jimmy on the way to hell.

The others seemed visibly relieved when he spoke—at last. His questioning gaze, they knew, might mean many things, the majority of them highly unpleasant. Smooth was more desirable in the role of friend than as an enemy.

"I went to Jimmy for my jack awhile ago," he said tersely. "The damn' toad-faced louse offered me five yards instead of the fifteen we each had coming. How do you guys like that for a cut on a twelve-grand job?"

Stuss Larkin ripped out an oath.

"I'd have knocked him off if he'd tried that on me," he snarled.

"That's what I did."

Smooth's tone was so coldly conversational that none of the three seemed to realize his meaning.

"You what?" they demanded. It was a chorus.

"Bumped the sucker—flattened him—knocked him off." Smooth grew voluble in explanation.

He reached into his vest pocket; tossed the empty .44 shell on the table in front of them.

"Jeez!" Nigger Fletcher, of white parentage but with the high cheekbones and thick lips of the Senegambian, blurted out the word. "Cripes! Hear that? He downed Jimmy!"

For almost a minute, their eyes wide with surprise and a tinge of awe, the others stared at Smooth who went calmly about the business of lighting a cigarette.

"Cripes!" Nigger reiterated at last. "Jimmy was hard—tough he was. Nobody wasn't lookin' for none of his game! Ketch him when he wasn't lookin'?"

Smooth held the other's eyes with a hard glare for a long second.

"No," he said finally. "He thought he was broad enough across the neck to pistol-whip me. Maybe he was hard—but I'm harder."

He paused for dramatic effect; let his words sink in. Then he went on, speaking in hard, level tones while his hand stole under his coat lapel.

"I'm taking over in Jimmy's place. You guys with me?"

The others glanced warily about among themselves, eyes avoiding those of Smooth, questing here and there in the unspeaking interrogation of Gangland.

SMOOTH sat silent, watchful. His fingers were on the butt of the gat under his arm. Unconsciously he was ticking off the seconds in his mind.

He might have to force a showdown; go to the mat with all three. Then it would be plain hell for a few seconds. Of the three, he reasoned, Nigger was the least likely to have made up his mind. Speaking to him, but including the others in his glance, Smooth said:

"Jimmy was trying to trim—us."

"The rotten, thievin' snake," Nigger responded angrily. Instinctively Smooth knew that this gave him the small advantage he needed.

"Yes or no?" he demanded. "With me—or against me?" He let them see his hand bringing the butt of his rod from under his coat.

"Cripes, yes!" Stuss Larkin became spokesman by self choice. "But how about Andy Lockmeier? He'll yell his head off after being second man so long."

"Andy?" Smooth repeated the name; permitted himself the luxury of a thin smile. "While we're chipping in to buy flowers for Jimmy, we can double the ante and cut Andy in—if he asks for it."

"Jeez!" Nigger said excitedly. "You gonna spot every guy 'at ain't for you?"

Smooth stared at him coldly.

"We don't expect to live forever in the Rackets, do we?" he asked impatiently. "Andy's been Jimmy's 'Yes man' for more than a year. Andy'll yes me or be put to bed in a box. The same goes for the rest of them."

"Now see here, you guys—." He stopped, seemed to inventory each of them separately.

"I'm going back—we're going back—to the mob. I'll speak my piece, and I'll knock over the first guy that don't like it. I don't want you to do any shooting unless they all fly at me. Then I expect you to use your rods. Oke with you?"

"Just one thing first." It was Joe Grimes, nearly as silent as Smooth—nearly as deadly. "Where do we get off if we back your play?"

"Fair question," Smooth replied quickly. "I'm boss and you three guys'll be the rest of the hand. From now out Andy Lockmeier's just a bum, and the other stray bosses are smart enough to know that I'll have my own pals on their jobs. You'll get the usual one share cut—down to the last penny—and besides I'll cut you three in on my share, settlement each Saturday. Oke?"

"Check with me—and me!" Joe and Stuss replied. "You're square, chief," Nigger said.

The questions of split and patronage settled, like any other satisfied politicians, they arose and started for the hangout. Grimes fell into step beside Smooth; laying tacit claim to the post of first lieutenant.

There was no argument.

The dog-notch on Joe Grimes' gun was filed

paper thin.

When he turned loose one shot, the whole clip followed.

### CHAPTER III WHO'S BOSS?

FATE gave the conspirators a break. When they arrived at the hangout they found the seven remaining members of the gang already were there. By agreement, Joe Grimes went in first. Stuss followed a moment later, and after him Smooth and Nigger together.

A five-handed poker game was in progress at a table in a corner. Because of the heat, coats and shoulder holsters had been hung over the backs of the player's chairs.

Andy Lochmeier, burly and beetle browed, sat alone in the swivel chair back of Jimmy Claffey's table as befitted the sub-leader of the mob in the absence of his chief.

His gat, free of its holster, lay deceptively beside his left arm. Smooth saw it and knew that Andy's vigilance had not relaxed. He was right-handed, but was accustomed to firing from a crouch, using his left arm for a rest. The gun, therefore, lay where he could go into action at a split second's notice.

Stuss and Nigger walked over to the poker game. Quietly they took up positions where they could crack down instantly on any of the players if trouble started.

Joe Grimes strolled unconcernedly over toward the sixth gangster, who was playing Canfield on a small table under a drop light. Pretending interest in the game, Grimes stood in such a position that the man could not see Smooth.

The remainder of the gang was pocketed now. It was man to man between Lochmeier and the new kingpin.

Smooth lost no time in bringing matters to an issue.

"Up out of there," he commanded coldly. "You're through in that chair. I just put Claffey over the jumps for crossing us, which makes a dub out of you."

"That's your story," Andy said. He grinned evilly; his killer eyes gleamed red like those of a jungle cat on the stalk. "I always told Jimmy you

were a louse; now I'm telling you."

With the fingers of his left hand he flicked his gun aside, as the magician seems to fumble with one hand, drawing attention from the movements of the other.

At the same moment, his right hand dropped below the level of the table to snatch at the gat hanging there in a wire clip.

Smooth moved like the wind. When he entered the room he had "boosted" his gat from the holster, holding it between ribs and elbow by pressure of the muscles. The weapon materialized suddenly in his hand, even as he crossed the intervening space in a bound and thrust his rod within a foot of Andy's forehead.

"Wiggle and I'll knock you off, too," he snapped. "I'll do it if you make me—but Claffey's enough for one day!"

Andy sat tense, waiting. Fury made his face a mask of hate.

"Up with the mitts—snappy now!" Smooth commanded. Then, over his shoulder, "Frisk him, Nigger."

Nigger turned to obey. As he moved, one of the poker players, one of Andy's buddies, snatched at the automatic hanging on the chair of the player next to him.

Stuss took one step; brought his rod crashing down on the other's skull. The other grunted as though in surprise, half rose; toppled to the floor. Smooth heard the double crash; nodded approvingly, but did not take his eyes off Andy.

Nigger's search brought surprising results. First he pushed across the gun on the desk top, then freed the rod from its clip on the front of the desk and shoved that over. He plucked a heavy gat from the right holster under Andy's coat, saw to it that the other was empty—then produced another gun from the top drawer of the desk.

Andy's eyes were snapping back and forth between the pile of weapons and his captor's face.

"Don't try it!" Smooth warned. "See here, guy; you're a fair sort. Of course you're sore as hell at going back to the ranks—but I can use you. You're a good gun, and you're lucky. Now what'll you do?" He moved the rod so it covered the center of Andy's face. "Want to be good or take one where Jimmy took it? Quick!"

He barked the last word; spat it forth angrily.

"A hell of a choice I have," Andy replied

bitterly. "If your proposition's on the square, I might's well string along with the gang as move on somewhere else."

"Right!" Smooth let the muzzle of his weapon fall, but saw to it that it still covered the other's midriff. "We'll get on all right—until you try the double cross. But don't let that worry you. I'll know what to do then."

CONTEMPTUOUSLY he snapped his rod back into its holster. He pushed Andy's two guns over to him from the pile. Andy thrust one into the right holster, caught the other by the barrel and pulled it toward him by the muzzle—across his left arm.

Everyone in the room sat silent, breathless. Andy had but to reverse the rod now, and Smooth would be at his mercy.

Smooth's face was expressionless. Only Joe Grimes, behind him, saw him shift his weight onto his toes. Momentarily he seemed to have lost interest in Andy.

"Tell you what, boys—" he said. His shoulders moved as though he was turning to speak to the others.

Instead, he went into the air as though launched from a catapult; up and over the table, head first, left hand clutching at Andy's throat, right at the other's gun hand. The impact carried Andy backward, with Smooth on top.

While Andy struggled to raise himself, Smooth shifted a leg under his back, snapped the other across his chest and locked on the paralyzing scissors hold of the mat game.

"You poor, damn' fool," he gritted. "Now I'm going to teach you not to bark at the big dogs."

Again his gat leaped forth. It rose and fell, rose and fell, crunching against flesh, and bone in gruesome fashion. Four fearful, lacerating blows went home. He paused, struck once more in a sweep that smashed against jawbone and ear.

The air left Andy's lungs in a deep sigh. He was out; pistol-whipped into unconsciousness.

"That's what Jimmy thought he was big enough to do to me," Smooth said coldly. "Take him into the other room. If he's learned sense, tell him to come back. If not, tell him I said to beat it."

Stuss caught the recumbent form by the coat collar. With studied brutality he dragged Andy across the floor, dropping him with a skull

clanging thud inside the smaller room.

Smooth walked across to the poker table, stirred the limp body of Boxcar Slayton, the other unconscious gangster, with his foot; said coldly to Stuss:

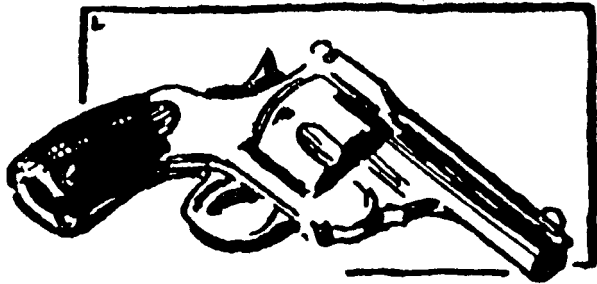
"This bird'll take some fixing. You swing a mean rod. Sock him again or get a croaker—I don't care."

He turned toward the entrance, swung back.

"Joe Grimes is second man," he said curtly, glaring here and there at the others as though inviting the least show of hostility. The door slammed behind him.

"He's goin' to break the story to Bad News Carrie," Nigger opined. Stuss guffawed.

"He's a thirty-minute egg," he said finally, "but if Carrie's got her habits on, he'll come back lookin' like he'd been snappin' percussion caps in a dynamite factory."



#### CHAPTER IV BAD NEWS FOR BAD NEWS

AS SMOOTH pressed the bell button of the East Side apartment which was the home of the Claffeys, he was thinking rapidly.

A thin, high pitched voice came over the speaking tube to the bell panel.

"Who's there?" it demanded, crustily. Smooth recognized the acid tones of Bad News Carrie; pictured her as he would see her in the flesh in a moment—tall, angular, unlovely; her hair stringy, the huge, eagle nose red as from recent weeping, the eyes suspicious and ready to flare with hate.

"Brody—message!" he responded curtly.

The latch clicked. In a few seconds he was being ushered into the hall of the garishly furnished apartment the strange pair had called home. On every hand were pillows, cushions, vases, figurines, lamps with brilliant colored shades, monstrosities in glass, nickel and whatnot.

Bad News Carrie stared at him with poorly concealed suspicion. She did not offer him a chair. Instead she stood, arms akimbo, her thin lips drawn back in a snarl, showing her horse-like teeth.

"Jimmy won't be home tonight," Smooth said tersely after the door had clicked shut.

"Hell he's not! Where's he going?" It was plain that Came was not a trustful soul.

Instead of replying, Smooth took a quick step past her, interposing his body between the ugly woman before him and a pivot-top table where Jimmy had boasted he kept a brace of guns for use on unwelcome callers.

"Where's he going, I asked you?" Carrie moved toward him, shrilling the question angrily.

"Hell—I think," Smooth said quietly. He was tense, ready for anything—except what actually happened.

Bad News Carrie slumped into a chair. She was white, shaken, but tearless.

"I knew it!" she said in a half whisper. "I told him it was bad luck to throw his hat on the bed—and last night I dreamed of muddy water and snakes."

She eyed him dazedly. Smooth caught himself wondering why it was always the homeliest women who wore blue satin lounging robes and boudoir caps in the late afternoons.

"Who knocked him over?" she demanded after a long pause.

"I did." Smooth kept his tones colorless; watched her narrowly. He sought from her tones and expression some tip on how to continue.

"Why?"

The single word, the total lack of tears and recrimination, tricked Smooth into an unjustified sense of safety.

"He tried to double-cross me on my split," he said. "Then he thought he was man enough to pistolwhip me. I thought it was time to move him over into the next stall. And it saves you a lot of beatings too, Bad News."

"Yeah," she said, nodding her head absently. "But I'd sort of like to have him back. Jim wasn't the worst guy in the world—even if he did sock me more'n was necessary. He was good to me when I needed somebody—needed 'em bad. That's why I've got to kill you, Mister."

Smooth eyed her like a child inspecting a new species of animal.

"What's that?" he almost gasped. "You say you've got to kill me?"

Bad News Carrie nodded apathetically. It was the gesture of an aggrieved child, rather than an avenging woman.

"That's what I said," she replied. She did not take her eyes from his face. "I've got to kill you, Smooth. Jimmy was a mobster and I'm his moll. You know the law of our kind; you knock Jimmy off—I croak you. Suppose you've got a moll; then maybe she burns me down."

"That's a lot of hooey, Bad News," Smooth said presently. "As a matter of fact I've done you a big favor by croaking Jimmy."

"You heard me," Carrie responded, still with the air of detached repression. "You come smoking next time, Smooth. I'm out now to square things for Jim."

A GRIN of utter and complete derision wreathed Smooth's lips.

"Oh, nuts!" he said. "You're better off without him."

"I'm not arguing that," Carrie replied. "The point is, Smooth, that I was Jimmy's moll and you put him off watch. What'll the others say—the rods and broads—if I don't do something about it?"

"You should give a damn—you'll be getting a full one-share cut from everything we turn."

"I will not!" Suddenly her voice was shrill, passionate. "I'm taking nothing from a mob that'll stand to see their boss croaked by one of themselves."

"Pipe down!" Smooth commanded. "A bat in the snout was the best that big bum ever gave you."

"That's a damn' lie, Smooth; I'm telling you something. If I ever took the worst of it from Jimmy Claffey, it was all right with me. You see, there was one time when he done something for me—something big."

"I was just a little drippy-nosed twist, working in a five-and-ten, when Jimmy was pirating over in Brooklyn. One day I hears a stoolie tipping the bulls where Jimmy's gang had their hangout."

"I slips Jimmy the word and he comes back with a fifty-case note. Pretty soon he starts taking me around. Everybody used to josh us; said we was both so homely we had to run together."

"Pretty soon my old woman gets mussed up with a truck and it's hospital, doctor bills and nurses. Lots of good my five-and-ten pay did there. Jimmy goes to bat, stakes us for all the expenses—and he buried the old lady when she croaks."

"That night I moved in with Jimmy. We've taken the good and bad together like pals, just as it came. I never gave him the double cross when he lived. Dead, he's resting easy, knowing I'll get the guy that handed him the hoopy-scoopy. Yes, Smooth, I've got to kill you."

"Well, for Cripes' sake!"

Smooth blurted the words, driven by astonishment. He had expected threats, tears, lamentations. Instead he encountered a cool, methodical mind—driven by the Law of Gangland, to square accounts for the pal gone via "the spot."

"You'd better go away now, Smooth." Her voice seemed to come to him from a distance, so low were the accents. "You did us both a favor when you backed your bigness between me and the gats in the table there, else maybe I'd be making a try for you now."

"The other way's better, Smooth Brody; you walking around, watching over your shoulder for Bad News Carrie and her rod; me going out among the rods' and molls telling them that I know who done the trick with Jimmy, and that I'm going to square it up the right way."

"Get along now—and remember I told you to come smoking the next time."

Smooth was outside the door, his jaw still slack with astonishment, before he realized that he was moving.

## CHAPTER V ONLY A PHONE CALL

"CRIPES, chief, here's news for you!"

Joe Grimes came thrusting his way through the outer room on the third night after Smooth's memorable interviews with the High-Jack-Games and Carrie.

"Shoot!" Smooth said without looking up.

"Bad News Carrie, Andy and Boxcar's teamed up, and are braggin' that they're out for your neck. Ain't that a fine mess of rats?"

"It's all Oke with me, Joe," Smooth smiled his thin-lipped contempt. "I didn't tell you about

the talk I had with Bad News after I'd knocked Jimmy over, did I?"

"No. Thought you'd spill it when you felt like it. Carrie's had her say considerable."

"It's a funny layout, Joe. She didn't take on a damn bit; said it was her job to get me now that I'd turned Jim in. I told her she was nuts, but damned if the old batteleaxe didn't stick to her story." He paused, thought for a moment.

"So she's lined up Andy and Boxcar?" he mused. "Suits me down to the ground. It's better than fighting a moll alone."

Andy Lochmeier, when he had recovered from the pistol whipping administered by Smooth, had stalked from the hideout, teeth set in his lip; eyes glaring murderously. Boxcar, his buddy for years, had followed half an hour later. Tonight's news was the first intimation that they had lined up with the enemy.

"Plenty of gab about the dumps, I suppose?" Smooth asked after a protracted silence.

"Plenty's right. They're making book that Bad News'll find some show-off way of squaring things for Jimmy that'll be sure fire. They all know her for what she is, chief—a cokie and a hell-cat. When she gets her habits on, and an idea in her head, nothing can stop her short of a slug of lead or a good sapping."

"What do you figure they'll try?"

"Hard to tell, chief. If it was just Andy and Boxcar, I'd say for you to keep a leary eye out while passing alleys or when strange automobiles nose up toward you in the dark."

"Bad News, though, is different. You can put your dough on one bet; whatever she does'll be something not in the book. It won't be any private party with Bad News pulling it. That twist'll dope out some way to make it public as a hanging, even if she has to take the chair for doing it. She's nuts—and poison as prussic acid."

Smooth leaned back in his chair and frowned thoughtfully.

"Hell!" he blurted at last. "I'd trade that broad off for three tough gunmen. It's all right to say she's putting herself in a man's place and it's all right to knock her over, but there's no percentage in shooting a woman, especially when everybody knows she's trying to even things for her man."

"She's got you in the nine hole, chief. Better figure out a fast one that'll set her down quick."

Suddenly there came an insistent ring on the telephone. Smooth answered, a quick frown creasing his brow.

"Yes, Brody talking," he said. "Yes—Look here, Carrie—" he turned and squinted at Joe. "There's no way for me to do that. Smooth Brody doesn't trade lead with women—anywhere."

Angry surges of red spread over his face as he ceased talking and listened to the voice at the other end of the wire. Finally he cursed violently.

"Look here, you horse-faced old hag," he barked. "Send Andy and Boxcar to do your damn' mouting and shooting for you. I'll meet *them* anywhere you say—and take 'em both on single-handed. Do it that way—or shut your filthy mouth and keep off my line."

He let his arm sag a trifle, turning the receiver so Joe Grimes also could hear.

It was the voice of Bad News Carrie, shrill now, emotion-shaken at last. She was shrieking the filthiest of taunts and challenges. Hysteria marked every syllable. Finally, through sheer exhaustion, her tone fell to a mumble. Smooth caught the last words:

"You—me—gun to gun—last chance to go out clean."

"Pull your brain together and say that last again," he barked.

"I say I'm giving you a last chance to go out clean," she voiced slowly. "Come to the Golden Rooster and you and me, gun to gun, we'll shoot it out on the dance floor. Everybody's waiting for you to show; I'm talking from there now."

"Sniff another powder and forget it," Smooth advised. "You're nuttier 'n hell."

He slammed the receiver down, turned wrathfully to Joe Grimes.

"**T**HAT dame'll get herself in a snowstorm some day," he said prophetically, "and then she'll make me knock her horns off to keep from getting salted down myself. What in hell did Jimmy ever have to tie himself up with a nit-wit like that?"

"Belonged together—they were a pair of naturals like ham and eggs. Both of 'em with a mean streak a yard wide," Joe returned. "Like I told you, she's got you in a tough spot; like waiting for a murder jury to come in."

Smooth frowned. Too egotistical to admit



fear, he wondered at the bodily shiver that went over him as he sensed the killer-tenacity of Bad News Carrie.

"Come on," he said. "Let's clean up here and get out. I want one good night's sleep."

Again Fate laughed in its sleeve.

## CHAPTER VI BLOOD ON THE SIDEWALK

CAUTION, intensified by the new-born menace Bad News represented, made Smooth Brody pause for the fraction of a second as he and Joe let themselves out of the front door.

Joe passed him, staggered; fell. At the same moment something caught at Smooth's ankles. He leaped back, catlike, managed to save himself from falling.

"Up with 'em, you!" a voice commanded from the darkness. "You're covered."

Smooth dropped prone in the wide doorway out of the light of the flickering street lamps. A second later the same voice growled: "Keep them mitts up, saphead, or I'll slip a slug into your guts."

Joe Grimes complied, looked about him eagerly.

"You, huh, Andy?" he said. "Reg-'lar old-fashioned stickup?"

"Hell no!" the other replied. "Tell Smooth to get out into the light—lady-friend laying for him in the doorway over there."

Speaking, he relaxed his vigilance; made the error of moving.

Smooth pressed the trigger once. Andy stumbled and fell, a bullet through the fleshy part of his thigh. His rod clattered into the street.

In the same split second, an automatic began coughing at the left. Bullets searched the doorway where Smooth lay flat.

Joe, free of the menace of Andy's rod, flashed out his gat and pumped a stream of five slugs in the direction of the new attacker. Smooth, quick to see his advantage, swung from the stairhead, over the railing and into the area below.

"Over here—under the stairs; roll!" Smooth hissed at Joe. A new volley of shots came from behind an ash can, twenty feet distant, as Joe fell as though hurt, rolled to the railing and vaulted over.

Smooth already had used his key, opening the

door into the dark basement corridor. They ran to the stairway and to the first floor front, where they could see the street.

"Bad News herself," Joe mumbled as a feminine figure sprang from the doorway directly opposite.

"You lousy, rat cowards," she was shrieking at the top of her voice. "I tricked them out of there and you cheap yeggs let them get away! Get away from here; get going—crawl into your holes, you cowardly punks; I'll go in there and gun that tough guy all by myself."

Instead of telephoning from the night club, Carrie apparently had put in the call from somewhere near by, then had raced to the place across the street with her aides in an effort to capture Smooth. Again Smooth shivered as he sensed the tigerish determination of this woman.

"Aw, be fair, Carrie," Boxcar pleaded. "We'd have had 'em but Joe came out first and tipped off our tripwire. Come on away; we'll get another chance at 'em."

Unwilling, stopping every moment like a tough child being led from an easy fight, Carrie finally quit the scene. Andy was limping, cursing softly at every step with the pain from his wound.

Three minutes later two policemen pounded up before the house from adjacent beats. Right after them came the motorcycle and riot squads; the reporters next.

Smooth and Joe remained discreetly within, listening to the police as they discovered broken windows and blood on the sidewalk where Andy had stood.

They battered on the door of the hangout, but left finally when they could not elicit an answer. A policeman remained on guard at the door until daylight, though, so Smooth and Joe spent the night there, gratefully.

Bad News Carrie, with her habits on, was too strong a dish to be ordered twice in one night.

## CHAPTER VII A PACKAGE FOR YELLOW BRODY

SMOOTH, almost fatalistic in his indifference to the ordinary dangers, was oppressed when he awoke in the early morning hours after an uncomfortable four hours in a lounging chair. Joe

Grimes, mouth open to the limit and snoring horribly, sat opposite him.

The sun was rising. Presently Smooth realized it was an intermittent hammering at the front door which had disturbed him. He arose, reconnoitered, and discovered that a uniformed messenger was the cause of the disturbance.

"Package for Yellow Brody," the youngster said as Smooth opened the door. Smooth scowled, receipted for the box and carried it back to the gang's headquarters room.

"What is it?" Joe asked, newly awakened and rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

For answer Smooth slid the package across the desk, the address uppermost.

"Yellow Brody!" he ejaculated. Their eyes met.

"Carrie!" Joe said. Smooth nodded.

"I don't want any part of it." Joe wriggled back in his chair, away from the parcel. "Throw it out in the back yard," he suggested. "They's no wedding presents in that."

"Come!" Smooth picked up the box gingerly, walked to the rear window. Joe followed, curious but plainly fearful.

Smooth raised a window, motioned Joe back, and pitched the box to the ground below. Both unconsciously shrank back to the protection of the wall as the package struck.

Nothing happened.

The parcel struck on a corner, bounced; rolled several feet and brought up against a battered garbage can filled with old bottles and trash.

Joe grunted in disbelief. Smooth, moving almost mechanically, drew his rod, brought a silencer from his hip pocket and screwed it onto the muzzle.

"We'll see!" he said, aiming at the box.

The automatic coughed once; the box twitched.

Simultaneously there was an echoing, crashing roar. The windows bulged inward; glass flying into fragments. Where the box had lain was a deep hole. The garbage can was gone completely. Already its contents were returning to earth in the form of powdered glass and bent, battered tins.

For a long moment after the noise of the falling refuse had died away, Smooth and Joe stared into each other's eyes.

"I told you she'd try circus stuff," Joe grunted

at last. "What a story the guns and molls would've had to chew over if you'd opened that box with your hands!"

Smooth wiped cold dew from his forehead. Absently he unscrewed the silencer from the muzzle of his rod. Joe put out a hand to stop him.

"Leave it on," he said anxiously. "And burn down that she snake the first time you pop eyes on her."

Smooth shrugged, finished; put the cylinder back in his hip pocket. Out in the rear yard the curious were gathering. Police and a company of firemen came up on the run.

"We're dumb; know nothing," Smooth directed. "Let's get back. The hell with the bomb and the hell with the broad. We've got to check up on that wine shipment, on our raid cars and be sure about the boys. Remember, it's our first operation as the new bunch. It's got to be right."

"Oke by me," Joe replied. "Stuss'n the boys'll be along any time now."

Almost as he spoke, the warning buzzer sounded. Stuss, followed by Nigger and Slicker McKee, entered.

Stuss was curious, but sullen.

"What the hell?" he demanded. "Somebody's touched off a whizzbang out back—and Bad News Carrie's broadcastin' to the world that she made the chief take it on the lam last night when she fronted you with a rod."

Smooth beckoned him closer.

"Carrie, Andy and Boxcar ambushed Joe and me as we started to leave early this morning. They'd laid a trip-wire and Joe stumbled over it. I rolled back into the doorway and put a slug into Andy's leg while Joe and Boxcar traded a few. Carrie kept out of sight until Joe and I were back in the house. That's what happened."

"Ye-ah, and Carrie sure gave her boy friends plenty hell for letting us beat 'em to it," Joe jubilated.

STUSS did not join in the crackle of laughter which followed. Instead he turned soberly to Smooth. There was real concern in his tones.

"Looky, chief," he said. "We all know you're a real guy, hard as nails—but it goes down damn hard to have every cheap mobsman in town razzing us for having a boss, that'll let some coke-headed broad make him jump through a hoop. Why'nt you

make a good job of it and put the rest of the damn' Claffey fam'ly on the spot right now?"

Smooth grimaced sourly.

"And then you'll have the same pikers razzing you for having a boss who was sap enough to knock off a woman to save his own neck."

"Jeez, chief!" Stuss was almost pleading now. "If you won't croak her, then kidnap the damned twist and shut up her squawking about what she's going to do to you."

Smooth stared at him with sudden interest. A saturnine smile spread over his lips.

"That's an idea—at that," he said. Which accounts for the later development of a long, black limousine stopping at the gang's old warehouse on the waterfront, where the gang's hijacked liquors, speedster cars and arsenal were housed.

Three silent forms emerged in the early darkness, carrying a fourth, trussed and hooded. They bore it carefully into the somber depths of the building. From within the bundle came nasal whines of anger.

That was that! Bad News Carrie wouldn't "blat" about Smooth and her proposed revenge for a few hours—or days—to come.

## CHAPTER VIII

### NIGGER SPEAKS HIS PIECE

"SOMEbody's going to die to-night and I hope it ain't me!"

Nigger's lugubrious voice broke the stillness of the gang's midtown hangout. It was midnight. For more than an hour Smooth, Stuss, Joe and Nigger had been waiting at the telephone for a report from Slicker McKee on the raid on the champagne cargo.

Smooth turned about, gave Nigger a long, searching stare. Joe Grimes spat out an oath.

"What the hell's got into you?" he demanded thickly. "Sure somebody's going to die tonight—in India, Germany, Australia, New York—everywhere. You're getting to be worse bad news than Old Carrie herself.

At the mention of the horse-faced woman's name, as though it was a stage cue, there came a ring at the outer door.

Stuss answered; returned with an envelope. He handed it to Smooth, avoiding the latter's eyes.

Smooth glanced at it and swore. It was addressed to "Yellow Brody." "Deliver at midnight" was marked on its face. Presently, when he realized the others were watching him intently, Smooth slit open the envelope and read:

Smooth: (And "Smooth" is right) I just learned my little package didn't do the good I hoped for, but here's a little thought for the new day. I'm making a salad for you; be careful of what you eat, you moll-buzzing, cheap grafter.—Bad News Carrie (and "Bad News" is right).

Smooth handed the note to Joe, a saturnine smile on his face. "She must have written it and left for later delivery," he said. "Wonder what she's thinking about now, down there in the dark in the warehouse?"

"What the hell's she mean about salad?" Joe demanded. "Don't you go eating nothing in strange dumps, boss."

"Nobody knows what that crazy snowbird meant when she wrote it," Smooth said. "Probably she was hungry, thought of salad and proceeded to write it into the note."

The telephone shrilled its summons. Kid Ferrell, a minor member of the gang, scouting about the dumps had run across news.

"Hell's poppin'," he declared. "Andy and Boxcar's turning the town upside down, looking for Carrie. She's disappeared. Seems Boxcar went to see her at seven; found her dump wide open and things all tore up. Somebody said three guys took her off in a black car."

"And then—?" Smooth prompted.

"Andy's trying to line up some rods to make a call on you."

"Thanks!" Smooth was his old, curt self again. "Let them come." He turned back to the others.

"Andy and Boxcar are looking for Bad News Carrie," he said with a satirical grin. "Sure you left her well tied up?"

"Hell, yes!" Stuss replied. "Hou-dini himself'd have to yell for help to get loose from the kind of tying I do."

"Fine!" Smooth exulted. "I've got a plan for shutting her damn' mouth. After we get the booze in and some of it delivered, we'll paint her homely mush up like a clown's; take her over to that Golden Rooster dump she's so fond of. That'll

show those cheap bums over there that instead of having to croak her, we just make a sap of her. Like it?"

"And while you're doing that, somebody slips her a gat and fixes you all up," Nigger predicted dolorously. "I'm telling you, somebody's going to die tonight!"

"Oh, get the hell out of here with your croaking!" Smooth exploded. "Another belch like that and somebody will die tonight, and you'll be—"

The telephone whirled.

"All set, chief," Slicker's voice said over the wire. "Mick's coming in with one truck over the Manhattan and I'm guarding two in over the Brooklyn Bridge. Everything rosy. Be there in half an hour."

Smooth snapped the receiver back on its hook, came to his feet.

"Three trucks, and on the way in," he announced. "Let's get down to the warehouse. On your toes, everybody."

THEY whizzed down Eighth Avenue in the black limousine with its armored body and bullet-proof glass which had been Jimmy Claffey's pride. En route, Smooth gave instruction as to the disposal of the hijacked wine. The contents of one truck was to be split between O'Hara's night club and Dominetti Brothers, the top-side bootleggers of Greenwich Village.

Leaving the superstitious Nigger on the ground floor to admit the trucks when they arrived, Smooth, Joe and Stuss proceeded to the next floor where the "office" had been established. It contained desks, tables, an ancient safe and other items calculated to lend an air of businesslike honesty.

Adjoining this, toward the rear, were the mob's arsenal, a storeroom where a reserve stock of really fine liquors waited for discriminating buyers, and a general odds-and-ends room. It was in the latter that Carrie had been left by her abductors.

Smooth, while refusing to admit it to himself, was obsessed by Carrie's tigerish hatred. He left the others and went to the storeroom as though in obedience to a hunch, but saying nothing to the others.

Switching on the light he turned to enjoy his

moment of triumph. It was short-lived for he felt again the chill of approaching disaster when he encountered the faded, uncanny blue-green eyes of Jimmy Claffey's moll. They were filled with burning hatred, an expression so fixed as to be almost past belief.

Bad News was tied, gagged. A loop of rope had even been passed around her knees to prevent her making any movement. Someone had been kind enough to throw some blankets over a long box. It was on this rude pallet that the prisoner now lay, gurgling horribly in her throat as she tried to form words of defiance.

Smooth walked about the box, testing the knots, making certain she was well secured. Stuss was right, it would take a super-Houdini to beat them. Satisfied on this point, he leaned toward her and said:

"We've got a little business to attend to, Carrie. Three nice truckloads of champagne hijacked an hour ago. When those are attended to, I'm going to give a party in your honor—at the Golden Rooster."

Carrie's eyes gleamed red as she sensed the sarcasm in his tones; snapped weirdly as he mentioned her hang-out. He went on:

"All your boy and girl pals will be there, Carrie—those cheap, piking guns and twists you've been telling what you were going to do to me.

"I'm going to lead you in on a chain like any other monkey, but first I'm going to paint big, black rings around your eyes, a pink circle about your lovely mouth—and then put white all over the rest of your face. Think that over while you're waiting, baby."

The taunting words struck deep, drove Carrie into a veritable frenzy. She twisted, tried to throw herself erect; strained at her bonds, meanwhile slaverling like some wild thing caught in a pronged trap.

At last she fell back, choking; exhausted. Blood was on the ropes which bound her ankles and wrists. She panted, fighting for breath.

Smooth, at first coldly amused, was awed. This woman with the single objective—his death—might die, but in passing she still would try to accomplish that to which she had set her mind. For a moment he felt for her almost respect—that accolade one fighter gives another. Then he saw

again only the hell-cat fury which was Bad News Carrie. He turned, walked to the door.

"They'll laugh, Carrie—your friends'll laugh like hell at you," he called over his shoulder.

AS HE passed the door of the gunroom en route back to the office, he thought proudly of his foresight in adding several racks of Mills bombs, two Thompson guns and several sawed-off shotguns. Jimmy Claffey had thought these touches unnecessary.

A buzzer sounded as he entered the door of his office, heralding the arrival of the first of the trucks. Walking to the head of the stairs, he watched it pull through the big doors.

The windshield was in fragments. The driver's coop was splintered and Eddie Lee, driving, dripped blood from a wound in his arm as he dismounted.

"How much?" Smooth called.

"Eighty cases, chief."

"Want to send this lot to O'Hara and the Wops?" Nigger asked.

"As soon as an uninjured driver shows up."

Eddie Lee came up the stairs. His face was white with pain but he grinned happily.

"We got 'em, one, two, three!" he reported, "I got a slug in the arm, high up. Nobody else got it. I'll take the stuff uptown if you say so."

"No, get to a Doctor—then slip around and see if you can get a line on Andy and Boxcar. They're on the prod tonight, I hear."

Eddie looked at him as though startled.

"I saw Andy's green roadster down the block when I came in five minutes ago," he said. "Saw it plain in my lights as I swung around the corner. Nobody in it, though."

"Probably taking himself a snoop," Joe Grimes suggested, but was interrupted by the arrival of the remaining two trucks. Seven of the gang spent a busy half hour stowing away the cases in the strong room, then shuffled into the office, eyes glowing, ready for approbation.

Smooth eyed them in friendly fashion; took a big roll from his pocket.

"Good work!" he said. "Everybody gets a century tonight. Settlement tomorrow night at 6—in cash to the last penny. I figure the job at between twenty-seven and thirty grand. I take half for my cut and take care of Joe, Stuss, Nigger and

Slicker as I see fit.

"The other half goes to you through Joe Grimes, who'll pay off tomorrow. The rule is twenty-four hours after each job. That suit everybody?"

"Sure, chief!" "That's square!" "You're a right guy!" The approving shouts came from the others instantly. Afterward there came silence—the quiet that precedes the storm.

And in the quiet, a woman spoke—a hate-obsessed woman.

"It don't suit me, you damn snake! Look up here and see what I brought for you."

Smooth jerked erect, flipped his rod out in a single motion.

Nigger, at his left, moaned miserably.

"I told you," he babbled, "somebody was going to die tonight."

## CHAPTER IX

"EASY with them gats; everybody's covered!"

The second interruption came from the doorway leading to the large open storeroom.

Andy Lochmeier and Boxcar, each leveling two heavy rods, stood there—shoulder to shoulder—covering the gang gathered about Joe Grimes and Smooth. Momentarily in the flush of the first pay-off, the guns had relaxed their vigilance. Now, it seemed, someone would pay.

Smooth, despite the fact that he had recognized the first voice as that of Bad News Carrie, and that she meant the greater menace to him—let his eyes dart to the doorway. Instantly it all was clear to him. Andy and Boxcar, knowing the storehouse like a book, had gained entrance, liberated Carrie—turning her loose on him and the gang.

"The hell with them guys!"

Smooth's rod, twitched from under his arm as soon as he heard Carrie's voice behind and above him, still was in his hand, concealed from Andy and Boxcar by the forms of the others. He flicked his eyes about eagerly, looking for a chance shot that would turn the tide in his favor.

"The hell with those guys! Knock 'em off or let 'em go: I give a damn. It's Smooth Brody I'm wanting."

Smooth turned at last; shivering inwardly at what his eyes showed him. Bad News Carrie, a Mills bomb in either hand, stood peering down at him from a sliding panel high above his desk. He felt the cold clutch of Death as his eyes met the glaring, maniacal gaze of the woman.

Her facial muscles were writhing and twisting; her mouth, never beautiful, was contorted now into a bestial snarl.

"I brought the pineapples for the salad I wrote you about," she mouthed viciously. "Hungry, you yellow rat?" She went through a ghastly pantomime of casting first one bomb, then the other; each time snatching them back just in time.

"You thought you knew all of the jumps of this place," she went on. "But Jimmy fixed up this slide so he could keep an eye on his rats. Trouble with him was he watched the wrong one."

Smooth remained silent. Coldly, precisely, he estimated his chances. He saw that the safety pins had been removed from the bombs. It followed that he could not chance a pot shot at Carrie, for her hands would release the pineapples and they all would be blown to hell in a second.

Slowly the realization grew that this ugly caricature of a woman, this horrible effigy of her sex, held him helpless.

He must stall, stall! He must wait and watch for the tiny advantage that would be his chance.

"Oh, hello!" he said affably. "Thought we left you waiting for the party at the Golden Rooster."

"Yeh?" All the derision in the world was rolled into the one word. "Trouble with you, Smooth, is that you're not smart. When you got me today, I knew Andy and Boxcar'd turn me loose. They know things about this place you never dreamed of. We've been watching you fly birds for more than an hour."

"Well, pull your party, Handsome!" Smooth flung the taunt at her suddenly. "Expect me to crawl on my belly to a nutty broad like you?"

Instead of showing anger, Carrie became talkative.

"It don't work out right somehow," she said vaguely. "By rights I ought to knock you off while I've got you dead to any chance of getaway."

"But something tells me Jimmy isn't pleased. He wants me to make a show out of you, just like you planned to do with me. He told me so last night when he come back to me from hell to tell

me what to do."

SHE transferred the bombs to one hand, rubbed her reddened nose roughly with the other. Smooth recognized the unwitting gesture of the cocaine addict with a shot too much aboard.

"That was nice of Jimmy." Smooth tried to make his tone fit the changed mood of his nemesis. "Maybe he's changed his mind about my being killed at all. Anyway, you know he wouldn't want the other boys to be hurt."

"You think not, huh?" It was the voice of a bewildered, blundering child. "That's right; Jimmy liked the boys pretty good." She raised her tone querulously. "Andy, why'nt you run those other boys off? Get them out of here. Then you and Boxcar come back."

Wordless, Andy and Boxcar stepped aside, motioning with their rods for the gangsters to march out. All got into motion except Joe Grimes. He shook his head firmly.

"I'm sticking," he said. "I string with Smooth. He gave me my chance."

He caught Smooth's eyes; signaled a silent message of a plan. Smooth was grasping at straws now. He turned back to Carrie.

"That was decent of you; Jimmy'd like that," he said. "Makes you feel good not to make any mistakes, eh?"

"Yes," she replied, absently. "And I'm not going to make one with you." She seemed now to be thinking aloud as she said:

"You shanghaied me to show the gang you don't give a damn for Bad News Carrie. Now I've shanghaied you—and we're even. I've got a good mind to turn you loose now. You'll have a sweet time explaining to the other gangs how come you wasn't bumped off when Bad News copped your bet."

She was silent—interminably. At last she said:

"Tell you what, Smooth. You say, 'Please, Carrie'—say it loud before Andy and Boxcar, and maybe I'll give you a few days more. What say?"

Smooth stiffened under the lash of her words. A thousand times he'd prefer the rending death she held in her hands than to beg this horrible hag for his life. Yet, if he could get out of this jam, he'd find a way to get rid of her forever. Inwardly he knew, hating himself for the knowledge, that Bad

News Carrie had put her finger on his yellow spot.

"That might be a good idea, Carrie," he said, softly.

"Then say, 'Please, Carrie'." Her voice was hard, inflexible.

What the hell? The thought flashed through his mind that it made no difference. Joe would back his word that nothing of the kind ever happened. They'd call Andy and Boxcar liars and prove it with their rods. Like thousands before him, he bowed his head; took his bitter dose.

"Please, Carrie—let me go this time," he begged.

Bad News grinned, wolfishly.

"You lousy, stinking, yellow dog! I knew you were yellow." The words were almost a prayer of thankfulness. "And I wish Jimmy's here to see it." For the moment joy made her strange features almost human in expression. In a moment she continued.

"Ye-ah! Jimmy thinks it's all right to let you go along a little while more; with me one jump behind you, and you not knowing when it's 'blooie!' and your light's out for good.... I'm using pineapples from now out, Smooth; that's how you're going to wash up finally."

Smooth's heart gave a great leap for joy. "Pineapples!" That meant she'd have to give up her idea of having a crowd of onlookers; she'd have to maneuver for another chance like this.

"You can go now," she said. "And while you're going, remember you're getting a chance you didn't give my Jimmy."

Smooth let his eyes flicker toward the door.

Already Andy and Boxcar had stepped back. Their weapons were out but were not covering them.

Without a word, a glance back, Smooth and Joe fell into step, side by side; strode to the doorway.

Andy reached out; touched Smooth's

shoulder.

"I said you were a louse," he grated. "Now it's proved."

Smooth made no reply; avoided the other's eyes. They turned at the doorway and walked downstairs, these two so miraculously saved from a grisly death.

The little door in the automobile entrance was swinging on its hinges. Joe stepped through first, followed by his disgraced chief.

ONCE through the barrier, Joe slapped Smooth a happy consoling clout between the shoulders.

"Jeez, Smooth!" he whispered. "They named you right. How you did put it over on old horse-face! I was stickin' because I had a sleeve gun and thought I'd get a chance to use it, but I gave up when I saw you outfoxing her."

Smooth squared his shoulders.

"Thanks, Joe," he said. "It took some fast thinking. The next trick's ours, remember!"

A window on the second floor clattered up. Bad News Carrie thrust her head and shoulders through.

"Goodbye, Smooth!" she called. "I mean—*goodnight!*"

THE two, pineapples were almost at the ground before Smooth and Joe Grimes could check their stride and look up.

That, probably, was the reason it was so easy to identify them when the dicks from Centre street arrived.

The bodies were torn to horrid, bloody shreds, fit only to be scooped up like any other waste, but—

The faces were undamaged.

Bad News Carrie, gang moll, had fulfilled the Law of The Underworld.