

Finger Man

Raymond Chandler

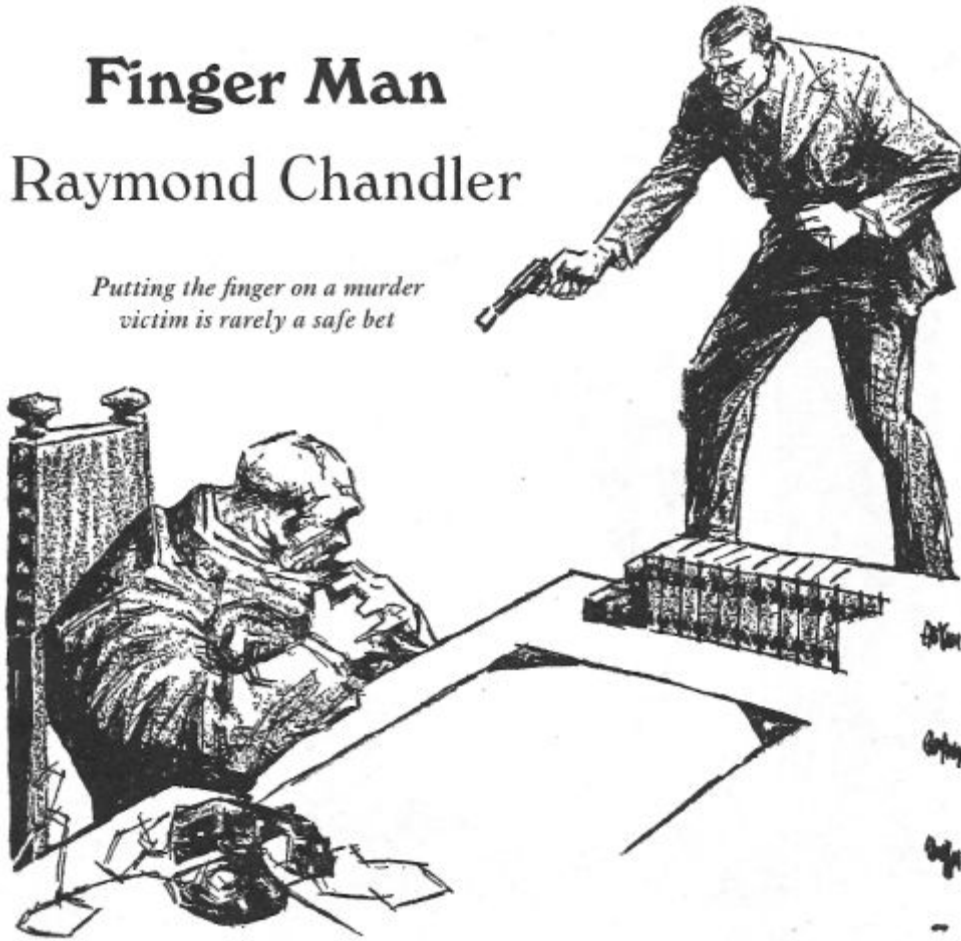
ARGUABLY THE GREATEST mystery writer of the twentieth century, Raymond Chandler (1888-1959) brought a literary sensibility to that least likely of places—pulp magazines. Pulp were very clearly and specifically designed to be fast, cheap, action-filled entertainment for the masses. No literary aspirations or pretensions were welcomed by the hard-working editors of even the best of them, notably *Black Mask* and *Dime Detective*. Still, Dashiell Hammett brought important realism to his pulp stories, and Chandler elevated the form even further.

Philip Marlowe, the hero of all seven of Chandler's novels, appears in this printing of "Finger Man," a novella filled with bad guys and corruption. When the story was first published in the October 1934 issue of *Black Mask*, the first-person narrator was unnamed. For its first book appearance, the anonymous shamus in "Finger Man" was given the Marlowe name, as Chandler had become the "hottest" mystery writer in America because of his Marlowe novels. The majority of Chandler's short fiction was collected in three paperback originals published by Avon in its "Murder Mystery Monthly" series, *5 Murderers* (1944), *Five Sinister Characters* (1945), and *Finger Man* (1946), and his detectives, whether named Carmody, Dalmas, Malvern, Mallory, or unnamed, were transformed into Marlowe. As the detectives evolved from the earliest experiments to the more complex and nuanced hero he envisioned and later compared to a modern-day knight, the adventures became classics of the American crime story.

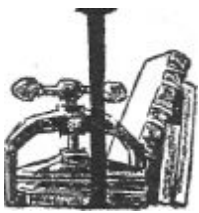
Finger Man

Raymond Chandler

Putting the finger on a murder victim is rarely a safe bet



ONE



I GOT AWAY from the Grand Jury a little after four, and then sneaked up the backstairs to Fenweather's office. Fenweather, the D.A., was a man with severe, chiseled features and the gray temples women love. He played with a pen on his desk and said: "I think they believed you. They might even indict Manny Tinnen for the Shannon kill this afternoon. If they do, then is the time you begin to watch your step."

I rolled a cigarette around in my fingers and finally put it in my mouth. "Don't put any men on me, Mr. Fenweather. I know the alleys in this town pretty well, and your men couldn't stay close enough to do me any good."

He looked towards one of the windows. "How well do you know Frank Dorr?" he asked, with his eyes away from me.

"I know he's a big politico, a fixer you have to see if you want to open a gambling hell or a bawdy house—or if you want to sell honest merchandise to the city."

"Right." Fenweather spoke sharply, and brought his head around towards me. Then he lowered his voice. "Having the goods on Tinnen was a surprise to a lot of people. If Frank Dorr had an interest in getting rid of Shannon who was the head of the Board where Dorr's supposed to get his contracts, it's close enough to make him take chances. And I'm told he and Manny Tinnen had dealings. I'd sort of keep an eye on him, if I were you."

I grinned. "I'm just one guy," I said.
"Frank Dorr covers a lot of territory. But I'll do what I can."

Fenweather stood up and held his hand across the desk. He said: "I'll be out of town for a couple of days, I'm leaving tonight, if this indictment comes through. Be careful—and if anything should happen to go wrong, see Bernie Ohls, my chief investigator."

I said: "Sure."

We shook hands and I went out past a tired-looking girl who gave me a tired smile and wound one of her lax curls up on the back of her neck as she looked at me. I got back to my office soon after four-thirty. I stopped outside the door of the little reception room for a moment, looking at it. Then I opened it and went in, and of course there wasn't anybody there.

There was nothing there but an old red davenport, two odd chairs, a bit of carpet, and a library table with a few old magazines on it. The reception room was left open for visitors to come in and sit down and wait—if I had any visitors and they felt like waiting.

I went across and unlocked the door into my private office, lettered "*Philip Marlowe. . . Investigations.*"

Lou Harger was sitting on a wooden chair on the side of the desk away from the window. He had bright yellow gloves clamped on the crook of a cane, a green snap-brim hat set too far back on his head. Very smooth black hair showed under the hat and grew too low on the nape of his neck.

"Hello. I've been waiting," he said, and



smiled languidly.

“ ‘Lo, Lou. How did you get in here?”

“The door must have been unlocked. Or maybe I had a key that fitted. Do you mind?”

I went around the desk and sat down in the swivel chair. I put my hat down on the desk, picked up a bulldog pipe out of an ash tray and began to fill it up.

“It’s all right as long as it’s you,” I said. “I just thought I had a better lock.”

He smiled with his full red lips. He was a very good-looking boy. He said: “Are you still doing business, or will you spend the next month in a hotel room drinking liquor with a couple of Headquarters boys?”

“I’m still doing business—if there’s any business for me to do.”

I lit a pipe, leaned back and stared at his clear olive skin, straight, dark eyebrows.

He put his cane on top of the desk and clasped his yellow gloves on the glass. He moved his lips in and out.

“I have a little something for you. Not a hell of a lot. But there’s carfare in it.”

I waited.

“I’m making a little play at Las Olindas tonight,” he said. “At Canales’ place.”

“The white smoke?”

“Uh-huh. I think I’m going to be lucky—and I’d like to have a guy with a rod.”

I took a fresh pack of cigarettes out of a top drawer and slid them across the desk. Lou picked them up and began to break the pack open.

I said: “What kind of play?”

He got a cigarette halfway out and stared down at it. There was a little something in his manner I didn’t like.

“I’ve been closed up for a month now. I wasn’t makin’ the kind of money it takes to stay open in this town. The Headquarters boys have been putting the pressure on since repeal. They have bad dreams when they see themselves trying to live on their pay.”

I said: “It doesn’t cost any more to operate here than anywhere else. And here you pay it all to one organization. That’s something.”

Lou Harger jabbed the cigarette in his mouth. “Yeah—Frank Dorr,” he snarled. “That fat, bloodsuckin’ sonofabitch!”

I didn’t say anything. I was way past the age when it’s fun to swear at people you can’t hurt. I watched Lou light his cigarette with my desk lighter. He went on, through a puff of smoke: “It’s a laugh, in a way. Canales bought a new wheel—from some grafters in the sheriff’s office. I know Pina, Canales’ head croupier, pretty well. The wheel is one they took away from me. It’s got bugs—and I know the bugs.”

“And Canales don’t... That sounds just like Canales,” I said.

Lou didn’t look at me. “He gets a nice crowd down there,” he said. “He has a small dance floor and a five-piece Mexican band to help the customers relax. They dance a bit and then go back for another trimming, instead of going away disgusted.”

I said: “What do *you* do?”

“I guess you might call it a system,” he said softly, and looked at me under his long lashes.

I looked away from him, looked around the room. It had a rust-red carpet, five green filing cases in a row under an advertising calendar, an old costumer in the corner, a few walnut chairs, net curtains over the windows. The fringe of the curtains was dirty from blowing about in the draft. There was a bar of late sunlight across my desk and it showed up the dust.

"I get it like this," I said. "You think you have that roulette wheel tamed and you expect to win enough money so that Canales will be mad at you. You'd like to have some protection along— me. I think it's screwy."

"It's not screwy at all," Lou said. "Any roulette wheel has a tendency to work in a certain rhythm. If you know the wheel very well indeed—"

I smiled and shrugged. "Okey, I wouldn't know about that. I don't know enough roulette. It sounds to me like you're being a sucker for your own racket, but I could be wrong. And that's not the point anyway."

"What is?" Lou asked thinly.

"I'm not much stuck on bodyguarding— but maybe that's not the point either. I take it I'm supposed to think this play is on the level. Suppose I don't, and walk out on you, and you get in a box? Or suppose I think everything is aces, but Canales don't agree with me and gets nasty."

"That's why I need a guy with a rod," Lou said, without moving a muscle except to speak.

I said evenly: "If I'm tough enough for the job—and I didn't know I was—that still isn't what worries me."

"Forget it," Lou said. "It breaks me up enough to know you're worried."

I smiled a little more and watched his yellow gloves moving around on top of the desk, moving too much. I said slowly: "You're the last guy in the world to be getting expense money that way just now. I'm the last guy to be standing behind you while you do it. That's all."

Lou said: "Yeah." He knocked some ash off his cigarette down on the glass top, bent his head to blow it off. He went on, as if it was a new subject: "Miss Glenn is going with me. She's a tall redhead, a swell looker. She used to model. She's nice to people in any kind of a spot and she'll keep Canales from breathing on my neck. So we'll make out. I just thought I'd tell you."

I was silent for a minute, then I said: "You know damn well I just got through telling the Grand Jury it was Manny Tinnen I saw lean out of that car and cut the ropes on Art Shannon's wrists after they pushed him on the roadway, filled with lead."

Lou smiled faintly at me. "That'll make it easier for the grafters on the big time; the fellows who take the contracts and don't appear in the business. They say Shannon was square and kept the Board in line. It was a nasty bump-off."

I shook my head. I didn't want to talk about that. I said: "Canales has a noseful of junk a lot of the time. And maybe he doesn't go for redheads."

Lou stood up slowly and lifted his cane off the desk. He stared at the tip of one yellow finger. He had an almost sleepy expression. Then he moved towards the door, swinging his cane.

"Well, I'll be seein' you some time," he drawled.

I let him get his hand on the knob before I said: "Don't go away sore, Lou. I'll drop down

to Las Olindas, if you have to have me. But I don't want any money for it, and for Pete's sake don't pay any more attention to me than you have to."

He licked his lips softly and didn't quite look at me. "Thanks, keed. I'll be careful as hell."

He went out then and his yellow glove disappeared around the edge of the door.

I sat still for about five minutes and then my pipe got too hot. I put it down, looked at my strap watch, and got up to switch on a small radio in the corner beyond the end of the desk. When the A.C. hum died down the last tinkle of a chime came out of the horn, then a voice was saying: "KLL now brings you its regular early evening broadcast of local news releases. An event of importance this afternoon was the indictment returned late today against Maynard J. Tinnen by the Grand Jury. Tinnen is a well-known City Hall lobbyist and man about town. The indictment, a shock to his many friends, was based almost entirely on the testimony—"

My telephone rang sharply and a girl's cool voice said in my ear: "One moment, please. Mr. Fenweather is calling you."

He came on at once. "Indictment returned. Take care of the boy."

I said I was just getting it over the radio. We talked a short moment and then he hung up, after saying he had to leave at once to catch a plane.

I leaned back in my chair again and listened to the radio without exactly hearing it. I was thinking what a damn fool Lou Harger was and that there wasn't anything I could do to change that.

It was a good crowd for a Tuesday but nobody was dancing. Around ten o'clock the little five-piece band got tired of messing around with a rhumba that nobody was paying any attention to. The marimba player dropped his sticks and reached under his chair for a glass. The rest of the boys lit cigarettes and sat there looking bored.

I leaned sidewise against the bar, which was on the same side of the room as the orchestra stand. I was turning a small glass of tequila around on the top of the bar. All the business was at the center one of the three roulette tables.

The bartender leaned beside me, on his side of the bar.

"The flame-top gal must be pickin' them," he said.

I nodded without looking at him. "She's playing with fistfuls now," I said. "Not even counting it."

The red-haired girl was tall. I could see the burnished copper of her hair between the heads of the people behind her. I could see Lou Harger's sleek head beside hers. Everybody seemed to be playing standing up.

"You don't play?" the bartender asked me.

"Not on Tuesdays. I had some trouble on a Tuesday once."

"Yeah? Do you like that stuff straight, or could I smooth it out for you?"

"Smooth it out with what?" I said. "You got a wood rasp handy?"

He grinned. I drank a little more of the tequila and made a face.

“Did anybody invent this stuff on purpose?”

“I wouldn’t know, mister.”

“What’s the limit over there?”

“I wouldn’t know that either. How the boss feels, I guess.”

The roulette tables were in a row near the far wall. A low railing of gilt metal joined their ends and the players were outside the railing.

Some kind of a confused wrangle started at the center table. Half a dozen people at the two end tables grabbed their chips up and moved across.

Then a clear, very polite voice, with a slightly foreign accent, spoke out: “If you will just be patient, madame... Mr. Canales will be here in a minute.”

I went across, squeezed near the railing. Two croupiers stood near me with their heads together and their eyes looking sidewise. One moved a rake slowly back and forth beside the idle wheel. They were staring at the red-haired girl.

She wore a high-cut black evening gown. She had fine white shoulders, was something less than beautiful and more than pretty. She was leaning on the edge of the table, in front of the wheel. Her long eyelashes were twitching.

There was a big pile of money and chips in front of her.

She spoke monotonously, as if she had said the same thing several times already.

“Get busy and spin that wheel! You take it away fast enough, but you don’t like to dish it out.”

The croupier in charge smiled a cold, even smile. He was tall, dark, disinterested: “The table can’t cover your bet,” he said with calm precision. “Mr. Canales, perhaps—” He shrugged neat shoulders.

The girl said: “It’s your money, highpockets. Don’t you want it back?”

Lou Harger licked his lips beside her, put a hand on her arm, stared at the pile of money with hot eyes. He said gently: “Wait for Canales...”

“To hell with Canales! I’m hot—and I want to stay that way”

A door opened at the end of the tables and a very slight, very pale man came into the room. He had straight, lusterless black hair, a high bony forehead, flat, impenetrable eyes. He had a thin mustache that was trimmed in two sharp lines almost at right angles to each other. They came down below the corners of his mouth a full inch. The effect was Oriental. His skin had a thick, glistening pallor.

He slid behind the croupiers, stopped at a corner of the center table, glanced at the red-haired girl and touched the ends of his mustache with two fingers, the nails of which had a purplish tint.

He smiled suddenly, and the instant after it was as though he had never smiled in his life. He spoke in a dull, ironic voice.

“Good evening, Miss Glenn. You must let me send somebody with you when you go home. I’d hate to see any of that money get in the wrong pockets.”

The red-haired girl looked at him, not very pleasantly.

“I’m not leaving—unless you’re throwing me out.”

Canales said: “No? What would you like to do?”

“Bet the wad—dark meat!”

The crowd noise became a deathly silence. There wasn’t a whisper of any kind of sound. Harger’s face slowly got ivory-white.

Canales’ face was without expression. He lifted a hand, delicately, gravely, slipped a large wallet from his dinner jacket and tossed it in front of the tall croupier.

“Ten grand,” he said in a voice that was a dull rustle of sound. “That’s my limit—always.”

The tall croupier picked the wallet up, spread it, drew out two flat packets of crisp bills, riffled them, refolded the wallet and passed it along the edge of the table to Canales.

Canales did not take it. Nobody moved, except the croupier.

The girl said: “Put it on the red.”

The croupier leaned across the table and very carefully stacked her money and chips. He placed her bet for her on the red diamond. He placed his hand along the curve of the wheel.

“If no one objects,” Canales said, without looking at anyone, “this is just the two of us.”

Heads moved. Nobody spoke. The croupier spun the wheel and sent the ball skimming in the groove with a light flirt of his left wrist. Then he drew his hands back and placed them in full view on the edge of the table, on top of it.

The red-haired girl’s eyes shone and her lips slowly parted.

The ball drifted along the groove, dipped past one of the bright metal diamonds, slid down the flank of the wheel and chattered along the tines beside the numbers. Movement went out of it suddenly, with a dry click. It fell next the double-zero, in red twenty-seven. The wheel was motionless.

The croupier took up his rake and slowly pushed the two packets of bills across, added them to the stake, pushed the whole thing off the field of play.

Canales put his wallet back in his breast pocket, turned and walked slowly back to the door, went through it.

I took my cramped fingers off the top of the railing, and a lot of people broke for the bar.

THREE

When Lou came up I was sitting at a little tile-top table in a corner, fooling with some more of the tequila. The little orchestra was playing a thin, brittle tango and one couple was maneuvering self-consciously on the dance floor.

Lou had a cream-colored overcoat on, with the collar turned up around a lot of white silk scarf. He had a fine-drawn glistening expression. He had white pigskin gloves this time and he put one of them down on the table and leaned at me.

“Over twenty-two thousand,” he said softly. “Boy, what a take!”

I said: “Very nice money, Lou. What kind of car are you driving?”

“See anything wrong with it?”

“The play?” I shrugged, fiddled with my glass. “I’m not wised up on roulette, Lou... I saw plenty wrong with your broad’s manners.”

“She’s not a broad,” Lou said. His voice got a little worried.

“Okey. She made Canales look like a million. What kind of car?”

“Buick sedan. Nile green, with two spotlights and those little fender lights on rods.” His voice was still worried.

I said: “Take it kind of slow through town. Give me a chance to get in the parade.”

He moved his glove and went away. The red-haired girl was not in sight anywhere. I looked down at the watch on my wrist. When I looked up again Canales was standing across the table. His eyes looked at me lifelessly above his trick mustache.

“You don’t like my place,” he said.

“On the contrary.”

“You don’t come here to play.” He was telling me, not asking me.

“Is it compulsory?” I asked dryly.

A very faint smile drifted across his face. He leaned a little down and said: “I think you are a dick. A smart dick.”

“Just a shamus,” I said. “And not so smart. Don’t let my long upper lip fool you. It runs in the family.”

Canales wrapped his fingers around the top of a chair, squeezed on it. “Don’t come here again—for anything.” He spoke very softly, almost dreamily. “I don’t like pigeons.”

I took the cigarette out of my mouth and looked it over before I looked at him. I said: “I

heard you insulted a while back. You took it nicely... So we won’t count this one.”

He had a queer expression for a moment. Then he turned and slid away with a little sway of the shoulders. He put his feet down flat and turned them out a good deal as he walked. His walk, like his face, was a little negroid.

I got up and went out through the big white double doors into a dim lobby, got my hat and coat and put them on. I went out through another pair of double doors onto a wide veranda with scrollwork along the edge of its roof. There was sea fog in the air and the windblown Monterey cypresses in front of the house dripped with it. The grounds sloped gently into the dark for a long distance. Fog hid the ocean.

I had parked the car out on the street, on the other side of the house. I drew my hat down and walked soundlessly on the damp moss that covered the driveway, rounded a corner of the porch, and stopped rigidly.

A man just in front of me was holding a gun—but he didn’t see me. He was holding the gun down at his side, pressed against the material of his overcoat, and his big hand made it look quite small. The dim light that reflected from the barrel seemed to come out of the fog, to be part of the fog. He was a big man, and he stood very still, poised on the balls of his feet.

I lifted my right hand very slowly and opened the top two buttons of my coat, reached inside and drew out a long .38 with a six-inch barrel. I eased it into my overcoat pocket.

The man in front of me moved, reached his left hand up to his face. He drew on a cigarette cupped inside his hand and the glow put brief light on a heavy chin, wide, dark

nostrils, and a square, aggressive nose, the nose of a fighting man.

Then he dropped the cigarette and stepped on it and a quick, light step made faint noise behind me. I was far too late turning.

Something swished and I went out like a light.

FOUR

When I came to I was cold and wet and had a headache a yard wide. There was a soft bruise behind my right ear that wasn't bleeding. I had been put down with a sap.

I got up off my back and saw that I was a few yards from the driveway, between two trees that were wet with fog. There was some mud on the backs of my shoes. I had been dragged off the path, but not very far.

I went through my pockets. My gun was gone, of course, but that was all—that and the idea that this excursion was all fun.

I nosed around through the fog, didn't find anything or see anyone, gave up bothering about that, and went along the blank side of the house to a curving line of palm trees and an old type arc light that hissed and flickered over the entrance to a sort of lane where I had stuck the 1925 Marmon touring car I still used for transportation. I got into it after wiping the seat off with a towel, teased the motor alive, and choked it along to a big empty street with disused car tracks in the middle.

I went from there to De Cazens Boulevard, which was the main drag of Las Olindas and was called after the man who built Canales' place long ago. After a while there was town, buildings, dead-looking stores, a service

station with a night-bell, and at last a drugstore which was still open.



A dolled-up sedan was parked in front of the drugstore and I parked behind that, got out, and saw that a hatless man was sitting at the counter, talking to a clerk in a blue smock. They seemed to have the world to themselves. I started to go in, then I stopped and took another look at the dolled-up sedan.

It was a Buick and of a color that could have been Nile-green in daylight. It had two spotlights and two little egg-shaped amber lights stuck up on thin nickel rods clamped to the front fenders. The window by the driver's seat was down. I went back to the Marmon and got a flash, reached in and twisted the license holder of the Buick around, put the light on it quickly, then off again.

It was registered to Louis N. Harger.

I got rid of the flash and went into the drugstore. There was a liquor display at one side, and the clerk in the blue smock sold me a pint of Canadian Club, which I took over to the counter and opened. There were ten seats at the counter, but I sat down on the one next to the hatless man. He began to look me over, in the mirror, very carefully.

I got a cup of black coffee two-thirds full and added plenty of the rye. I drank it down and

waited for a minute, to let it warm me up. Then I looked the hatless man over.

He was about twenty-eight, a little thin on top, had a healthy red face, fairly honest eyes, dirty hands and looked as if he wasn't making much money. He wore a gray whipcord jacket with metal buttons on it, pants that didn't match.

I said carelessly, in a low voice: "Your bus outside?"

He sat very still. His mouth got small and tight and he had trouble pulling his eyes away from mine, in the mirror.

"My brother's," he said, after a moment.

I said: "Care for a drink?... Your brother is an old friend of mine."

He nodded slowly, gulped, moved his hand slowly, but finally got the bottle and curdled his coffee with it. He drank the whole thing down. Then I watched him dig up a crumpled pack of cigarettes, spear his mouth with one, strike a match on the counter, after missing twice on his thumbnail, and inhale with a lot of very poor nonchalance that he knew wasn't going over.

I leaned close to him and said evenly: "This doesn't *have* to be trouble."

He said: "Yeah... Wh-what's the beef?"

The clerk sidled towards us. I asked for more coffee. When I got it I stared at the clerk until he went and stood in front of the display window with his back to me. I laced my second cup of coffee and drank some of it. I looked at the clerk's back and said: "The guy the car belongs to doesn't have a brother."

He held himself tightly, but turned towards me. "You think it's a hot car?"

"No."

"You don't think it's a hot car?"

I said: "No. I just want the story."

"You a dick?"

"Uh-huh—but it isn't a shakedown, if that's what worries you."

He drew hard on his cigarette and moved his spoon around in his empty cup.

"I can lose my job over this," he said slowly. "But I needed a hundred bucks. I'm a hack driver."

"I guessed that," I said.

He looked surprised, turned his head and stared at me. "Have another drink and let's get on with it," I said. "Car thieves don't park them on the main drag and then sit around in drugstores."

The clerk came back from the window and hovered near us, busying himself with rubbing a rag on the coffee urn. A heavy silence fell. The clerk put the rag down, went along to the back of the store, behind the partition, and began to whistle aggressively.

The man beside me took some more of the whiskey and drank it, nodding his head wisely at me. "Listen—I brought a fare out and was supposed to wait for him. A guy and a jane come up alongside me in the Buick and the guy offers me a hundred bucks to let him wear my cap and drive my hack into town. I'm to hang around here an hour, then take his heap to the Hotel Carillon on Towne Boulevard. My cab will be there for me. He gives me the hundred bucks."

"What was his story?" I asked.

“He said they’d been to a gambling joint and had some luck for a change. They’re afraid of holdups on the way in. They figure there’s always spotters watchin’ the play.”

I took one of his cigarettes and straightened it out in my fingers. “It’s a story I can’t hurt much,” I said. “Could I see your cards?”

He gave them to me. His name was Tom Sneyd and he was a driver for the Green Top Cab Company. I corked my pint, slipped it into my side pocket, and danced a half-dollar on the counter.

The clerk came along and made change. He was almost shaking with curiosity.

“Come on, Tom,” I said in front of him. “Let’s go get that cab. I don’t think you should wait around here any longer.”

We went out, and I let the Buick lead me away from the straggling lights of Las Olindas, through a series of small beach towns with little houses built on sandlots close to the ocean, and bigger ones built on the slopes of the hills behind. A window was lit here and there. The tires sang on the moist concrete and the little amber lights on the Buick’s fenders peeped back at me from the curves.

At West Cimarron we turned inland, chugged on through Canal City, and met the San Angelo Cut. It took us almost an hour to get to 5640 Towne Boulevard, which is the number of the Hotel Carillon. It is a big, rambling slate-roofed building with a basement garage and a forecourt fountain on which they play a pale green light in the evening.

Green Top Cab No. 469 was parked across the street, on the dark side. I couldn’t see where anybody had been shooting into it. Tom Sneyd found his cap in the driver’s compartment, climbed eagerly under the wheel.

“Does that fix me up? Can I go now?” His voice was strident with relief.

I told him it was all right with me, and gave him my card. It was twelve minutes past one as he took the corner. I climbed into the Buick and tooled it down the ramp to the garage and left it with a colored boy who was dusting cars in slow motion. I went around to the lobby.

The clerk was an ascetic-looking young man who was reading a volume of *California Appellate Decisions* under the switchboard light. He said Lou was not in and had not been in since eleven, when he came on duty. After a short argument about the lateness of the hour and the importance of my visit, he rang Lou’s apartment, but there wasn’t any answer.

I went out and sat in my Marmon for a few minutes, smoked a cigarette, imbibed a little from my pint of Canadian Club. Then I went back into the Carillon and shut myself in a pay booth. I dialed the *Telegram*, asked for the City Desk, got a man named Von Ballin.

He yelped at me when I told him who I was. “You still walking around? That ought to be a story. I thought Manny Tinnen’s friends would have had you laid away in old lavender by this time.”

I said: “Can that and listen to this. Do you know a man named Lou Harger? He’s a gambler. Had a place that was raided and closed up a month ago.”

Von Ballin said he didn’t know Lou personally, but he knew who he was.

“Who around your rag would know him real well?”

He thought a moment. “There’s a lad named Jerry Cross here,” he said, “that’s supposed to be an expert on night life. What did you want to know?”

"Where would he go to celebrate," I said. Then I told him some of the story, not too much. I left out the part where I got sapped and the part about the taxi. "He hasn't shown at his hotel," I ended. "I ought to get a line on him."

"Well, if you're a friend of his—"

"Of his—not of his crowd," I said sharply.

Von Ballin stopped to yell at somebody to take a call, then said to me softly, close to the phone: "Come through, boy. Come through."

"All right. But I'm talking to you, not to your sheet. I got sapped and lost my gun outside Canales' joint. Lou and his girl switched his car for a taxi they picked up. Then they dropped out of sight. I don't like it too well. Lou wasn't drunk enough to chase around town with that much dough in his pockets. And if he was, the girl wouldn't let him. She had the practical eye."

"I'll see what I can do," Von Ballin said. "But it don't sound promising. I'll give you a buzz."

I told him I lived at the Merritt Plaza, in case he had forgotten, went out and got into the Marmon again. I drove home and put hot towels on my head for fifteen minutes, then sat around in my pajamas and drank hot whiskey and lemon and called the Carillon every once in a while. At two-thirty Von Ballin called me and said no luck. Lou hadn't been pinched, he wasn't in any of the Receiving Hospitals, and he hadn't shown at any of the clubs Jerry Cross could think of.

At three I called the Carillon for the last time. Then I put my light out and went to sleep.

In the morning it was the same way. I tried to trace the red-haired girl a little. There were twenty-eight people named Glenn in the phone book, and three women among them.

One didn't answer, the other two assured me they didn't have red hair. One offered to show me.

I shaved, showered, had breakfast, walked three blocks down the hill to the Condor Building.

Miss Glenn was sitting in my little reception room.

FIVE

I unlocked the other door and she went in and sat in the chair where Lou had sat the afternoon before. I opened some windows, locked the outer door of the reception room, and struck a match for the unlighted cigarette she held in her ungloved and ringless left hand.

She was dressed in a blouse and plaid skirt with a loose coat over them, and a close-fitting hat that was far enough out of style to suggest a run of bad luck. But it hid almost all of her hair. Her skin was without make-up and she looked about thirty and had the set face of exhaustion.

She held her cigarette with a hand that was almost too steady, a hand on guard. I sat down and waited for her to talk.

She stared at the wall over my head and didn't say anything. After a little while I packed my pipe and smoked for a minute. Then I got up and went across to the door that opened into the hallway and picked up a couple of letters that had been pushed through the slot.

I sat down at the desk again, looked them over, read one of them twice, as if I had been alone. While I was doing this I didn't look at her directly or speak to her, but I kept an eye on her all the same. She looked like a lady who was getting nerved for something.

Finally she moved. She opened up a big black patent-leather bag and took out a fat manila envelope, pulled a rubber band off it and sat holding the envelope between the palms of her hands, with her head tilted way back and the cigarette dribbling gray smoke from the corners of her mouth.

She said slowly: "Lou said if I ever got caught in the rain, you were the boy to see. It's raining hard where I am."

I stared at the manila envelope. "Lou is a pretty good friend of mine," I said. "I'd do anything in reason for him. Some things not in reason—like last night. That doesn't mean Lou and I always play the same games."

She dropped her cigarette into the glass bowl of the ash tray and left it to smoke. A dark flame burned suddenly in her eyes, then went out.

"Lou is dead." Her voice was quite toneless.

I reached over with a pencil and stabbed at the hot end of the cigarette until it stopped smoking.

She went on: "A couple of Canales' boys got him in my apartment—with one shot from a small gun that looked like my gun. Mine was gone when I looked for it afterwards. I spent the night there with him dead... I had to."

She broke quite suddenly. Her eyes turned up in her head and her head came down and hit the desk. She lay still, with the manila envelope in front of her lax hands.

I jerked a drawer open and brought up a bottle and a glass, poured a stiff one and stepped around it, heaved her up in her chair. I pushed the edge of the glass hard against her mouth—hard enough to hurt. She struggled

and swallowed. Some of it ran down her chin, but life came back into her eyes.

I left the whiskey in front of her and sat down again. The flap of the envelope had come open enough for me to see currency inside, bales of currency.

She began to talk to me in a dreamy sort of voice.

"We got all big bills from the cashier, but makes quite a package at that. There's twenty-two thousand even in the envelope. I kept out a few odd hundreds.

"Lou was worried. He figured it would be pretty easy for Canales to catch up with us. You might be right behind and not be able to do very much about it."

I said: "Canales lost the money in full view of everybody there. It was good advertising—even if it hurt."

She went on exactly as though I had not spoken. "Going through the town we spotted a cab driver sitting in his parked cab and Lou had a brain wave. He offered the boy a C note to let him drive the cab into San Angelo and bring the Buick to the hotel after a while. The boy took us up and we went over on another street and made the switch. We were sorry about ditching you, but Lou said you wouldn't mind. And we might get a chance to flag you.

"Lou didn't go into his hotel. We took another cab over to my place. I live at the Hobart Arms, eight hundred block on South Minter. It's a place where you don't have to answer questions at the desk. We went up to my apartment and put the lights on and two guys with masks came around the half-wall between the living room and the dinette. One was small and thin and the other one was a big slob with a chin that stuck out under his mask like a shelf. Lou made a wrong motion and the big one shot him just the once. The gun just

made a flat crack, not very loud, and Lou fell down on the floor and never moved.”

I said: “It might be the ones that made a sucker out of me. I haven’t told you about that yet.”

She didn’t seem to hear that either. Her face was white and composed, but as expressionless as plaster. “Maybe I’d better have another finger of the hooch,” she said.

I poured us a couple of drinks, and we drank them. She went on: “They went through us, but we didn’t have the money. We had stopped at an all-night drugstore and had it weighed and mailed it at a branch post office. They went through the apartment, but of course we had just come in and hadn’t had time to hide anything. The big one slammed me down with his fist, and when I woke up again they were gone and I was alone with Lou dead on the floor.”

She pointed to a mark on the angle of her jaw. There was something there, but it didn’t show much. I moved around in my chair a little and said: “They passed you on the way in. Smart boys would have looked a taxi over on that road. How did they know where to go?”

“I thought that out during the night,” Miss Glenn said. “Canales knows where I live. He followed me home once and tried to get me to ask him up.”

“Yeah,” I said, “but why did they go to your place and how did they get in?”

“That’s not hard. There’s a ledge just below the windows and a man could edge along it to the fire escape. They probably had other boys covering Lou’s hotel. We thought of that chance but we didn’t think about my place being known to them.”

“Tell me the rest of it,” I said.

“The money was mailed to me,” Miss Glenn explained. “Lou was a swell boy, but a girl has to protect herself. That’s why I had to stay there last night with Lou dead on the floor. Until the mail came. Then I came over here.”

I got up and looked out of the window. A fat girl was pounding a typewriter across the court. I could hear the clack of it. I sat down, stared at my thumb.

“Did they plant the gun?” I asked.

“Not unless it’s under him. I didn’t look there.”

“They let you off too easy. Maybe it wasn’t Canales at all. Did Lou open his heart to you much?”

She shook her head quietly. Her eyes were slate-blue now, and thoughtful, without the blank stare.

“All right,” I said. “Just what did you think of having me do about it all?”

She narrowed her eyes a little, then put a hand out and pushed the bulging envelope slowly across the desk.

“I’m no baby and I’m in a jam. But I’m not going to the cleaners just the same. Half of this money is mine, and I want it with a clean getaway. One-half net. If I’d called the law last night, there’d have been a way to chisel me out of it... I think Lou would like you to have his half, if you want to play with me.”

I said: “It’s big money to flash at a private dick, Miss Glenn,” and smiled wearily. “You’re a little worse off for not calling cops last night. But there’s an answer to anything they might say. I think I’d better go over there and see what’s broken, if anything.”

She leaned forward quickly and said: “Will you take care of the money?... Dare you?”

“Sure. I’ll pop downstairs and put it in a safe-deposit box. You can hold one of the keys—and we’ll talk split later on. I think it would be a swell idea if Canales knew he had to see me, and still sweller if you hid out in a little hotel where I have a friend—at least until I nose around a bit.”

She nodded. I put my hat on and put the envelope inside my belt. I went out, telling her there was a gun in the top left-hand drawer, if she felt nervous.

When I got back she didn’t seem to have moved. But she said she had phoned Canales’ place and left a message for him she thought he would understand.

We went by rather devious ways to the Lorraine, at Brant and Avenue C. Nobody shot at us going over, and as far as I could see we were not trailed.

I shook hands with Jim Dolan, the day clerk at the Lorraine, with a twenty folded in my hand. He put his hand in his pocket and said he would be glad to see that “Miss Thompson” was not bothered.

I left. There was nothing in the noon paper about Lou Harger of the Hobart Arms.

SIX

The Hobart Arms was just another apartment house, in a block lined with them. It was six stories high and had a buff front. A lot of cars were parked at both curbs all along the block. I drove through slowly and looked things over. The neighborhood didn’t have the look of having been excited about anything in the immediate past. It was peaceful and sunny, and the parked cars had a settled look, as if they were right at home.

I circled into an alley with a high board fence on each side and a lot of flimsy garages cutting it. I parked beside one that had a For Rent sign and went between two garbage cans into the concrete yard of the Hobart Arms, along the side to the street. A man was putting golf clubs into the back of a coupe. In the lobby a Filipino was dragging a vacuum cleaner over the rug and a dark Jewess was writing at the switchboard.

I used the automatic elevator and prowled along an upper corridor to the last door on the left. I knocked, waited, knocked again, went in with Miss Glenn’s key.

Nobody was dead on the floor.

I looked at myself in the mirror that was the back of a pull-down bed, went across and looked out of a window. There was a ledge below that had once been a coping. It ran along to the fire escape. A blind man could have walked in. I didn’t notice anything like footmarks in the dust on it.

There was nothing in the dinette or kitchen except what belonged there. The bedroom had a cheerful carpet and painted gray walls. There was a lot of junk in the corner, around a waste-basket, and a broken comb on the dresser held a few strands of red hair. The closets were empty except for some gin bottles.

I went back to the living room, looked behind the wall bed, stood around for a minute, left the apartment.

The Filipino in the lobby had made about three yards with the vacuum cleaner. I leaned on the counter beside the switchboard.

“Miss Glenn?”

The dark Jewess said: “Five-two-four,” and made a check mark on the laundry list.

“She’s not in. Has she been in lately?”

She glanced up at me. “I haven’t noticed. What is it—a bill?”

I said I was just a friend, thanked her and went away. That established the fact that there had been no excitement in Miss Glenn’s apartment. I went back to the alley and the Marmon.

I hadn’t believed it quite the way Miss Glenn told it anyhow.

I crossed Cordova, drove a block and stopped beside a forgotten drugstore that slept behind two giant pepper trees and a dusty, cluttered window. It had a single pay booth in the corner. An old man shuffled towards me wistfully, then went away when he saw what I wanted, lowered a pair of steel spectacles on the end of his nose and sat down again with his newspaper.

I dropped my nickel, dialed, and a girl’s voice said: “Telegrayam!” with a tinny drawl. I asked for Von Ballin.

When I got him and he knew who it was, I could hear him clearing his throat. Then his voice came close to the phone and said very distinctly: “I’ve got something for you, but it’s bad. I’m sorry as all hell. Your friend Harger is in the morgue. We got a flash about ten minutes ago.”

I leaned against the wall of the booth and felt my eyes getting haggard. I said: “What else did you get?”

“Couple of radio cops picked him up in somebody’s front yard or something, in West Cimarron. He was shot through the heart. It happened last night, but for some reason they only just put out the identification.”

I said: “West Cimarron, huh?... Well, that takes care of that. I’ll be in to see you.”

I thanked him and hung up, stood for a moment looking out through the glass at a middle-aged gray-haired man who had come into the store and was pawing over the magazine rack.

Then I dropped another nickel and dialed the Lorraine, asked for the clerk.

I said: “Get your girl to put me on to the redhead, will you, Jim?”

I got a cigarette out and lit it, puffed smoke at the glass of the door. The smoke flattened out against the glass and swirled about in the close air. Then the line clicked and the operator’s voice said: “Sorry, your party does not answer.”

“Give me Jim again,” I said. Then, when he answered, “Can you take time to run up and find out why she doesn’t answer the phone? Maybe she’s just being cagey.”

Jim said: “You bet. I’ll shoot right up with a key.”

Sweat was coming out all over me. I put the receiver down on a little shelf and jerked the booth door open. The gray-haired man looked up quickly from the magazines, then scowled and looked at his watch. Smoke poured out of the booth. After a moment I kicked the door shut and picked up the receiver again.

Jim’s voice seemed to come to me from a long way off. “She’s not here. Maybe she went for a walk.”

I said: “Yeah—or maybe it was a ride.”

I pronged the receiver and pushed on out of the booth. The gray-haired stranger slammed a magazine down so hard that it fell to the floor. He stooped to pick it up as I went past him. Then he straightened up just behind me and said quietly, but very firmly: “Keep the

hands down, and quiet. Walk on out to your heap. This is business.”

Out of the corner of my eye I could see the old man peeking shortsightedly at us. But there wasn’t anything for him to see, even if he could see that far. Something prodded my back. It might have been a finger, but I didn’t think it was.

We went out of the store very peacefully.

A long gray car had stopped close behind the Marmon. Its rear door was open and a man with a square face and a crooked mouth was standing with one foot on the running board. His right hand was behind him, inside the car.

My man’s voice said: “Get in your car and drive west. Take this first corner and go about twenty-five, not more.”

The narrow street was sunny and quiet and the pepper trees whispered. Traffic threshed by on Cordova a short block away. I shrugged, opened the door of my car and got under the wheel. The gray-haired man got in very quickly beside me, watching my hands. He swung his right hand around, with a snub-nosed gun in it.

“Careful getting your keys out, buddy.”

I was careful. As I stepped on the starter a car door slammed behind, there were rapid steps, and someone got into the back seat of the Marmon. I let in the clutch and drove around the corner. In the mirror I could see the gray car making the turn behind. Then it dropped back a little.

I drove west on a street that paralleled Cordova and when we had gone a block and a half a hand came down over my shoulder from behind and took my gun away from me. The gray-haired man rested his short revolver on his

leg and felt me over carefully with his free hand. He leaned back satisfied.

“Okey. Drop over to the main drag and snap it up,” he said. “But that don’t mean trying to sideswipe a prowler car, if you lamp one... Or if you think it does, try it and see.”

I made the two turns, speeded up to thirty-five and held it there. We went through some nice residential districts, and then the landscape began to thin out. When it was quite thin the gray car behind dropped back, turned towards town and disappeared.

“What’s the snatch for?” I asked.

The gray-haired man laughed and rubbed his broad red chin. “Just business. The big boy wants to talk to you.”

“Canales?”

“Canales—hell! I said the *big boy*.”

I watched traffic, what there was of it that far out, and didn’t speak for a few minutes. Then I said: “Why didn’t you pull it in the apartment, or in the alley?”

“Wanted to make sure you wasn’t covered.”

“Who’s this big boy?”

“Skip that—till we get you there. Anything else?”

“Yes. Can I smoke?”

He held the wheel while I lit up. The man in the back seat hadn’t said a word at any time. After a while the gray-haired man made me pull up and move over, and he drove.

“I used to own one of these, six years ago, when I was poor,” he said jovially.

I couldn't think of a really good answer to that, so I just let smoke seep down into my lungs and wondered why, if Lou had been killed in West Cimarron, the killers didn't get the money. And if he really had been killed at Miss Glenn's apartment, why somebody had taken the trouble to carry him back to West Cimarron.

SEVEN

In twenty minutes we were in the foothills. We went over a hogback, drifted down a long white concrete ribbon, crossed a bridge, went halfway up the next slope and turned off on a gravel road that disappeared around a shoulder of scrub oak and manzanita. Plumes of pampas grass flared on the side of the hill, like jets of water. The wheels crunched on the gravel and skidded on the curves.

We came to a mountain cabin with a wide porch and cemented boulder foundations. The windmill of a generator turned slowly on the crest of a spur a hundred feet behind the cabin. A mountain blue jay flashed across the road, zoomed, banked sharply, and fell out of sight like a stone.

The gray-haired man tooled the car up to the porch, beside a tan-colored Lincoln coupe, switched off the ignition and set the Marmon's long parking brake. He took the keys out, folded them carefully in their leather case, put the case away in his pocket.

The man in the back seat got out and held the door beside me open. He had a gun in his hand. I got out. The gray-haired man got out. We all went into the house.

There was a big room with walls of knotted pine, beautifully polished. We went across it walking on Indian rugs and the gray-haired man knocked carefully on a door.

A voice shouted: "What is it?"

The gray-haired man put his face against the door and said: "Beasley—and the guy you wanted to talk to."

The voice inside said to come on in. Beasley opened the door, pushed me through it and shut it behind me.

It was another big room with knotted pine walls and Indian rugs on the floor. A driftwood fire hissed and puffed on a stone hearth.

The man who sat behind a flat desk was Frank Dorr, the politico.

He was the kind of man who liked to have a desk in front of him, and shove his fat stomach against it, and fiddle with things on it, and look very wise. He had a fat, muddy face, a thin fringe of white hair that stuck up a little, small sharp eyes, small and very delicate hands.

What I could see of him was dressed in a slovenly gray suit, and there was a large black Persian cat on the desk in front of him. He was scratching the cat's head with one of his little neat hands and the cat was leaning against his hand. Its busy tail flowed over the edge of the desk and fell straight down.

He said: "Sit down," without looking away from the cat.

I sat down in a leather chair with a very low seat. Dorr said: "How do you like it up here? Kind of nice, ain't it? This is Toby, my girl friend. Only girl friend I got. Ain't you, Toby?"

I said: "I like it up here—but I don't like the way I got here."

Dorr raised his head a few inches and looked at me with his mouth slightly open. He had beautiful teeth, but they hadn't grown in

his mouth. He said: "I'm a busy man, brother. It was simpler than arguing. Have a drink?"

"Sure I'll have a drink," I said.

He squeezed the cat's head gently between his two palms, then pushed it away from him and put both hands down on the arms of his chair. He shoved hard and his face got a little red and he finally got up on his feet. He waddled across to a built-in cabinet and took out a squat decanter of whiskey and two gold-veined glasses.

"No ice today," he said, waddling back to the desk. "Have to drink it straight."

He poured two drinks, gestured, and I went over and got mine. He sat down again. I sat down with my drink. Dorr lit a long brown cigar, pushed the box two inches in my direction, leaned back and stared at me with complete relaxation.

"You're the guy that fingered Manny Tinnen," he said. "It won't do."

I sipped my whiskey. It was good enough to sip.

"Life gets complicated at times," Dorr went on, in the same even, relaxed voice. "Politics— even when it's a lot of fun—is tough on the nerves. You know me. I'm tough and I get what I want. There ain't a hell of a lot I want any more, but what I want—I want bad. And ain't so damn particular how I get it."

"You have that reputation," I said politely.

Dorr's eyes twinkled. He looked around for the cat, dragged it towards him by the tail, pushed it down on its side and began to rub its stomach. The cat seemed to like it.

Dorr looked at me and said very softly: "You bumped Lou Harger."

"What makes you think so?" I asked, without any particular emphasis.

"You bumped Lou Harger. Maybe he needed the bump—but you gave it to him. He was shot once through the heart, with a thirty-eight. You wear a thirty-eight and you're known to be a fancy shot with it. You were with Harger at Las Olindas last night and saw him win a lot of money. You were supposed to be acting as bodyguard for him, but you got a better idea. You caught up with him and that girl in West Cimarron, slipped Harger the dose and got the money."

I finished my whiskey, got up and poured myself some more of it.

"You made a deal with the girl," Dorr said, "but the deal didn't stick. She got a cute idea. But that don't matter, because the police got your gun along with Harger. And you got the dough."

I said: "Is there a tag out for me?"

"Not till I give the word... And the gun hasn't been turned in... I got a lot of friends, you know."

I said slowly: "I got sapped outside Canales' place. It served me right. My gun was take from me. I never caught up with Harger, never saw him again. The girl came to me this morning with the money in an envelope and a story that Harger had been killed in her apartment. That's how I have the money—for safekeeping. I wasn't sure about the girl's story, but her bringing the money carried a lot of weight. And Harger was a friend of mine. I started out to investigate."

"You should have let the cops do that," Dorr said with a grin.

"There was a chance the girl was being framed. Besides there was a possibility I might

make a few dollars—legitimately. It has been done, even in San Angelo.”

Dorr stuck a finger towards the cat’s face and the cat bit it, with an absent expression. Then it pulled away from him, sat down on a corner of the desk and began to lick one toe.

“Twenty-two grand, and the jane passed it over to you to keep,” Dorr said. “Ain’t that just like a jane?”

“You got the dough,” Dorr said. “Harger was killed with your gun. The girl’s gone—but I could bring her back. I think she’d make a good witness, if we needed one.”

“Was the play at Las Olindas crooked?” I asked.

Dorr finished his drink and curled his lips around his cigar again. “Sure,” he said carelessly. “The croupier—a guy named Pina—was in on it. The wheel was wired for the double-zero. The old crap. Copper button on the floor, copper button on Pina’s shoe sole, wires up his leg, batteries in his hip pockets. The old crap.”

I said: “Canales didn’t act as if he knew about it.”

Dorr chuckled. “He knew the wheel was wired. He didn’t know his head croupier was playin’ on the other team.”

“I’d hate to be Pina,” I said.

Dorr made a negligent motion with his cigar. “He’s taken care of... The play was careful and quiet. They didn’t make any fancy long shots, just even money bets, and they didn’t win all the time. They couldn’t. No wired wheel is that good.”

I shrugged, moved about in my chair. “You know a hell of a lot about it,” I said. “Was all this just to get me set for a squeeze?”

He grinned softly: “Hell, no! Some of it just happened—the way the best plans do.” He waved his cigar again, and a pale gray tendril of smoke curled past his cunning little eyes. There was a muffled sound of talk in the outside room. “I got connections I got to please—even if I don’t like all their capers,” he added simply.

“Like Manny Tinnen?” I said. “He was around City Hall a lot, knew too much. Okey, Mister Dorr. Just what do you figure on having me do for you? Commit suicide?”

He laughed. His fat shoulders shook carefully. He put one of his small hands out with the palm towards me. “I wouldn’t think of that,” he said dryly, “and the other way’s better business. The way public opinion is about the Shannon kill. I ain’t sure that louse of a D.A. wouldn’t convict Tinnen without you—if he could sell the folks the idea you’d been knocked off to button your mouth.”

I got up out of my chair, went over and leaned on the desk, leaned across it towards Dorr.

He said: “No funny business!” a little sharply and breathlessly. His hand went to a drawer and got it half open. His movements with his hands were very quick in contrast with the movements of his body.

I smiled down at the hand and he took it away from the drawer. I saw a gun just inside the drawer.

I said: “I’ve already talked to the Grand Jury.”

Dorr leaned back and smiled at me. “Guys make mistakes,” he said. “Even smart private dicks... You could have a change of heart— and put it in writing.”

I said very softly. “No. I’d be under a perjury rap—which I couldn’t beat. I’d rather be under a murder rap—which I can beat. Especially as Fenweather will *want* me to beat it. He won’t want to spoil me as a witness. The Tinnen case is too important to him.”

Dorr said evenly: “Then you’ll have to try and beat it, brother. And after you get through beating it there’ll still be enough mud on your neck so no jury’ll convict Manny on your say-so alone.”

I put my hand out slowly and scratched the cat’s ear. “What about the twenty-two grand?”

“It *could be* all yours, if you want to play. After all, it ain’t my money... If Manny gets clear, I might add a little something that *is* my money.”

I tickled the cat under its chin. It began to purr. I picked it up and held it gently in my arms.

“Who did kill Lou Harger, Dorrr?” I asked, not looking at him.

He shook his head. I looked at him, smiling. “Swell cat you have,” I said.

Dorr licked his lips. “I think the little bastard likes you,” he grinned. He looked pleased at the idea.

I nodded—and threw the cat in his face.

He yelped, but his hands came up to catch the cat. The cat twisted neatly in the air and landed with both front paws working. One of them split Dorrr’s cheek like a banana peel. He yelled very loudly.

I had the gun out of the drawer and the muzzle of it into the back of Dorrr’s neck when Beasley and the square-faced man dodged in.

For an instant there was a sort of tableau. Then the cat tore itself loose from Dorrr’s arms, shot to the floor and went under the desk. Beasley raised his snub-nosed gun, but he didn’t look as if he was certain what he meant to do with it.

I shoved the muzzle of mine hard into Dorrr’s neck and said: “Frankie gets it first, boys... And that’s not a gag.”

Dorr grunted in front of me. “Take it easy,” he growled to his hoods. He took a handkerchief from his breast pocket and began to dab at his split and bleeding cheek with it. The man with the crooked mouth began to sidle along the wall.

I said: “Don’t get the idea I’m enjoying this, but I’m not fooling either. You heels stay put.”

The man with the crooked mouth stopped sidling and gave me a nasty leer. He kept his hands low.

Dorr half turned his head and tried to talk over his shoulder to me. I couldn’t see enough of his face to get any expression, but he didn’t seem scared. He said: “This won’t get you anything. I could have you knocked off easy enough, if that was what I wanted. Now where are you? You can’t shoot anybody without getting in a worse jam than if you did what I asked you to. It looks like a stalemate to me.”

I thought that over for a moment while Beasley looked at me quite pleasantly, as though it was all just routine to him. There was nothing pleasant about the other man. I listened hard, but the rest of the house seemed to be quite silent.

Dorr edged forward from the gun and said: “Well?”

I said: "I'm going out. I have a gun and it looks like a gun that I could hit somebody with, if I have to. I don't want to very much, and if you'll have Beasley throw my keys over and the other one turn back the gun he took from me, I'll forget about the snatch."

Dorr moved his arms in the lazy beginning of a shrug. "Then what?"

"Figure out your deal a little closer," I said. "If you get enough protection behind me, I might throw in with you... And if you're as tough as you think you are, a few hours won't cut any ice one way or the other."

"It's an idea," Dorr said and chuckled. Then to Beasley: "Keep your rod to yourself and give him his keys. Also his gun—the one you got today."

Beasley sighed and very carefully inserted a hand into his pants. He tossed my leather key-case across the room near the end of the desk. The man with the twisted mouth put his hand up, edged it inside his side pocket and I eased down behind Dorr's back, while he did it. He came out with my gun, let it fall to the floor and kicked it away from him.

I came out from behind Dorr's back, got my keys and the gun up from the floor, moved sidewise towards the door of the room. Dorr watched with an empty stare that meant nothing. Beasley followed me around with his body and stepped away from the door as I neared it. The other man had trouble holding himself quiet.

I got to the door and reversed a key that was in it. Dorr said dreamily: "You're just like one of those rubber balls on the end of an elastic. The farther you get away, the suddener you'll bounce back."

I said: "The elastic might be a little rotten," and went through the door, turned the key in it and braced myself for shots that didn't

come. As a bluff, mine was thinner than the gold on a week-end wedding ring. It worked because Dorr let it, and that was all.

I got out of the house, got the Marmon started and wrangled it around and sent it skidding past the shoulder of the hill and so on down to the highway. There was no sound of anything coming after me.

When I reached the concrete highway bridge it was a little past two o'clock, and I drove with one hand for a while and wiped the sweat off the back of my neck.

EIGHT

The morgue was at the end of a long and bright and silent corridor that branched off from behind the main lobby of the County Building. The corridor ended in two doors and a blank wall faced with marble. One door had "Inquest Room" lettered on the glass panel behind which there was no light. The other opened into a small, cheerful office.

A man with gander-blue eyes and rust-colored hair parted in the exact center of his head was pawing over some printed forms at a table. He looked up, looked me over, and then suddenly smiled.

I said: "Hello, Landon... Remember the Shelby case?"

The bright blue eyes twinkled. He got up and came around the table with his hand out. "Sure. What can we do—" He broke off suddenly and snapped his fingers. "Hell! You're the guy that put the bee on that hot rod."

I tossed a butt through the open door into the corridor. "That's not why I'm here," I said. "Anyhow not this time. There's a fellow named Louis Harger... picked up shot last night

or this morning, in West Cimarron, as I get it. Could I take a look-see?"

"They can't stop you," Landon said.

He led the way through the door on the far side of his office into a place that was all white paint and white enamel and glass and bright light. Against one wall was a double tier of large bins with glass windows in them. Through the peepholes showed bundles in white sheeting, and, further back, frosted pipes.

A body covered with a sheet lay on a table that was high at the head and sloped down to the foot. Landon pulled the sheet down casually from a man's dead, placid, yellowish face. Long black hair lay loosely on a small pillow, with the dank-ness of water still in it. The eyes were half open and stared incuriously at the ceiling.

I stepped close, looked at the face, Landon pulled the sheet on down and rapped his knuckles on a chest that rang hollowly, like a board. There was a bullet hole over the heart.

"Nice clean shot," he said.

I turned away quickly, got a cigarette out and rolled it around in my fingers. I stared at the floor.

"Who identified him?"

"Stuff in his pockets," Landon said. "We're checking his prints, of course. You know him?"

I said: "Yes."

Landon scratched the base of his chin softly with his thumbnail. We walked back into the office and Landon went behind his table and sat down.

He thumbed over some papers, separated one from the pile and studied it for a moment.

He said: "A sheriff's radio car found him at twelve thirty-five a.m., on the side of the old road out of West Cimarron, a quarter of a mile from where the cutoff starts. That isn't traveled much, but the prowler car takes a slant down it now and then looking for petting parties."

I said: "Can you say how long he had been dead?"

"Not very long. He was still warm, and the nights are cool along there."

I put my unlighted cigarette in my mouth and moved it up and down with my lips. "And I bet you took a long thirty-eight out of him," I said.

"How did you know that?" Landon asked quickly.

"I just guess. It's that sort of hole."

He stared at me with bright, interested eyes. I thanked him, said I'd be seeing him, went through the door and lit my cigarette in the corridor. I walked back to the elevators and got into one, rode to the seventh floor, then went along another corridor exactly like the one below except that it didn't lead to the morgue. It led to some small, bare offices that were used by the District Attorney's investigators. Halfway along I opened a door and went into one of them.

Bernie Ohls was sitting humped loosely at a desk placed against the wall. He was the chief investigator Fenweather had told me to see, if I got into any kind of a jam. He was a medium-sized bland man with white eyebrows and an out-thrust, very deeply cleft chin. There was another desk against the other wall, a couple of hard chairs, a brass spittoon on a rubber mat and very little else.

Ohls nodded casually at me, got out of his chair and fixed the door latch. Then he got a flat tin of little cigars out of his desk, lit one of them, pushed the tin along the desk and stared at me along his nose. I sat down in one of the straight chairs and tilted it back.

Ohls said: "Well?"

"It's Lou Harger," I said. "I thought maybe it wasn't."

"The hell you did. I could have told you it was Harger."

Somebody tried the handle of the door, then knocked. Ohls paid no attention. Whoever it was went away.

I said slowly: "He was killed between eleven-thirty and twelve thirty-five. There was just time for the job to be done where he was found. There wasn't time for it to be done the way the girl said. There wasn't time for me to do it."

Ohls said: "Yeah. Maybe you could prove that. And then maybe you could prove a friend of yours didn't do it with your gun."

I said: "A friend of mine wouldn't be likely to do it with my gun—if he was a friend of mine."

Ohls grunted, smiled sourly at me sidewise. He said: "Most anyone would think that. That's why he might have done it."

I let the legs of my chair settle to the floor. I stared at him.

"Would I come and tell you about the money and the gun—everything that ties me to it?"

Ohls said expressionlessly: "You would—if you knew damn well somebody else had already told it for you."

I said: "Dorr wouldn't lose much time."

I pinched my cigarette out and flipped it towards the brass cuspidor. Then I stood up.

"Okey. There's no tag out for me yet—so I'll go over and tell my story."

Ohls said: "Sit down a minute."

I sat down. He took his little cigar out of his mouth and flung it away from him with a savage gesture. It rolled along the brown linoleum and smoked in the corner. He put his arms down on the desk and drummed with the fingers of both hands. His lower lip came forward and pressed his upper lip back against his teeth.

"Dorr probably knows you're here now," he said. "The only reason you ain't in the tank upstairs is they're not sure but it would be better to knock you off and take a chance. If Fenweather loses the election, I'll be all washed up—if I mess around with you."

I said: "If he convicts Manny Tinnen, he won't lose the election."

Ohls took another of the little cigars out of the box and lit it. He picked his hat off the desk, fingered it a moment, put it on.

"Why'd the redhead give you that song and dance about the bump in her apartment, the stiff on the floor—all that hot comedy?"

"They wanted me to go over there. They figured I'd go to see if a gun was planted—maybe just to check up on her. That got me away from the busy part of town. They could tell better if the D.A. had any boys watching my blind side."

“That’s just a guess,” Ohls said sourly.

I said: “Sure.”

Ohls swung his thick legs around, planted his feet hard and leaned his hands on his knees. The little cigar twitched in the corner of his mouth.

“I’d like to get to know some of these guys that let loose of twenty-two grand just to color up a fairy tale,” he said nastily.

I stood up again and went past him towards the door.

Ohls said: “What’s the hurry?”

I turned around and shrugged, looked at him blankly. “You don’t act very interested,” I said.

He climbed to his feet, said wearily: “The hack driver’s most likely a dirty little crook. But it might just be Dorr’s lads don’t know he rates in this. Let’s go get him while his memory’s fresh.”

NINE

The Green Top Garage was on Deviveras, three blocks east of Main. I pulled the Marmon up in front of a fireplug and got out. Ohls slumped in the seat and growled: “I’ll stay here. Maybe I can spot a tail.”

I went into a huge echoing garage, in the inner gloom of which a few brand new paint jobs were splashes of sudden color. There was a small, dirty, glass-walled office in the corner and a short man sat there with a derby hat on the back of his head and a red tie under his stubbled chin. He was whittling tobacco in the palm of his hand.

I said: “You the dispatcher?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m looking for one of your drivers,” I said. “Name of Tom Sneyd.”

He put down the knife and the plug and began to grind the cut tobacco between his two palms. “What’s the beef?” he asked cautiously.

“No beef. I’m a friend of his.”

“More friends, huh?... He works nights, mister... So he’s gone I guess. Seventeen twenty-three Renfrew. That’s over by Gray Lake.”

I said: “Thanks. Phone?”

“No phone.”

I pulled a folded city map from an inside pocket and unfolded part of it on the table in front of his nose. He looked annoyed.

“There’s a big one on the wall,” he growled, and began to pack a short pipe with his tobacco.

“I’m used to this one,” I said. I bent over the spread map, looking for Renfrew Street. Then I stopped and looked suddenly at the face of the man in the derby. “You remembered that address damn quick,” I said.

He put his pipe in his mouth, bit hard on it, and pushed two quick fingers into the pocket of his open vest.

“Couple other mugs was askin’ for it a while back.”

I folded the map very quickly and shoved it back into my pocket as I went through the door. I jumped across the sidewalk, slid under the wheel and plunged at the starter.

“We’re headed,” I told Bernie Ohls. “Two guys got the kid’s address there a while back. It might be—”

Ohls grabbed the side of the car and swore as we took the corner on squealing tires. I bent forward over the wheel and drove hard. There was a red light at Central. I swerved into a corner service station, went through the pumps, popped out on Central and jostled through some traffic to make a right turn east again.

A colored traffic cop blew a whistle at me and then stared hard as if trying to read the license number. I kept on going.

Warehouses, a produce market, a big gas tank, more warehouses, railroad tracks, and two bridges dropped behind us. I beat three traffic signals by a hair and went right through a fourth. Six blocks on I got the siren from a motorcycle cop. Ohls passed me a bronze star and I flashed it out of the car, twisting it so the sun caught it. The siren stopped. The motorcycle kept right behind us for another dozen blocks, then sheered off.

Gray Lake is an artificial reservoir in a cut between two groups of hills, on the east fringe of San Angelo. Narrow but expensively paved streets wind around in the hills, describing elaborate curves along their flanks for the benefit of a few cheap and scattered bungalows.

We plunged up into the hills, reading street signs on the run. The gray silk of the lake dropped away from us and the exhaust of the old Marmon roared between crumbling banks that shed dirt down on the unused sidewalks. Mongrel dogs quartered in the wild grass among the gopher holes.

Renfrew was almost at the top. Where it began there was a small neat bungalow in front of which a child in a diaper and nothing else fumbled around in a wire pen on a patch of

lawn. Then there was a stretch without houses. Then there were two houses, then the road dropped, slipped in and out of sharp turns, went between banks high enough to put the whole street in shadow.

Then a gun roared around a bend ahead of us.

Ohls sat up sharply, said: “Oh-oh! That’s no rabbit gun,” slipped his service pistol out and unlatched the door on his side.

We came out of the turn and saw two more houses on the down side of the hill, with a couple of steep lots between them. A long gray car was slewed across the street in the space between the two houses. Its left front tire was flat and both its front doors were wide open, like the spread ears of an elephant.

A small, dark-faced man was kneeling on both knees in the street beside the open right-hand door. His right arm hung loose from his shoulder and there was blood on the hand that belonged to it. With his other hand he was trying to pick up an automatic from the concrete in front of him.

I skidded the Marmon to a fast stop and Ohls stumbled out.

“Drop that, you!” he yelled.

The man with the limp arm snarled, relaxed, fell back against the running board, and a shot came from behind the car and snapped in the air not very far from my ear. I was out on the road by that time. The gray car was angled enough towards the houses so that I couldn’t see any part of its left side except the open door. The shot seemed to come from about there. Ohls put two slugs into the door. I dropped, looked under the car and saw a pair of feet. I shot at them and missed.

About that time there was a thin but very sharp crack from the corner of the nearest

house. Glass broke in the gray car. The gun behind it roared and plaster jumped out of the corner of the house wall, above the bushes. Then I saw the upper part of a man's body in the bushes. He was lying downhill on his stomach and he had a light rifle to his shoulder.

He was Tom Sneyd, the taxi driver.

Ohls grunted and charged the gray car. He fired twice more into the door, then dodged down behind the hood. More explosions occurred behind the car. I kicked the wounded man's gun out of his way, slid past him and sneaked a look over the gas tank. But the man behind had had too many angles to figure.

He was a big man in a brown suit and he made a clatter running hard for the lip of the hill between the two bungalows. Ohls' gun roared. The man whirled and snapped a shot without stopping. Ohls was in the open now. I saw his hat jerk off his head. I saw him stand squarely on well-spread feet, steady his pistol as if he was on the police range.

But the big man was already sagging. My bullet had drilled through his neck. Ohls fired at him very carefully and he fell and the sixth and last slug from his gun caught the man in the chest and twisted him around. The side of his head slapped the curb with a sickening crunch.

We walked towards him from opposite ends of the car. Ohls leaned down, heaved the man over on his back. His face in death had a loose, amiable expression, in spite of the blood all over his neck. Ohls began to go through his pockets.

I looked back to see what the other one was doing. He wasn't doing anything but sitting on the running board holding his right arm against his side and grimacing with pain.

Tom Sneyd scrambled up the bank and came towards us.

Ohls said: "It's a guy named Poke Andrews. I've seen him around the poolrooms." He stood up and brushed off his knee. He had some odds and ends in his left hand. "Yeah, Poke Andrews. Gun work by the day, hour or week. I guess there was a livin' in it—for a while."

"It's not the guy that sapped me," I said. "But it's the guy I was looking at when I got sapped. And if the redhead was giving out any truth at all this morning, it's likely the guy that shot Lou Harger."

Ohls nodded, went over and got his hat. There was a hole in the brim. "I wouldn't be surprised at all," he said, putting his hat on calmly.

Tom Sneyd stood in front of us with his little rifle held rigidly across his chest. He was hatless and coatless, and had sneakers on his feet. His eyes were bright and mad, and he was beginning to shake.

"I knew I'd get them babies!" he crowed. "I knew I'd fix them lousy bastards!" Then he stopped talking and his face began to change color. It got green. He leaned down slowly, dropped his rifle, put both his hands on his bent knees.

Ohls said: "You better go lay down somewhere, buddy. If I'm any judge of color, you're goin' to shoot your cookies."

TEN

Tom Sneyd was lying on his back on a day bed in the front room of his little bungalow. There was a wet towel across his forehead. A little girl with honey-colored hair was sitting beside him, holding his hand. A young woman with hair a couple of shades darker than the little girl's sat

in the corner and looked at Tom Sneyd with tired ecstasy.

It was very hot when we came in. All the windows were shut and all the blinds down. Ohls opened a couple of front windows and sat down beside them, looked out towards the gray car. The dark Mexican was anchored to its steering wheel by his good wrist.

“It was what they said about my little girl,” Tom Sneyd said from under the towel. “That’s what sent me screwy. They said they’d come back and get her, if I didn’t play with them.”

Ohls said: “Okey, Tom. Let’s have it from the start.” He put one of his little cigars in his mouth, looked at Tom Sneyd doubtfully, and didn’t light it.

I sat in a very hard Windsor chair and looked down at the cheap, new carpet.

“I was readin’ a mag, waiting for time to eat and go to work,” Tom Sneyd said carefully. “The little girl opened the door. They come in with guns on us, got us all in here and shut the windows. They pulled down all the blinds but one and the Mex sat by that and kept looking out. He never said a word. The big guy sat on the bed here and made me tell him all about last night—twice. Then he said I was to forget I’d met anybody or come into town with anybody. The rest was okey.”

Ohls nodded and said: “What time did you first see this man here?”

“I didn’t notice,” Tom Sneyd said. “Say eleven-thirty, quarter of twelve. I checked in to the office at one-fifteen, right after I got my hack at the Carillon. It took us a good hour to make town from the beach. We was in the drugstore talkin’ say fifteen minutes, maybe longer.”

“That figures back to around midnight when you met him,” Ohls said.

Tom Sneyd shook his head and the towel fell down over his face. He pushed it back up again.

“Well, no,” Tom Sneyd said. “The guy in the drugstore told me he closed up at twelve. He wasn’t closing up when we left.”

Ohls turned his head and looked at me without expression. He looked back at Tom Sneyd. “Tell us the rest about the two gunnies,” he said.

“The big guy said most likely I wouldn’t have to talk to anybody about it. If I did and talked right, they’d be back with some dough. If I talked wrong, they’d be back for my little girl.”

“Go on,” Ohls said. “They’re full of crap.”

“They went away. When I saw them go on up the street I got screwy. Renfrew is just a pocket— one of them graft jobs. It goes on around the hill half a mile, then stops. There’s no way to get off it. So they had to come back this way... I got my twenty-two, which is all the gun I have, and hid in the bushes. I got the tire with the second shot. I guess they thought it was a blowout. I missed with the next and that put ‘em wise. They got guns loose. I got the Mex then, and the big guy ducked behind the car... That’s all there was to it. Then you come along.”

Ohls flexed his thick, hard fingers and smiled grimly at the girl in the corner. “Who lives in the next house, Tom?”

“A man named Grandy, a motorman on the interurban. He lives all alone. He’s at work now.”

“I didn’t guess he was home,” Ohls grinned. He got up and went over and patted

the little girl on the head. “You’ll have to come down and make a statement, Tom.”

“Sure.” Tom Sneyd’s voice was tired, listless. “I guess I lose my job, too, for rentin’ out the hack last night.”

“I ain’t so sure about that,” Ohls said softly. “Not if your boss likes guys with a few guts to run his hacks.”

He patted the little girl on the head again, went towards the door and opened it. I nodded at Tom Sneyd and followed Ohls out of the house. Ohls said quietly: “He don’t know about the kill yet. No need to spring it in front of the kid.”

We went over to the gray car. We had got some sacks out of the basement and spread them over the late Andrews, weighted them down with stones. Ohls glanced that way and said absently: “I got to get to where there’s a phone pretty quick.”

He leaned on the door of the car and looked in at the Mexican. The Mexican sat with his head back and his eyes half-closed and a drawn expression on his brown face. His left wrist was shackled to the spider of the wheel.

“What’s your name?” Ohls snapped at him.

“Luis Cadena,” the Mexican said it in a soft voice without opening his eyes any wider.

“Which one of you heels scratched the guy at West Cimarron last night?”

“No understand, señor,” the Mexican said purringly.

“Don’t go dumb on me, spig,” Ohls said dispassionately. “It gets me sore.” He leaned on the window and rolled his little cigar around in his mouth.

The Mexican looked faintly amused and at the same time very tired. The blood on his right hand had dried black.

Ohls said: “Andrews scratched the guy in a taxi at West Cimarron. There was a girl along. We got the girl. You have a lousy chance to prove you weren’t in on it.”

Light flickered and died behind the Mexican’s half-open eyes. He smiled with a glint of small white teeth.

Ohls said: “What did he do with the gun?”

“No understand, señor.”

Ohls said: “He’s tough. When they get tough it scares me.”

He walked away from the car and scuffed some loose dirt from the sidewalk beside the sacks that draped the dead man. His toe gradually uncovered the contractor’s stencil in the cement. He read it out loud: “Dorr Paving and Construction Company, San Angelo. It’s a wonder the fat louse wouldn’t stay in his own racket.”

I stood beside Ohls and looked down the hill between the two houses. Sudden flashes of light darted from the windshields of cars going along the boulevard that fringed Gray Lake, far below.

Ohls said: “Well?”

I said: “The killers knew about the taxi—maybe—and the girl friend reached town with the swag. So it wasn’t Canales’ job. Canales isn’t the boy to let anybody play around with twenty-two grand of his money. The redhead was in on the kill, and it was done for a reason.”

Ohls grinned. “Sure. It was done so you could be framed for it.”

I said: "It's a shame how little account some folks take of human life—or twenty-two grand. Harger was knocked off so I could be framed and the dough was passed to me to make the frame tighter."

"Maybe they thought you'd highball," Ohls grunted. "That would sew you up right."

I rolled a cigarette around in my fingers. "That would have been a little too dumb, even for me. What do we do now? Wait till the moon comes up so we can sing—or go down the hill and tell some more little white lies?"

Ohls spat on one of Poke Andrews' sacks. He said gruffly: "This is county land here. I could take all this mess over to the sub-station at Solano and keep it hush-hush for a while. The hack driver would be tickled to death to keep it under the hat. And I've gone far enough so I'd like to get the Mex in the goldfish room with me personal."

"I'd like it that way too," I said. "I guess you can't hold it down there for long, but you might hold it down long enough for me to see a fat boy about a cat."

ELEVEN

It was late afternoon when I got back to the hotel. The clerk handed me a slip which read: "Please phone F. D. as soon as possible."

I went upstairs and drank some liquor that was in the bottom of a bottle. Then I phoned down for another pint, scraped my chin, changed clothes and looked up Frank Dorr's number in the book. He lived in a beautiful old house on Greenview Park Crescent.

I made myself a tall smooth one with a tinkle and sat down in an easy chair with the phone at my elbow. I got a maid first. Then I got

a man who spoke Mister Dorr's name as though he thought it might blow up in his mouth. After him I got a voice with a lot of silk in it. Then I got a long silence and at the end of the silence I got Frank Dorr himself. He sounded glad to hear from me.

He said: "I've been thinking about our talk this morning, and I have a better idea. Drop out and see me... And you might bring that money along. You just have time to get it out of the bank."

I said: "Yeah. The safe-deposit closes at six. But it's not your money."

I heard him chuckle. "Don't be foolish. It's all marked, and I wouldn't want to have to accuse you of stealing it."

I thought that over, and didn't believe it—about the currency being marked. I took a drink out of my glass and said: "I *might* be willing to turn it over to the party I got it from—in your presence."

He said: "Well—I told you that party left town. But I'll see what I can do. No tricks, please."

I said of course no tricks, and hung up. I finished my drink, called Von Ballin of the *Telegram*. He said the sheriff's people didn't seem to have any ideas about Lou Harger—or give a damn. He was a little sore that I still wouldn't let him use my story. I could tell from the way he talked that he hadn't got the doings over near Gray Lake.

I called Ohls, couldn't reach him.

I mixed myself another drink, swallowed half of it and began to feel it too much. I put my hat on, changed my mind about the other half of my drink, went down to my car. The early evening traffic was thick with householders riding home to dinner. I wasn't sure whether two cars tailed me or just one. At any rate

nobody tried to catch up and throw a pineapple in my lap.

The house was a square two-storied place of old red brick, with beautiful grounds and a red brick wall with a white stone coping around them. A shiny black limousine was parked under the porte-cochère at the side. I followed a red-flagged walk up over two terraces, and a pale wisp of a man in a cutaway coat let me into a wide, silent hall with dark old furniture and a glimpse of garden at the end. He led me along that and along another hall at right angles and ushered me softly into a paneled study that was dimly lit against the gathering dusk. He went away, leaving me alone.

The end of the room was mostly open french windows, through which a brass-colored sky showed behind a line of quiet trees. In front of the trees a sprinkler swung slowly on a patch of velvety lawn that was already dark. There were large dim oils on the walls, a huge black desk with books across one end, a lot of deep lounging chairs, a heavy soft rug that went from wall to wall. There was a faint smell of good cigars and beyond that somewhere a smell of garden flowers and moist earth. The door opened and a youngish man in nose-glasses came in, gave me a slight formal nod, looked around vaguely, and said that Mr. Dorr would be there in a moment. He went out again, and I lit a cigarette.

In a little while the door opened again and Beasley came in, walked past me with a grin and sat down just inside the windows. Then Dorr came in and behind him Miss Glenn.

Dorr had his black cat in his arms and two lovely red scratches, shiny with collodion, down his right cheek. Miss Glenn had on the same clothes I had seen on her in the morning. She looked dark and drawn and spiritless, and she went past me as though she had never seen me before.

Dorr squeezed himself into the high-backed chair behind the desk and put the cat down in front of him. The cat strolled over to one corner of the desk and began to lick its chest with a long, sweeping, businesslike motion.

Dorr said: "Well, well. Here we are," and chuckled pleasantly.

The man in the cutaway came in with a tray of cocktails, passed them around, put the tray with the shaker down on a low table beside Miss Glenn. He went out again, closing the door as if he was afraid he might crack it.

We all drank and looked very solemn.

I said: "We're all here but two. I guess we have a quorum."

Dorr said: "What's that?" sharply and put his head to one side.

I said: "Lou Harger's in the morgue and Canales is dodging cops. Otherwise we're all here. All the interested parties."

Miss Glenn made an abrupt movement, then relaxed suddenly and picked at the arm of her chair.

Dorr took two swallows of his cocktail, put the glass aside and folded his small neat hands on the desk. His face looked a little sinister.

"The money," he said coldly. "I'll take charge of it now."

I said: "Not now or any other time. I didn't bring it."

Dorr stared at me and his face got a little red. I looked at Beasley. Beasley had a cigarette in his mouth and his hands in his pockets and the back of his head against the back of his chair. He looked half asleep.

Dorr said softly, meditatively: "Holding out, huh?"

"Yes," I said grimly. "While I have it I'm fairly safe. You overplayed your hand when you let me get my paws on it. I'd be a fool not to hold what advantage it gives me."

Dorr said: "Safe?" with a gentle sinister intonation.

I laughed. "Not safe from a frame," I said. "But the last one didn't click so well... Not safe from being gun-walked again. But that's going to be harder next time too... But fairly safe from being shot in the back and having you sue my estate for the dough."

Dorr stroked the cat and looked at me under his eyebrows.

"Let's get a couple of more important things straightened out," I said. "Who takes the rap for Lou Harger?"

"What makes you so sure *you* don't?"
Dorr asked nastily.

"My alibi's been polished up. I didn't know how good it was until I knew how close Lou's death could be timed. I'm clear now... regardless of who turns in what gun with what fairy tale... And the lads that were sent to scotch my alibi ran into some trouble."

Dorr said: "That so?" without any apparent emotion.

"A thug named Andrews and a Mexican calling himself Luis Cadena. I daresay you've heard of them."

"I don't know such people," Dor said sharply.

"Then it won't upset you to hear Andrews got very dead, and the law has Cadena."

"Certainly not," Dor said. "They were from Canales. Canales had Harger killed."

I said: "So that's your new idea. I think it's lousy."

I leaned over and slipped my empty glass under my chair. Miss Glenn turned her head towards me and spoke very gravely, as if it was very important to the future of the race for me to believe what she said: "Of course—*of course* Canales had Lou killed... At least, the men he sent after us killed Lou."

I nodded politely. "What for? A packet of money they didn't get? They wouldn't have killed him. They'd have brought him in, brought both of you in. You arranged for that kill, and the taxi stunt was to sidetrack me, not to fool Canales' boys."

She put her hand out quickly. Her eyes were shimmering. I went ahead.

"I wasn't very bright, but I didn't figure on anything so flossy. Who the hell would? Canales had no motive to gun Lou, unless it got back the money he had been gypped out of. Supposing he could know that quick he *had* been gypped."

Dorr was licking his lips and quivering his chins and looking from one of us to the other with his small tight eyes. Miss Glenn said drearily: "Lou knew all about the play. He planned it with the croupier, Pina. Pina wanted some getaway money, wanted to move on to Havana. Of course Canales would have got wise, but not too soon, if I hadn't got noisy and tough. I got Lou killed—but not the way you mean."

I dropped an inch of ash off a cigarette I had forgotten all about. "All right," I said grimly.

"Canales takes the rap... And I suppose you two chisellers think that's all I care about... Where was Lou going to be when Canales was *supposed* to find out he'd been gypped?"

"He was going to be gone," Miss Glenn said tonelessly. "A damn long way off. And I was going to be gone with him."

I said: "Nerts! You seem to forget I know *why* Lou was killed."

Beasley sat up in his chair and moved his right hand rather delicately towards his left shoulder. "This wise guy bother you, chief?"

Dorr said: "Not yet. Let him rant."

I moved so that I faced a little more towards Beasley. The sky had gone dark outside and the sprinkler had been turned off. A damp feeling came slowly into the room. Dorrr opened a cedar-wood box and put a long brown cigar in his mouth, bit the end off with a dry snap of his false teeth. There was the harsh noise of a match striking, then the slow, rather labored puffing of his breath in the cigar.

He said slowly, through a cloud of smoke: "Let's forget all this and make a deal about that money... Manny Tinnen hung himself in his cell this afternoon."

Miss Glenn stood up suddenly, pushing her arms straight down at her sides. Then she sank slowly down into the chair again, sat motionless. I said: "Did he have any help?" Then I made a sudden, sharp movement—and stopped.

Beasley jerked a swift glance at me, but I wasn't looking at Beasley. There was a shadow outside one of the windows—a lighter shadow than the dark lawn and darker trees. There was a hollow, bitter, coughing plop; a thin spray of whitish smoke in the window.

Beasley jerked, rose halfway to his feet, then fell on his face with one arm doubled under him.

Canales stepped through the windows, past Beasley's body, came three steps further, and stood silent, with a long, black, small-calibered gun in his hand, the larger tube of a silencer flaring from the end of it.

"Be very still," he said. "I am a fair shot— even with this elephant gun."

His face was so white that it was almost luminous. His dark eyes were all smoke-gray iris, without pupils.

"Sound carries well at night, out of open windows," he said tonelessly.

Dorr put both his hands down on the desk and began to pat it. The black cat put its body very low, drifted down over the end of the desk and went under a chair. Miss Glenn turned her head towards Canales very slowly, as if some kind of mechanism moved it.

Canales said: "Perhaps you have a buzzer on that desk. If the door of the room opens, I shoot. It will give me a lot of pleasure to see blood come out of your fat neck."

I moved the fingers of my right hand two inches on the arm of my chair. The silenced gun swayed towards me and I stopped moving my fingers. Canales smiled very briefly under his angular mustache.

"You are a smart dick," he said. "I thought I had you right. But there are things about you I like."

I didn't say anything. Canales looked back at Dorrr. He said very precisely: "I have been bled by your organization for a long time. But this is something else again. Last night I was cheated out of some money. But this is trivial too. I am wanted for the murder of this Harger.

A man named Cadena has been made to confess that I hired him... That is just a little too much fix."

Dorr swayed gently over his desk, put his elbows down hard on it, held his face in his small hands and began to shake. His cigar was smoking on the floor.

Canales said: "I would like to get my money back, and I would like to get clear of this rap— but most of all I would like you to say something—so I can shoot you with your mouth open and see blood come out of it."

Beasley's body stirred on the carpet. His hands groped a little. Dorr's eyes were agony trying not to look at him. Canales was rapt and blind in his act by this time. I moved my fingers a little more on the arm of my chair. But I had a long way to go.

Canales said: "Pina has talked to me. I saw to that. You killed Harger. Because he was a secret witness against Manny Tinnen. The D.A. kept the secret, and the dick here kept it. But Harger could not keep it himself. He told his broad— and the broad told you... So the killing was arranged, in a way to throw suspicion with a motive on me. First on this dick, and if that wouldn't hold, on me."

There was silence. I wanted to say something, but I couldn't get anything out. I didn't think anybody but Canales would ever again say anything.

Canales said: "You fixed Pina to let Harger and his girl win my money. It was not hard— because I don't play my wheels crooked."

Dorr had stopped shaking. His face lifted, stone-white, and turned towards Canales, slowly, like the face of a man about to have an epileptic fit. Beasley was up on one elbow. His eyes were almost shut but a gun was labouring upwards in his hand.

Canales leaned forward and began to smile. His trigger finger whitened at the exact moment Beasley's gun began to pulse and roar.

Canales arched his back until his body was a rigid curve. He fell stiffly forward, hit the edge of the desk and slid along it to the floor, without lifting his hands.

Beasley dropped his gun and fell down on his face again. His body got soft and his fingers moved fitfully, then were still.

I got motion into my legs, stood up and went to kick Canales' gun under the desk— senselessly. Doing this I saw that Canales had fired at least once, because Frank Dorr had no right eye.

He sat still and quiet with his chin on his chest and a nice touch of melancholy on the good side of his face.

The door of the room came open and the secretary with the nose-glasses slid in pop-eyed. He staggered back against the door, closing it again. I could hear his rapid breathing across the room.

He gasped: "Is—is anything wrong?"

I thought that very funny, even then. Then I realized that he might be short-sighted and from where he stood Frank Dorr looked natural enough. The rest of it could have been just routine to Dorr's help.

I said: "Yes—but we'll take care of it. Stay out of here."

He said: "Yes, sir," and went out again. That surprised me so much that my mouth fell open. I went down the room and bent over the gray-haired Beasley. He was unconscious, but had a fair pulse. He was bleeding from the side, slowly.

Miss Glenn was standing up and looked almost as dopy as Canales had looked. She was talking to me quickly, in a brittle, very distinct voice: “I didn’t know Lou was to be killed, but I couldn’t have done anything about it anyway. They burned me with a branding iron—just for a sample of what I’d get. Look!”

I looked. She tore her dress down in front and there was a hideous burn on her chest almost between her two breasts.

I said: “Okey, sister. That’s nasty medicine. But we’ve got to have some law here now and an ambulance for Beasley.”

I pushed past her towards the telephone, shook her hand off my arm when she grabbed at me. She went on talking to my back in a thin, desperate voice.

“I thought they’d just hold Lou out of the way until after the trial. But they dragged him out of the cab and shot him without a word. Then the little one drove the taxi into town and the big one brought me up into the hills to a shack. Dorr was there. He told me how you had to be framed. He promised me the money, if I went through with it, and torture till I died, if I let them down.”

It occurred to me that I was turning my back too much to people. I swung around, got the telephone in my hands, still on the hook, and put my gun down on the desk.

“Listen! Give me a break,” she said wildly. “Dorr framed it all with Pina, the croupier. Pina was one of the gang that got Shannon where they could fix him. I didn’t—”

I said: “Sure—that’s all right. Take it easy.”

The room, the whole house seemed very still, as if a lot of people were hunched outside the door, listening.

“It wasn’t a bad idea,” I said, as if I had all the time in the world. “Lou was just a white chip to Frank Dorr. The play he figured put us both out as witnesses. But it was too elaborate, took in too many people. That sort always blows up in your face.”

“Lou was getting out of the state,” she said, clutching at her dress. “He was scared. He thought the roulette trick was some kind of a pay-off to him.”

I said: “Yeah,” lifted the phone and asked for police headquarters.

The room door came open again then and the secretary barged in with a gun. A uniformed chauffeur was behind him with another gun.

I said very loudly into the phone: “This is Frank Dorr’s house. There’s been a killing...”

The secretary and the chauffeur dodged out again. I heard running in the hall. I clicked the phone, called the *Telegram* office and got Von Ballin. When I got through giving him the flash Miss Glenn was gone out of the window into the dark garden.

I didn’t go after her. I didn’t mind very much if she got away.

I tried to get Ohls, but they said he was still down at Solano. And by that time the night was full of sirens.

I had a little trouble but not too much. Fenweather pulled too much weight. Not all of the story came out, but enough so that the City Hall boys in the two-hundred-dollar suits had their left elbows in front of their faces for some time.

Pina was picked up in Salt Lake City. He broke and implicated four others of Manny Tinnen’s gang. Two of them were killed resisting arrest, the other two got life without parole.

Miss Glenn made a clean getaway and was never heard of again. I think that's about all, except that I had to turn the twenty-two grand over to the Public Administrator. He

allowed me two hundred dollars fee and nine dollars and twenty cents mileage. Sometimes I wonder what he did with the rest of it.