



C. D. FOR CORPUS DELICTI

By
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Berry Bangs suppressed a scream. "Good heavens! There is a body! The girl is dead!" she gasped.

CLARENCE DARROW MORT realized that he had grown to love his fellow men. He knew that he was drunk and that it was time he was home in bed.

He slid off his bar stool and walked a little too erectly toward the checkroom. This was on the opposite side of the Riviera Club, and Mort had only approached his destination when Phil Sinton, the club manager, blocked his path.

"The boss wants to see you, Mr. Mort."

Mort replied with dignity: "But I don't want to see your boss. Tell Lucky to go to hell."

Sinton did not change expression. He said quietly: "It has to be now, Mr. Mort. Just come with me."

Customers were staring. But the extreme courtesy that gloved Sinton's firm command enabled Mort to comply without losing face. He knew that he had best comply. Lucky Page was absolute master of the Riviera—every waiter doubled in muscle. Mort followed Sinton through the crowded night club.

He was led into the room which was Page's real source of revenue. Page boasted that there was a million dollars' worth of gambling equipment here, and anyone who saw the layout felt inclined to agree. At the far end of the gambling room was a plain walnut door which Sinton opened without knocking. He did knock at a second door a few yards beyond. There was a grunt from within, and both men entered.

Lucky Page sat at a massive carved desk. He nodded to Sinton, who quickly stepped outside. Mort subsided a little unsteadily

into a billowy leather chair. Page smiled engagingly.

"Nice victory you won today, C.D. I doubt if Darrow himself could have got that guy off, even if he was alive."

He noticed the look on Mort's face and said: "Oh, I forgot, C.D., how you don't like anyone reminding you that you were named after Darrow. My mistake. No offense meant."

"That," said Mort coldly, "is an understatement. I not only dislike any allusion to the derivation of my given and middle names, but I am inclined to make something of it. If you were not a big, powerful ox, and I were not almost helplessly drunk, I should knock your teeth down your throat."

Lucky Page chuckled. "For the life of me, I don't know why you take it that way. Clarence Darrow was the greatest criminal lawyer of his day. It's an honor to be named after him."

cashed one here, C.D. I'll tell Phil it's all right. He looks after all the bookkeeping."

MORT felt somewhat relieved, though it irked him to be under any obligation to Page. He remembered the days when the gambler had operated a shady roadhouse with slot machines strategically located where drunks couldn't miss them. Page had not been above strong-arming any drunk so incredibly lucky as to hit a jackpot.

"If it's not the check, Page, what's on your mind?"

"One hundred thousand dollars. Your cut will be half of it. Are you interested?"

"I am always interested in one hundred thousand dollars or any portion thereof."

Page laughed his satisfaction. He laughed from the bottom of his belly, but the laugh fell short of heartiness. Mort felt uncomfortable.

"Get to the point, Page."

"We arrange this phony murder, see," explained Lucky Page. "Then we tell Berry that her playboy brother is in a jam and needs real legal help—\$100,000 worth. And that means you! Your cut will be half. Are you interested?" Clarence Darrow Mort was always interested in a hundred grand, or any portion thereof. He didn't know then that real murder would step unannounced into the scheme or that he'd be fighting desperately for the life of the very guy he'd hoped to play for a sucker.

Mort managed an alcoholic shrug. "True, Darrow possessed that high degree of animal cunning that passes for a great legal mind. Outside the courtroom he even betrayed intelligence of an enviable degree. I admired and respected him a great deal, still do. But I can never forgive my father for naming me after him."

Page looked baffled. "But, C.D., you've been doing all right. Your father gave you a break. You must have made twenty grand getting that guy off today."

A forlorn smile passed across Mort's face. "Again my namesake has plagued me. Darrow defended many a penniless man—today I labored for the same reward. Lately my clients have been almost exclusively indigents. I trust that this explains why the check I cashed here last week was worthless. However, my luck is bound to change. A wealthy murderer will sooner or later come along. So if you will just give me a reasonable time, say thirty days..."

Page roared with laughter.

"So you thought I had you brought in here about a check? Didn't even know you'd

"This is it: You know Jetur Bangs, don't you? Well, the kid's on my cuff for a hundred grand. That's a lot of dough for a guy like me to lose."

"It's a lot of dough," Mort commented coolly, "but you haven't lost it. What you really mean is that your gimmicks out there short-changed the sucker for that many markers. And now that his old man has died and left his inheritance tied up in a spend-thrift trust, you're hooked."

Page eyed Mort with resentment, but he managed a smile.

"I never knew how to take you, C.D. But I'm cutting you in anyway. We're going to collect that hundred grand."

"You may omit the 'we,' I'm out. I don't care for a wild goose chase when the money is on a contingent basis. In the first place, your gambling debt has no legal standing—you couldn't sue and collect a dime even if Jetur had the money. In the second place, there's no chance that he will have. His sister, Berry Bangs, is trustee of the spend-thrift trust, and she would laugh in our faces if we asked her to pay off. If you're thinking

about breaking the will, that's out, too. The fact that Old Man Bangs tied up Jetur's money is ample evidence that he possessed all his marbles. He well knew that if the moron got the dough in his own hands he'd give it away to chiselers like you."

Page writhed at the insult, but like a good disciple of Machiavelli or Dale Carnegie, he came up smiling.

"Sure, C.D., I know the deal's against me, but I still got an angle. In my book it can't miss. Suppose Jetur gets himself into a jam, a bad jam. What would his sister, Berry, do in a case like that? She'd have to front for him, of course! She's strictly Social with a capital S. She couldn't stand having her brother do time or fry."

Mort sat back interestedly in his chair.

"Go on."

"I thought you'd like the idea, C.D. Here's the layout as I've planned it: You know Sonia Renoir, my blues singer. She's been driving Jetur just about nuts. Couple of weeks ago he gave her an engagement ring with a three-carat rock in it. Only she wouldn't take Jetur along with it. So the chump lets her keep it, and she's wearing it now on her right hand."

"Sure, it's a laugh. Sonia'd have taken Jetur quickly enough only she knows how his dough's tied up. So here's how we use the situation—tonight I send Sonia home early. Jetur follows her to her apartment at the Sherry Arms. He goes in the front way right past the desk clerk, though he rates a special key to the back door. It's Sonia's way of kidding the boys. She gives them a pass to first base, but when they get there they find out how far it is to home plate."

"Jetur comes downstairs after being up there only a few minutes. Then he goes to the family mansion, wakes up his sister and tells her a hell of a story. He's just walked in on Sonia and found her stretched out all dead with her head smashed to jelly. The ring he's given her is gone. He's afraid it'll look as if they had a row over the ring and he lost his head and killed her."

"So that means Jetur needs legal help—real legal help. And that means you! You're the only mouthpiece in town that people think of when they're in real murder trouble. And you're the only guy who could get away with telling Berry it'll cost a hundred grand of her brother's money to get him off. Get it?"

"I could hardly miss it," Mort replied coldly. "Disbarment, I mean. As soon as Berry's sister tumbled to the fraud, she'd have me hanged from the highest limb. No thanks, I want no part of that deal for a lousy fifty-fifty cut of a hundred grand!"

"But you haven't let me finish. Berry

Bangs will never get wise. It's like this: Sonia's set to take a powder. She's hooked a West Coast millionaire who's going to take her away from all this. She'll drop out of show business, and nobody around here will ever see her pretty face again. There'll be no tell-tale publicity about her wedding on the Coast, because she'll be married under her real name, Mabel McNabb. She'll cooperate on account of I introduced her to her millionaire."

Mort regarded Page. "So Sonia's taking a trip! Well, I'll give her credit for keeping it quiet."

"Sure, she's played it down, all right. A smart girl, Sonia. Well, can I count you in?"

Mort nodded slowly. "I'm in. But how about Jetur? Will he go for it?"

Page chuckled. "He knows better than to refuse!" He pressed a button. The door opened, and Phil Sinton appeared. "Bring in Jetur."

SINTON vanished and presently reappeared with a too-handsome youth slightly the worse for liquor. He nodded casually to Mort.

"Mr. Mort's agreed to our proposition," Page announced. "We're going to put it over tonight."

Jetur Bangs frowned. "I've been thinking. If I've got to go through with this lousy swindle to pay you dough you rooked me out of in the first place, I want something out of it besides the ride."

Page frowned unpleasantly. "Meaning what?"

"Meaning we may as well raise the ante to a hundred and fifty grand and cut it three ways. Then I'll get mine. After all, it's my own money!"

"You'll get yours," Page told him, "if you try to throw a monkey wrench into this deal. It's bad enough my losing fifty grand on you. Don't make me think about how bad I feel. Besides, even Mort couldn't raise the ante for the job. It'll be the same price!"

Jetur managed to twist defiance into his handsome features.

"I still say it's fifty grand for me or no dice!"

Phil Sinton had been waiting for Page's eye. He got it, stepped quickly behind Jetur and did something to Jetur's arm that Mort couldn't see. Jetur screamed.

"For God's sake, let go!" He was the color of a sheet. Sinton made no effort to relax his grip.

Page spoke with sarcasm.

"Is it still no dice?"

"Damn it, make him let me go. I was just kiddin'!"

Sinton stepped back. Jetur seemed on the verge of tears as he rubbed his arm. Slowly, color returned to his face. Page chuckled amusedly.

"Sure you've got your lines right, Jetur?" he asked menacingly.

"Yeah."

Mort had watched the goings-on with growing nausea.

"I don't like this deal. Suppose the boy's sister wants proof of a corpus delicti. What then?"

"Oh, I expected her to check with the desk man at the Sherry. That's why Jetur's going to show up, just in case. That'll give her all the scare she'll need. She'll pay quickly enough."

Mort shook his head. "I still don't like it. But I'll go along."

"If anything goes wrong," Page said sourly, "it'll be your fault. Sure you're sober enough to handle it?"

Mort rose stiffly, not deigning to reply. He strode back into the night club. Page had been unable to guess how completely sobering the interview had been. So Sonia was eloping with a West Coast millionaire!

He paused, for she was in the middle of a number.

She had about as much voice as a strip teaser, and though she would have been outraged at the comparison, she got by for the same reason. Her body was perfect. Her hair was black and straight and fell to the waist of her backless gown. Women sneered at that straight hair, but men stared with strange intensity.

Sonia sang to a white-thatched customer at a front table. As Mort watched, Page appeared and joined the man. He would be the West Coast find, of course. There was a diamond ring on a finger of each of Sonia's hands now. Though the one on the right hand was at times blinding, the new one moved about in the spotlight with the startling effect of a comet.

Mort got his hat and left the night club. Outside, the doorman signaled for a cab, but he waved a hand.

"It's a nice night. I'll walk."

He had walked only a few steps when a black sedan drew up beside him and halted. He turned, then froze in his tracks.

AT PRECISELY two forty-five his apartment phone rang. He permitted it to ring four times, then answered.

"I must see you, Mr. Mort!" It was a feminine voice. "It's a matter of life and death!"

"Who is speaking?"

"Bernice Bangs. I must see you at once."

Mort permitted a few seconds to pass be-

fore answering. The nocturnal caller, of course, was the Berry Bangs of the roto-gravure and society pages, but only members of her inner circle of select friends would have dared use her nickname.

"Your business can't be so important, Miss Bangs, that it can't wait till morning. Supposing you drop into my office at, let's say ten."

"This can't wait until morning. I'm coming right over."

She hung up. Mort smiled enigmatically as he cradled the phone. Fifteen minutes later his bell rang. He opened the door. Berry Bangs and Jetur walked into his room without ceremony.

"So sorry to get you up, Mr. Mort," Berry said carelessly, "but my brother's in a jam. Have you got a cigarette? I'm fresh out and so's Jetur."

Mort ushered the pair into his library and provided cigarettes. Jetur avoided his eyes completely.

Berry took a quick drag on her cigarette and said: "Jetur's been playing with a canary named Sonia something-or-other at the Riviera. Got a voice like nothing but plenty of figure." As if to illustrate, Berry loosed a cape, exposing a strapless evening gown. Red-gold hair touched her beautifully molded shoulders. Mort compared Sonia Renoir and unfavorably.

"I've heard the lady sing," he admitted.

"Sure, all the wolves in town have. She's played everything in pants. So what does Jetur here do but pay a call on her tonight after she quits at the Riviera. He walks right in on her and finds her flat on the floor with her brains soaking into the rug. Then he brightly beats it out the front way, the same way he came in. The desk man at the Sherry saw him make both trips, so that means Jetur'll be the top man in the pinch parade as soon as the body's discovered. So I decided he needed real legal talent. In this town that means you."

Mort bowed slightly. "I am indeed honored. However, I'm not sure that I care to take this case. Juries are inclined to be prejudiced against wealthy young playboys such as Jetur. I'm afraid—"

"Nonsense!" said Berry. "You've handled tougher cases than this, and Jetur may even be innocent, as he says. If it's fees you're worried about, name your own price!"

Mort reflected, shook his head as if against his better judgment.

"One hundred thousand dollars," he said quietly.

Berry started. "Why, that's—" She caught herself, muttered, "I guess I asked for it," and took a checkbook from her handbag. She hastily scribbled a check. Mort accepted

it and thrust it casually into his left pocket.

"Very well, Miss Bangs, I shall handle your brother's case. I want him to go back to the Riviera and pretend that nothing at all has happened. It is imperative that he betray no consciousness of guilt. Of course, we will never admit that he found the girl murdered. His story must be that he left her alive and well."

Berry's brows drew together. "Not so fast, Mr. Mort. You can send Jetur to the Riviera all right, but as his trustee I'm going to have a look at the corpus delicti before I'm letting myself be accountable for an expenditure of a hundred thousand dollars. We're going, you and I, to the Sherry Arms."

Mort stiffened. "Miss Bangs, I am accustomed to conducting the defense of my clients according to my own methods. For us to go together to Sonia Renoir's apartment would be to point suspicion directly toward your brother. I certainly shall not go there!"

"Then you certainly shall not cash that check in the morning! You'll find that payment has been stopped!" Berry chuckled as she watched Mort with narrowed eyes. "Maybe I'm upsetting a little playhouse, huh? Listen, Mr. Mort, I'm an old hand at parrying Jetur's thrusts at his trust fund. He's used about every trick in the book to extract money from me, and maybe now he's trying a phony murder!"

Mort ventured a quick glance at Jetur and found him pale. He shrugged.

"Really, Miss Bangs, your tone is almost insulting. But since you insist, I see there is no alternative but to accede to your request, though—" He left off, shaking his head deprecatingly. Then he got his hat and accompanied the pair downstairs.

Jetur had driven his own car, and he went off to the Riviera. Mort climbed in beside Berry, who was driving a convertible of dimensions rivaling those of a Pullman car. She drove across town to the Sherry Arms, and Mort rode silently beside her.

The desk man at the Sherry smiled a greeting.

"Good evening, Mr. Mort! I suppose you—"

"We're calling on Miss Renoir," Mort cut him short. "She's expecting us, so we'll go right up."

This seemed to be all right with the desk man, though he looked a little wonderingly at Berry.

An automatic elevator carried them to the fourth floor. Mort led the girl without hesitation to a door. He pressed the bell button. There was no answer, and he pressed again. He tried the door, and it opened. He went inside, Berry at his heels.

She suppressed a scream. "Good heavens! There is a body! The girl is dead!"

BOTH statements were correct. Sonia Renoir's body lay on her living room floor. She had been wearing a dressing gown, and apparently the struggle had all but torn it from her. The dark stain in the rug around the base of her skull left no doubt as to the result of the struggle. Her right hand lay across her body.

The diamond ring was missing.

Berry had apparently lost all desire to investigate the matter further.

"Let's get out of—" She stopped, stared, as a man appeared in the doorway.

"Hello, Joe," said Mort calmly. "Captain Wood, meet Miss Bangs. Joe's a homicide dick. Quick work, Joe. Somebody tip you?"

Wood nodded. "Yeah, C.D. Headquarters got a call there was a body in here, so I came out myself." He went over to the phone and sent for his crew. Then he came back and sat down. "What you doing here, C.D.?"

"I'm representing a client. Jetur Bangs. He walked in here and found this. So he got cold feet and ran out. So I'm surrendering him. He's at the Riviera."

Wood looked absently at the almost naked body on the floor. Sonia Renoir looked as if she might have fallen asleep there—unless you noticed the stain in the rug around her upturned head. Wood sighed regretfully, got up and stretched.

"Well, let's go and get Jetur. I got a patrolman on guard downstairs, so I'll send him up." He shook his head. "This is the worst jam Jetur's ever been in."

Berry was very pale as they rode downstairs. Wood gave curt instructions to the patrolman at the desk and to the man there, then the trio went outside. They used Wood's squad car.

The last show was under way when they arrived at the Riviera. Phil Sinton came up as they entered. He eyed Wood with alarm, Mort questioning.

"Maybe we'd better have this out in Page's office," Mort suggested. Wood nodded. He watched as Mort crossed to the bar and halted beside Jetur perched on a bar stool.

"Come along, Jetur. We're going to the office for a little talk with a homicide dick." Apparently perplexed, Jetur slid off the stool. Mort said casually: "The girl's dead. Did you know that?"

He thought Jetur was going to faint. He caught his arm and steadied him.

"Easy does it. Now, keep your mouth shut about our deal. Let me do the talking!"

Deathly pale, Jetur walked beside him, Wood following. Phil Sinton had found

Page, who came in, jocular and expansive.

"Help yourselves, folks! Always glad to accommodate an officer of the law. Would you folks like drinks served?" Nobody seemed interested. Page started to retire.

"Stick around," said Mort. "Since we're using your office, you may as well have a grandstand seat to the show. Besides, it was your singer who was murdered."

Page froze. "Murdered?" His eyes narrowed upon Mort's. "You, you—you're not kidding! Sonia really got herself murdered?"

Mort nodded. "We've just come from her apartment. Captain Wood wants to question Jetur."

Page stared at Jetur. So did Wood. "Come on, son. Let's hear your story."

Jetur told his story. If he had heard Mort's explicit instructions, he ignored them. He began from the beginning, telling in detail about his debt to Page, about the scheme to settle it by staging a phony murder. Like a cornered wildcat, he stared from Page to Mort.

"Damn it, I'm not going through with that yarn for anybody! Not when there's a murder rap to pin on me! Sonia was alive when I left her. I never touched her at all!"

Wood had listened delightedly. He grinned at Mort.

"How about it, C.D.? Is the kid telling the truth about the frame-up to shake loose a hundred grand?"

"Well, I—"

"Sure he is!" Page supplied. "Why try to conceal it? I wasn't doing anything wrong—just trying to get my money back. Now that it's really murder, I'm not covering up for anybody!"

Wood grinned gloatingly as Clarence Darrow Mort sat without a word to say.

"Looks as if you decided not to keep it a phony murder," he told Jetur. "Come on, son, let's have it. You couldn't stand seeing her go away with another guy, so you lost your head and let her have it. Right?"

Jetur shook his head stubbornly. "I was fed up with Sonia long ago. All I asked for was my ring back. She put up a squawk, but I got it, and she was alive enough when I left her."

WOOD'S eyes became sharp and alert.

"A ring? What ring?"

"A three-carat rock," Page supplied. "Jetur'd given it to her for an engagement ring, so she hung onto it even though she gave him the brush." He turned on Jetur. "So you decided you'd take the ring, huh? And she wouldn't give it back, so you had to conk her."

"I did not!" Jetur appealed to the detective. "Maybe you should ask Page a few

things, too. He had ideas about Sonia himself!"

Wood smiled at Page. Page reddened.

"In case you got any ideas of dragging me into this deal, skip 'em. I've been right here all the time. I was sitting out at Mr. Caldwell's table, that's Sonia's boy-friend. Two hundred people saw me!"

Wood looked mildly bored. "If you had any dirty work to do, Lucky, you'd hardly do it yourself. What about Sinton?"

"He was right here all the time. Check on us both if you want to."

"Don't think I won't." Wood turned again to Jetur. "Let's see the ring, son."

Jetur produced a diamond ring. Wood regarded it, then dropped it into his pocket.

"Exhibit A," he explained. "Now tell me, son, what did you hit her with?"

"I tell you I didn't touch her! She was plenty mad about having to give back the ring, but she gave it back willingly enough when I threatened—" He stopped guiltily.

"Threatened what?"

"I told her I'd make a stink about her West Coast meal ticket. So she gave back the ring."

Wood said nothing. But his thought was clear. He sighed.

"Just a minute," said Berry Bangs. "Jetur wasn't the only boy-friend darling Sonia had. For example, the eminent counsel here!"

Wood regarded her interestedly.

"Go on."

"When we went to Sonia's apartment tonight, the desk man greeted Mr. Mort as if he were a frequent caller. Mort shut him up before he could give anything away, but later he gave himself away. He went directly to Sonia's floor without asking, and he knew where her apartment was when we got there. Maybe he's got one of her keys!"

Wood regarded Mort, who nodded.

"Sure, I have one of her keys. Why should I be an exception? I confess that I was quite fond of Sonia. I used to drop in at her place often. And, as my pal, Page, put it, I was visibly upset tonight when I learned that she was checking out. By the way, Page, thanks for the plug."

Page scowled. "I still think you're a good prospect for this murder, C.D. Even when you left I thought what a wonderful setup it was for anybody who wanted to rub out Sonia. And you looked as if you'd like to!"

Wood regarded Mort. "I hope you've got an alibi."

"I have. Page was kind enough to supply it for me. As I left here tonight, a squad car pulled up, and Hank Barnes, of the fraud squad, nailed me. Seems Page had signed an affidavit about a rubber check I left here last week. So I was an hour and a half rousing a magistrate and getting bail

set. I'd just got home when Miss Bangs called. You can check with the fraud squad, Joe. It's a wonder you hadn't heard about it."

Wood eyed Page. "This true about that check?"

Page looked uncomfortable. "I'd have to check with Sinton." He seemed genuinely apologetic as he turned to Mort. "Sorry if it happened, C.D. Of course Sinton looks after all that stuff. He must have made a mistake in your case."

"Well, you can thank him for me. My alibi's perfect."

WOOD addressed Jetur. "I'm arresting you, son. The charge is murder. You'll really need a lawyer now."

"He has one," said Mort. "I've been retained and paid, and I'm defending him."

"The hell you are!" Berry Bangs shrieked fiercely. "I wouldn't let you defend my brother if you agreed to work for nothing! As for paying you—you just try to cash that check!"

Mort appealed to Jetur. "How about it? Do you want me to defend you, or don't you?"

"Well, I—"

"Suppose I could demonstrate to your satisfaction that I can win your case?"

"You—you think you can?"

"I'm morally certain. You see, I could give the jury an alternative theory as to who killed Sonia Renoir. I could show them that another person had a motive and an opportunity. For example, there is your sister, Berry. I learned tonight from the fraud squad that I'm not the only one so indiscreet as to hand out rubber checks. Only last week Berry herself was caught up on one."

Mort turned slowly in the dead silence and smiled at the girl.

"Of course you can imagine my surprise at learning that her bank account had deteriorated into such a precarious position. But Hank Barnes explained that in the last year the poor girl has taken an awful drubbing in the stock market and her inheritance is virtually exhausted."

"Does that astound you, Jetur, to know that your sister, who holds the purse strings on your spendthrift trust, has been even a greater spendthrift than you? Well, your own losses here at the Riviera are in a piker class compared to hers on the stock market. So even a jury could see that by framing you for murder and causing you to die in the electric chair she would inherit your trusted fortune without strings!"

"This is ridiculous!" Berry Bangs blazed with contempt. "Of course the whole thing is fantastic!"

"I'll agree with that," said Wood. "Even if she had a motive for framing Jetur, how

could she have known about the setup, the phony murder scheme?"

"From the victim herself. Jetur's told you how angry she was when he blackmailed her into giving up his ring. Her natural instinct would be to call Berry and give away the whole plot as revenge."

"You're getting better and better!" Berry scoffed. "How do you think I'd get into the slut's apartment? Even if I could get by the desk man without being seen!"

"You could have used the back entrance. As an old caller via the same route I know that the door was often carelessly left unlocked. As for getting into the apartment, Sonia would have been gratified at your call."

"You're an idiot! You know you're making up the whole thing out of whole cloth! You can't prove a thing!"

Mort shrugged. "My dear Miss Bangs, I have no desire to do so. I am not at all concerned with turning in the culprit guilty of Sonia Renoir's murder. I am only interested in raising a reasonable doubt in the minds of the jury which tries your brother. I'll leave it to Joe Wood as to whether my little theory would accomplish that purpose."

Wood eyed Berry gravely. "Unless you've got an alibi—"

"Of course I have! Jetur himself knows I was at home when he got there!"

"You still could have done it," said Jetur sullenly. "I stopped for a couple of drinks on the way from Sonia's."

"Jetur! You don't think for a minute that—"

"The hell I don't!" Jetur crossed and looked her in the eye. "I wouldn't put anything past you, my darling little sister! Do you think I don't know you tricked Dad into putting that spendthrift trust into his will?"

He turned his back on Berry as he faced Mort.

"I'm hiring you, Mr. Mort. I think you've got the right slant as to who killed Sonia. And maybe it'll be a good idea to check up on the way she's been handling that trust fund of mine. If I know Berry—"

Wood shouted, and Jetur never finished. Berry had doubled her knee and snatched off a slipper. Its narrow heel was directed toward the back of Jetur's head in a vicious arc when Wood leaped forward and caught her arm. She dug his face with her nails. He snapped bracelets upon her wrists.

"So that's the way you did it, with the heel of your shoe! We'll have to take a look for a bloody heel in your wardrobe. Or would you like to confess right now?"

She called him a vile name. Mort shook his head deprecatingly.

"As Hank Barnes said about the rubber check, it happens in the best of families."