

# CLOSE TO A CORPSE

By  
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*Detective Sergeant Dan Kenny Moves Swiftly to Spike  
a Killer's Alibi!*

**D**ETECTIVE SERGEANT DAN KENNY seated himself on a bench with a sigh. Even after twenty years in the New York Police Department he still hated the city morgue. The bleak place with its rows of cadavers in compartments that could be pulled out of the wall reminded him of some sort of weird filing cabinet.

Kenny stared bleakly at the elderly morgue attendant. Old John Lake with his pasty white face and gray hair was getting to look more and more like the dead that were in his care. His manner was always like that of a well educated and overly unctuous undertaker.

"That is the last of the poor unfortunates who have been brought to this haven within the last forty-eight hours, Sergeant," Lake said. "I'm afraid the body you are seeking is not here."

"It wasn't important." There was something about Lake that always made Kenny inclined to feel tough and vitriolic. "Just a cheap gangster that's turned up missing so I'm checking the hospitals and the morgue. Routine stuff. The lug probably just skipped out of town."

John Lake nodded and then frowned as the phone rang in his office. Kenny glanced at his wrist-watch. It was a quarter past three, early morning. He rose up from the bench and followed Lake into the office as the morgue attendant went to answer the phone.

"City Morgue," Lake said as he picked up the receiver. He listened a moment and his eyes widened. "Just a moment, please repeat that."

Lake quickly handed the phone to Kenny and the sergeant placed the receiver to his ear.

"Go ahead," he said. "Let's have it again."

"This is Harvey Wilson, of Wilson and Hart, attorneys," came a muffled masculine voice over the wire. "I'm at my office on the tenth floor of the Chapman building. I'm going to commit suicide, so you'd better send the morgue wagon here for my body."

"Hey, wait!" shouted Kenny excitedly. "Don't do anything foolish. You just wait there until I get to your office



The flashlight gleamed on the still figure

and we'll talk this thing over. Go slow, will you, old man?"

FROM the other end of the line there the sound of a shot and then a thud and a clatter. The sergeant lowered the phone and looked at the morgue attendant.

"Did he do it?" asked Lake.

"Sounded like it." Kenny put down the phone and hung up the receiver. "Call the homicide squad, Lake," he snapped. "I'm going to the Chapman Building and see what happened to that poor devil."

Lake was busy on the phone as Detective Sergeant Kenny left the city morgue and climbed into the car he had left standing outside. The fresh night air felt good as Kenny started the motor and drove away.

Only twenty blocks separated the morgue from the Chapman Building. The sergeant made it in a few minutes without using his siren. He parked in front of the office building. The lobby door was locked but a night elevator operator appeared and opened it after Kenny had knocked several times.

"Police," snapped Kenny, flashing his badge. "We just received a suicide report from the tenth floor here."

"Gosh!" exclaimed the operator as he led the way to the night car. "Who was it?"

"He gave his name as Harvey Wilson and told us he was going to kill himself," said Kenny as the car ascended. "Then I heard a shot over the wire." He looked intently at the operator. "Have you taken any one up to the tenth in the last half hour?"

"Yeah." The operator nodded. "Mr. Jeff Bart. He's Mr. Wilson's partner. He signed in about three-fifteen. He put the time down in the book in the lobby like all the guys do when they come here to work at night."

"Good," muttered Kenny.

The car stopped at the tenth floor and the door slid open. Kenny stepped out into the corridor with the elevator operator close behind him. Half-way down the hall a lean, sandy-haired young man about the same build as the sergeant was struggling desperately to get an office door open from the outside.

"That's Mr. Bart," said the operator.

"Somethin' has happened all right."

Jefferson Bart turned as the two men came toward him. There was a wild expression in his eyes and he was still wearing his hat.

"My partner," he exclaimed. "He's locked himself in—and I can't get the door open. I left my keys at home. I heard a shot, and tried to find someone on this floor who might have a pass key. Then I came back here. I think he's killed himself."

"Yeah." Kenny shoved Bart to one side and looked at the door. It seemed rather flimsy. He moved back and flung himself against it, giving the door a hard blow with his shoulder. It flew open, revealing a yawning maw of darkness beyond it. "You didn't try hard enough, Bart."

The sergeant produced an automatic and a flashlight. He stepped into the office with Jeff Bart behind him. The buzzer in the elevator was sounding stridently. Kenny glanced back at the operator.

"That's probably the homicide squad," said Kenny. "Bring them up."

"Yes, sir." The operator ran to the car, and the floor door banged shut as the elevator descended.

Kenny went on into the office with Bart following. The ray of the flashlight gleamed on a still figure that was sprawled back in a chair. Behind the sergeant there was a click as Bart found a light switch and turned on the lights.

"He's dead all right," Kenny said as he thrust his gun and flashlight back into his pockets. "Shot in the right temple."

"This is awful," Bart muttered. "Why did he do it?"

Kenny did not answer. He was staring thoughtfully at the corpse. Harvey Wilson had been a middle-aged man. He was slumped back in a comfortable leather desk chair, his arms dangling over the sides. There was a .32 automatic lying on the floor just below the fingers of his right hand.

THE telephone transceiver was off hook and lying on the desk a little to one side of him. Kenny went close and sniffed. There seemed to be a faint hint of perfume in the air.

"I didn't believe he would do anything foolish even though he sounded excited when he

phoned me,” said Bart suddenly. “I told him not to worry, to wait until I got here and we would work things out some way.”

“What do you mean?” asked Kenny. He saw that the windows were closed and the door leading into the next office, apparently that of Bart, was locked from this side. There was the sound of the elevator door opening and voices in the hall. The homicide squad had arrived.

“Why, Wilson phoned to tell me—” began Bart and then stopped as the sergeant shook his head.

“Hold it,” Kenny said. “No use in you having to tell your story twice. Waste of time.”

The men from the homicide squad crowded into the office. Most of them were detectives, fingerprint men and photographers, none of them in uniform, save a few patrol car officers who had been sent to the scene. Kenny saw that Captain Tilford was in charge. The detective sergeant saluted the captain. Tilford returned the salute.

“Suicide, eh?” said Tilford, looking at the corpse.

“I don’t think so, Captain.” Kenny shook his head. “More likely murder.”

“Murder!” gasped Jeff Bart. “But how could it be? The door was locked from the inside and Harvey told me on the phone what he was going to do.”

“There’s a snap lock on the door,” said Kenny. “The killer could have shot Wilson and then stepped out into the hail, automatically locking the door behind him. He might have slipped away then. Tell us why you think your partner might have killed himself, Bart.”

“He phoned me and told me that he had drawn out all of the funds of the firm and spent the money gambling,” explained Bart. “He said he had cheated me and ruined the firm of Wilson and Bart. I couldn’t believe it was that bad, and asked him to wait here until I reached the office and we would talk things over.”

“And what did Wilson say to that?” demanded Kenny.

“He—he just laughed at me,” said Bart. “Told me he had drawn our last ten thousand dollars out of the bank today to pay off some of his debts. That by the time I arrived here he would be gone.”

“So you came here, grew angry at what your

partner had done and murdered him,” snapped Captain Tilford abruptly. “Then you tried to make it look like suicide.”

“The voice of the man who called the morgue and said he was Harvey Wilson, sounded muffled,” said Kenny. “Might not have been Wilson at all.”

Bart looked dazedly at the homicide man. He was pale and obviously frightened. Kenny frowned as he gazed at the young attorney. Jefferson Bart looked almost too guilty. Twenty years of police work had taught the sergeant it was usually an innocent person who looked that way when confronted in such a situation.

An assistant medical examiner appeared and looked over the body. He did it with the casualness of a butcher preparing a roast.

“Death by lethal penetration of the auricularis superior,” said the medical examiner. “The missile taking a downward course.”

“Yeah,” said Kenny. “In other words the guy was killed by a shot in the head, the gun fired from such an angle that suicide isn’t probable. Besides, the lights were out when Bart and I first entered the office and suicides don’t usually kill themselves in the dark. They like to have light when they do it.”

“But I didn’t kill him!” protested Bart suddenly, as though he just realized he had actually been accused of murder. “I liked Harvey Wilson. He was my partner, and besides, I’m in love with his niece. Grace Wilson will stand by me. She’ll never believe I killed her uncle.”

“Then she has more faith in you than I have,” said Captain Tilford. “You’re under arrest, Bart. We’re holding you on a charge of murder.” He motioned to some of his men. “Take him away, boys.”

**D**ETECTIVE SERGEANT DAN KENNY yawned. It was late and he was sleepy. He left the homicide squad busy in the office going through all of the usual routine, checking for fingerprints, taking pictures of the body, and stepped out into the corridor.

Kenny had the elevator operator take him down to the lobby and show him the office register. He found that Jefferson Bart had signed in at 3:25 A. M. The name above Bart’s interested Kenny. It was Nick Streeter, and he had signed in

at 2:50 A. M. His office number was 1128.

"Who is Nick Streeter?" Kenny asked the operator.

"Oh, that guy." The night man did not sound as if he thought much of Streeter. "He has an office up on the eleventh floor. Claims he is a broker of some sort, but I've heard that he really runs a private gambling club somewhere over on the East Side."

"Then his office in this building is just a front?"

"That's the way I figure it." The operator nodded as the elevator indicator buzzed. "Tenth floor again. You guys certainly keep me busy."

"Take me up to the eleventh before you stop at ten," said Kenny. "I want to have a little talk with Streeter."

"Okay."

The detective sergeant got off on the eleventh floor and walked to the closed door of 1128. There was a light burning inside. Kenny put his right hand on the gun in his pocket and he opened the door with his left.

He stepped into a small office. A heavy-set dark haired man was counting a roll of bills. He glanced up with a scowl as he saw Kenny. Then he snatched up the money and shoved it out of sight in a drawer of his desk.

"I wondered what became of Wilson's ten thousand bucks," Kenny said mildly. He sniffed. "That pomade you use on your hair sure has plenty of smell, Streeter."

"Who are you?" demanded Streeter. "And what is this stuff about Wilson's ten grand?"

"The name is Kenny," said the sergeant. "Detective Sergeant Kenny from Headquarters. Investigating the murder of Harvey Wilson."

"Murder?" A flicker of surprise showed in Streeter's dark eyes.

"That's right." Kenny nodded. "You thought you had arranged it so the police would believe it was suicide, didn't you?"

Behind Kenny the outer door of the office closed and there was a faint clicking sound. The sergeant glanced over his shoulder. There was no one at the door. He looked back at the desk to find Nick Streeter covering him with an automatic.

"Automatic lock on the door," Streeter said quietly. "It works from the desk. The door is steel and the office is soundproof. A shot fired in here couldn't even be heard out in the hall. Are you the

only one who suspects me?"

Dan Kenny knew what would happen if he gave the correct answer to that one. He had a vision of himself lying stiff and cold like one of those bodies he had been examining in the morgue. It was not a pretty picture and he did not like it.

"Just me and the whole homicide squad," he said quickly. "Now that we are just a couple of pals together would you mind telling me why you bumped off Wilson?"

"He was trying to double-cross me," said Streeter. "He was taken for fifty grand in my joint. He lost all of his firm's money except ten grand trying to win back his dough. So tonight Wilson plans to skip town, after drawing the ten grand out of the bank."

"So you kill him, get the ten thousand and decide to make it look like suicide," said Kenny, moving closer to the desk as he noticed that the wire of the lamp ran along the floor not far from his feet. "You disguise your voice, phone Jefferson Bart, and make him think it is his partner confessing all."

"Nice touch that," said Streeter, who was not lacking in self-esteem. "So was my calling the morgue."

"Except for muffling your voice," said Kenny. "I happened to be at the morgue and listened to that call. There was no reason for the muffled voice. No one knew you or Wilson at the morgue."

"You better put that gun of yours on the desk," ordered Streeter. "I don't like the way you keep holding onto it in your pocket."

"Sure." The sergeant drew the automatic out of his pocket and placed it on the edge of the desk. "There you are."

The gun was a little too close to the edge and it slid out and hit the floor with a thud.

"Sorry," Kenny said.

He reached down to pick up the gun. As he did so he gave the electric cord a quick hard tug. It jerked the lamp off the desk and it landed against Streeter, knocking the gun out of his hand.

Kenny stood up, his automatic in his hand. He reached across the desk and tapped Streeter over the head with the barrel of his weapon while the gambling club owner was trying to pick up his own gun. Streeter went limp, knocked out from

the blow.

"This guy makes a much better murderer than Jeff Bart," muttered Kenny as he drew out a pair of handcuffs and placed them on the wrists of the unconscious man. "And if Streeter has a gal who believes and trusts him, then dames are more simple-minded than I think they are."

Detective Sergeant Kenny sighed and then yawned. He found the automatic button that

unlocked the outer door of the office and opened the door. He had placed his gun on the desk. He frowned as he picked it up and smelled the barrel. The scent from the pomade on Nick Streeter's hair was on the gun.

"This night life is getting me," mused Kenny. "Much more of it and I'll be dead," He grinned. "In fact, I just came close to being a corpse a few minutes ago."