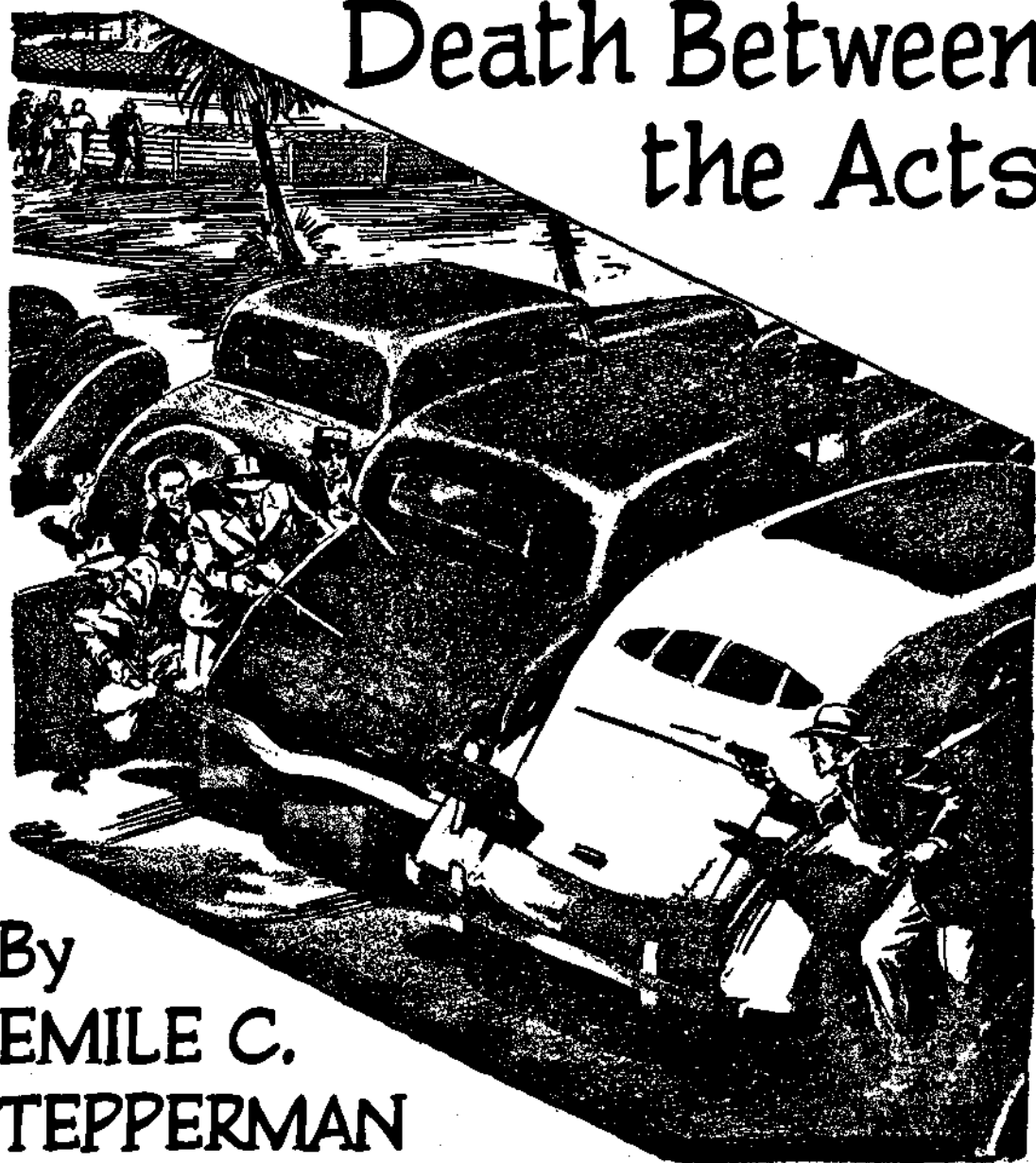


# Death Between the Acts



By  
**EMILE C.  
TEPPERMAN**

*Ed Race was willing to lend his time, money, or six-gun skill to deserving friends ... and Charley Wiener needed all three — desperately!*

**E**D RACE'S big, capable hands were wrapped tight around the rim of the steering wheel, and he kept his eyes straight ahead as he swung into Biscayne Boulevard, making seventy-two, with his foot down almost to the floorboard on the accelerator.

He had covered the sixty miles from Palm Beach to Miami in forty minutes, without being stopped by any traffic

policemen. Traffic was light at this time of the evening, and he saw only a single sedan ahead. It was a large, seven-passenger car, and it had been making as good time as Ed himself, all the way from Hollywood, which was about twenty miles north of Miami. Ed had tried to pass it a couple of times, but the speed its driver was making had prevented that.

Now the car ahead slowed up, and Ed

guessed that they, too, were preparing to make the turn into the causeway which led across the bay to Miami Beach. And it was just at that instant that the thing happened.

The left-hand rear-door of the sedan was suddenly flung open, and a girl leaped out, hit the pavement and rolled in the path of Ed's car, skirts billowing high over her shapely legs.

Ed clamped down hard on the brake. His car screamed to a stop within a foot of the girl, who was already scrambling to her feet. The car out of which she had leaped lurched to a halt, and a stocky man jumped out from the driver's seat, ran back toward her. The girl, her pretty face twisted into a mask of terror in the glare of Ed's headlamps, saw the stocky man, uttered a shriek, and started to run aimlessly. She stumbled, fell, and got to her feet again. Apparently she had been hurt in her leap from the car in spite of the fact that they had slowed down considerably. But she seemed desperate, frantic.

The stocky man caught up to her in three strides. His face was cool, impassive, as he seized her arm, and without saying a word, started to drag her back toward the sedan. The girl screamed, and tried to scratch her captor's face. Without change of expression the stocky man struck her in the face with his clenched fist, and she wilted, hung limply in his arm.

Ed had the door of his car open by this time, and he sprang out, shouted: "Hey, you!" and raced toward them.

The stocky man paid no attention to Ed, but made steadily for the sedan. Out of the big car another man hopped. This one was little, thin, with a single wisp of nondescript-colored hair on an otherwise bald dome. The little man gazed at Ed with a queer, bird-like stare, and whipped a hand out of the side pocket of his linen jacket. The hand was balled around the

butt of an automatic, and the automatic pointed at Ed.

"Stay outta this, mister," the little man said. "It's none of your business!"

Ed slowed up. He was only a few feet from the muzzle of that gun, and its holder spoke as if he meant to use it. The stocky man was already bundling the girl back into the car when she seemed to awake from her lethargy, and screamed again. She began to shriek and scratch and kick, and for a second her captor was taken aback. In that second, she broke his hold on her, started to run toward Ed. The stocky man cursed, came after her, and caught her again, just alongside of Ed Race. The two of them were now between Ed and the little man with the gun, and Ed took advantage of the situation, threw an arm around the stocky man's throat, lifted him by the seat of the pants, and fairly hurled him at the man with the gun.

The two of them went down in a welter of arms and legs, and the automatic slid out of the little man's hand, while its owner slumped under the body of the man whom Ed had thrown.

The stocky fellow got to his feet, crouched, and rushed at Ed. Ed met him with a stiff uppercut that sent him back into the side of the sedan. Then Ed stepped in, picked up the automatic.

The stocky man was feeling in his coat for a gun, but Ed calmly lifted a hard fist to his chin. This time he went out cold. Ed whirled, looking for the girl. She had disappeared!

**B**ISCAYNE BOULEVARD at this point is rather deserted at night. Two cars had passed while the fight was going on, but neither had stopped. Motorists these days aren't anxious to get into brawls that may hold them up, or cause their appearance in court as witnesses.

Ed turned back to the two men. The little man was still slumped down, his head resting on the running-board of the car, where it had struck when he fell. The stocky man was stirring, but still unconscious. Ed grinned ruefully. He had mixed in something that was none of his business. For all he knew, these two men might be officers of the law, and the girl might be a felon. Of course, she didn't look like a criminal, and Ed hadn't liked the way the stocky man hit her.

He glanced around, seeking for some possible place where the girl might have disappeared to. There was none. This was the Thirteenth Street Circle, and traffic had to make a wide detour around a monument, then either go on down Biscayne Boulevard toward Flagler Street and the center of town, or else turn left into the causeway.

Opposite was the vast bulk of a department store; on his own side of the street there was a row of stores, all closed for the night. There was literally no place where she could have gone, unless she had taken refuge in one of the darkened store entryways—in which case he could not have missed her bright orange dress. Yet it was not in evidence.

Ed shrugged, carefully wiped his prints from the automatic, dropped it alongside the unconscious men. Then he got into his own sedan and drove around the circle, swung left onto the causeway. He glanced at his wrist watch, and cursed under his breath. He had lost precious minutes back there. Now he stepped on the accelerator, drove the needle up to sixty, sixty-five. The concrete, three-and-a-half mile causeway across Biscayne Bay, linking the City of Miami to the City of Miami Beach, was a beautiful piece of construction work. Wide and smooth, it was easy driving, and gave one an oppor-

tunity to glimpse the splendor of the view on either side. Far over to the left, one could see the long row of electric lights that marked the Venetian Way, the second of the three causeways across the bay. To the right was the gorgeous skyline of Miami, which reminded Ed almost of New York's own skyline. There were tall buildings and garish lights, and something that looked like the string of lights on a shoot-the-shoots, but which was really the illumination for the aquarium boat anchored along the bay front of Miami.

Ed paid but scant attention to these things now. His face was tight, as he sped past palatial yachts tied up along the causeway, past the landing field of the Goodyear blimp which had crashed only the other day. He was swinging around the wide curve which approached the first of the two drawbridges in the causeway, when he heard a *chug-chugging* alongside, glanced out of the window and saw a grim-faced motorcycle cop motioning him to pull over.

He bit his lip in vexation, slowed down, and came to a stop along the edge of the water. The cop parked the motorcycle just ahead, and came back swaggering, a hand on the holster hanging from his Sam Browne belt.

"Let's have yoah license, mistah," the officer said grimly.

Ed took out his wallet, handed over his driver's license and the card from the Drive-Yourself company.

The cop grunted. "New Yawk, eh? You fellahs seem to think you-all own this here town. This ain't a license to do seventy, mister!"

"Look here, officer," Ed said desperately, "I've got to get to the Miami Beach Dog Track by nine o'clock. It's a matter of life and death. That's why I was tearing up the road."

The officer raised his eyebrows. "Life an' death, eh? How come?"

ED TOOK a crumpled telegram from his pocket. "I was up at Palm Beach tonight, and I got this telegram from an old friend of mine. I tried to reach him by telephone, but he wasn't home. So I hired a car and started to drive here."

The cop took the blank suspiciously, and read it. It was as follows:

EDWARD RACE

c/o FLORIDA THEATER

PARTAGES CIRCUIT

PALM BEACH FLA

COME AT ONCE MIAMI BEACH  
DOG TRACK STOP BRING TEN  
GRAND STOP LIFE AND  
DEATH STOP ODDS ARE TER-  
RIBLE AGAINST ME BUT ITS  
LAST CHANCE TONIGHT STOP  
COME BEFORE NINE OCLOCK  
STOP DONT FAIL STOP I KNOW  
YOU CAN GET THE MONEY  
FROM YOUR BROKERS THEY  
ARE OPEN TILL TEN OCLOCK  
STOP ILL BE WAITING FOR  
YOU AT TRACK BUT IF YOU  
MISS ME REMEMBER ITS LIFE  
AND DEATH

CHARLEY WIENER

The cop frowned, read the telegram through a second time. While he was doing this, Ed kept glancing nervously back along the causeway toward Miami. He had at first thought that the officer was after him for the fracas back at Biscayne Boulevard. He had been more or less relieved to learn that he was just being stopped for speeding. Now he feared that some other officer might have discovered the two men at the sedan, and come after him. He said to the cop:

"You ought to know Charley Wiener. Everybody down here knows him. He comes to Miami every year. He owns a string of dogs—"

"Yeah, sure," the cop told him. "I know Charley Wiener. A hell of a nice guy. He goes fishin' right here off the causeway every Sunday night. But I can't figure out what kind of life and death jam he can be in. An' I don't know you. What's this about the Florida Theater at Palm Beach, an' the Partages Circuit?"

Ed looked at his watch. It was twenty-five minutes to nine. He could take ten minutes to explain and still have time to make the track by nine o'clock—provided the cop gave him a break. He explained patiently:

"I'm an actor. I'm working over at the Florida this week. I'll play Hollywood next week, and the Miami Theater the week after. Then I'm booked for the Miami Biltmore over at Coral Gables. I play this circuit every winter. Maybe you've seen my act—The Masked Marksman—"

"Say!" the cop exclaimed. "Are you the Masked Marksman? The guy that juggles those big, forty-five calibre revolvers on the stage, an' does somersaults, an' shoots out candles?"

Ed nodded. "That's me."

The cop sighed. He folded up Ed's license, and handed it back to him. "I saw your act last year. I came every day while you were at the Miami, and I trotted out to Coral Gables every day the week after. Your act is a knockout, Mr. Race. "If could shoot like you, I'd die happy!" He stretched out his hand. "Will you shake with me, Mr. Race?"

At that particular moment, Ed would have kissed him. He took the license, shook hands with the cop.

"My name is Seeley," the officer said.

"Tom Seeley. And I'm mighty glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Race. Anything I can do for you, why just say the word."

"That's white of you," Ed said. "All I want to do is to get over to the dog-track and see what sort of jam Charley is up against—"

"Okay," Tom Seeley said. "You're goin' there—like a gentleman!"

He strode over to his motorcycle, kicked it into life, and straddled it. Then he turned, grinned, and shouted over the barking of his motor: "You're gonna have an escort to the track, Mr. Race. An' talk about speed—you try an' keep up with me!"

He raised an arm, got into motion, and roared out along the causeway.

Ed grinned, shoved his car into gear, and followed. The needle of his speedometer crept up past the seventy mark, touched eighty, slipped past, and hovered around eighty-five. Ahead of him, the motorcycle made a thin streak of speed, its siren shrieking, clearing a path for them.

ALMOST in the blink of an eyelid they had left the causeway, and were in Miami Beach. Seeley sped down Fifth Street, with Ed hanging close behind him, and swung right on Washington Avenue, heading straight for the dog track. Cars pulled aside to let them pass, and pedestrians stopped to stare, wondering what high muck-amuck was being accorded a princely escort to the track.

Ed was chuckling to himself, thinking of the two men he had left lying next to the big sedan on Biscayne Boulevard. He wondered who the girl was, and where they'd been taking her; what sort of desperate frenzy had caused her to leap from the car; and where she had disappeared to. Seeley was about a block ahead of him, and the lights of the dog-track had

come in sight, when Ed suddenly felt something hard poked into his back. He stiffened, raised his eyes to the rear-vision mirror, and saw the face of the girl he had been thinking about. She was in the rear seat, and her face was white, determined. She said: "Slow up, Mister Race, and let me out. I've got your gun—I got it out of the side pocket. And believe me. I'll shoot if you don't stop!"

Ed exclaimed: "My God! So you were hiding in there all the time? That's where you disappeared to!"

She was hardly more than nineteen, he saw now, and fragiley pretty. Her hair was corn-colored and bobbed, and her face was thin, almost elf-like. She was under some dreadful strain, he could see, and she might shoot from nervousness if for no other reason.

He said hastily: "Look out for that gun, Miss. It's got a hair trigger. It might go off before you know it!"

The cold muzzle was up against the back of his neck, and he shuddered to think of what he'd look like if the big forty-five exploded now.

"Never mind talking!" the girl grated. "Slow up and let me out!"

Ed applied the brake gently, eased down to fifty, forty, thirty. Seeley and his motorcycle pulled away from them. Ed said: "Listen, Miss, suppose I don't slow up. If you shoot me, the car'll crash and you'll be killed or maimed. You don't dare to shoot."

"Oh, yes I do!" she said vehemently. "If I don't get away, I might as well be dead anyway! You better stop!"

Ed stopped.

"Now," she asked, "where's that ten thousand dollars you said you were taking to the track?"

Ed laughed hollowly. "That was only a gag, sister. You don't think I'd carry ten

thousand—?"

He stopped as the gun poked a little harder into his neck. "I want that money. I want it bad enough to—commit—murder for it!"

Her lips were close to his ear as she leaned forward, crouching in the rear, and he caught the faint odor of the perfume she used. The car was still rolling, and he took his foot off the brake, let it continue to roll. "I'll take a chance," he grinned. "I don't think you're a killer, sister. I'm not handing over any ten grand to the first girl with a gun that asks me for it. Let's see you shoot."

"All right then. When I count three I'm going to pull the trigger!" In a whisper she said: "One! Two! Th—" she uttered a little groan, threw the gun away, and it fell with a clatter to the floorboard at Ed's feet. Ed pulled his feet out of the way with a jerk, and the hair-trigger exploded with a mighty crash. The slug from the gun smashed out through the right hand door, through the thin metal, leaving a rough, gaping hole in the body.

"I—I couldn't do it!" she moaned, and put her hands up to her face. Her shoulder shook as she sobbed.

Ed groaned, looking ruefully at the hole in the door. "Those guys will charge me damages now! Couldn't you have put the thing down instead of throwing it?"

**H**E picked the gun up, put it into the holster under his right armpit. There already was one gun under his left armpit, and this was its mate. He had taken it out because it made too much of a bulge under his palm beach jacket. But now he thought he had better wear it. These revolvers were two of the matched six with which he performed each day at the theater. And he never went out without carrying them. In addition to being a headline

vaudeville artist, Ed Race had developed a hobby of recent years that helped to lend the touch of excitement to his life which his nervous energy craved. He dabbled in criminology as a sideline, and held licenses to act as a private detective in a dozen states. Few people outside of the theatrical world knew that Ed Race, the private detective, was also the Masked Marksman of vaudeville fame. He always appeared on the stage with a mask, and tried to keep his identity secret so far as possible. For in his career of crime investigation he had made a respectable number of enemies, and he didn't relish the idea of being spotted from the orchestra of a theater while he was performing on the stage.

Not that he disliked the thrill of the constant danger. Ed could have retired comfortably on the money he had made in the vaudeville business in the last eight years. The salary he received as a headliner was far too large for him to spend, considering the simple way he lived.

He made no effort to save, or to conserve his funds, yet they seemed to grow in spite of himself, mocking him when he told himself he remained in the vaudeville business because he had to. He knew within himself that he stayed because he couldn't live without the excitement of the theater, without the thunderous applause that greeted his every appearance on the stage.

He gambled with his money in large chunks, invested in crazy, wildcat schemes, and lent money indiscriminately. Yet his gambles always seemed to be lucky ones, the wildest stocks he bought started paying dividends after he invested in them. Friends to whom he lent cash generally made a come-back and repaid him. So Ed had accumulated more money than he knew what to do with. And if Charley Wiener had asked him for fifty

thousand instead of ten, he would have gotten it gladly.

Now, as he holstered the gun, he turned and inspected the girl, who was softly weeping behind him. "I'm in a hurry now, sister," he told her. "But if you'll wait till I take care of my business at the track, maybe I can help you if you'll tell me what's your trouble. You—"

He stopped as the girl raised her eyes and gasped, pointing ahead of them. Ed looked, saw the single big eye of a motorcycle headlamp bearing down on them.

"It's the policeman!" she gasped. "P-please! D-don't give me away!" And she ducked behind the seat.

Ed frowned, puzzled, and turned to greet Seeley, who pulled up alongside. The cop exclaimed: "What happened, Mr. Race? I all of a sudden saw I was alone, so I come back to look for you!"

"I—er—the ignition went dead," Ed explained. "Fuse blew. It's all right now though." He went through the motions of fumbling with the fuse under the dashboard. "I wrapped it in silver paper from my cigarette package, and I guess it'll last till tomorrow."

Seeley looked impressed. "Say, that's a good idea, Mr. Race. I never heard of wrapping 'em in silver paper. Fuse once blew on me out on the Tamiami Trail, an' I was stuck in the Everglades all night. Sorry I didn't know that stunt."

"Well, you just remember it for future use. Shall we start again?"

Seeley nodded, swung his cycle around, and headed off. "We'll just make it," he called back.

**E**D FOLLOWED again, and the girl poked her head up once more. "Please," she said. "I heard everything you said to the policeman about who you were. Will you promise me something?

It's terribly important."

"That depends," Ed said, keeping his eyes front. "I don't know what to say to a girl like you. First you jump out of a car with two tough eggs in it. Then you hide in mine. Then you hold me up and want to take ten grand away from me. Then you ask me to promise you something—"

"Please!" she repeated earnestly. "That telegram—"

She stopped, ducked down again. They had turned the corner after Seeley, and were entering the spacious parking grounds outside the dog-track. Seeley had slowed up, and was alongside again, and the girl had not ducked down a moment too soon. Whatever she wanted to say would remain unsaid.

The cop motioned to an empty parking spot, and Ed maneuvered into it. Seeley had got off his cycle, and was opening the door of the car almost before Ed had turned off the ignition.

"It's ten to nine, Mister Race," the cop said. "Let's hurry. If Charley Wiener said it was life and death, then it must be serious."

Ed cast a furtive glance into the rear, saw the girl snuggling down. He shrugged. She seemed to know something about Charley's frantic telegram. But she was equally anxious not to be caught. He would have to forego hearing what she had to say.

He left the car, walked arm in arm with Seeley through the gate. Seeley waved to the gateman, and they didn't have to pay any admission. Within, there was a throng of gay, carefree people, bustling about, hurrying to place bets at the mutuel windows, exchanging jests and giving each other tips. A band was playing in the grandstand, and on the track eight greyhounds were being marched up and down in leash, led by eight brightly uniformed pages. The big, electrically il-

luminated board out in the middle of the field showed that this was the third race, scheduled for 9:05.

Ed fingered the telegram in his pocket, said worriedly: "How the hell are we going to find Charley Wiener in this crowd? He—"

Seeley gripped his arm, pointed. There, at the rail, just opposite the judge's box, stood Charley Wiener. He was watching the dogs parade, and didn't seem to have a care in the world.

Seeley pushed through the gay throng, saying over his shoulder to Ed: "Hell, he doesn't look like he was in a life-and-death jam!"

Ed didn't think so either, but there was no telling from Charley's poker-face. Charley Wiener was a sportsman. He owned a string of bungalows in Rockaway, in New York, and worked like a beaver in the summer, up north. In the winter he came down to Miami and blew everything he made in the summer on the dogs. He had been training dogs for five years now, but had failed to develop a single winner. Every once in a while he would call Ed Race on the phone, and excitedly give him a tip. The tip invariably cost Ed money. But Charley was a good fellow, and Ed felt that some day he would bring a winner to the track.

When Ed got through the crowd and reached his side, Charley had his elbows on the rail, his chin cupped in his hands, and was studying the eight greyhounds. Ed tapped him on the shoulder, said:

"Hello, Charley. I got here as quick as I could. Hope I'm in time. You don't look like you're in a jam." Ed was fumbling in his watch pocket as he spoke, and he pulled out a crumpled bill. "I brought the ten grand—got it all in one bill. I hope it squares you."

Charley Wiener took his hand

enthusiastically, pumped it up and down. "Hello, Eddie. Haven't seen you for six months, I knew you'd come." He nodded to Seeley. "Hiya, Tom? Want a good dog for this race?"

Seeley grinned, looked puzzled. "What's the trouble, Mr. Wiener?"

Wiener threw him an inquiring glance. "Trouble?"

Seeley stared at him. "You're in a jam, aren't you?"

"Jam? What do you mean?" He let his glance slide from Seeley to Ed. "What are you guys doing—ribbing me?"

Ed said: "Look here, Charley. I brought your ten grand. Your telegram said you had to have it—or else. Well, here it is. If you don't care to talk about it, that's okay with me. Maybe it's something personal. I'm sure Seeley, here, won't let it get any further. The reason he knows about it is because he stopped me on the causeway for speeding, and I had to show him your telegram to get out of it. When he saw it was a matter of life and death with you, he escorted me here. He's—"

**E**D STOPPED, staring. Charley Wiener had suddenly burst out laughing, uncontrollably. He slapped his knee, slapped Ed on the shoulder, patted Seeley on the back. "Well, I'll be damned! So you thought I was in a jam, and you brought the dough!"

Ed said irritably: "Listen, Charley, it's no joke. Here's your telegram."

He took out the crumpled form, and Wiener seized it, still laughing.

"Gee, I never thought you'd take it that way, Eddie. I guess I didn't figure it would sound like that. I forgot you didn't know Life and Death!"

"What do you mean—I didn't know Life and Death?"

"My dog, Eddie. That's my dog's



name!" He opened his racing card, pointed to the entries for the third race. There it was, staring up at Ed:

**Number 8—Life and Death—67 lbs.  
Owner, Charles Wiener**

Ed raised his eyes from the card, stared at Seeley, then at Charley Wiener. "Well, you son-of-a-gun! Dragging me out here, and me thinking you were up against a life and death jam!"

"Look," Charley said eagerly, pointing to his own telegram. "Life and Death has to win. He outclasses every dog in the race. And it's the last chance to bet on him. I'm selling out my stable tonight and going north. My daughter is going to be married. That's why I sent you this telegram. You've bet ten grand on horses and dogs before. Look—" he pointed to the board out on the field—"the odds are only one to one, but it's an absolutely sure bet. You lay down that ten grand, and you'll double your money. I've already put every cent I could scrape up on him!"

Ed said: "Charley, I'd like to push your face in. Here you get me all excited, thinking, you're in trouble. I race out here from Palm Beach, all hell bent for leather. I have to get back to Palm Beach by ten-thirty. My number goes on—"

Charley gripped his arm. "Go on, Ed. Lay that ten grand. You can collect and get back to the theater in plenty of time."

Ed shrugged, glanced at Seeley. "What can you do with a guy like that?" he asked hopelessly.

Seeley grinned, dug into his pocket and pulled out two ten-dollar bills, a five and three singles. "Here's twenty-eight bucks I feel like gambling with."

"All right." Ed thrust the ten-thousand-dollar bill into his hand. "Let's all

be crazy. Here, you take mine over to the mutuel window too, while you're at it."

Seeley took the bill, and pushed his way through the crowd toward the rear where the cashiers' cages were located.

Charley Wiener said: "You won't regret this one, Eddie. It's a sure thing. Look at that dog. He can't lose!" He pointed at the greyhounds, which were just being lined up in front of the judge's box, having their muzzles and covers tested to assure that they would not be hampered in running.

Ed appraised each of them in turn with the shrewd eye of an expert. They were all sleek, well-groomed, aching to go. Number eight impressed Ed. The hound's long body and lean flanks spoke of tremendous reserve power. It carried itself well, with the poise of a thoroughbred.

Charley Wiener glowed with pride. "I tell you, Eddie, I got a winner this time. He outclasses the other seven. Number three would walk away with this race if it wasn't for Life and Death. Look-number three's odds are up to five to two. It was even money when the betting started."

Ed was inclined to agree with Charley that Life and Death would walk away with the race. The band stopped playing, and the dogs started marching to the line. The announcer up at the microphone called out:

"You have exactly five minutes to place your bets, ladies and gentlemen. The cashiers at the rear are waiting for you. Don't delay till the last minute, or you may not be able to lay down a bet."

A young man approached Charley and Ed. He was in the neighborhood of twenty-three or twenty-four, fair-haired, with clean-cut features and a high forehead. He was dressed in tan flannel trousers and a tan sport jacket.

CHARLEY WIENER hailed him gayly. "Hi there, Ronny. Want you to meet my best friend—Eddie Race. You know, the guy that shoots 'em up on the stage. Eddie, this is Ronny Greer, my future son-in-law. He's going to marry Gloria. You've never met Gloria, have you?"

Ed shook hands with Ronny Green, while Charley went on: "Ronny is a dog owner, too. He owns number three—the hound that would win this race if Life and Death wasn't in it."

Ronny Green made a face. "You're right. I've never seen you with a winner yet, and you have to go and pick one when I've got my best dog entered! I think I'll go and place a bet on Life and Death myself!"

He left them, and Charley said glowingly: "He's a swell kid, Ronny is. He knows more about dogs than I do. Gloria met him when she was in Europe. When she gets married, I'll sell out all my bungalows in Rockaway, and take Lucie and the twins for a trip around the world."

Ed had met Lucie, Charley's wife, and his other two children, Billy and Stephen. Billy and Stephen were twins, and Ed could never tell them apart. They were only six years old, and they had a lot of fun making Ed guess which was which. He had never met Gloria, because she had been away at a finishing school, and later in Europe.

Seeley came back with Ed's mutuel ticket, and his own. The crowd surged up around them, close to the rail, as the dogs were placed in the starting box. A bugle sounded to indicate that no more bets would be accepted. Everybody grew tense as the dogs waited to be released. About two hundred feet back of the starting box, the mechanical bunny was started, and its white shape flashed under the brilliant incandescent lights as it sped

around the inside of the track.

The announcer up in the grandstand called into his microphone in a playful voice: "Here comes the bu-nny!"

And at that moment an almost hysterical voice behind the spot where Ed and Charley and Seeley were standing shouted: "Dad! Dad!"

Charley Wiener swung around, and Ed, following his glance, saw that the girl he had left in the car outside was struggling to get through to them. Her face flushed, her eyes distended.

Charley Wiener paid no attention to the dogs. He started pushing toward the excited girl. "Gloria!" he shouted. And Ed Race's eyes narrowed. Gloria! This girl that he had seen leap from the big sedan was Charley Wiener's daughter!

He and Seeley pushed after Wiener, came out of the throng just as Charley met his daughter in the cleared space behind the crowd. Gloria threw only a single glance at Ed, then gripped her father's arm!

"Dad! Life and Death isn't going to win! They know about the siren! They're going to sound the siren! They came to the house and took Billy and Stephen and me away, and they said they'd-they'd do things to the twins if I didn't tell them what was wrong with Life and Death. They knew there was some secret about him. So—so I told them. And then they took me along in a car, but I jumped out of it. I—I was afraid to tell the police, because those two men still had Billy and Stephen. What'll we do?"

Charley Wiener seemed dazed. He gazed helplessly at Ed and Seeley.

Ed didn't understand what she was talking about. "What's this about a siren?" Charley Wiener groaned. "It's Life and Death's only weakness. He was frightened by a siren when he was a pup. Whenever he hears one, he quits. He—"

WIENER stopped, his face going gray as there came to them from somewhere outside the track the shrill notes of a siren. Its keen, wailing tone spread over the track, and Ed, glancing out at the dogs which were just rounding the turn for the home stretch, saw number eight, in the lead, falter and swerve.

In a moment the leading dog had flashed over the finish line, and the race was over. Number three had won!

Charley Wiener didn't care, however. He had Gloria by the arm, was questioning her fiercely. "The twins! Where are the twins? To hell with the race. What's happened to Billy and Stephen?"

Gloria was sobbing. "I don't know, dad. They b-blindfolded us when they took us away. I-I don't know."

The crowd was pushing past their little group now, some making for the mutuel windows to collect on their tickets. On the tote board, electric bulbs spelled:

**\$2.00 ticket on No. 3 pays — \$6.00**

Charley Wiener's face was gray. "My God, Eddie," he said, "I don't give a damn about the race. I want those two kids back!"

Ed said: "Come on. Let's get out!" He made his way toward the exit, followed by Charley, Gloria and Seeley. Seeley caught up with him, took his arm. "This is kidnaping, Mr. Race. I guess I better phone in, and report."

Ed nodded. "Get to a phone. I'm going to find who sounded that siren outside."

At the gate, he said to Charley Wiener: you wait here with Gloria. I'll be right back. Get hold of the track officials, tell them to locate this here Ronny Greer. His dog won the race by default."

Gloria exclaimed: "But, Mr. Race, Ronny couldn't have had anything to do with it. He wouldn't hurt Billy and Stephen!"

"You may be right," Ed told her glumly, "but it doesn't hurt to investigate."

He left them, passed through the gate and was about to question the attendant, when out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of a figure that looked a little familiar to him, slinking in among the parked cars. He could have sworn it was the stocky man whom he had tangled with back at Biscayne Boulevard.

Ed ducked in between two cars in the next row, bent low, and crept after him. He came out on the other side, and almost bumped into a close-huddled group of four men, with their heads together. It was pretty dark here, but Ed recognized the profile of Ronny Greer.

Greer was saying: "All right, you guys. Here's your dough. Now amscray. We'll leave the twins—"

He stopped as one of the men sensed Ed's presence, raised his head. It was the stocky man, who had just joined the group. His eyes rested on the figure of Ed Race, in the shadow, and he said hoarsely: "Somebody's there!"

At the same time his hand flashed up to his shoulder holster, came out with a gun. One of the big forty-fives appeared in his right hand as if by magic, and its deep-toned roar sounded a split-second sooner than the stocky man's gun. The stocky man went crashing backward, dead on his feet.

The other three men separated, darting to either side, among the cars. Shots began coming Ed's way from three directions. Ed knelt beside the car, firing methodically at the flashes, with both guns out now. Bullets clanged against the steel of the car against which he rested, and slugs whistled past his head. But Ed's bleak face did not move a muscle there in the darkness as he traded shots. He was thinking of the twins. Suddenly one of the three uttered a shriek, and his body fell

forward to the ground. Ed had caught him in the chest, firing at his flash. The other two were in darkness at the edge of the parking lot, and they had the advantage, because the lights of the track were behind Ed. They could see him, but he could not see them.

A BULLET nicked Ed's shoulder, tearing the coat, and burning lightly across his skin. He dropped lower, firing almost from the ground, but unable to see what he was shooting at. And suddenly, aid came to him from an unexpected source. The headlamps of the car he was leaning against abruptly went on, bathing the darkness in the bright glare of their luminance. Ed saw, outlined in their glow, the figures of his two remaining assailants, firing over the hood of the car ahead. One of them was Ronny Greer, the other was the thin man who had been in the sedan with the stocky one. Both blinked in the glare of the headlamps.

Ed couldn't guess who was in the car, who had snapped the lights on, but he took advantage of the opportunity. Both his guns spoke at exactly the same time. Ed didn't have to go over there to look at them; he knew they were dead.

Instead, he turned to the car, wrenched open the door, and looked in. Two towheaded, tousled kids were in there, looking up at him with laughing eyes. They were both gagged, and their hands tied. Ed exclaimed: "Billy and Stephen!"

He tore the gags from them, and his fingers worked swiftly untying the ropes that held the little wrists. As soon as the gags were off they both started to talk together: "Uncle Ed! We saw you shoot! Gee, you can sure shoot!"

Ed asked: "Who turned on the headlights?"

One of the youngsters said proudly: "I

did, Uncle Ed! I wanted to see how you shot those bad men, so I turned around in the seat, and reached the lights and turned them on. Gee, it was great!"

There was a rush of feet behind them, and Charley Wiener pushed Ed aside, fell on the twins, hugging and kissing them. Gloria, behind him, was pawing over his shoulder at them.

A crowd had poured out from the track at the sound of the shots, and several uniformed men, with Seeley at their head. Ed pointed to the dead bodies. "It's all over but the funerals," he told Seeley. "That guy, Greer, was behind it all. He knew there was something phony about Life and Death, so he had those other birds kidnap the twins and Gloria, and force the secret from her. He knew if he could get Life and Death out of the race he could win at big odds."

Gloria looked up at Ed. "It—it was Ronny who was in back of it all?"

Charley Wiener lifted the twins out of the car. "My God, Gloria," he said, "you almost married the guy!"

She buried her face in her hands.

The twins didn't seem to mind. They started climbing up Ed, pulling themselves up by his coat. "Uncle Ed!" they shouted. "See if you can guess. Which is Billy and which is Stephen?"

Ed laughed. "I give up!" He glanced at Seeley, who was looking mournfully at his tote tickets. "Lookit that," Seeley exclaimed. "Twenty-eight bucks shot!"

Ed said: "How about my ten grand?"

Charley Wiener heaved a sigh. "The race is going to be declared off," he announced. "All bets will be refunded. And I'm quitting the dog races—for good!"

Ed grinned at him. "Without ever having a winner?"

"To hell with it!" said Charley. "I'm going to stick to the bungalow business from now on. It's less of a gamble!"