

Martin Clyde, headquarters detective, would walk barefoot through hell to prove that—

Dicks Die Hard

By Theodore Tinsley

A GANG of workmen were repairing the street paving and the clatter of their pneumatic drills against the asphalt was a hammering snarl that matched the grim rage in the heart of Detective Martin Clyde. Just ahead was the doorway of the dingy tenement where Mopsy Dolan had his hangout. Martin had made up his mind to stride in there and shake Mopsy's teeth loose. It was the only way to make him lay off young Sam.

Mopsy was a vicious crook who lived well at the expense of timorous merchants who paid monthly tribute. If they didn't pay, an "Italian grapefruit" might be tossed through their plate-glass—or worse. The worried detective knew that his brother was playing around with Mopsy. He had begged Sam earnestly to cut loose, but had been told angrily by the kid to mind his own business.

He had said no more to Sam. But he sent a grim warning to the gangster: "Keep your dirty paws off my brother, or I'll bust your head open."

Mopsy's answer was an invitation, to go to hell.

Marty Clyde hesitated in front of the tenement. The noise of the pneumatic drills made his worried head ache. The threats he had made against Mopsy were common knowledge in police headquarters. He'd been urged to get the goods on Mopsy's racket so they could haul him in.

A figure came hurrying suddenly from the dim doorway, bumped into the detective, recoiled with a gasp. Martin's face paled as he recognized his younger brother. Breathing heavily, his clothes rumpled, Sam looked the picture of frightened dismay.

"Oh—er—hello."

"Hello, Sam. Been talking with Mopsy Dolan again, huh?"

"Who, me? You're crazy. I—I haven't seen him in days."

"What happened to the button on your coat?"

Sam's shifty eyes flicked toward the missing button. "The—the tailor musta ripped it off. I sent the suit to be dry-cleaned the other day."

"Yeah?" Martin eyed the suit grimly. It was

rumpled, wrinkled, dusty, unpressed. "Listen, kid—"

Sam jerked away suddenly. "See you later, Martin. I—I gotta be going." He disappeared down the street.

With an angry spark in his dark eyes, Martin strode into the tenement.

He expected to find Mopsy's hangout on the ground floor—but he didn't expect to find the door ajar. He pushed it wider and peered inside. He couldn't see anyone, but there was a faintly familiar reek in the air that sent him questing toward an inner room like a hound on the scent. The automatic lock clicked as he slammed the door shut.

Mopsy was on the floor, face upward, a bullet-hole in his chest. Dead as a smoked herring. The wide-open eyes were blankly dull; the gun in the loosely extended hand looked very quiet.

A SUDDEN icy terror coursed through his blood. Sam! He bent swiftly and pried open the clenched left hand of the gangster. His breath hissed as he saw the pearl-gray glint of a coat button. It had happened—the thing he had dreaded for weeks—Sam was a murderer.

A sudden pounding at the front door made the quiet apartment rumble with sinister echoes.

"Open up! Open up for the police, or I'll bust the door down!"

Martin knew the voice with a sick dismay. Tierney—the cop on the beat. He acted instinctively, shoved the damning gray coat button into his pocket. With noiseless stealth he ran to a rear room, opened a closet, closed the door, fired a bullet from his service gun into the floor. Grimly he blessed the stuttering clamor of the pneumatic drills on the asphalt outside. They filled the dusk with a snarl like machine-guns; they camouflaged the muffled roar of his shot.

Patrolman Tierney looked puzzled when he entered. Suspicions grew in his blue eyes as Martin Clyde told his story. Self-defense. A well-known crook trailed to his hideout for questioning, a sudden treacherous attack—a deadly killer wiped out in line of duty.

Tierney loosened the gun from Mopsy's limp hand. "That's funny. You say he fired at you? This gun ain't been used."

"I—I meant he tried to use it. I—I beat him to the draw." Martin's voice steadied suddenly. "Take charge here, will you? I'm going down to headquarters and report."

"This is serious. I understand you and Mopsy weren't exactly pals." Tierney's eyes bored briefly into the detective's.

"How did you know about this—mess?" Martin asked slowly.

"I got a call at the police box. Somebody tipped headquarters that Mopsy had an argument and got bumped."

"Yeah? I wonder who phoned? Well, see you later."

Tierney made no effort to detain him. He caught a trolley and rode to headquarters, a sick horror at his heart. No one but Sam could have tipped the police. Sam knew that the minute the button was found he was doomed. But he knew, also, Martin's fierce love for him, knew that the button would be instantly pocketed and covered up. Sam—his own brother had done this!

The inspector listened to Martin Clyde's explanation with a flinty face. "Self-defense, eh? Patrolman Tierney phoned in his report a few minutes ago. I'm sorry a detective on my staff had to commit murder to satisfy a personal grudge. Turn in your shield. You're suspended, pending a departmental trial. Go home—and report the moment I send for you. If you try to skip out—" His voice hardened.

Martin's voice matched his superior's. "Don't worry, sir. I'll report."

His mother was in the living room when he reached home. So was Sam. Sam looked queerly at his brother. His face was white, but whether with triumph or fear, Martin couldn't tell. He tossed his coat over the back of a chair—and instantly cursed himself for his stupidity.

His mother was staring at him. "Why, Marty! Where's your shield?"

"I turned it in," he said dully. "I've been suspended from duty."

He told her the same story he had told Patrolman Tierney and the inspector. "Is that the truth? Self-defense, son?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Then you've only done your duty and you've

nothing to fear."

She kissed him, went into the kitchen. Martin closed the door softly. His hand came out of his pocket and showed Sam the pearl-gray button. Sam's fingers jumped to the empty spot on his coat for a instant.

"How did it get into Mopsy's fist?"

"I dunno." His eyes peered beseechingly at his brother's set face. "Don't turn me in, Marty! I didn't do it. Arrestin' me would kill the old lady. She—"

"Shut up, you sniveling little skunk!" Martin's voice cut like a knife. "I'm taking the rap for this." His head jerked toward the kitchen. "Not for your sake, but for hers. Thanks to a murderous little whelp, I'm going to be kicked off the force—maybe convicted of murder. But I'll save mother the horror of seeing you burned in the chair."

Sam's voice was a frightened snarl. "Aw, nuts! You can't prove a thing on me. Gimme that button!"

They were glaring at each other, the older brother's fist clenched, when the door opened and Mrs. Clyde came in with some food.

"Well, for—" Her face cleared and she smiled. "Wrestling, are ye? A fine way to treat my furniture!"

"I was showing Sam a new police hold," Martin mumbled.

"Be careful ye don't hurt him."

"No. I—I won't hurt him, Mother," Martin said.

After supper the younger brother walked to the telephone and called a number. He talked in a low voice. Martin, listening intently behind his newspaper, couldn't hear what he said. He watched Sam pick up his hat, slide casually into his overcoat.

"Where are you going?"

"Mind your own business."

"Let him alone, Marty," Mrs. Clyde said gently. "Where are you going, Sammy boy?"

"I'm going to see Tom Rainey. Thought we'd go over to the settlement house and shoot a few games of billiards."

MARTIN waited in the little living room till nearly two-thirty without any sign of his sullen brother. He gave up, finally, and went to bed.

He fell asleep almost instantly. He didn't hear Sam come in.

They had finished breakfast the next morning when the doorbell rang.

It was Inspector Schwartz and a lean little ferret of a man whom Martin recognized as a detective from the district attorney's office.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said dully. "Come in."

The inspector nodded with faint embarrassment at Mrs. Clyde. He walked straight to the chair on which Martin's coat still hung. He put his hand in the inner pocket and drew out something. He showed it to the D.A.'s man.

"Mopsy Dolan's wallet, all right," the latter snapped. "Look—there's the little ivory elephant Mopsy always carried for luck."

"Where did you get this, Clyde?" the inspector snapped.

"Why, I—" Martin's face darkened. He looked at Sam, but Sam's face was averted. "Who told you I had this wallet of Mopsy's, Inspector?"

"What's that got to do with it? We had a tip over the phone that the wallet was still hot in your pocket. Put on your hat and coat, Clyde," the inspector said. "You're under arrest." He showed a thick sheaf of hundred dollar bills in the wallet.

Martin was staring at him like an automaton when the doorbell rang again. Sam answered it.

He came back with a quiet, sober-eyed man, a little older than himself.

"This is Tom Rainey, Inspector. I—I was out with him last night. I asked him to call here this morning. You see—when I told him, that I—I discovered Mopsy's wallet last night in Martin's pocket—"

"You lie!" Martin interrupted him fiercely. "The wallet was not in my pocket last night and you know it."

Sam gulped and moved closer to the protecting bulk of the inspector.

"Yeah? Is that so? Well, I saw it—and I told Tom Rainey. He said the ivory elephant sounded like Mopsy's luck-piece—and he told me something else. Mopsy met Tom in the settlement house a coupla nights ago. He was half-drunk and pretty nasty. Tell 'em about it, Tom."

Rainey nodded gravely. "Well, Mopsy told me Martin had threatened to kill him. He said that Martin was demanding too big a split on the—"

"Split?" The inspector's smile was like ice.

"Yes, sir. He said Martin was giving the boys plenty of police protection. But he was demanding

a fifty-fifty split of the graft money. They had an argument and Mopsy told him to go to hell. Martin said he'd get rid of him and split the graft with someone else."

"I—I thought you ought to know about this," Sam faltered. "That's why I asked Rainey to come over this morning. I'm—I'm the one who tipped headquarters about the wallet. I—I don't believe in murder, even if it's my own brother."

Martin's throat contracted with a dry, clicking sound. "Okay. I'm guilty. Let's go."

"No, no!" Mrs. Clyde wailed.

"I'm sorry about this," Rainey said. "I only wish it wasn't true. But the wallet and the button and—" He gulped, stopped talking suddenly.

"What button?" In one fierce leap Sam was away from the inspector's side and in front of Rainey. "What button?"

"Why—I—the button—that . . ." Rainey's voice trailed. His heavy face was suddenly the color of clay.

"No one on earth knew about that button, except Martin and myself," Sam cried shrilly. "Marty hid it to save me. He didn't report it to the police. But you know about it, hey? Why? Because you planted that button in Mopsy's hand—after you killed him!"

Rainey was snarling. He backed away a step.

Sam's eyes blazed. "I brought you here deliberately to trap you, Rainey. I knew you'd get too confident and give yourself away. Grab him, don't let him get out! He killed Mopsy!"

Rainey sprang toward the door, whirled, a gun in his shaking hand. His bullet chipped the lobe of Inspector Schwartz's ear. He tried to fire again but the inspector's gun roared. Rainey fell sideways, rolled on his back, was stiffly quiet. A haze of smoke drifted to the ceiling.

The D.A.'s sleuth said shakily: "Hell, that was a close call for you, Inspector."

"Yeah." He fingered his bleeding ear and his eyes bored into Sam. "Better explain this, young feller!"

Martin heard his brother's voice like a white-hot flame burning away all his doubts, his sick despair. Sam hadn't tried to frame him! Sam was innocent.

"I didn't realize who the real killer was until last night," Sam was saying. "Marty showed me the button from my coat, told me he had taken it from Mopsy's dead hand. Then I remembered—I *knew*! It happened last week at the settlement house

gymnasium. Rainey insisted on wrestling with me. I couldn't figure out why at the time; he was always so sedate and quiet. What he really wanted was that button! He ripped it off my coat while we were wrestling.

"Go ahead," the inspector said.

"Yesterday afternoon I got a tip that Mopsy wanted to see me in a hurry. When I got there I found him dead. I didn't know my coat button had been planted in his hand to frame me for the kill. But I was scared stiff. Mopsy's wallet was on the floor and I grabbed it, instinctively, I suppose. I decided to visit Rainey last night and play dumb.

"I went to see him, pretended I hated my bossy brother and told him Marty had stolen the wallet. He agreed to come here and identify it. Originally

he had intended to frame me; but I suppose he'd figure that Marty was a better fall guy than me, because Marty was an honest dick who was driving the gang out of business. Rainey swallowed my bait and came. I knew if I played dumb and vindictive against Marty, Rainey would explain too much and trip himself up—and he did!"

"This Rainey was trying to get the racket away from Mopsy, eh?"

"Right."

"Better come down to headquarters, Clyde, and get your shield back," the inspector said.

Martin didn't hear him. He was staring at his brother.

"Sam, if I ever lose faith in you again—kick me right square in the jaw, will you?"