

Koski saw him try to wrestle  
the girl away from the body



## By STEWART STERLING **GUNMETAL FINISH**



### CHAPTER I

#### JUNK BOAT

**L**IEUTENANT Steve Koski leaned against the bulkhead of the pilothouse, motionless as a statue. In the faint glow from the binnacle bowl he looked like a statue, too. A rugged, weather-bronzed figure, Koski wore a melton jacket that was buttoned close around his neck. A beat-up felt, soggy with moisture, was pulled low over his ice-blue eyes that searched the pale opaqueness of the fog.

He didn't move even when Sergeant Mulcahey spoke on a subject that touched a sore spot.

"I see by the mornin' papers," the sergeant said, putting the wheel down a spoke, "that Commissioner Andrews has finally succeeded in breakin' up that ring of dock thieves which has been nibblin' away at pier cargoes to the tune of sixty, seventy thousan' a month. Commissioner, in a pig's pазook! *We* know who rounded up them rats!"

"Sure." Koski continued to squint into the curtain of mist blanketing the Brooklyn waterfront. "But what's the use beefing, Irish? The Harbor Division's always been the stepchild of the Police Department. It always will be."

"It gripes my innards, though," Mulcahey said. He swung the *Vigilant's* bow a point toward the nun buoy at the head of Governor's Island. "We stay out, twenty hours a stretch, sloppin' around in freezin' rain. We let them cargo snatchers use us for clay pipes in a shootin' gallery. An' then, when they're in front of them floodlights in Headquarters' lineup, some loud-mouth politician in a soft leather chair tells the taxpayers how he—"

"Clam!" Lieutenant Koski held up a palm for silence.

Against the jumble of harbor sounds—the mournful clanking of the bell at Buttermilk Channel, the deep hoarseness of a tramp steamer feeling her way through the shrouding fog like a blind man, the high, frantic toots of a tug—came the hollow *turkey-turkey-turkey* of a two-cycle motor, echoing flatly over the calm surface of the water.

Sergeant Mulcahey bent over the binnacle, peering forward, his plump, ruddy features burnished by the glow spilling up from the card.

"It's a junkie," he announced. "I can't see him, though—"

"The sucker's running without lights." Koski picked up a lacquered megaphone, stepped back to the cockpit. "Cut her, Irish," he said to the sergeant.

MULCAHEY silenced his hundred and eighty horses. Koski put the mouthpiece of the megaphone to one ear and swept the wide end of the fibre funnel in a slow semi-circle. At one spot, on the port quarter, the hollow *turkey-turkey* which had seemed to come from every point on the compass, sounded sharply louder. The lieutenant pointed.

"Sic 'em, Tige," he said to Mulcahey. "He bit your father."

The sergeant cut the motor in fast, angled the nose of the patrol boat around in a rush. He moved the throttle-bar forward. The *Vigilant's* bow lifted. Water seethed past the gunnels, boiled astern.

Koski switched on the big searchlight. A probing finger of white poked through a hundred feet of milky murk—and touched something red.

"Right rudder," Koski cautioned. "It's a tramp. The junkie's run in behind her."

The police boat veered off, heeling over to its cockpit coaming. The rusty red hull of the tramp bulked darkly above them, its running lights vague in the mist. Shouts of alarm came down to the two officers as the *Vigilant* surged under the steamer's counter, swung wide to avoid her threshing screw, and plunged like a rocking horse gone mad across the bobbling wake, after the junk boat.

"The junkie's heading down Buttermilk." Koski used the megaphone as a sound-tracer again.

Mulcahey spun the spokes. "Tell me now," he complained, "why wouldn't we run across this miscreant an hour ago, instead of when we're headin' for Pier One to sign off duty? An' me, with a very tasty dish waitin' my beck an' call!"

"Your dame'll wait." Koski caught a low

gray shadow in the blurred cone of the searchlight. The shadow slid around the tail barge of a long tow, which was headed toward the Narrows, and vanished. "Pour it on, Irish," he said.

Sergeant Mulcahey fiddled with the controls. The motor's roar lifted to a high, shrill pitch. The guns in the bulkhead racks began to chatter from the vibration.

"That junkie's probably got a boatload of ol' manila, Steve. He'll claim he bought it. Nobody'll be able to prove different an'—"

"I'll be able to prove he's forfeiting his license by running in a fog without lights," Steve Koski retorted. "And don't kid yourself. He's not scooting away like that with any stolen rope. If that's what it was, he'd have dumped it overboard long ago and waited for us to come up with him."

The police boat closed the gap swiftly. The junk boat turned, twisted to evade the searchlight, then wheeled, at last, toward the deep shadows of shore.

"He's makin' for the Gowanus!" Mulcahey swore softly. If the junk boat should gain that narrow hulk-lined canal to find him would be like hunting a rat under a barn.

Steve Koski lifted the repeating rifle out of its brackets. The quarry was no more than two hundred yards ahead. Mulcahey kept the long finger of light on the hunched figure crouching beside the junk boat's motor housing.

A stub-nosed diesel tug, with a beard of rope matting trailing over its bow, came chugging out of the mouth of the canal. The junk boatman headed right at the tug. Koski crawled up on the forward deck.

"Swing out a point, Irish," he called to Mulcahey. "He's smack in line with that tug's wheelhouse."

The tug began to turn. The cargo lighter the tug was towing swung out and the junk boat slewed. Its bow began to disappear behind the lighter.

Koski fired.

A searchlight came on then above the tug's wheelhouse. It felt its way across the water to the police boat. When it touched the square green flag whipping at the *Vigilant's* signal mast, the light winked out abruptly. The tug sheered off, to get out of the way. Mulcahey called. "Did you hit the junkie?"

Koski shook his head. "I wasn't trying to. I was aiming at his gas tank. Bear down on her, Irish."

They thundered into the mouth of the evil-smelling canal, their exhaust reverberating from the narrow walls. The junk boat was rounding a wharf topped by a ramshackle galvanized shed.

"Half," Koski yelled, from his position on the forward hatch.

Mulcahey slowed the motor to 600 r.p.m., sweeping the shore to starboard with the blinding brilliance of the searchlight.

A BEAM of the iron shed, Sergeant Mulcahey caught the stern of the junk boat full in the glare, fifty feet ahead. He grabbed the clutch lever, went into reverse.

The *Vigilant* lost way, rumbled to a foaming halt ten feet off the pier head. The junk boat had its nose in the mud beneath the pilings of the pier.

"I can't get the light down on him, Steve."

"Use your flash," Koski ordered. "And watch yourself."

Mulcahey poked the hand torch over the coaming. From the gloom beneath the pier a gun spat. A stanchion on the police boat rang loudly, lead ricocheting off into the fog.

Koski's rifle answered, once. There was no return shot.

"I might have hit him that time, Irish. Back around under there so I can get a boat hook on him."

The *Vigilant* churned the foul-smelling water. It moved out, then came back as Koski hurried aft. He kept the repeater cradled in his right arm even when he snatched the boat hook from its chocks. He kept low behind the

stern transom.

"Another couple feet astern, Irish."

The stern of the police boat inched in under the wharf. Koski leaned out then, hooked the after thwart of the junk boat with his ten-foot pole.

"Slow ahead, Irish."

Mulcahey moved her out into the canal. Koski hauled the junk boat out into the glare of the sergeant's flashlight. The man who lay slumped across the motor housing was dead. His jaw hung slackly open. His eyes stared unblinking into the light.

"Sureshot Steve," Mulcahey marveled. "You sure got him good."

Steve Koski went overside, dropped lightly onto the junk boat's bow thwart. He shook his head. "Somebody else got him first, Sarge." He pointed to the water sloshing along the floorboard. It was the color of claret. "He never bled that much in half a minute."

"I see what you mean." Sergeant Mulcahey studied it. "Yeah. You could be right about that." The sergeant took the bow line, threw hitches around a cleat on the *Vigilant's* stern rail. "But what I'll be wanting to know, Steve—what did the poor devil have in the boat anyway that was worth dyin' for?! Never have I seen a junkie with less to—"

"He's no junkie." Koski held up the man's arm. The sleeve of his overcoat glistened silkily in the light. "You ever see a water rat wearin' a hundred an' fifty dollar overcoat?"

He fished a hat out of the pink water.

"Or a twenty buck kelly?"

Mulcahey scratched his head. "Well, what d'you know!"

"I think I've seen this lug's face before, somewhere, Irish," Koski said.

"In the Commissioner's private portrait gall'ry, no doubt—"

Mulcahey broke off. From the pilothouse came a sepulchral voice.

"*Vigilant!* . . . *Vigilant!* . . . Come in! . . ." Come in!"

## CHAPTER II

## HOLDUP AND MURDER

MULCAHEY hurried to the squawk box and slapped down the *Talk* toggle. "Patrol Boat Nine calling Doubleya Enn Pee Dee. Over."

The hollow tones of the speaker were croaking as he clicked the lever to *Listen*. "Where are you, *Vigilant*? Over."

"Gowanus Canal. Take it."

"Report immediately to Pier Ten, Fulton Market, on a nineteen, a thirty-two. Acknowledge."

"Nineteen and thirty-two at Fulton Fish Market," Mulcahey repeated.

Koski yelled, "Tell 'em we're scooting, Sarge."

"We're on our way, now. Over."

"Notify on arrival, *Vigilant*. Keep on the box. Doubleyou Enn Pee Dee to Pee Dee to Pee Bee Nine, four twenty-six peeyem, March twenty-eight, authority Police Telegraph Bureau. That is all."

The two-way was silent.

Steve Koski was searching the dead man's clothing when Sergeant Mulcahey got to the cockpit.

"We're getting our noses rubbed in it, Steve. Holdup an' murder at Fulton Market."

"Get her spinning, Sarge. I'll poke around on this tub for a few minutes. Keep me tied in short."

The patrol boat made a tight circle, churned suds under the bow of the towed junk boat. Koski squatted on the stern thwart, examining the stuff he'd frisked from the corpse's pockets: Alligator wallet, swollen with folding money. Three dollars in silver. Keys on ring. Gold pocket knife. Silk handkerchief. Gold pen. Envelope with two airline tickets, New York to Havana via Miami.

"On the midnight plane tonight, eh?" Koski eyed the body dispassionately. "I'm

afraid they wouldn't take you now unless you were boxed, mister. Wonder who was supposed to go on that little trip with you?"

In the disc of the flashlight, the dead man stared glassily at Koski's shoes. The lieutenant studied the low forehead, the dark hair growing within an inch of the eyebrows. The long, thin nose with the slightly upturned, reddened tip. The small, purse lips, the gold-capped incisor. The last time that face had looked up at Koski had surely been from a police flyer.

His name was Eddie-something. It began to come back, now. . . .

He snapped his fingers! Eddie—Eddie-the-Switch, that's who it was! Koski couldn't remember the criminal's last name—it didn't matter, anyway—but the Marine Division's crack plainclothesman couldn't forget the reason given on the Wanted Bulletin for Eddie's being known as the Switch: "*So-called because of frequent boasts that he would light somebody up!*"

Eddie-the-Switch had killed a payroll messenger down South somewhere—Birmingham, if Koski recalled correctly. After beating that rap, he had been picked up on another manslaughter charge in Kansas City. He'd shot his way out of jail there. Yeah. Quite a customer, this Eddie-the-Switch had been.

But how had a hot rod like that happened to be on this junk boat? He certainly had been a long way from the accommodations on the Nightliner to Miami!

Steve Koski fished the .45 out of the wine-colored water that sloshed from side to side over the junk boat's propeller shaft as the *Vigilant's* wake bounced the eighteen-footer wildly. It was an Army Colt—with a kick Koski was glad he hadn't felt.

BUT, Koski realized, the man must have been dying before the rifle bullet drilled that hole beneath his ear. There was a soggy redness, the size of a dinner plate, on the right

side of the man's coat, from the third to the fourth button. Blood from that wound had stained the water. Eddie-the-Switch wouldn't have bled much after Steve's .303 hit him.

Koski looked at the gunman's hands. The man wore no gloves. Yet there were no smudges of oil or grease on palms or fingers.

"I could stand to know who cranked that flywheel for you, Eddie," Steve Koski muttered.

He combed over the boat itself. In the stern locker, he found a jug half filled with muscatel, a burlap sack with a dozen bronze fittings—nearly new—cleats, swivel-hooks, turnbuckles. Under the bow thwart were a couple of lard cans containing brass grommets and faucets and some new copper wire. On the floorboards lay a dozen crumpled-up balls of sopping newspapers, four soaking-wet men's socks with oyster shells in them, and more oyster shells between the boat's ribs.

Oyster shells? In old socks? For what?

Even if somebody had opened up a few dozen oysters on a junk boat, they'd have thrown the shells over, wouldn't they? Lieutenant Koski puzzled over it.

Mulcahey was using the megaphone to shout back to him over the roar of the exhaust. "Sounds like they got everything but the fire engines out, over there, Steve." He was indicating the Fulton Market section.

Koski put the Army Colt in Eddie's hat, went to the bow of the junk boat and hauled in on the tow line. "Coast her, Irish."

The exhaust quieted. The wake subsided. Steve Koski dropped hat and gun into the cockpit.

"Heave that tarp, Sarge," he called.

When Koski got it, he tossed the heavy canvas over the dead man, gave Mulcahey his hand and went up over the stern transom into the *Vigilant's* cockpit.

With the big motor throttled down, Koski could hear the sirens on the Manhattan shore plainly. There was the rising wail of the patrol coops, the agonized screech of an ambulance,

the clanging gong of the truck bringing reserve patrolmen.

"I've heard the band from P. S. Fifty-one sound just like that," Mulcahey muttered, "rend'rin' *A Hot Time in the Ole Town, Tonight*. That sounds now like the Commissioner was arrivin', with all the cameramen lined up with the flash bulbs."

"We have something for the pix boys, back there," Koski said, the nod of his head indicating the junk boat. He watched the low roofs of the oyster sheds and fish houses emerge from the thinning fog that wreathed the tall light-spattered towers of the financial district. "We caught a pretty big mackerel, ourselves, Irish," he went on. "But I don't think we'll let the lens-men snap him, the way he is now."

Mulcahey slowed the *Vigilant*, searching for a berth among the fleet of purse seiners, oyster dredges, halibut boats and Block Islanders that were crowding against the fish market wharves.

"You find out anything about him, Steve?" the sergeant asked.

"I remember him from a Kansas City flyer," Koski answered. "His name is Eddie-the-Switch. And a bad boy with a trigger he was. We were lucky somebody else had pretty well taken care of him before we ran him aground."

THE sergeant grunted. "I am not what you can call a careless man with a dollar, except maybe where chicks are concerned, but I will offer a chunk at six, two and even that when it comes out in the papers, the Commissioner himself personally directed the dragnet which cornered the internationally famous desperado."

"There's the ambulance," Koski said. "Over by Shoalwater Seafoods. Run in alongside that oyster dredge, the *Mollie B*."

Sergeant Mulcahey maneuvered the black-hulled patrol boat against the battered rubrail of the dredge. Koski sprang to the foredeck.

"Get through to Pier One on the two-way," he called back to the sergeant. "Ask them to look up the dope on 71J22RCH." He pointed to the crudely-lettered license number painted on the junk boat's bows.

"Check," Mulcahey said. "Give the Commissioner my love."

Koski looped the bow line around the Mollie B's starboard samson post, crossed the decks between yawning cargo hatches, went through a door on the water side of the pier and into the huge fish shed.

He was in the weigh office of the wholesale house. On the other side of the high wire screen, a group of men clustered around something on the floor of the office. Koski saw patrolmen in uniform, bristling precinct detectives, a couple of ambulance internes, a doctor, four or five high-booted men in white rubber aprons, a scattering of fishboat men in oilskins.

He pushed open a gate in the wire fence, went through. A patrolman blocked his way until Koski held out his cupped hand with the gold shield.

"Sorry, Lieutenant," the patrolman apologized. "Couldn't see you. Lights kind of blind you in here."

"Sure. What happens?"

"Guy with a gun stuck up the kid who was lugging the day's receipts out to the armored truck. Kid put up a battle, got killed. Gunman dropped one of the truck guards, too. They just got him into the ambulance a minute ago."

"What about the holdup man?"

"He got away in the confusion, Lieutenant. Ran out to the street. They're after him, out there, now."

"Yuh?" Koski shoved through the group.

A boy of twenty or so—a nice-looking blonde youngster who looked as if he ought to be in a basketball uniform rather than in the dirty oyster-stained apron he wore—lay on the floor. He had his knees curled up under him and his hands were clasped around his middle so—for an instant—Koski had the illusion that

he was only badly hurt.

A divisional detective captain caught sight of Koski. "Hello, Lieutenant. They call you in on this?"

"They hung out the lantern, yeah," Koski said. "'One if by land, two if by sea.' And we were on the opposite shore. Took us a few minutes to get over here."

The divisional detective captain wrinkled his nose at the strong fish smell—something Koski was so used to he never noticed it.

"Little delay doesn't make any difference," he told Koski. "Appreciate your help, but we've got the guy penned up, down the block."

"You have?"

"They're gettin' ready to go in after him, now, with tear gas. Couple truck drivers saw him run in a clam shed, yuh."

"Are you sure he's the one?"

"Yuh, yuh." The detective captain clapped Koski's shoulder encouragingly. "We got him, all right. Without any help from the Marine Division. Some other time, Lieutenant. Some other time—and thanks."

He walked away.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE GIRL IN THE CASE

A MAN seized Koski's arm. "You an officer?"

Lieutenant Koski looked him over. The man was fiftyish, gray-haired, six feet and over, heavy built, big boned even to his weather-leathered face. The faded-blue fisherman's eyes searched the lieutenant's anxiously.

"Yeah. Why?"

"Can't you do something about getting Bill's body away from here, before his father sees him again—like this?"

"We have to leave him until the Homicide crew have shot their pictures," the Harbor Squad detective explained. "Who's his

father?"

"Why, Cale is." The big man seemed surprised. "Thought you knew. Caleb Telfer, my partner. I'm Win Negus, cap'n the *Mollie B.* Cale is head of Shoalwater Seafoods. We own the boats and the wholesale house together. He had Bill workin' here, to learn the oyster business."

"Was his father here when he got shot?"

"Hell's bells a-booming—that's what keeled Cale over! The boy died right at Cale's feet. It knocked the old man out, colder'n a Newfoundland tunny. Doc's in there now, tryin' to bring Cale around."

"You see the killing, yourself?"

"No." Negus jerked a thumb gloomily toward the shellfish bins out by the open end of the shed. "I was over by the checker, talkin' to our lobster buyer, when I heard the shots and the boys yellin'. By the time I'd turned around, it was all over—except for this fella scuttling away, there by the clam barrels."

Koski cocked an ear at the flurry of police whistles out in the street. Either the reserve men had rounded up their prisoner, or the chase was heading in a different direction.

"What'd this holdup guy look like, Mister Negus?"

The dredger captain scowled thoughtfully. "I'm not one of these here camera-eyes," he said. "But near's I rec'lect, he was about twenty-five years old, not as tall as you are by a couple of inches, kind of thin and sallow-complected. He was wearin' gray pants or maybe dungarees an' a sweater-cap, I think. He had this bundle under his arm. I didn't rightly notice what it was because, by that time, I'd seen the guard layin' on the floor and a couple other guards runnin' in from the truck. I didn't see Bill at all, 'till later."

"They got him!" somebody out in the street yelled. The cops got him!"

Koski grunted skeptically. Win Negus's description hadn't sounded to the Marine Division man like that of a stickup specialist. Those boys were usually pretty careful

dressers—the sweater was off-key, somehow.

As far as the man the precinct boys seemed to have cornered, he didn't fit in with Koski's notion of a criminal clever enough to have planned a coup like this, either. The holdup man had evidently known just when the day's receipts would be handed over, and had timed his attack shrewdly enough to intercept the money before it got in the hands of the armored truck guards. Was it reasonable to suppose he'd figured all that out so neatly—and then left his getaway to such a slipshod chance as running out in the street, without even an escape car at the curb? There was a false note, somewhere.

"How much was stolen, Mister Negus?" Koski asked.

"Don't know, exactly. Cale will." The fishboat man pushed open the door to the inner office.

An ambulance interne was holding an ampule under the nose of a middle-aged, snowy-haired, apple-cheeked man who lay back in an old-fashioned oak chair, his fingers clawing at the arms. His collar had been loosened. His plump, rosy face was shiny with sweat.

"All right to ask a few questions, Doc?" Koski said.

The interne glanced up. "Why—uh—"

Cale Telfer rolled his head loosely toward the newcomers. "What you want to know?" His voice was deep and gruff, but there was a curious quaver in it.

The interne shrugged, closed his kit and went out.

"How much was stolen?" Koski watched the man's eyes. They flickered swiftly to Negus and away again, as if to question what one partner had said about the other.

Cale lurched up from his chair then, took two unsteady strides to a high bookkeeper's desk. That slanting shelf must have been polished by generations of Telfer elbows, Koski thought.

"Here. Here are duplicate deposit slips." Cale Telfer's trembling fingers passed the paper to Koski.

"Traders and Marine National," Koski murmured, reading. "For deposit—thirty-six thousand, four hundred twelve dollars and eighty-eight cents." Koski's eyes narrowed the least bit. "That's a big haul."

"If you doubt my word, sir—" Cale began.

Negus cut in. "This last Friday before Lent is always one of the biggest days of the year. But it won't hit the firm. We're covered by insurance, aren't we, Cale?"

The wholesaler rubbed a hand over his forehead as if he was dazed. "Yes, of course, Win. But what difference does it make, with Bill—"

"I realize it must be a shock." Koski put the slip in his jacket pocket. "You saw the gunman, Mister Telfer?"

Cale's round face puckered in an agony of recollection. "Clear's I see you, sir. And as near." His forehead continued to wrinkle, his cheek muscles to contract spasmodically as he went on to describe, in terse detail, the man Koski had found in the junk boat. "That's the man, sir. I'd know him, wherever I saw him, even if it was twenty years from now. And I won't rest until he's been punished—if it takes twice that long!"

He collapsed, trembling, into the chair. His face had lost all its color. The rosy cheeks were dull putty.

Negus hurried to him. "But Cale, are you *sure*? The police are after another—"

Koski warned Negus back with a gesture. "Tell me just what happened, Mister Telfer."

His lips scarcely moving, Cale answered. "I gave Bill the bag—to take out to the armored guards. When Bill got to the weigh scales—this murderer came up behind him—grabbed the bag and—"

"*Behind* him?" Win Negus cried. "How the devil could he have gotten *behind* Bill?"

Koski got between the dredger captain and his partner. "Let him tell it, mister," he warned

Negus.

"He must have got in the same way he left, Win," Cale said hoarsely. "By the pier door, there at the side—"

"It was locked!" Negus roared. "I locked it myself! I always do, after—"

Koski put an elbow in the dredgerman's stomach, shoved him back. "Clam. Stay clammed. Understand?" Negus fumed, but kept quiet. The Harbor Squad detective touched Cale's shoulder. The wholesaler's eyes were closed.

"Did you tell this to the police when they came?"

Cale opened his eyes wide. "Didn't tell anyone. Nobody asked me anything—until just now."

Behind Koski, Negus cursed thickly. "How in the devil could he have answered questions anyway, when he collapsed? He was out like a light until a couple minutes ago!"

"Yeah," Koski said, continuing to address Cale. He pointed to the door by which he himself had entered the oyster house. "You say the gunman ran this way, out onto the wharf?"

"Yes." Cale panted convulsively. "He grabbed the money bag. The guard coming to meet Bill saw it—pulled his gun. The murderer shot the guard. Bill grappled with him—and got two bullets right—" the father faltered, forced himself to go on—"right under the heart. Then the murderer spun around, ran back to the door there—and out. That's all I—I remember. When I saw Bill was—was—"

He sprang up suddenly, lurched at the glass door and stumbled out. Koski turned. Through the partition, he saw a slender, dark-haired girl in a squirrel coat break out of a patrolman's grip, fling herself on the dead boy's body.

Negus crowded through the door with Koski. But before they could reach Cale Telfer, he was bending over the wailing girl, trying to wrestle her away from his son's body.



"Get—away—from—him!" he raged. "If it hadn't been for you getting your claws in him, you hellcat—this wouldn't have—"

"Cale!" Negus bellowed, breaking his partner's grip on the girl. "For God's sake, man, use a little sense!"

**I**N THE SCUFFLE, the cop grabbed the girl, hauled her roughly to her feet.

"I'll have to run you in, if you don't obey orders, miss."

"I can't help it," she sobbed. "I can't believe he's—"

She turned away, whimpering, covering her mouth with her hands. Even with her face contorted with anguish, there was a sort of wild beauty in her gypsy-like coloring, her enormous dark gypsy eyes.

Cale mumbled what might have been an apology.

"Sorry," he said. "I was upset. I didn't know what I was saying."

Negus helped him back to the office, explaining, beneath his breath, to Koski, "What Cale meant—if Bill'd been on the *Mollie B.* with me, the way his father wanted him to be, he'd have been ashore now with the rest of the crew. Cale wanted him to learn oysterin' from the beds up, way we did, thirty years ago. All hand-tongin' then. No power hoists like nowadays."

He clattered on. Koski got the impression he was trying to keep the older man from saying anything more that he might regret. But Cale refused to remain silent.

"Bill wouldn't go on the *Mollie B.*," he said bitterly. "Had to work in the Market so's he'd be close enough to that little tramp to see her every night. I ought to have *made* him sign on with Win!"

Negus squeezed his partner's arm gently. It might have been a sympathetic gesture—or a warning. The head of Shoalwater Seafoods looked up sharply. The eyes of the two men locked for a moment. Then Cale turned his

head away, shuddering as if from a severe chill.

"Who's the girl?" Koski asked.

"Patty Rondo," Negus replied quickly, anxious to take the burden of answering on his own shoulders. "She's an entertainer over at the *Lighthouse*. No real harm in her, I suppose. And there wouldn't have been any in Bill's foolin' around with her, except he got marryin' notions in his head."

Sergeant Mulcahey stuck his head in the wharf door. "I got that dope, Lootenant."

"Whatsit, Irish?"

"Number 71J22RCH is licensed in the name of D. J. Felch, Port Richmond. You remember the guy?"

"I'll say I do, Sarge." There had been a midnight meeting between Doojey Felch and the crew of the *Vigilant*—which had resulted in that junkie's conducting his waterfront activities some thirty miles further upriver for a period of six months, less time off for good behavior. Doojey was just the sort to have been mixed up with Eddie-the-Switch. "Ask Headquarters to send out a three-state for him. Put his photo on the six o'clock T.V. program. Doojey would have been the other one in the junk boat, sure."

Mulcahey scowled. "You could be right, Lootenant. Still an' all, Pier One reports they have been notified by this selfsame D. J. Felch that his junk boat was stolen this afternoon around two-thirty from where it was tied to a gas barge in Newtown Creek."

"Alibi," Koski said. "And it smells. Doojey was in this just as deep as the rat out in the boat."

"Boat?" Negus reacted as if he'd been touched with a live wire. "You mean—out in the *Mollie B.*?"

Koski moved past the sergeant, out onto the pier. "The man who killed your son is in the junk boat there, on the other side of the *Vigilant*, Mister Telfer."

"Dead?" Cale whispered. "Is he dead?!"

"Yeah." Koski stepped onto the dredger, squatting on his haunches. He pointed to the deck just aft a heavy winch. "There's blood spatter. That armored truck guard must have plugged him. He was bleeding pretty bad when he ducked out this door, and crossed the deck here, to get to the junk boat."

"Hell's bells a-booming!" Negus protested loudly, "that junk skiff wasn't here when the holdup happened."

"Sure it was," Koski said. "It was on the far side of your oyster boat, Mister Negus. At low tide, like this, nobody would have seen it from the pier. Probably it was only here a minute anyhow—just long enough for the gunman to hop up on your deck, cross to the pier, and go in and grab the money bags. They'd have timed it to a whisker. Sure."

#### CHAPTER IV

##### "I'M YOUR EARS!"

THE PHONE in the office jangled. Cale turned, automatically, to answer it. Steve Koski eyed Win Negus steadily.

"There was some fidoodling with the thirty-six thousand, though," he said to Negus. "That money didn't go into the junk boat with the killer. He didn't have it when we caught up with him."

The master of the oysterman didn't understand. Steve Koski made it clear for him.

"The moneybag the killer took to the junk boat," Koski said, "was filled with socks loaded down with oyster shells and old newspapers—stuff that would weigh about what the day's receipts would total."

"He might have ditched the dough on the dredger here," Mulcahey suggested, "soon's he got outside the shed. Then he could have repacked the bag with—"

"He wouldn't have taken time to do that," Koski interrupted. "Not with all that hell busting loose on the pier." Keeping his eyes on Negus, who seemed suddenly grim and

defiant, Koski went on, "The killer couldn't have known the armored truck boys would point out somebody else as the escaping murderer. No. But he might have switched bags, here on the *Mollie B*. He might have left the one loaded with cash, here—and taken the dummy when he jumped down into the junk boat."

Cale Telfer came back from the phone and stopped at the wharf door. "Detectives want me to make a statement, Win. They're up front of the shed, now."

"Want me to go with you?"

"Uh, uh." Koski stopped the oysterman. "You stay here while the dredger's being searched, Mister Negus."

Cale turned away, his shoulders bowed. "I'll be all right, Win," he said, his voice dull and listless. "Only be a minute, I guess." He walked wearily toward the wire partition.

"Plenty places where you could hide a small bag on a big tub like this, Irish," Koski told Mulcahey. "Mister Negus'll help you use the fine-tooth comb." The sergeant wiped mist off his face with the inside of his sleeve. "You'll not be with us, hah?"

"I'll be walking down the avenue a bit." Koski stepped quickly onto the pier.

"O-o-o-oh!" Mulcahey's eyebrows went up, the corners of his lips came down. "Like that."

"Yeah." It was an old tip-off Koski had used with his sergeant before. "And watch it, Irish. Nobody goes on the *Mollie B*. Nobody off."

"Not—" Joe Mulcahey sized up Negus, the oysterman gravely—"while breathin', Lootenant."

Koski went on through the wire partition. Cale Telfer was fifty feet ahead of him, but the Harbor Squad lieutenant made no effort to close the gap as the old man stalked past the shucking boards and out into South Street.

Cale's clumsy subterfuge—that the police wanted him to 'make a statement'—hadn't registered for a moment with Koski. When

that crusty divisional detective captain got ready to take an affidavit, he didn't request the person concerned to show up at the precinct house. He went and brought him in.

CALE marched to a sleek maroon sedan parked across from the Municipal Fish Market, got in and tramped on the starter. When he pulled out and turned up Catherine Slip, Koski was pointing the wholesaler's sedan out to First Grade Detective Herman Goldweiss, patrol car 8, Precinct 2.

"I'm supposed to be posted here until the newspaper men—" the radio car cop began.

"You're supposed to take orders. Get going. Don't let him get away from you," Koski commanded. "Don't crowd him too close."

"That's old Telfer!" Goldweiss protested, pulling the car away from the curb. "Guy whose son got shot!"

"No kiddin'?" Koski seemed mildly surprised.

"What's a idea tailin' him? They already got the killer."

"They have? Did they find the bag of marbles he was supposed to have hijacked?"

"Nah. He must of stashed it somewhere." The commandeered patrol car slithered around a corner, braked fast as Telfer pulled his sedan in to the curb ahead, beneath a spasmodic neon: *The Lighthouse*. "Don't worry, Lieutenant," Goldweiss said. "The boys'll get where he hid it out of him, after they've talked to him a while in the back room."

"That's what I'm afraid of."

Koski left the radio-car officer trying to figure it out, glanced in through the Lighthouse door. Cale was making for a booth halfway down the gloomy tunnel of the dimly-lighted grille. The girl in the booth was Patty Rondo. Beside the row of booths was a long bar with a dozen idlers ranged against it.

Koski went in. There was no time for caution. If it had been the girl who'd phoned Bill's father to come here, it meant the

fireworks might start suddenly.

They'd already begun when Koski slid into the next empty booth. He couldn't see either of them. The backs of the booths extended nearly up to the low ceiling. But he could hear.

Patty was in a cold rage. "You rotten, double-crossing fink!"

"I'm not denying anything," Cale answered in a curiously flat, toneless voice.

"He's dead! You killed him!"

"I wish I could say it wasn't true." The old man's words came slowly, as if he was weighing each one carefully. "But it is."

"If it wasn't for your filthy two-timing, we'd be away on our honeymoon now. What'd you do with the money?"

"I put it out of your reach, Patty." Cale seemed to be explaining something to a dull-witted child. "I never meant you to get your hands on it, you know. Any more than I intended you should get your claws into Bill."

"Bill's safe enough from me, at any rate." She gave a sinister little laugh. "But if you think I'm not going to get that money, you've got another—"

"No, Patty. When you told me on the phone I'd better bring you something, or I'd be sorry, I knew what you meant, all right. So I did bring you something."

Koski took three fast steps on the balls of his feet then. He had his hand on the barrel of Cale's nickel-plated gun, pressing its muzzle down toward the beer mats on the table, before the old man stared up at him, thunderstruck.

Patty was quicker. She started to slither past the table, out of the booth.

KOSKI pushed her back, crowded in beside her, taking the gun away from Cale with no trouble.

"Hands on the table. Both of you. That's right. Keep 'em there. Let's put a few cards on the table, too, hah?"

Cale seemed too frozen with fear to open

his mouth.

Patty sneered at him. "Can't make a move without yawping copper, can you, murderer! Have to ring the blues in on everything—even your own son's killing!"

The old man went deathly pale, leaned against the back of the booth, gasping.

"You've got him wrong, Miss Rondo." Koski wondered why the near-gunplay hadn't caused more commotion among the men at the bar. No one seemed to be watching them with any special interest. "Mister Telfer didn't call the police in on this. He didn't know I'd trailed him here. I expect he wouldn't have liked it anymore'n you do."

"Me?" She laughed, hysterically. "I'm glad you're here! You must have heard him admit—what he's done."

"Yeah." Now, out of the corner of his eye, Koski did catch a furtive movement of the loungers at the bar. He crowded against the girl so she wouldn't be able to hamper his gun hand. "Mister Telfer admitted being in on a bad deal, all right. But it was a deal you cooked up."

The group at the bar was splitting—three or four sidling and shuffling toward the booth to distract his attention, the others sneaking up behind him.

"You hooked the boy—a kid who never wised up to your kind. You got him to the marry-me stage, and when his father came around to break it up, you offered to give the boy the gate—if you got paid enough."

The old man stared at him, awed. "I did. Yes. She wanted more than I could pay."

Koski stood up abruptly, the nickel-plated gun in his left hand, his right hand in the gun pocket of his melton. He swiveled around, facing the three who'd idled up within a few feet of the booth behind him.

He said, "Something, boys?" They found business of pressing interest back at the bar, moved back hastily.

"She told you how you could get the dough for her, I expect, Mister Telfer." Koski

spoke to the old man, but watched the girl. She was staring at someone standing behind the garish jukebox. The lieutenant could only make out a shadowy figure there.

"He's a liar, if he told you I framed that holdup, copper," Patty cried scornfully. "It was Cale Telfer's own idea. He told Eddie when to run the boat in an' tie up, when the door would be unlocked—"

"That is true." The old man struggled to his feet, in spite of Koski's warning gesture with the gun. "But I had no intention—"

"No!" snarled Patty. "You'd no intention of bein' on the up an' up with Eddie, after you rigged the holdup with him. You held out the money, tipped off the guards, got Eddie killed—"

"How'd you know he was dead, Miss Rondo?" Koski shoved Cale back into his seat. The old man had blocked the lieutenant's line of vision so he lost sight of that shadowy figure momentarily.

The girl didn't answer.

The answer came, close to Koski's ear. Close enough so he felt the cold bluntness of the automatic's nose, before he heard the familiar nasal whine of Doojey Felch, saw the thin, wolfish face with the broken yellow teeth.

"I told her, Koski. I seen him die. I seen you kill him over there at Gowanus. It'd serve you right if Patty took that gun away from you right now an' pushed the button on you. Patty was Eddie's girl, Koski. They was goin' on a honeymoon if you hadn't lucked onto us out there in the Bay. If Patty was to grab your gun now and it was to go off—"

"If that was to happen, Doojie," the heavy rumbling voice of Joe Mulcahey announced with matter-of-fact authority, "the first thing she'd have to do would be to comb your brains out of her hair! Stick your thumbs in your ears! In your ears, I said! Where I can see 'em! An' keep 'em there!"

THEY waited on the sidewalk for the patrol wagon. Doojie Felch and Patty Rondo, handcuffed together, were facing the wall and leaning against it with their hands against the wet brick to keep them from falling. Steve Koski and Joe Mulcahey were watching the fog condense in rivulets, thick as mineral oil, on the windows of the cafe.

"I thought I told you to watch Negus and not let him off the oyster boat, you thick-skulled Hibernian!"

"He's still there, Steve. I only came over here to show you the note he found in his pocket, whilst we was givin' the pilot-house the up an' down. Old Cale Telfer must have stuck it in there, unbeknownst, that time we were all millin' around looking at those bloodstains on the deck."

He gave Koski a slip torn from a Shoalwater Seafood's memorandum pad:

Win—

The money's in the lower right-hand drawer of my desk. I never meant it to get anywhere but in the firm's bank account. I thought I was doing what was best for Bill, to go along with the holdup scheme and so get that witch out of the way. But what I did was send Bill to his death. So I can't see any use to go on living myself. I'll try to balance the books before I go.

Cale.

"Yeah," Koski nodded. "This fits. Cale agreed to her scheme for a stickup, but he was too honest to let his partner, or even the insurance people, share a loss like that. So he fixed up that dummy bag, gave it to his son—"

"Not expectin' any shootin' to come out of it," Mulcahey made it more a statement than a question.

"She'd have promised there'd be no violence. But the armored truck guard spoiled

that. He shot first and got Eddie. Eddie knew he was in bad shape, and he blasted away like a maniac, wounded the guard, killed the boy. So, instead of putting Patty and her pals in wrong on account of a holdup that wouldn't have netted them a nickel, old Telfer unintentionally had planned his own son's funeral."

The sergeant wiped moisture off the barrel of his Police Positive. "This Negus, now. He's no dope. I don't say he had it figured out, all neat like that, Steve. But he knew his partner was mixed up in it some way."

"He was trying to cover up for him. Yeah. I caught onto that, after a bit." Koski heard the clanging of the police van down the block. "But how'd you catch on to my being at the *Lighthouse*?"

"Negus went to Cale's desk, after he read the note. He found the old man'd taken his gun. He knew the only person he'd be likely to want to kill was this—Patty person. So he told me where I'd find her. I knew I'd find you here."

"You're so smart, you bulls!" Doojie snarled. "How'd *you* know where Telfer went, Koski?"

Mulcahey hummed softly,

*Me. . . an' my sha-a-dow*

*Walkin' down the av-e-noo. . . .*

He broke off as the 'wagon' clanged to a stop. "You s'pose the Commissioner'd object if we was to appear as shadows, in the background of the pix they'll be takin' of these two?"

"Ah, who wants publicity, anyway?!" asked Steve Koski.

"The Commissioner," sighed Joe Mulcahey.